

The 27th Virginia at the Battle of Port Republic

By Austin Williams, 5th Virginia

At 3:45 on the morning of 9 June 1862, the 27th Virginia Volunteer Infantry slowly crossed a makeshift footbridge over the South Branch of the Shenandoah and marched through the quiet village of Port Republic. Under the command of Colonel Andrew J. Grigsby, the 27th formed part of the Stonewall Brigade then commanded General Charles S. Winder. Having defeated one Federal force the previous day at Cross Keys, General Thomas J. Jackson was impatient to engage Federal forces under General James Shields and directed Winder to begin the attack without waiting for reinforcements. With the 33rd Virginia detached for picket duty the previous night, Winder ordered the 5th and 27th Virginia to advance across an open wheat field, nearly a mile and a half long, flanked by the river to the left and ending in a low wooded ridge where Indiana and Ohio regiments waited. The undersized 27th, which numbered only 150 men at the time of the battle, advanced to the right of the 5th Virginia.¹

After driving back Federal pickets and advancing a third of the way across the field, the 27th and 5th came under heavy artillery fire from Federal cannon posted at the coaling on the Confederate right flank. Winder sent the 2nd and 4th Virginia through the thick woods on the Confederate right to make a flank attack that ultimately failed to silence the cannons. Although guns of the Rockbridge Artillery attempted to provide supporting fire, the 27th and 5th were largely helpless, their lines raked with shot and grape from the guns at the coaling. Despite being bolstered by Colonel Harry Hays' 7th Louisiana, which advanced between the 5th and 27th, Winder's position was rapidly becoming untenable under the bombardment and crossfire from a Federal regiment on the left.

When Shield's forces began to advance into the field to engage Winder's three stalled regiments, Winder feared his thinning line would collapse. Gambling that an advance would be safer than remaining in the field under artillery fire, Winder ordered his forces to charge. The two lines of Virginians and Louisianans swept forward with a cheer, firing as they advanced and rapidly becoming disorganized. Colonel Grigsby's horse was hit twice, throwing him to the ground but having no effect on the unending stream of oaths he directed at the enemy.² He advanced on foot with his regiment, later describing the effects of "a heavy fire of grape, by which my ranks were considerably thinned."³ Upon reaching a fence line in the middle of the field, the 5th Virginia and 7th Louisiana sought cover and began firing on the enemy. The 27th, however, continued the advance a short way alone. Finding themselves unsupported and facing several regiments, they withdrew to the fence line, where they "remained under a perfect shower of balls for near an hour" according to Grigsby's report.⁴

Winder later wrote that "the men stood it boldly for some time and fought gallantly, many until all their cartridges were gone" but eventually "the infantry line began to waver

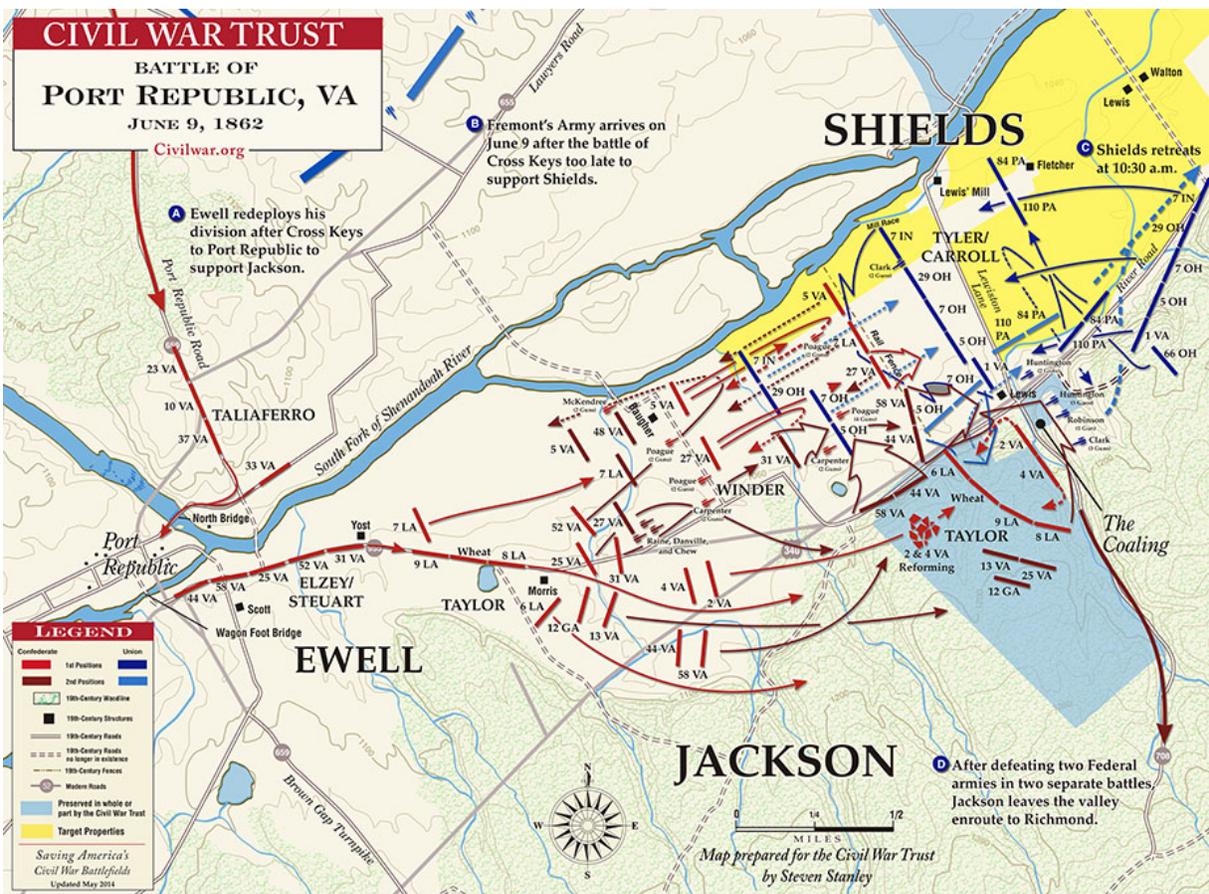
¹ Official Records of the War of the Rebellion (OR).

