



The Signal Flag

BRANDYWINE VALLEY CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE



Campaign # 23

Skirmish # 3

November 2009

From the Rear Ranks:

Thanksgiving in the American Civil: A PROCLAMATION

The year that is drawing toward its close has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added, which are of so extraordinary a nature that they cannot fail to penetrate and soften the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever-watchful providence of Almighty God.

In the midst of a civil war of unequalled magnitude and severity, which has sometimes seemed to foreign states to invite and provoke their aggressions, peace has been preserved with all nations, order has been maintained, the laws have been respected and obeyed, and harmony has prevailed everywhere, except in the theater of military conflict, while that theater has been greatly contracted by the advancing armies and navies of the Union.

Needful diversions of wealth and strength from the fields of peaceful industry to the national defense have not arrested the plow, the shuttle, or the ship; the ax has enlarged the borders of our settlements, and the mines, as well of iron and coal as of the precious metals, have yielded even more abundantly than heretofore. Population has steadily increased, notwithstanding the waste that has been made in the camp, the siege, and the battle-field, and the country rejoicing in the consciousness of augmented strength and vigor, is permitted to expect continuance of years with large increase of freedom. No human counsel hath devised, nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are gracious gifts of the Most High God, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy.

It seems to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently, and gratefully acknowledged as with one heart and one voice by the whole American people. I do, therefore, invite my fellow-citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next as a day of thanksgiving and praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the heavens. And I recommend to them that, while offering up the ascriptions justly due to Him for such singular deliverances and blessings, they do so also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to His tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners, or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged, and fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty hand to heal the wounds of the nation, and to restore it, as soon as may be consistent with the Divine purposes, to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquility, and union. In testimony whereof, I have here unto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

Done at the city of Washington this third day of October, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, and of the Independence of the United States the eighty-eighth.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

By the President: WILLIAM H. SEWARD, Secretary of State.

I believe it is the duty of every citizen of this great country to make themselves aware of the important documents which provide the foundation for our republic. This proclamation by President Lincoln, 140 years ago this October, established Thanksgiving as a national holiday. It should be read carefully, and thoughtfully, as we move into the year 2010.

I remain your most obedient servant,
Robert Paul Sprague



~ Officers ~

President: John Walls
Vice President: Chip Crowe
Secretary: Ted Pawlik
Treasurer: Dave Walter

~ Committee Members ~

Preservation: Bob Sprague, John Walls

Nominating Committee:

Vince Carosella

Speakers: Roger Arthur

Trips: Greg Buss

Credentials: Vacant

Greeter:

Publicity: Bill Stiman

Historians: Bill Sitman and Bob Sprague

Social Dir: Flo Williams

~Members at Large ~

David Hoffritz, James Lawler, Lynne Fulton

~ Official Sutler ~

Bob Sprague: Books / Periodicals
610-644-0353

~ Annual Membership ~

Individual \$25.00; Family \$40.00; Student \$15.00
(Full time student up to age 23)

? Questions ? Contact:

John Walls
1109 Debra's Way,
West Chester, Pa 19382
610-692-0435

JohnFWalls@verizon.com

BVCWRT Web Site:

<http://bvcwrt.home.comcast.net>

Webmaster: Jim Lawler

dtownjim@comcast.net

Signal Flag Editor:

Lynne Fulton
610-647-1039

mailto:fultonlm1949@aol.com

Unsolicited articles from our members are welcome.
Please contact Lynne!

**We are wheelchair assessable*



What is the BVCWRT all about???

We were founded in 1987. According to our by-laws, "the purpose of the Brandywine Valley Civil War Round Table shall be to provide a congenial medium through which persons having a common interest in the events of the American Civil War - its causes and effects, engagements, personages, units, armaments and other things pertaining thereto - may satisfy their interest and broaden individual knowledge through discussion, lectures, field trips and the exchange of books, paper and other data. The purposed is also to consider the preservation and protection of the battlefields, sites, landmarks, relics and collection of the period."

In plain English, we are an organization of diverse people brought together by our common interest in the American Civil War. This interest can range from the casual to the obsessive. We intend to tailor our activities and presentations to appeal to all our members, novice or expert.

Welcome New Members & Reenlistments

The Round Table welcomes our new members since our last meeting. Please welcome them and share your Civil War enthusiasm.

