

The Battle of Thoroughfare Gap

History was made 150 years ago in that 'rough pass in the Bull Run Mountains'

AUGUST 28, 1862

The involvement of the Town of Haymarket in the Civil War was basically limited to the period after the First Battle of Manassas in July 1861, and when the town was burned by federal troops on the night of Nov. 3-4, 1862.

Due to its strategic position at the intersection of the Gap Road (Route 55) and the Old Carolina Road, the residents of Haymarket had to deal with a lot during those 16 months. The casualties of both sides were brought to Haymarket after First Manassas, and after Confederate forces left their defensive

positions at Centreville in the spring of 1862, the town was frequently occupied by Union forces.

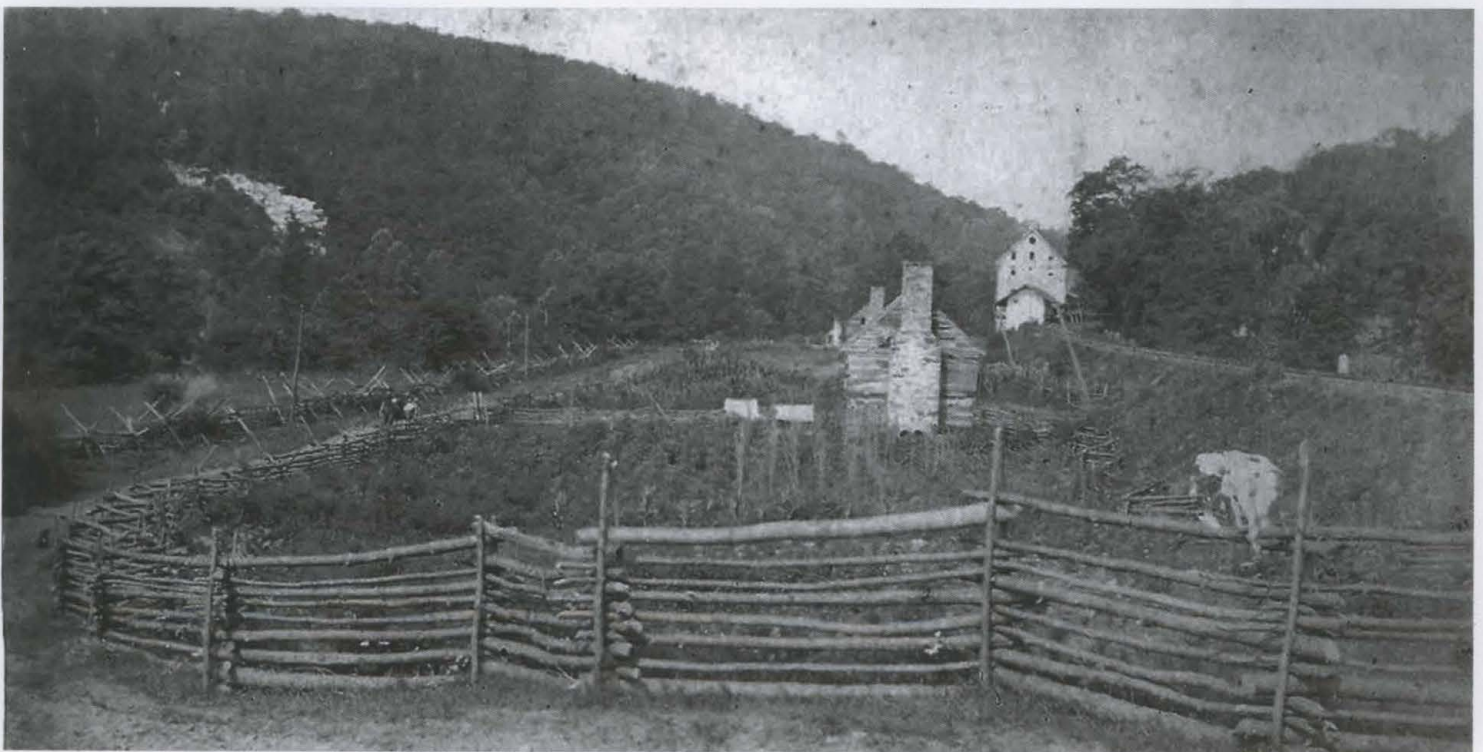
Thoroughfare Gap west of Haymarket was also a strategic site during the Civil War. The Manassas Gap Railroad passed through the narrow gap, as well as the main road linking the Shenandoah Valley with the cities to the east. It was also the location of the Chapman's Mill industrial/commercial complex on Broad Run.

