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Hollywood Meets History 30 Years Later



Seated: Ron Maxwell (director), actors Stephen Lang and Tom Berenger, with other cast and crew for the Gettysburg 30th Anniversary celebration. (All anniversary photos by Leon Reed)

By Leon Reed
Special Coorespondent to
Civil War News

GETTYSBURG, Penn.— Director Ron Maxwell, actors Stephen Lang and Tom Berenger, and a dozen other cast members and crew joined thousands of starstruck history and movie buffs the weekend of October 13-15 in celebrating the 30th anniversary of the film *Gettysburg*. The celebrations occurred across the county at Adams County Historical Society (ACHS), Seminary Ridge Museum, Majestic Theater, and other sites.

Speaking to a crowd at ACHS, Maxwell said the film wasn't a solitary effort: "It was a collection of filmmakers that willed it into being."

Lang, who played Maj. Gen. George Pickett, recalled reading Michael Shaara's Pulitzer Prize-winning book *The Killer Angels* around 1976, shortly after its

1974 release. The film was adapted from the book. "From the minute I read it, I had it in mind I had to play Pickett," said Lang.

Years later, while playing Hamlet at a Connecticut theater, he heard from another cast member that the man who was going to direct *Killer Angels* was in the audience. After the play, the director introduced himself, saying "Hi, I'm Ron Maxwell." Lang replied, saying "Hi, I'm George Pickett." "Ron sort of looked at me and said, 'I think we should have breakfast tomorrow,' and by the end of breakfast, I had the part," said Lang. "It's very unusual that you wind up playing a part you've dreamed of for years. It was a real privilege."

Lang wasn't the only person who had long dreamed of doing the movie. Maxwell also read the book shortly after it came out, immediately obtained the movie rights, and "talked about *Killer Angels* on the set of every

movie I worked on for the next 10 years." But Maxwell said getting the green light from a studio appeared more like *Mission Impossible* than *Killer Angels*.

Berenger, who played Lieut. Gen. James Longstreet, shared memories of traveling around the country on family vacations, including a first trip to Gettysburg at age 7. Like every other seven-year-old boy who ever visited Gettysburg, Berenger said his best memory was scrambling around Devil's Den. "When the time came to film Pickett's Charge, I was suddenly a seven-year-old in Devil's Den again," he said.

Maxwell, on the other hand, said he had never toured any Civil War battlefield until his first visit to meet with Shaara. "On the first day, he showed me the first-day scenes he wrote about, and we did

★ **Gettysburg**
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Cannon Roar West of Winchester N-SSA Fires off its 148th National Skirmish



Hardaway's Alabama Battery took 1st place in the howitzer class with Jeffrey Baldwin's Tredegar 12-pounder field howitzer. (Niki Bethke)

By Bruce Miller

The North-South Skirmish Association (N-SSA) held its 148th National Competition October 6 through 8, 2023. Member units competed in live-fire matches with original or authentic reproduction Civil War period arms including cannon, mortars, muskets, carbines, breech-loading rifles and revolvers. It is the largest Civil War event of its kind in the country and attracts spectators, Civil War enthusiasts, and shooting sports media coverage.

Forty-five cannon participated in the artillery team matches, a crowd favorite. One historical gun was Ken Kurdt's original State of New York 6-pounder. It was manufactured in 1834 by Bellona Foundry, along the James River above Richmond. The markings near the vent say "I.C. & Co. B.F." indicating this gun was manufactured when Major John Clark owned Bellona, before it was purchased by Dr. Junius L. Archer in the 1840s. Another big favorite was the

Smithgall Foundation's massive Army 20-pounder Parrott rifle. It was manufactured at West Point Foundry in 1861 for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and was used by the 1st Pennsylvania Light Artillery during the War. In the N-SSA, the 3rd U.S. Infantry competes with both small arms and the impressive artillery pieces.