New Members:

*Mile Allen, Joe Biddle, Paul Moog
John Obenchain, Greg Smith, David Walton*





Brandywine Valley Civil War Round Table
Come to our next meeting
November 4, 2009

Speaker: Matthew Borowick
Topic: "The Court Martial of Fitz John Porter"
Time: 7:00 PM
Place: West Chester Borough Hall, Gay Street

The Court Martial of Fitz John Porter

by Matthew Borowick

"Scapegoat": when we hear the word we think of a quarterback who couldn't complete a crucial pass to win the Super Bowl, a cleanup hitter who fans with two outs and the bases loaded in the seventh game of the World Series, or a seven foot center who misses a slam dunk and loses the NBA Championship.

As in sports, the Civil War had its share of heroes and its share of men to whom blame for defeat or disaster was attached. A Union defeat at Manassas in the summer of 1862 led to criticism and a court-martial for one of the rising stars of the Army of the Potomac's high command.

After Robert E. Lee drove John Pope's army back to Washington, questions were raised about who was responsible for the defeat. Fingers quickly pointed toward Major General Fitz John Porter, who did not perform as Pope had expected him to because, as Porter's enemies claimed, Porter wanted to see Pope fail. Porter spent the next 24 years of his life trying to clear his name.

This month's unique and energetic presentation on a rarely-discussed but incredibly fascinating topic will focus on the events surrounding the Union defeat at Second Manassas and how rivalries in the Northern armies led to the downfall of one of the North's ablest generals.

Biographical information

Matthew Borowick has had a lifelong interest in the American Civil War, dating back to his days as a first-grader when he took his copy of "The Golden Book of the Civil War" to school daily. His interest in the war continued and in 1992 he joined the Robert E. Lee Civil War Round Table of Central New Jersey. He has served the round table in numerous capacities, including newsletter editor, advisory board member and webmaster. Today, he is one of five regular Civil War News columnists, authoring "Round Table Review", which details best practices of Civil War round tables from throughout the country.

In 1997, the Lee round table opened the Civil War Library and Research Center. Located in Woodbridge, NJ, this 2,000 volume facility is open to the public and serves to provide a wonderful resource for casual reading or serious research into the Civil War. Matt served as the library's executive director for its first 10 years.

Matt earned a B.A. in Economics and an MBA in Finance from Seton Hall University and is employed by Seton Hall as its Associate Vice President for Alumni and Government Relations. He and his wife Kathy, who has been to more Civil War battlefields than she cares to admit, live in Monmouth Junction, NJ with their four children.

Minutes of the October 7, 2009 Meeting
BVCWRT
Submitted by Ted Pawlik

John Walls Presiding:

Treasurer's Report (Dave Walter):

- The bank balance as of September 1, 2009 was \$2954.37. Expenses for the month of September were \$1032.34. This included a \$1000 donation to the Friends of the National Park at Gettysburg. Receipts for the month of September were \$953.00. The bank balance as of October 1, 2009 was \$2875.03.
- To date, there are 62 members who have paid their dues.

Preservation Committee (Bob Sprague):

- Bob reported on a letter received from the Friends of the National Park at Gettysburg thanking the Round Table for their contribution.
- The Civil War Preservation Trust advised of an opportunity to make a contribution to save Third Winchester Battlefield. For every \$1.00 contributed, there is a match of \$8.82. A motion was made to donate \$400.00 to this effort. The motion was seconded and approved by the members present.
- Including the above donation, the BVCWRT has donated \$21,500 for civil war preservation from August 2000 thru October 2009. The following is a list of donations made:

