

PIEDMONT BATTLEFIELD

Submitted by Richard Beswick.



This marker is on the side of Va State Rt 608 (Battlefield Rd) a few hundred yards north of the village of New Hope approximately 10 miles north of Staunton Va. — at Battlefield Road, Staunton Va.



(Left view of Confederate line) Turning left (west) on Piedmont Road and driving a few hundred yards until you are almost to Cline River Road (Va State Rt. 774) looking to the left you see the

ridge. Behind the ridge the Middle River runs. It is a tributary of the Shenandoah River. This photo and the two following show the left of the ridge, the center and the right. Approximately 5000 Confederate soldiers massed in front of this ridge, in front of the wood which covered the ridge at the time. They had hastily built a fence breastwork in front to protect them from Union fire. The Union line was 200 yards from this breastwork. On the morning of June 5th the right flank of the Union army made three futile assaults on the Confederates across the 200 yards from this breastwork. On the morning of June 5th the right flank of the Union army made three futile assaults on the Confederates across the 200 yard open field which you see in these three photos — at Battlefield Road, Staunton Va.



(Center of the Confederate line) It was then as it is now, a farmer's field — at Battlefield Road, Staunton Va.



(Right of the Confederate line) The right of the Confederate line was "anchored" on the Middle River. — at Battlefield Road, Staunton Va.



This is the view from Battlefield Road near the commemorative plaque. It looks down the shallow ravine along Crawford Run Stream. Union Col. Thoburn's 2nd Brigade which included the 12th West Virginia Volunteer Infantry Regiment, of which 1st Sgt. William H. Leach was a member, advance through this landscape partially hidden by the smoke of battle and the depression to attack the left end of the Confederate line (left as viewed by the Union) which had been left "in the air." The Confederate General "Grumble" Jones had made a mistake in adjusting his troops and exposed his main line to being attacked from the left side. — You can see the Blue Ridge Mountains in the distance.



My Uncle William H. Leach of the 12th WVVIR which was part of the 2nd Brigade would have seen this when they came up out of the shallow valley and through the smoke of battle to see the edge of the Confederate line in this landscape. A North Carolina Regiment would quickly

wheel and fire a volley into the advancing 12th West Virginia Regiment (12th WVVIR). It was staggered by the sheet of flame and mini balls. At this time their flag bearer, Joseph S. Halstead committed an extreme act of courage, rushing ahead of his 12th WVVIR, carrying their battle flag over the Confederate breastworks and hollering "come on boys here is where I want you." He was quickly gunned down. The rest of the West Virginians flew across the field and into the Confederate flank with levelled bayonets and a rage bought with Corporal Halstead's self sacrifice. Fierce hand to hand fighting followed. The 12th had crossed the T of the Confederate line, the Confederate position was untenable, with the Union's 1st Brigade simultaneously attacking their front, the Confederate line crumbled into chaos, surrendering or retreating through the woods, over the ridge, down the ravine behind and splashed through the Middle River behind that. My Great, Great Uncle 1st Sgt. William H. Leach would have died from the volley from the South Carolina Regiment or from the hand to hand fighting afterwards. He would have died on the landscape in the above photo, on the afternoon of June 5th, 1864. From his letters which we have, he was fighting to keep the Union together with a view similar to Lincoln's thoughts on November 19th 1863; "Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth, upon this continent, a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure." William lived a life of service, meaning and consequence. We remembered him at Piedmont on this March 28th. I — at Battlefield Road, Staunton Va.