² Robertson, James *The Stonewall Brigade*, page 111.

³ OR.

⁴ OR.

under the storm of shot, shell, and balls which was being rained upon them.”⁵ Despite the best efforts of Winder, Grigsby, and the other officers, men began to leave the fence line and fall back across the field. The trickle became a flood as Union force advanced to within 20 paces of Grigsby’s line. As the line gave way, Grigsby ordered his battered regiment back across the field, with Union forces in close pursuit. Captain William T. Poague’s artillery helped cover the retreat, losing a six-pounder in the rout. Winder desperately sought to reorganize his command, later writing “I tried to rally the men... here I partially succeeded, but the enemy so greatly outnumbered us, and, getting within such easy range, thinned our ranks so terribly, that it was impossible to rally the men for some time.”⁶ As fresh troops from General Ewell’s Division arrived on the field, Jackson rode among his old Brigade, shouting “The Stonewall Brigade never retreats! Follow me!”⁷ Ewell’s troops succeeded in finally silencing the guns at the coaling and drove the Federal troops from their advanced position in the wheat field. As the Federal forces withdrew, the rallied 27th Virginia and the rest of the Stonewall Brigade joined the pursuit, capturing significant numbers of prisoners.



The 27th suffered heavy casualties for a unit its size, with nearly a third of its strength dead, wounded, or missing by the end of the battle. Lists of casualties in the

⁵ OR.

⁶ OR.

⁷ Robertson, 112.

Official Records record the death of Lieutenant James A. Lennon and 6 men killed. Lieutenant Joseph H. Haynes fell morally wounded and an additional officer and 26 men were wounded. 11 men were recorded missing after the battle.

Equipment and Uniforms

There is no exact record of the arms, equipment, and uniforms worn and carried by the 27th during the Battle of Port Republic. The battle occurred after nearly two months of the constant marching and fighting of the Valley Campaign, so the men's equipment and uniforms likely showed signs of heavy use. The diary of James Beard of the 5th Virginia indicates the Brigade's baggage was sent south on 17 April 1862, so the men would have been traveling light for almost two months. He does mention, however, carrying a knapsack on 20 May, indicating at least part of the Stonewall Brigade likely carried knapsacks at Port Republic.⁸ One of the most common items issued to the Brigade while it was forming at Harper's Ferry in summer 1861 was webbing; presumably to make cartridge box straps and belts. Several images of Stonewall Brigade soldiers show them wearing this white webbing, some of which may still have been in use in spring 1862.

The regiments of the Stonewall Brigade were not issued battle flags until their arrival on the Peninsula following the Battle of Port Republic. The 27th Virginia would therefore have likely carried the cotton bunting Virginia state flags presented by Governor Letcher to all Virginia regiments in October 1861.