| | | |
|----------|--|------------|
| 08/10/00 | Friends of the National Parks at Gettysburg | \$1,000.00 |
| 10/26/01 | Central Virginia Battlefield Trust | \$1,000.00 |
| 10/26/01 | Friends of the National Parks at Gettysburg | \$1,000.00 |
| 11/06/02 | Civil War Preservation Trust (Chancellorsville) | \$1,000.00 |
| 11/25/02 | Friends of the National Parks at Gettysburg | \$500.00 |
| 11/03/03 | Civil War Preservation Trust (2 nd Manassas) | \$1,000.00 |
| 11/03/03 | Civil War Preservation Trust (Bentonville) | \$1,000.00 |
| 10/06/04 | Civil War Preservation Trust (Antietam) | \$1,500.00 |
| 10/18/04 | Central Virginia Battlefield Trust (Chancellors) | \$500.00 |
| 10/06/05 | CWPT (Morris Island, S.C.) | \$1,000.00 |
| 10/06/05 | CWPT (Spotsylvania Ct. House, VA) | \$1,000.00 |
| 04/09/05 | CWPT (Slaughter Pen Farm) Bearss | \$1,000.00 |
| 05/10/05 | CWPT (Slaughter Pen Farm) McPherson | \$1,000.00 |
| 05/19/05 | Civil War Institute (Book donation) | \$300.00 |
| 09/06/06 | CWPT (Slaughter Pen Farm) | \$1,000.00 |
| 03/04/07 | CWPT (Bentonville, NC) | \$500.00 |
| 10/11/07 | CWPT (Franklin, TENN) | \$500.00 |
| 10/11/07 | CWPT (Chancellorsville, VA) | \$500.00 |
| 12/07/07 | CWPT (Averasboro, Fisher Hill, Brices Cross Roads, The Crater) | \$500.00 |
| 04/04/08 | CWPT (Antietam, Cedar Creek, Cold Harbor, Perryville) | \$2,000.00 |
| 06/27/08 | Civil War Institute (Book Donation) | \$200.00 |
| 12/13/08 | CWPT (Third Winchester, Virginia) | \$1,000.00 |
| 02/05/09 | CWPT (Cedar Creek, Virginia) | \$500.00 |
| 03/06/09 | CWPT (Sailor's Creek) | \$500.00 |
| 06/22/09 | Civil War Institute (Book Donation) | \$100.00 |
| 09/03/09 | Friends of the National Park at Gettysburg | \$1,000.00 |
| 10/07/09 | CWPT (Third Winchester, Virginia) | \$400.00 |

Field Trip (Greg Buss)

- Greg passed out information regarding the field trip to 2nd Manassas on April 10, 2010. The bus will leave the West Chester Municipal Building at 6:15 PM. The cost will be \$50.00 per person. Checks are to made payable to the BVCWRT and can be sent to
Gregory R. Buss, 502 Langford Drive, Downingtown, PA 19335
- There are 45 spaces on the bus and it will be first come – first served.

John Walls expressed appreciation to Lynn Fulton to the excellent job on the newsletter.

Speaker for the Evening: Roger Arthur – The Importance of John Brown

Taps (General D. Butterfield – Pvt. O.W. Norton)

The 11,000 soldiers killed in the Seven Days battle near Richmond, Virginia in 1862 prompted General Dan Butterfield to direct that a tribute be made to those killed on both sides. Butterfield hummed the melody to his bugler Oliver Norton, who then developed the simple sequence of notes (24) and performed them for the first time after the battle. General Butterfield later confirmed that Norton had nailed it. "Taps" went on to take its place in history as one of the most poignant pieces of military music, our final tribute to fallen comrades.

"Fading light dims the sight,
And a star gems the sky, gleaming bright.
From afar drawing nigh – Falls the night."

"Day is done, gone the sun,
From the lake, from the hills, from the sky.
All is well, safely rest, God is nigh."

"Then good night, peaceful night,
Till the light of the dawn shineth bright,
God is near, do not fear – Friend, good night."

(Robert Paul Sprague, Archives, "Songs of the Civil War, 1991).

=====

Michael Dougherty Information by Jim Lawler

I was asked to provide a summary of the events in the life of Pvt. Michael Dougherty - the soldier I discussed during my talk to the Round Table on September 2, 2009. Here's the list:

Michael Dougherty was born on May 10, 1844 in County Donegal, Ireland.

In 1859, at the age of 15, he left Ireland and traveled alone on an emigrant ship bound for Philadelphia. He settled with other members of his family in Bristol, Bucks County, PA.

In 1862, at the age of 18, he enlisted in what he thought would become the Second Irish Dragoons - a cavalry regiment that they hoped would be associated with the famed Irish Brigade. But the unit was instead mustered into service as Company B of the 13th PA Cavalry.

On February 26, 1863, Dougherty's regiment was drawn into an ambush. His horse was shot out from under him, and he was captured along with about 50 others. They were taken to Libby prison in Richmond where they were held until May 26, 1863. At that point, they were exchanged and returned to their regiment at Winchester, VA.

During the Second Battle of Winchester, June 13 through 15, 1863, Dougherty was on duty as a special courier for Maj. Gen. Robert H. Milroy, the Union Army garrison commander at Winchester. Dougherty was later presented with a gold medal for bravery in carrying dispatches from Milroy's headquarters.

Early on the morning of October 12, 1863, near Jeffersonson, VA, Dougherty was on patrol as a vedette when he observed the advance of Lee's army attempting to flank the Union position. Dougherty along with other volunteers attacked a building the enemy had occupied, drove them out of it, and held the building against counter attacks until reinforcements arrived. Later the same afternoon, his detachment was cut off from the division, and 127 of them were captured. Initially, he was held as a POW in various warehouse buildings in Richmond.