The range is reconfigured so cannon fire perpendicular to the small arms firing line and the guns are classified by type: smoothbore, rifled, howitzer, and rifled howitzer. Target frames with paper targets mounted on drywall backers are set at ranges of 200 yards for rifled and smoothbore guns and 100 yards for howitzers. All cannon fire 12 solid projectiles, with a maximum of seven shots, at either of two targets: a bull's eye and a cannon silhouette that represents counter battery fire. The best five shots on each target count for a maximum of 25 points per target,

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with a perfect score being 50-5V. Howitzers fire a maximum of 12 projectiles at a single bullseye target, with the 10 best shots counted and a perfect score being 50-10V.

In the Smoothbore Class, the Dixie Artillery won with their 6-pounder gun and a score of 47-3V. In the Rifled Class, McNeill's Rangers and their 2.25-inch Confederate mountain rifle won with a near perfect score of 50-4V. All six rifled guns that medaled scored 48-3V or better.

In the Howitzer Class, Hardaway's Alabama Battery won, shooting an impressive 50-4V with their 12-pounder Tredegar field howitzer. The 1st Maryland Cavalry took the Rifled Howitzer Class with their pack Parrott, scoring a nice 49-1V. The accuracy of Civil War period cannon is utterly amazing and shows that Civil War gun crews knew how to get the most out of

them.

Forty-three units participated in the mortar team match. The mortar teams fire seven shots at a stake 100 yards down range. Officials then carefully measure the distance between stake and mortar balls, then tally the best five shots for score. The overall winner was the 11th New Jersey Infantry with a terrific five-shot aggregate score of 25 feet, 8 inches. This is a particularly fun match to watch because with the mortars' low muzzle velocity, you can actually see the flight of the projectile.

One of the most impressive events at the North-South Skirmish Association nationals are the opening ceremonies held on the morning of the final day of competition. On Sunday morning as the sun rises in the eastern sky, over 2,500 skirmishers form up by unit with their flags flying. For as long as anyone can remember, the N-SSA band has led off the ceremonies with the playing of

period arrangements of the "Star-Spangled Banner," "Dixie," and "The Battle Cry of Freedom." Bruce Rohrbach of the 149th Pennsylvania is the latest in a long line of band leaders. He has been in the band for over 40 years and plays a Helicon; a pre-Sousa tuba. Rohrbach also plays professionally, as do most of the other dozen band members. While they play a range of instruments from flute to bass drum, all are also shooters. Their performance adds a great deal to the heritage and pageantry of the final day of all N-SSA Nationals.

As for the small arms matches, this National was once again dominated by the 110th Ohio Volunteer Infantry (OVI), who would win two small arms matches and finish second in three others. It seems the near invincible 110th OVI refuses to lose as they won their 29th musket team match since 2000 on this weekend. They won the musket team match with a time of

519.5 seconds for the five-event program, almost a minute and a half ahead of the second-place team. One hundred fifty-two teams participated in this N-SSA signature competition.

The 110th also triumphed over 103 rain-soaked teams in winning the carbine team match. Harlan's Light Cavalry won the smoothbore musket match, defeating 130 other four-member teams. One of the N-SSA's founding units, the Washington Blue Rifles, bested 64 other teams to win the four-event revolver team match by a solid 26.7 seconds. The 149th Pennsylvania Infantry scored the gold medal in the single shot rifle match; the 8th Virginia Infantry won the breech-loading rifle match, and the 1st Maryland Cavalry won the Spencer team match. The most recent addition to the N-SSA small arms competitions is the smoothbore pistol match, which was won by the 1st Maryland Cavalry.

The N-SSA is the country's oldest and largest Civil War shooting sports organization with almost 3,000 individuals that make up its 200 member units. Each portrays a particular unit or regiment and proudly wears a uniform representing the one the original soldiers wore over 160 years ago. At the 148th National, nine members were recognized for 50 years and five for 60 years of membership, quite an accomplishment. The National Rifle Association award for the top Young Skirmisher (under 19 years of age) went to Spencer Ostner, 9th Virginia Cavalry, with an aggregate musket and carbine score of 160-0X and the Senior Skirmisher (over 65) award went to Mark Hughes, also 9th Virginia Cavalry, with a 184-1X.

The 149th National Competition is scheduled for May 17-19, 2024, at Fort Shenandoah, just north of Winchester, Virginia. For more information about the N-SSA, visit www.n-ssa.org.