The Regiment's armaments were likely primarily smoothbore muskets and other outdated weapons. Companies of the Stonewall Brigade were issued "altered muskets" (likely converted flintlocks), "minie rifles", "Deringer rifles" (likely the M1814 common rifle), "Harper's Ferry rifles with sword bayonets", "percussion muskets" (likely the M1842 smoothbore), "Mississippi rifles with saber bayonets", flintlocks, and even double barreled shotguns in the summer of 1861.⁹ Many of the latter two styles were likely replaced by the time of Port Republic with imports and captured weapons. Ted Barclay of the 4th Virginia wrote just prior to Port Republic that he was carrying a "Belgium gun", likely an early import. A member of the 2nd Virginia carried a .70 caliber Bavarian musket in the Battle of Gaines Mill soon after Port Republic.¹⁰ Members of the 33rd Virginia were carrying smoothbore M1842 muskets in 1862. New York troops recovered a M1842 Harper's Ferry musket, dated 1847, that was lost by the Sergeant-Major of the 33rd Virginia at Second Manassas several months after Port Republic.¹¹

The uniforms of the 27th must be similarly estimated based on the records available for other units of the Brigade prior to the battle. As the depot system had not yet reached significant production in the Confederacy, the regiment would have been uniformed based on the commutation system in which men were reimbursed by the government for providing their own uniform. Companies were largely outfitted together or along a common theme, giving a fair degree of uniformity by company, but not necessarily by

⁸ Diary of James E. Beard. <http://valley.lib.virginia.edu/papers/AD1008>.

⁹ Sumner, Bret. "Stonewall Brigade - 1861 Impression Guidelines." <http://www.stonewallbrigade.net/1861-impression.html>.

¹⁰ Second Virginia Living History Group. <http://2ndvirginiacsa.tripod.com/id4.html>

¹¹ Mink, Eric. "Weaponry of the Stonewall Brigade." <http://www.stonewallbrigade.net/weapons.html>.

regiment. Many of the distinctive and elaborate militia uniforms worn by some companies of the Brigade, such as the Continental Morgan Guard and the Pulaski Guards, were presumably no longer in use by June 1862. Several companies of the Brigade mustered in 1861 wearing red flannel overshirts. These may have fallen out of service by Port Republic, as a newspaper account reported a company of the 4th Virginia planned to swap out their shirts for grey uniforms prior to entering the field.¹² These grey uniforms may have been of the various styles now labeled Richmond Depot Type I or Commutation Jackets, of various shades of grey and varying cuts and button configurations. Some had trim and/or epaulets, while others did without this ornamentation.

The following are some images of Stonewall Brigade soldiers wearing uniforms that may have made an appearance at Port Republic:



Private Carter Louthan of the 2nd Virginia is pictured in a simple grey jacket with trim on the collar.¹³



This militia uniform, worn by Captain Peyton Hale of the 4th Virginia includes a forage cap with leather visor and grey pants with a brown 1" trim sewn into the trousers.¹⁴

¹² Sumner.

¹³ Image from Frye, Denis. *2nd Virginia Infantry*.



Sergeant Daniel H. Sheetz (left), of the 2nd Virginia, wears a jacket with epaulets, similar to a Richmond Depot Type II, but appears to have trim on his collar.¹⁵ Corporal George Baylor (right) of the 5th Virginia wears a jacket similar to Sheetz.¹⁶ Private Benjamin Beahm similarly wears a jacket with epaulets, although, based on his service record, this image may date from after the Battle of Port Republic.¹⁷



Privates Joseph Hisey (left) and Wesley Culp (center)¹⁸ of the 2nd Virginia and Richard Williams of an unknown regiment of the Stonewall Brigade¹⁹ all wear different styles of overshirts. Note the trim on Williams's trousers as well.

¹⁴ Image from <http://historical.ha.com/c/item.zx?saleNo=6074&lotNo=52144>.

¹⁵ Image from National Park Service Marker at Spangler Springs, Gettysburg.

¹⁶ Image from Wallace, Lee. *5th Virginia Infantry*.

¹⁷ Image form <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Beambenj.jpg>.

¹⁸ Image from <http://www.gdg.org/Gettysburg%20Magazine/culpbros.html>.



Private Samuel H. Wilhelm (left) of the 4th Virginia wears a plain sack coat along with a flat square belt buckle.²⁰ Jacob Hale (right) of the 4th Virginia also wears a sack coat, but this one features dark colored epaulets or trim and a turned down collar.²¹



These images of William Darst and John Welch Darst (left) and John Benjamin Darst (center), all of the 4th Virginia,²² and Sergeant John Brown of the 5th Virginia²³ (right) show webbing, likely similar to that issued in large quantities to the Stonewall Brigade in 1861.