On December 28, 1863, Dougherty was moved from the Pemberton building in Richmond to the prison camp on Belle Isle.

In February 1864, he was moved from Belle Isle to Andersonville. He was never transferred out of Andersonville as most other prisoners were because he was put into the hospital there in August.

In April 1865, when the prisoners were released from Andersonville, they were sent to Vicksburg, Mississippi. From there they would be transported North on steamboats. Dougherty was loaded on the Sultana on April 24th. The boat was grossly overcrowded with about 2,200 ex-prisoners, plus a number of civilians and crew members. While in route, the boilers exploded around 2 AM on April 27th. About 1,700 men, women, and children died as a result of the explosion.

On June 27, 1865, Dougherty was discharged from the army and returned home to Bristol, PA.

In September, 1865, he became a naturalized citizen of the United States.

In 1869, he married Rose McGee in Bristol and started a family.

In 1879, he joined the GAR, and was a member of the Clay Beaty Post #73 in Bristol.

In 1880-1881, he served as a borough councilman in Bristol.

In 1883, he was a founding member of the Bristol chapter of the Ancient Order of Hibernians.

In 1884, he held a position in Bucks County as Clerk of the Orphan's Court.

On January 23, 1897, Dougherty was issued a letter awarding him the Medal of Honor for his actions on Oct 12, 1863. His citation reads: [This soldier,] at the head of a detachment of his company, dashed across an open field exposed to a deadly fire from the enemy and succeeded in dislodging them from an unoccupied house, which he and his comrades defended for several hours against repeated attacks, thus preventing the enemy from flanking the position of the Union forces. Copies of the citation can be read on-line at:

<http://www.history.army.mil/html/moh/civwaral.html> and

http://www.homeofheroes.com/moh/citations_1862_cwa/dougherty_michael.html

On Dec 7, 1905, Dougherty returned to Andersonville to attend the dedication of the Pennsylvania Memorial there.

In 1908, a printed version of a diary that Dougherty had kept while he was a POW was produced by one of his sons who operated a printing business in Bristol. An electronic copy of that printing of the diary can be found on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/stream/prisondiaryofmic00doug#page/n1/mode/2up>

Another version of the diary was printed in 1960 by Pyramid Books under the title "Diary of a Civil War Hero." The 1960 version includes the same text as the 1908 version.

Dougherty also brought home two wills from soldiers who died in Andersonville. In 1876, he carried the wills to New York City to deliver the documents to the soldiers' next of kin.

In 1913, Dougherty attended the reunion of Civil War soldiers in Gettysburg for the 50th anniversary of the battle. Just prior to the reunion itself, he attended the state GAR encampment that was also held in Gettysburg and he was called upon to give an impromptu speech there.

On November 11, 1921, Dougherty served as an honorary pall bearer at the dedication of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington Cemetery.

On February 19, 1930, Michael Dougherty died at the age of 85.

On May 27, 1990, a ceremony was held to install a Medal of Honor marker at his grave site in Bristol, PA.

On May 21, 2001, a life-sized statue of Pvt. Dougherty was unveiled at a ceremony in Bristol. A picture of the statue is available on the Web site of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, Division #1 Bristol, PA at

<http://www.aohbristol.com/MichaelDougherty.htm>

Fitz John Porter Views the Confederates from a Balloon

The use of balloons for observation dates back to the 1790s, but the Civil War was the first war in which they were generally used for military purposes. At the outbreak of the war Thaddeus Lowe was authorized to create an aeronautic service; he built five balloons which were used during the Peninsular and later campaigns. Lowe was the first person in America to take photographs from a balloon. Fitz John Porter, whose ascent is here described, is the general whose career was ruined by charges of disobedience at Second Bull Run; his long struggle to win vindication ended favorably in 1886.

Commager - "The Blue and the Gray"

On the 11th of April [1862] at five o'clock, an event at once amusing and thrilling occurred at our quarters. The commander-in-chief had appointed his personal and confidential friend, General Fitz John Porter, to conduct the siege of Yorktown. Porter was a polite, soldierly gentleman, and a native of New Hampshire, who had been in the regular army since early manhood. He fought gallantly in the Mexican war, being thrice promoted and once seriously wounded, and he was now forty years of age, handsome, enthusiastic, ambitious, and popular. He made frequent ascension with Lowe, and learned to go aloft alone. One day he ascended thrice, and finally seemed as cosily at home in the firmament as upon the solid earth. It is needless to say that he grew careless, and on this particular morning leaped into the car and demanded the cables to be let out with all speed. I saw with some surprise that the flurried assistants were sending up the great straining canvas with a single rope attached. The enormous bag was only partially inflated, and the loose folds opened and shut with a crack like that of a musket. Noisily, fitfully, the yellow mass rose into the sky, the basket rocking like a feather in the zephyr; and just as I turned aside to speak to a comrade, a sound came from overhead, like the explosion of a shell, and something striking me across the face laid me flat upon the ground.