In warfare, it is often the events leading up to a major battle that predetermine the final outcome; such was the case

of the Battle of Thoroughfare Gap, which took place on Aug. 28, 1862, the day before the epic Second Battle of Manassas.

It was not the number of combatants involved, the number of casualties (total of about 100 killed on both sides), or even who controlled the gap once the firing stopped that was important.

The most important issue was the advantage gained when the armies of Gen. Robert E. Lee and Gen. James Longstreet successfully fought their way eastward through the Gap, and were able



Photographed in the 1880s, Thoroughfare Gap had changed little from the Civil War days. Courtesy Manassas Battlefield National Park.

to join forces with Gen. T. J. "Stonewall" Jackson at Manassas before the start of the Second Battle of Manassas on Aug. 29, 1862.

If Union troops had been able to stop Lee and Longstreet at the Gap, and rout Jackson's forces, the outcome of the epic battle might have been a resounding Union victory instead of defeat, and hastening the ending of the war.

This question and many other aspects of the Battle of Thoroughfare Gap will be examined during the Sesquicentennial Commemoration of the event, to be held Aug. 25-26, 2012, at the Chapman/Beverly Mill and related sites on the mountain.

Hosted by the Turn the Mill Around Campaign and the Bull Run Mountain Conservancy Inc., the two-day event will feature presentations by expert speakers, site tours of the battlefield, and displays explaining Civil War soldier life, including weapons, equipment and medicine. Also, living historians will interpret life on the mountain, and the community perspective during the war.

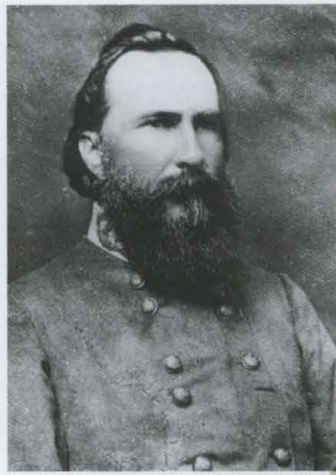
A BATTLE IN THE MAKING

Thoroughfare Gap first figured in the Civil War in July 1861, when Confederate Gen. Joseph E. Johnston, commander of the Department of Northern Virginia, moved soldiers from the Shenandoah Valley eastward by rail through the gap to join troops under Gen. P.G.T. Beauregard at the First Battle of Manassas.

