



**The Fight for Fleetwood** is known for the cavalry clashing with their sabers drawn.

# Cavalries clash again, 160 years later

Photographs by **LUKE CHRISTOPHER**

The sun beat down on a crowd of spectators as clouds of smoke from Confederate cannons dissipated over the grassy farmland. Mounted Union soldiers stood watching on a ridge across the field. Just then the bugle sounded and the charge began.

To commemorate its 160th anniversary, a 3-day event held last weekend (June 9 to 11) remembered the Battle of Brandy Station in Culpeper. Activities ranged from battlefield tours, historical talks, reenactments and the first church service in 49 years at the Historic Fleetwood Church.

According to The American Battlefield Trust, the Battle of Brandy Station was the largest cavalry battle ever fought in North America during the Civil War on June 9, 1863. It was the opening battle of the Gettysburg campaign. Both the Union and Confederate cavalries – mounted soldiers – were unaware of each other’s locations and happened to come across each other near the Rappahannock River.

The morning of June 9, Union Maj. Gen. Alfred Pleasonton sent soldiers over the river. Following the crossing, Union soldiers struck the Confederate camp, which was manned by Confederate Maj. Gen. J.E.B. Stuart. After some movement, the Union cavalry split up: one headed for Brandy

Station and the other to Stevensburg. Union and Confederate cavalries clashed on a low ridge called Fleetwood Hill in Brandy Station. After 14 hours of fighting, Pleasonton and his men abandoned the field. Historically, the battle result is inconclusive.

However, the one who remains on the field after the battle can usually

safely call themselves the victors, said local historian Clark “Bud” Hall.

There were 20,500 forces engaged – 11,000 Union and 9,500 Confederate, according to ABT. There were 1,299 estimated casualties – 866 Union and 433 Confederate.

But Hall explained the Confederacy lost irreplaceable men and horses

during the battle of which they would not recover. Confederate soldiers privately owned their own horses while the Union could easily replace horses that were U.S. government property.

“I look upon the Battle of Brandy Station as the beginning of the end of the war,” Hall said.

— MARIA BASILEO

**Clark “Bud” Hall,** the Battle of Brandy Station’s principal historian speaks about the Fight for Fleetwood Hill for the reenactors.



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**Above** | A gunner is in charge of the muzzle-loading team, and an efficient team can fire three rounds a minute.

**Right** | A federal officer leads a charge with saber drawn. It's said Federals often used their sabers in cavalry battles; Confederates preferred to use their revolvers, until they ran out of ammunition, and then their sabers.

**Below left** | Doug Mowery of western Pennsylvania and Nathaniel Williams of Halifax, Va., rest and eat in the Federal camp. Federal soldiers survived on hardtack, a rock-like cake made of flour, water and salt; some called it "tooth duller." It was usually dipped in coffee to soften. A staple Confederate soldier ration is "sloosh," a flattened cornmeal cake fried in bacon fat in a cast iron skillet.

**Below right** | Dan Burtz of Colorado and Al Underwood of Barboursville, Va., rest in the Federal camp after the earlier battle and prepare for the Fight of Fleetwood Hill. Underwood holds an antique Sharps .54-caliber carbine breech-loading rifle, which was the most popular cavalry rifle in the Civil War.