¹⁹ Image from <http://www.essential.civilwar.vt.edu/1145.html>.

²⁰ Image from <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/ppmsca.32458/>.

²¹ Image from Roberston James. *4th Virginia Infantry*.

²² Image from Roberston James. *4th Virginia Infantry*.



Private Peter Kurtz of the 5th Virginia wears a coat with distinctive collar facings and three stripes on each sleeve.²⁴ Note the white webbing belt. His slouch hat is also unique among the images, as other photographs with hats feature kepis or forage caps (or militia shakos likely not wore in the field).



Captain George Bedinger of the 33rd Virginia²⁵ wears what appears to be a sack coat based on the button spacing and turned down collar. However, the collar appears to have a different colored facing and the coat has epaulets.

²³ Image from Wallace, Lee. *5th Virginia Infantry*.

²⁴ http://www.flickr.com/photos/library_of_congress/6883280574/

²⁵ Image from Reidenbaugh, Lowell. *33rd Virginia Infantry*.

Appendix - After Action Reports

The following is the official after-action report, contained in the Official Records of the War of the Rebellion, submitted by General Winder detailing the Stonewall Brigade's involvement at Port Republic:

HEADQUARTERS FIRST BRIGADE, VALLEY DISTRICT, Camp near Weyer's Cave, Va., June 15, 1862.

SIR: I have the honor herewith to report the part taken by this brigade in the operations of the 8th and 9th instant near Port Republic, Va.: While quietly in camp on Sunday morning, the 8th instant, between 8 and 9 o'clock, I heard artillery to our right and rear, which I inferred must be that of the enemy. Captain Poague came in at this time and informed me he had ordered his battery to be prepared for action. I approved it, and requested him to transmit to Captain Carpenter, camped just by him, instructions to the same effect. The good judgment of both these officers had anticipated such orders, a most fortunate circumstance indeed, as the enemy were pressing rapidly on our rear. General Jackson rode to my tent at this time and ordered me to send a regiment to the bridge over the Shenandoah at Port Republic in double-quick time. I at once sent orders to Col. J. W. Allen, commanding Second Regiment, to conduct his regiment to that point. Mounting my horse, I rode in the direction of the bridge. Passing Poague's battery, I observed a Parrott gun hitched up and ordered it to follow me. About one-fourth of a mile from camp I discovered the position of a battery of the enemy across the river, it sending shell just across the road, but too high to do any damage. The gun arriving, I turned it to the left, to bear on the aforesaid battery, when General Jackson directed me to send it to him on the right. This I did and awaited the arrival of other guns, which were soon brought up and placed in position on the hill commanding the opposite side of [the] river. The second shot silenced the enemy's battery, causing it to limber up and move off. Carpenter's battery arriving, I ordered it placed on the left of Poague's, and the eight pieces of the two batteries to be directed on the retreating battery and column of infantry advancing up the road. The guns were rapidly and admirably served, pouring a heavy and destructive fire upon the enemy. His column halted, staggered at so warm a reception, wavered, and then retreated down the road, being signally repulsed by the artillery alone. I directed pieces to move to the left, keeping up a constant fire upon him so long as he was within range. Two or more guns were moved a mile beyond the original position.

Colonel Allen, Second Regiment, arriving, I directed him to move to the left (General Taliaferro's brigade having gone to the bridge), throwing out skirmishers, guarding against a flank movement by the enemy. The Fourth Regiment, Colonel Ronald, was ordered to support this regiment. The Fifth Regiment, Lieutenant-Colonel Funk, supported Poague's battery. The Twenty-seventh, Colonel Grigsby, supported Carpenter's battery. The Thirty-third Regiment, Colonel Neft, was advanced on the left and held in position to repel a flank movement, and at night picketed near same point. Some few unimportant changes occurred during the day, but the enemy did not again advance within range of our guns. So heavy and well directed was our artillery fire he was obliged to abandon a howitzer and two limbers, which were found in the woods on the following day, being a portion of the battery used against us in the morning.

I had observed him trying to remove it and succeeded beyond my expectations in forcing him to leave it, though I knew he had not taken it off by the road on which it advanced. The brigade moved to camp at dark just above Port Republic. The total strength of brigade was 1,334 rank and file in action.