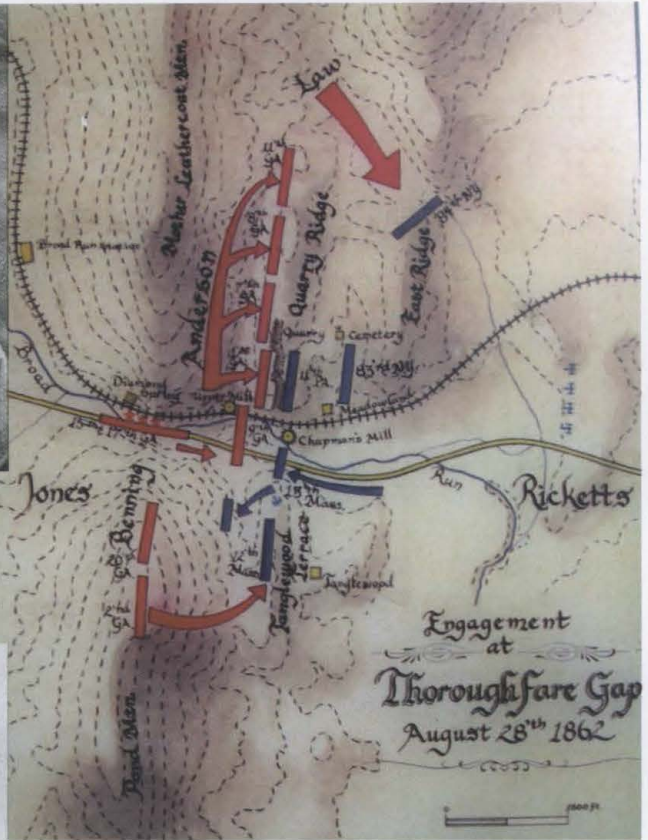
Later, Gen. Johnston signed an agreement with John Chapman, owner of the mill, to set up a slaughterhouse and meat curing and storage facility on his property. The facility, managed by the Confederate Army Subsistence Department, provided beef and pork for the Confederate troops stationed in Manassas over the winter of 1861-62. The slaughterhouse was located over Broad Run, and pens and sheds built around the property. The mill was used for meat storage.

After Confederate forces withdrew from positions in Northern Virginia, it became apparent that the processing plant might fall into Union hands.

"When the order came in March 1862 for the Confederate Army to evacuate this part of Northern Virginia, the large stores of meat and herds of cattle and



GEN. JAMES LONGSTREET led his army into battle at Thoroughfare Gap.



Map on the Civil War Trails exhibit on Rt. 55 details the movements of Confederate and Union forces during the Battle of Thoroughfare Gap. Courtesy of Terrence Haney, cartographer, and *Civil War*, the magazine of the Civil War Society, Berryville, Va.

GEN. 'STONEWALL' JACKSON raided a Federal supply depot at Manassas Junction on Aug. 26, 1862.

hogs at Thoroughfare Gap were dealt with hastily," according to Frances Lillian Jones in *Beverley (Chapman's) Mill, Thoroughfare Gap, Virginia: A History and Preservation Plan*. "Whatever could not be carried away by the evacuating army was given away to civilians or destroyed. Departing Confederate troops set fire to the mill, burning the remaining meat inside, to prevent its use or the use of the mill, by the Union Army."

It is estimated that between one and two million pounds of meat was burned, along with the smaller buildings. Gutted by fire, the mill still stood.

Military action in the area raged in August 1862, with fighting along the Rappahannock River and at Fauquier Springs. On Aug. 26, 1862, Gen. T.J. "Stonewall" Jackson led his corps of 24,000 men through the undefended Thoroughfare Gap, and sacked a Federal

supply depot at Manassas Junction. Deep in enemy territory, Jackson waited for the Union forces to come after him.

"If the Federals could delay Longstreet's passage long enough, Jackson's isolated corps might be annihilated by the two Union armies converging on the area," wrote Noel G. Harrison in "The Battle at Thoroughfare Gap," published in Issue 52 of *Civil War* magazine.

On the night of Aug. 27, General Lee and his staff stayed at "Avenel," the Beverley homeplace between The Plains and Thoroughfare Gap. William Beverley, then 12 years old, recalled "...General Lee walked the floor until midnight, when a courier arrived with a dispatch from General Jackson, assuring Lee that Jackson was in no immediate danger, and

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could hold out until Lee's army could reach him.

"The courier was Lt. Thomas Baynton Turner (son of Edward Carter Turner), who was reared at Kinloch... he knew every inch of the ground, and reached "Avenel" from Manassas by making a detour through Hopewell Gap," recalled William Beverley.

AUGUST 28, 1862

On the morning of Aug. 28, 1862, Lee and Longstreet moved their armies eastward toward Thoroughfare Gap, which Longstreet described as "...a rough pass in the

Bull Run Mountains, at some points not more than a hundred yards wide."