Half blind and stunned, I staggered to my feet, but the air seemed full of cries and curses. Opening my eyes ruefully, I saw all faces turned upwards, and when I looked above, the balloon was adrift.

The treacherous cable, rotted with vitriol, had snapped in twain; one fragment had been the cause of my downfall, and the other trailed, like a great entrails from the receding car, where Fitz John Porter was bounding upward upon a Pegasus that he could neither check nor direct.

The whole army was agitated by the unwonted occurrence. From battery No. 1, on the brink of the York, to the mouth of Warwick river, every soldier and officer was absorbed. Far within the Confederate lines the confusion extended. We heard the enemy's alarm-guns, and directly the signal flags were waving up and down our front.

The General appeared directly over the edge of the car. He was tossing his hands frightenedly, and shouting something that we could not comprehend.

"O-pen-the-valve!" called Lowe, in his shrill tones; "climb-to-the-netting-and-reach-the-valve-rope."

"The valve!-the valve!" repeated a multitude of tongues, and all gazed with thrilling interest at the retreating hulk that still kept straight upward, swerving neither to the east nor the west.

It was a weird spectacle,-that frail, fading oval, gliding against the sky, floating in the serene azure, the little vessel swinging silently beneath, and a hundred thousand martial men watching the loss of their brother in arms, but powerless to relieve or recover him. Had Fitz John Porter been drifting down the rapids of Niagara, he could not have been so far from human assistance. But we saw him directly, no bigger than a child's toy, clambering up the netting and reaching for the cord.

"He can't do it," muttered a man beside me; "the wind blows the valverope to and fro, and only a spry, cool-headed fellow can catch it."

We saw the General descend, and appearing again over the edge of the basket, he seemed to be motioning to the breathless hordes below, the story of his failure. Then he dropped out of sight, and when we next saw him, he, as reconnoitering the Confederate works through a long black spy-glass. A gloat laugh went up and down the lines as this cool procedure was observed, and then a cheer of applause ran from group to group. For a moment it was doubtful that the balloon would float in either direction; it seemed to falter, like an irresolute being, and moved reluctantly southeastward, towards Fortress Monroe. A huzza, half uttered, quivered on every lip. All eyes glistened, and some were dim with tears of joy. But the wayward canvas now turned due westward, and was blown rapidly toward the Confederate works. Its course was fitfully direct, and the wind seemed to veer often, as if contrary currents, conscious of the opportunity, were struggling for the possession of the daring navigator. The south wind held mastery for awhile, and the balloon passed the Federal front amid a howl of despair from the soldiery. It kept right on, over sharpshooters, rifle-pits, and outworks, and finally passed, as if to deliver up its freight, directly over the heights of Yorktown.

The cool courage, either of heroism or despair, had seized upon Fitz John Porter. He turned his black

glass upon the ramparts and masked cannon below, upon the remote camps, upon the beleaguered town, upon the guns of Gloucester Point, and upon distant Norfolk. Had he been reconnoitering from a secure perch at the tip of the moon, he could not have been more vigilant, and the Confederates probably thought this some Yankee device to peer, into their sanctuary in despite of ball or shell. None of their great guns could be brought to bear upon the balloon; but there were some discharges of musketry that appeared to have no effect, and finally even these demonstrations ceased. Both armies in solemn silence were gazing aloft, while the imperturbable mariner continued to spy out the land.

The sun was now rising behind us, and roseate rays struggled up to the zenith, like the arcs made by showery bombs. They threw a hazy atmosphere upon the balloon, and the light shone through the network like the sun through the ribs of the skeleton ship in the *Ancient Mariner*. Then, as all looked agape, the air-craft "plunged, and tacked, and veered," and drifted rapidly toward the Federal lines again.