Costuming Committee judges review Kasey Jo Bowser's projects for authenticity, accuracy, and craftsmanship during the competition on Saturday. For her seamstress work on these two projects, Kasey Jo won 1st Place Matron Ladies Best Visual and the Elmer Venskoske Award for her dress, and the 1st Place Toddler's Best Visual for her daughter's dress. (Ericka Curley)



The fiery muzzle blast from 3rd Maryland Artillery's 12-pounder mortar makes it easy to see why the crewman firing the piece keeps a safe distance. Crews fire seven mortar balls at target stakes placed 100 yards from the firing line. The distances of the five closest shots are then tallied to determine a team's score. (Niki Bethke)



Skirmishers fire Henry rifles and a Spencer rifle during the magazine-fed breechloading rifle competition. The N-SSA National also includes a Spencer match consisting of teams with a four-person company of Spencer Shooters. (Lis Cole)



The 9th Regiment New York Cavalry starts to clear their targets in the first event of the rifle musket match. The eight-person musket teams compete to hit 32 clay pigeons to clear the board in the least amount of time. (Ericka Curley)



The 9th Virginia Cavalry, CSA is one of 152 musket teams who competed in this National rifle musket match. Two team members skillfully aim their muskets while a third retrieves a percussion cap from his belt pouch to place on his gun. (Ericka Curley)



This skirmisher fires his Rogers & Spencer revolver with a cloud of black powder smoke in the opening shot of the revolver company match. (Niki Bethke)



The 110th Ohio Volunteer Infantry (OVI), Co. A, won their 29th musket match since the year 2000 with their skill, practice, and ability to clear targets quickly. (Ericka Curley)



The range towers provide a full view of the revolver range, on which 65 teams competed in the two phases of the revolver company match. (Niki Bethke)

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The 2nd Maryland, Baltimore Light Artillery, CSA revolver team fires at targets placed at 25 yards from the firing line. Muzzle blast and percussion cap fragments necessitate the dividers between each shooter. (Niki Bethke)



Members of the 8th Regiment Virginia Volunteer Infantry compete in the four-event revolver match on Friday morning. (Niki Bethke)



The 110th Ohio Volunteer Infantry (OVI) competes in the smoothbore musket match. Smoothbore musket shooting is a great test of skill, as marksmanship with these firearms is more challenging to master than with rifled muskets. (Ericka Curley)



Duncan Bartley and Tony Shiflett of the 1st Regiment Virginia Volunteers compete in the smoothbore musket match along with 130 other four-member teams, shooting targets placed at 25 and 50 yards. (Ericka Curley)



Jack Boyenton and Jessica Kwon fire their smoothbore muskets at 3.5-inch square wooden blocks. The 148th National was Jessica's first skirmish since joining the 1st Regiment Virginia Volunteers. (Lars Curley)



A competitor takes aim with his Ballard rifle during the single-shot breechloader rifle competition. Teams in this match usually consist of shooters of Ballard and Sharps rifles, along with other Civil War era single-shot breechloaders. (Niki Bethke)



This uniformly-garbed Union team fires at 16, four-inch hanging targets. At a National Skirmish, eight-person musket teams fill 65 line positions; the largest continuous firing line in the country, controlled by a single main tower. (Ericka Curley)



Sadie Walsh competes in her first National Skirmish shooting black powder. She and her older sister Emily grew up shooting in the Tenderfoot BB gun matches and have come of age to officially join their team, the 2nd Maryland, Baltimore Light Artillery, CSA. (Ericka Curley)



Skirmishers with the 1st Maryland Infantry load and aim during the smoothbore musket match. As a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving the history of the American Civil War, N-SSA teams are named for actual Civil War units and adopt uniforms representative of the ones worn over 160 years ago. (Niki Bethke)



Safe gun handling is a priority in the N-SSA. Each line position is required to have a safety officer (with a signal flag) to monitor the safety of the team's loading and firing. A line judge for each team uses a stopwatch to record the length of time it takes for the team to break all of their targets, and ensures that the correct number of hit targets is counted. (Ericka Curley)

Ashley R. Rhodes

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