

The historical inspiration for the Barrett Hill Farm reenactment.

Over 10,500 military engagements occurred during the Civil War. They weren't all on the scale of Gettysburg or Antietam. Skirmishes were fought by units as small as a portion of a company and as large as brigades and divisions. "Holding the Rapidan" focuses on those small company actions that occurred up and down the lines formed by the Corps picketing and defending the Rapidan River during the second half of September 1863.

From The Richmond Examiner September 16, 1863

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INTERESTING FROM THE RAPIDAN.

We learn that Gen. LEE'S army, or a portion of it, was in line of battle near the Rapidan yesterday, (Tuesday, the 15th) the enemy having advanced to the Rapidan in force. There was some skirmishing between the pickets; but the enemy having suspended his forward movement, there was no serious collision between the opposing forces.

The Yankees crossed the Rappahannock on the night of the 12th inst., in strong force, with three corps of infantry, five brigades of cavalry, and six or eight batteries of artillery -- in all about 15,000 or 20,000 men. Their advance was very rapid, but not unexpected. They have taken about fifty or seventy-five prisoners, and three pieces of artillery. Our men fought gallantly, disputing every inch of ground to Mitchell's Station, on the Orange and Alexandria railroad, four miles this side of Culpeper. Our loss is represented to be about 150 killed, wounded, and missing.

A splitted [sic] fight took place on Monday at Raccoon Ford, in which the Sixth Virginia cavalry repeatedly charged and drove the Yankees back. Their loss was fifty or sixty killed and wounded. Our loss was duly four or five. The repeated efforts of the enemy to gain the river were routed, and we now hold possession of the ford. Among the rumors by the train on Tuesday was one to the effect that a party of STUART's ordnance train has been captured between Robertson and Rapidan Rivers.

It is believed that the demonstration on the Upper Rappahannock is merely a feint to cover other movements -- probably an advance via Fredericksburg -- to meet which ample preparations have been made; but it is more probable that this movement is only a "reconnaissance in force," to ascertain the position and probable strength of Gen. Lee's army.

From The History of the 15th Massachusetts.

The Fifteenth Regiment reached Culpeper Court House at 4 P.M. and encamped a mile and a half west of the town. As cannonading was heard toward the south along the Rapidan, the regiment was ordered to be ready to move at a moment's notice. No advance was made, however, until the 17th when the regiment went to the Rapidan, where it arrived at noon. For the next seventeen days, the Second Corps picketed along the river. There was considerable firing at the pickets by the enemy, who were in concealment on the south side of the river.

From the Essential Civil War Curriculum.

In September, Lee and Meade had been compelled to ship substantial portions of their armies to the Western Theater to take part in the battles around Chattanooga, Tennessee.

(What remained of) Lee's army was stationed behind the Rapidan, spread out in a long line centered on Orange Courthouse. The Confederates guarded strong fortifications at the many fords spaced at intervals astride the river, with the Second Corps, commanded by Lieutenant General Richard Stoddert Ewell holding the right of Lee's line, while the Third Corps, commanded by Lieutenant General Ambrose Powell Hill, held the left. The flanks of Lee's army were guarded by the two divisions of Major General James Ewell Brown Stuart's recently created Cavalry Corps, with Major General Fitzhugh Lee's division on the right and Major General Wade Hampton's division on the left. Since Hampton was still recuperating from wounds received in June, Stuart personally supervised the movements of that division.