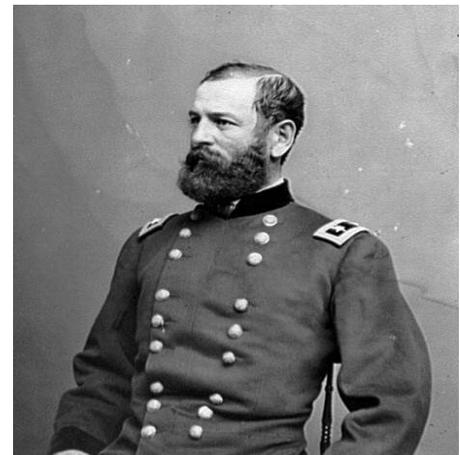
The alleluiah that now went up shook the spheres, and when he had regained our camp limits, the General was seen clambering up again to clutch the valve-rope. This time he was successful, and the balloon fell like a stone, so that all hearts once more leaped up, and the cheers were hushed. Cavalry rode pell-mell from several directions, to reach the place of descent, and the General's personal staff galloped past me like the wind, to be the first at his debarkation. I followed the throng of soldiery with due haste, and came up to the horsemen in a few minutes. The balloon had struck a canvas tent with great violence, felling it as by a bolt, and the General, unharmed, had disentangled himself from innumerable folds of oiled canvas, and was now the cynosure of an immense group of people. While the officers shook his hands, the rabble bawled their satisfaction in hurrahs, and a band of music marching up directly, the throng on foot and horse gave him a vociferous escort to his quarters. *Townsend - "Campaigns of a Non-Combatant"*

Source: "The Blue and The Gray" by Henry Steele Commager. His source was Townsend, Campaigns of a Non-Combatant

Fitz John Porter

August 31, 1822 – May 21, 1901 (aged 78)
Photo 1862

Fitz John Porter (August 31, 1822 – May 21, 1901) (sometimes written **FitzJohn Porter** or **Fitz-John Porter**) was a career United States Army officer and a Union General during the American Civil War. He is most known for his performance at the Second Battle of Bull Run and his subsequent court martial. Although Porter served well in the early battles of the Civil War, his military career was ruined by the controversial trial which was called by his political rivals. Afterwards he worked intensely to restore his tarnished reputation for almost 25 years, when he was finally restored to the army's roll.



Early life and career

Porter was born in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. He came from a family prominent in American naval service; his cousins were William D. Porter, David Dixon Porter, and David G. Farragut. Nevertheless, he pursued an army career. He graduated from the United States Military Academy (West Point) in 1845, standing eighth out of 41 cadets, and was brevetted a second lieutenant in the 4th U.S. Artillery.^[2]

Porter was promoted to second lieutenant on June 18, 1846 and First Lieutenant on May 29, 1847. He served in the Mexican-American War and was appointed a brevet captain on September 8, 1847, for bravery at the Battle of Molino del Rey. He was wounded at Chapultepec on September 13, for which he also received a brevet promotion to major.^[2]



After the war with Mexico ended, Porter returned to West Point and became a cavalry and artillery instructor from 1849 to 1853, and then became adjutant to

the academy's superintendent until 1855. He next served at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, as assistant adjutant general in the Department of the West in 1856, where he was brevetted to captain that June. Porter then served under future Confederate Albert Sidney Johnston in the expedition against the Mormons in 1857 and 1858. Afterwards Porter inspected and reorganized the defenses of Charleston Harbor, South Carolina until late 1860, when he aided in the evacuation of army personnel from Texas after that state seceded from the Union.^[3]

Civil War Service

Union General Fitz John Porter (seated in chair) and staff

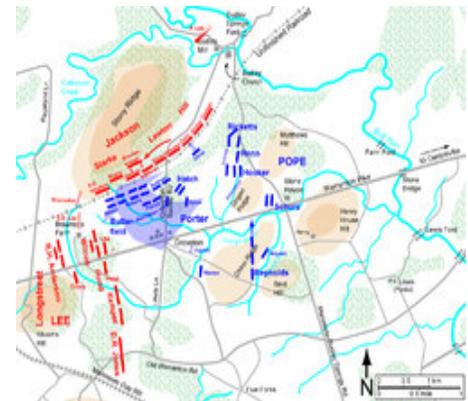
After the start of the Civil War, Porter became chief of staff and assistant adjutant general for the Department of Pennsylvania, but he was almost immediately promoted to colonel of the 15th Infantry on May 14, 1861. In August, he was promoted to brigadier general, backdated to May 17^[2] so he would be senior enough to receive division command in the Army of the Potomac, newly formed under Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan. Soon Porter became a trusted adviser and loyal friend to McClellan, but this association with the soon-to-be-controversial commanding general would prove to be disastrous for Porter's military career.