As they entered the Gap, the lead units of the 9th Georgia Infantry were confronted by a cavalry regiment under Col. Sir Percy Wyndham, a Briton serving in the U.S. Army. Wyndham's regiment was backed up by a Federal infantry division commanded by Brig. Gen. James Ricketts that was positioned east of the Gap. Wyndham's men attempted to block the road with fallen trees, but were soon pushed eastward out of the Gap by the Georgians. Taking up a position behind a road embankment east of the Gap, the

Confederates fired on Rickett's troops, who began to pull back.

"Both sides fed units into the pass, and the engagement evolved into two separate actions: one north of Broad Run for control of Mother Leathercoat Mountain, including the Upper Mill and Chapman's Mill – and one south of Broad Run, waged for possession of Pond Mountain, Tanglewood and surrounding ground," wrote Noel Harrison.

North of Broad Run, the 13th Massachusetts engaged the 9th Georgia, pushing them back down the railroad tracks and eventually reaching Chapman's Mill. There, Union sharpshooters took over the second floor and fired on the Georgians. They were soon joined by the 11th Pennsylvania, which formed a firing line up the eastern side of the quarry.

At that point, the main objective of the Confederates was to keep the enemy from gaining the high ground on Mother Leathercoat. Four regiments commanded by Gen. G. T. "Tige" Anderson were positioned on the railroad tracks west of the Gap. He quickly became aware of the deadly Union fire coming from the area west of the mill that had already killed or wounded about 50 Georgians.

"I met Col. Beck at the water tank (beside the railroad tracks), and he

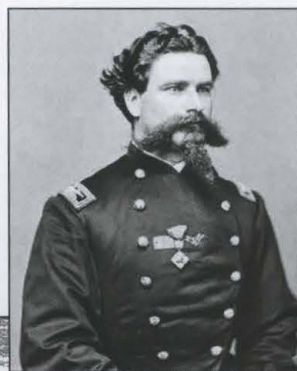
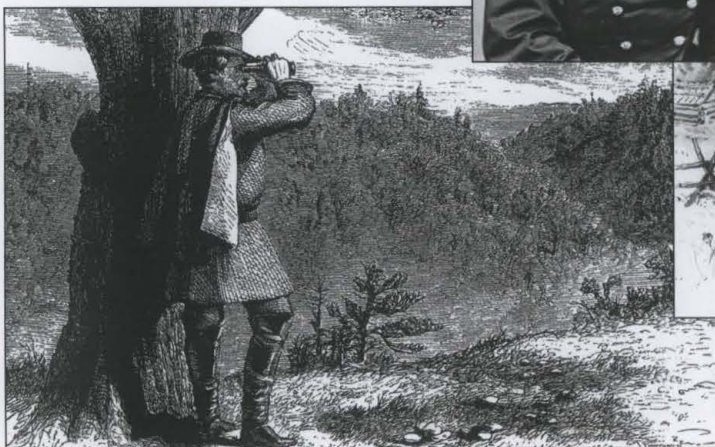
informed me of his situation, remarking with tears in his eyes that he could not fight a Division," according to Gen. Anderson's personal papers concerning the 20th Georgia Infantry. "By the time the Brigade was up and appreciating the fact that the hill on my left (Mother Leathercoat) was the key to the Gap... the 1st Georgia Regulars changed direction and hurried up the steep face of the hill. This hill was so steep that my men assisted themselves by grabbing hold of the bushes on the hill."

Anderson's men ran into Union forces at the quarry, a long pit that started about 20 feet wide and 15 feet deep at the bottom, and narrowing to five feet wide and five feet deep at the top.