Porter led his division at the beginning of the Peninsula Campaign, seeing action at the Siege of Yorktown. McClellan created two provisional corps and Porter was assigned to command the V Corps. During the Seven Days Battles, and particularly at the Battle of Gaines' Mill, he displayed a talent for defensive fighting.^[4] At the Battle of Malvern Hill he also played a leading role. For his successful performance on the Peninsula he was promoted to major general of volunteers on July 4, 1862.^[2]

Second Bull Run

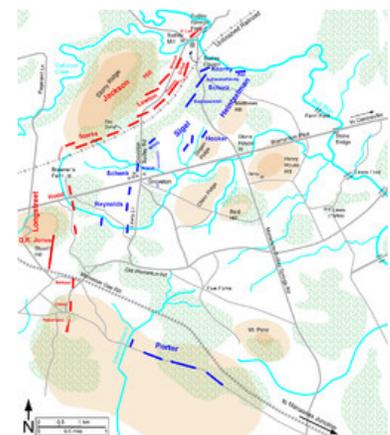
August 29, noon; Longstreet's Corps arrives, Porter's Corps stops and does not engage

Porter's corps was sent to reinforce Maj. Gen. John Pope in the Northern Virginia Campaign, a reassignment that he openly challenged and complained about, criticizing Pope personally. During the Second Battle of Bull Run, on August 29, 1862, he was ordered to attack the flank and rear of Maj. Gen. Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson's wing of the Army of Northern Virginia. Porter had stopped at Dawkin's Branch where he had encountered Maj. Gen. J.E.B. Stuart's cavalry screen. On August 29 he received a message from Pope directing him to attack the Confederate right (which Pope assumed to be Jackson on Stony Ridge), but at the same time to maintain contact with the neighboring division under Maj. Gen. John F. Reynolds, a conflict in orders that could not be resolved. Pope was apparently unaware that Confederate Maj. Gen. James Longstreet's wing of the army had arrived on the battlefield and the proposed envelopment of Jackson's position would have collided suicidally with Longstreet's large force. Porter chose not to make the attack because of the intelligence he had received that Longstreet was to his immediate front.



August 30, 3:00; Porter turns and attacks, Longstreet in position to attack and "rolls up" Pope's army

On August 30 Pope again ordered the flank attack, and Porter reluctantly complied. As the V Corps turned to head towards Jackson's right and attacked, it presented its own (and consequently the entire army's) flank to Longstreet's waiting men. About 30,000 Confederates now assailed Porter's 5,000 or so men and drove through them and into the rest of Pope's forces, doing exactly what Porter most feared would come of these orders. Pope was infuriated by the defeat, accused Porter of insubordination, and relieved him of his command on September 5.^[5]



Porter was soon restored to command of the corps by McClellan and led it through the Maryland Campaign, where the corps served in a reserve position

during the Battle of Antietam. He is famously said to have told McClellan, "Remember, General, I command the last reserve of the last Army of the Republic."^[6] McClellan took his implied advice and failed to commit his reserves into a battle that might have been won if he had used his forces aggressively.

Court martial

On November 25, 1862, Porter was arrested and court-martialed for his actions at Second Bull Run. By this time, McClellan had been relieved by President Abraham Lincoln and could not provide political cover for his protégé. In fact, Porter's association with the disgraced McClellan and his open criticism of Pope were significant reasons for his conviction at court-martial. The officers of the court were appointed by Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, who detested McClellan, and most of those officers received promotions after they delivered their verdict.¹ Porter was found guilty on January 10, 1863, of disobedience and misconduct, and he was dismissed from the Army on January 21, 1863.^[2]

Postbellum

After the war ended, Porter was offered a command in the Egyptian Army but declined it,^[5] and spent most of the remainder of his life fighting against this injustice. In 1878, a special commission under General John M. Schofield exonerated Porter by finding that his reluctance to attack Longstreet probably saved Pope's Army of Virginia from an even greater defeat. Eight years later, President Chester A. Arthur reversed Porter's sentence and a special act of the U.S. Congress restored Porter's commission as an infantry colonel in the U.S. Army, backdated to May 14, 1861, but without any back pay due. Two days later, August 7, 1886, Porter, vindicated, retired from the Army at his own request.

Porter was then involved in mining, construction, and commerce. He served as the New York City Commissioner of Public Works, the New York City Police Commissioner, and the New York City Fire Commissioner. He died in Morristown, New Jersey, and is buried in Green-Wood Cemetery, Brooklyn, New York.^[2] His grave can be found in Section 54, Lot 5685/89.

Namesake and honors

In 1904, a statue of Porter designed by artist James E. Kelly was dedicated in Haven Park in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. In World War II the United States liberty ship [*SS FitzJohn Porter*](#) was named in his honor. Information gotten from Wikipedia.