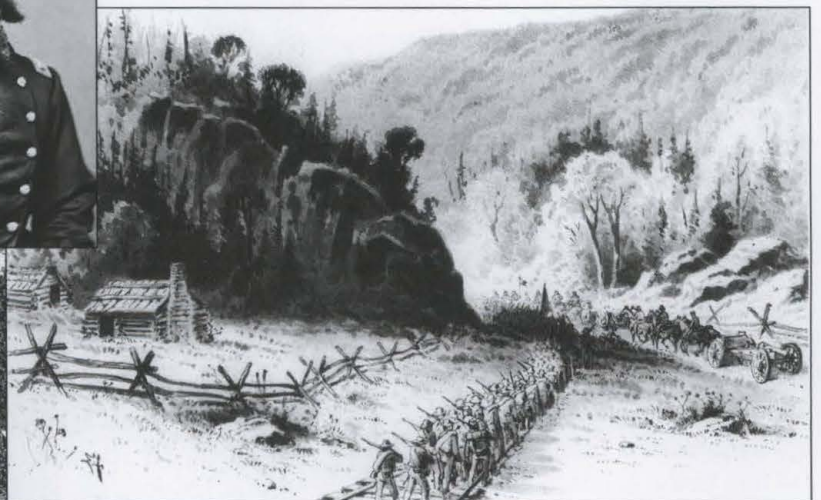
A bitter fight ensued in extremely close quarters. "I was near enough to the federal line to have touched bayonets with the man in front of me," wrote W. H. Andrews, of the Georgia Regulars. The fighting continued until after the third Confederate assault, at which point the Union troops retreated.

On the other side of the Gap, Col. H. L. Benning's 20th Georgia regiment scaled the slopes of Pond Mountain, reaching the crest before the Union troops could reach it. From the promontory, they fired on the Yankees, driving them off. Once they joined forces with the 2nd Georgia on

Gen. Robert E. Lee looked eastward into Thoroughfare Gap as the battle unfolded on Aug. 28, 1862. Courtesy Turn the Mill Around Campaign.



COL. SPERCY WYNDHAM and his cavalymen tried to stop Longstreet's advance.



Drawing of Longstreet's army entering Thoroughfare Gap from the west. A unit from Georgia was the first to draw fire. Courtesy Turn the Mill Around Campaign.



GEN. GEORGE T. 'TIGE' ANDERSON led the effort to take the high ground on Mother Leathercoat Mountain.

the mountain, they completely held the high ground.

Driving Gen. Ricketts' forces from the north side of the Gap involved Col. Evander Law's Brigade, which had struggled up the west slope of Mother Leathercoat and appeared opposite the Union flank, engaging the 84th New York. At about the same time, three brigades under the command of Brig. Gen. Cadmus M. Wilcox that had crossed the mountain at Hopewell Gap and made their way to the battlefield, and getting into position to attack Rickett's rear. "Finding both his flanks turned and his center forced back, Ricketts ordered a retreat into the gathering darkness," wrote Noel Harrison. "Union troops lost

the race for the crest of Pond Mountain, Tige Anderson's leftward turn entirely excluded them from Mother Leathercoat Mountain."

Realizing that his position was becoming untenable, Ricketts ordered his men to pull back to Gainesville, abandoning the effort to hold the Gap in order to escape before his line of retreat was cut off by Wilcox's troops.

AFTERMATH

Lee and Longstreet had not intended to move through the pass until the next day, but with the Union opposition out of the way, the Confederates cleared the Gap in anticipation of joining Jackson

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GEN. JAMES RICKETTS commanded the Union division east of Thoroughfare Gap.

at Manassas. Gen. Anderson succinctly described the major short-term result of the battle:

“Ricketts had fled toward Gainesville, and Longstreet with his 30,000 veterans moved on like a majestic stream to form a conjunction with Jackson on the plains of Manassas, where on Aug. 30, the Southern Army gained one of the most brilliant victories of the war.”

Col. John Coussons, CSA, who served as a scout during the Battle of Thoroughfare Gap, characterized the action in an article published in 1906:

“Never, perhaps, in all the tide of time was an unnoted stroke of war more fruitful of results than was that headlong scramble over the mountain. It saves Stonewall Jackson from destruction; it opened the way for Longstreet; it reunited Lee’s army; it made the Second Battle of Manassas a possibility and an actuality; and thus crowned the campaign of 1862 with the best balanced battle and the most brilliant victory ever lost and won on American soil.”