References

- Fitz John Porter at Find a Grave Retrieved on 2008-12-28
- Eicher, John H., and Eicher, David J., *Civil War High Commands*, Stanford University Press, 2001, ISBN 0-8047-3641-3.
- Dupuy, Trevor N., Johnson, Curt, and Bongard, David L., *Harper Encyclopedia of Military Biography*, Castle Books, 1992, 1st Ed., ISBN 0-7858-0437-4.
- McPherson, James M., *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era (Oxford History of the United States)*, Oxford University Press, 1988, ISBN 0-19-503863-0.
- Sears, Stephen W., *Landscape Turned Red: The Battle of Antietam*, Houghton Mifflin, 1983, ISBN 0-89919-172-X.
- Porter biography
- Court Martial of Porter

Notes

1. [^] Eicher, p. 435. Court-martialed 1863, restored and resigned in 1886 to rank from 1861
2. [^] [a](#) [b](#) [c](#) [d](#) [e](#) [f](#) Eicher, p. 435.
3. [^] Dupuy, p. 607.
4. [^] Dupuy, p. 608. "he was a skilled defensive commander who possessed a fine eye for terrain..."
5. [^] [a](#) [b](#) Dupuy, p. 608.
6. [^] Sears, p. 291; McPherson, pp. 543-44.



Scheduled Speakers for 2009 - 2010:

Sep 2, 2009: James Lawler – “Survival – Andersonville and Sultana”

Oct 7, 2009: Roger Arthur – “Importance of John Brown” (Tentative)

Nov 4, 2009: M. Borowick – “Fitz-John Porter’s Court Marital

Dec 2, 2009: BVCWRT Members - Discussion of selected topics, plus our Christmas Social

Jan 6, 2010: Mike Kochan – “Monitor”

Feb 3, 2010: M. Leepson – “Battle of Monocacy”

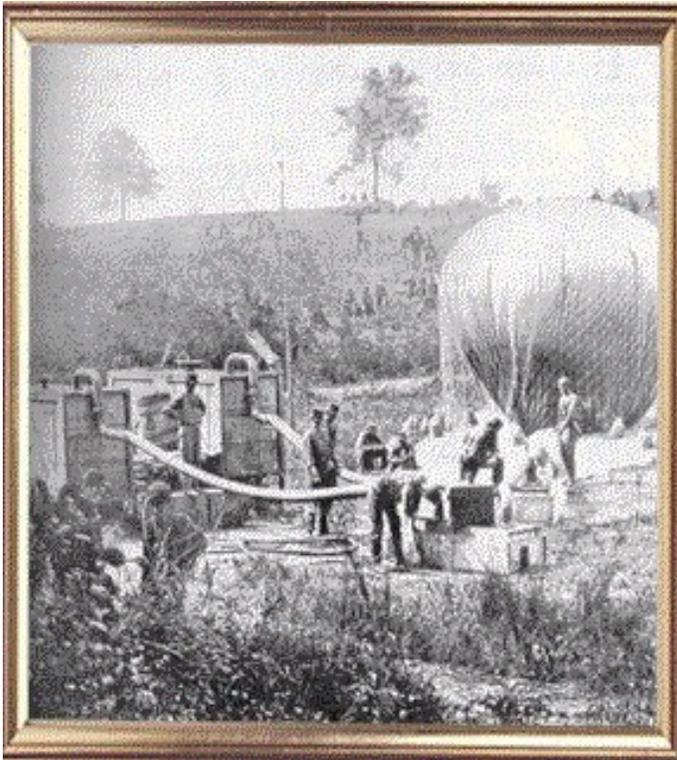
Mar 3, 2010: J Booz – “Antietam”

Apr 7, 2010: Gary Eckelbarger – “2nd Manassas” (Tentative)

Apr ?, 2010: Field Trip: 2nd Manassas (More information to come from Greg Buss)

May 5, 2010: ChipCrowe – “Hunter McGuire”

May 25, 2010: (Annual Banquet): Speaker will be Elizabeth Brown Pryor, who is an American diplomat and historian. In 2008, Pryor was awarded the Lincoln Prize for *Reading the Man: A Portrait of Robert E. Lee through his Private Letters*. She shared the honor with James Oakes, who won for *The Radical and the Republican: Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, and the Triumph of Antislavery Politics*. Pryor's book is notable for using hundreds of Lee's previously unpublished private letters to create a fresh biography of the Confederate general.



Civil War Balloon

"A personal reminiscence by Professor T. S. C. Lowe, who introduced and made balloon observations on the Peninsula for the Union Army"