For the remainder of the war, Union troops were sent to occupy Thoroughfare Gap anytime it appeared that Lee’s infantry might try to use it, which happened in November 1862, and June,

Thoroughfare Gap, 150 years later

On Saturday and Sunday, Aug. 25-26, the Turn the Mill Around Campaign and the Bull Run Mountain Conservancy Inc. will host a 150th Anniversary Commemoration of the Battle of Thoroughfare Gap.

The event will run from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. each day, and will feature presentations by Civil War authorities Jim Burgess, Childs Burden, Bruce Slawter, Doug Fulmer, Fred Schmidtman, Marci Markey and Michael Kieffer.

Between presentations, the public is encouraged to visit the display areas to gain a better perspective of soldier life during the Civil War, or to pet or sit on “Rocky,” a cavalry horse brought by Black Horse Troop re-enactor Ed Dandar.

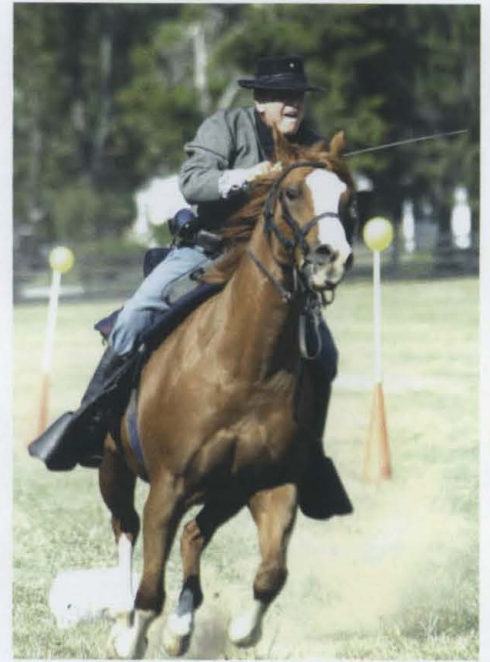
Living history interpretations will include Marci Mackey as Sarah Beverley Turner; Civil War medicine, by Margaret Rowe; the Union soldier, by Doug Fuller; and the Confederate soldier by Dave Goetz.

Bob Lemon’s Blue Ridge Barbecue will provide food for the event.

The 150th Anniversary Commemoration of the Battle of Thoroughfare Gap is free both days and open to the public. Donations are appreciated.

For more information, visit the Turn the Mill Around Website, www.chapmansmill.org.

Civil War re-enactor Ed Dandar and ‘Rocky’ will be present at the commemoration, displaying Civil War cavalry equipment and weapons. With their parents’ permission, children may pet or feed Rocky carrots, or sit in his saddle.



July and October 1863, according to Noel Harrison.

“On three occasions, during the intervals between these Union occupations, Confederate cavalry threatened to obstruct the pass, but were thwarted twice by Union cavalry and once by Union infantry,” he wrote.

All of this activity ultimately led to devastation of Chapman’s Mill and the Upper Mill, and most of the other buildings in the Gap.

“According to a court deposition taken

in a suit to settle John Chapman’s estate, it was noted that Chapman became a lunatic in 1862 (sic) in consequence of the destruction of his property and maltreatment by Federal soldiers, and died intestate in 1866,” wrote Frances Lillian Jones.

Efforts to sell the property at auction in 1867 to settle Chapman’s debts found no takers. The property lay fallow until 1871, when it was sold to William and Robert Beverley.

Author John Toler is a writer and historian and has served Fauquier County for over 50 years, including 4 decades with the Fauquier-Times Democrat. He has written and lectured about many legendary characters in Fauquier County’s history. Toler is the co-author of *250 Years in Fauquier County: A Virginia Story*, and author of *Warrenton, Virginia: A History of 200 Years*.