On the morning of the 9th instant, at 3.45 o'clock, I received orders to have my brigade in Port Republic at 4.45 o'clock. Orders were immediately given, and the head of the brigade reached the point indicated at that hour. I met General Jackson shortly thereafter, who ordered me to move across South River on a temporary foot-bridge being constructed. I sent Lieutenant Garnett to recall Colonel Neff's regiment from picket, and [I then moved the] Brigade as indicated. I was ordered to follow the road down the valley. I placed the Second Regiment, Colonel Allen, in front, throwing forward two companies as an advance guard. Having proceeded about a mile, the cavalry in front reported the enemy's pickets. General Jackson being near, I referred the officer to him. I then received orders to drive them in, occupy the woods in front, and attack the enemy. I directed Captain Nadenbousch, commanding [the] advance, to deploy skirmishers on either side of the road and move forward; Captain Carpenter to advance two pieces, take post on left of road, and shell the pickets. These orders were rapidly and well executed; the enemy's pickets disappeared and I had skirmishers advanced, the line being supported by Colonel Allen. The enemy here opened a rapid fire of shell with great accuracy on the road and vicinity.

I was then ordered to send a regiment through the woods to endeavor to turn their battery, also a battery to get a position above them. I directed Colonel Allen to move with his regiment, he being in advance and near the wood, to accomplish this, and Colonel Ronald, Fourth Regiment, to support him; Captain Carpenter to take his battery in same direction to execute the above order. Captain Poague's two Parrott guns I ordered in position on left of road in a wheat field and opened on enemy's battery, the smoke of which only could be seen, the remaining pieces being under cover. Colonel Grigsby, Twenty-seventh Regiment, I ordered to support this battery. Lieutenant-Colonel Funk, Fifth Regiment, was placed on left and to rear of Twenty-seventh Regiment. The Thirty-third Regiment, Colonel Neff, to take position on right of road, but, being detained in crossing the river, this order never readied him. The enemy's fire was so well directed I found it necessary to separate Poague's two guns, placing one some distance on left, ordering Funk's regiment to follow the movement. Here the fire was resumed. The enemy soon placed a battery of two pieces in front and in a commanding position. I sent Lieutenant Garnett, and afterward Captain Poague, to look for a position nearer and more desirable, but none could be found unless the enemy were driven off. I then learned his skirmishers were advancing, and ordered Funk's regiment forward to support extreme left of line, at same time sending to General Jackson for reinforcements, being greatly outnumbered.

Col. H. T. Hays soon reported to me with the Seventh Louisiana Regiment. I directed him to take position on the right of Funk's, and ordered Grigsby's regiment up, placing it on the right of Hays. This line under Hays I ordered to move forward, drive the enemy from his position, and carry his battery at the point of the bayonet. I at the same time directed time remainder of Poague's and a section of Carpenter's battery, the latter having reported it impossible to get through the thick woods or find any position to be advanced. Colonel Hays moved his

command forward in gallant style with a cheer. Seeing his movement I advanced with the artillery, placing the guns in battery just in rear of Hays' line, which I found had been halted behind a fence, the enemy being in such strong force and pouring in such a fire of rifles. I then sent for reinforcements, but heavy artillery received none. The men stood it boldly for some time and fought gallantly, many until all their cartridges were gone. Captain Raine reported with two pieces of artillery to me, however, without any cannoneers; this piece I sent from the field, the other being brought into action. I had directed Captain Poague to move with a Parrott gun to the right, and sent Lieutenant Garnett to Carpenter to endeavor to place his section so as to enfilade the enemy.

The Thirty-first Regiment Virginia Volunteers (Colonel Hoffman) arrived about this time to relieve Colonel Hays, who was ordered to join his brigade. This change was impossible to effect, and I held Colonel Hoffman in rear of the batteries for their security, as the infantry line began to waver under the storm of shot, shell, and balls which was being rained upon them. The batteries were moved to rear and I tried to rally the men, placing Hoffman's regiment in line on which to rally; here I partially succeeded, but the enemy so greatly outnumbered us, and, getting within such easy range, thinned our ranks so terribly, that it was impossible to rally the men for some time, though I was most ably assisted in my endeavors by my staff; the gallant Hays, Grigsby, Funk, Major Williams (Fifth Regiment), Captains Nadenbousch (Second), and Burke (Fifth Regiment); these came particularly under my observation, though doubtless others did their duty as nobly and bravely. Here one piece of Poague's, I regret to say, fell into the enemy's hands, I having ordered it to halt and fire on his advancing column, where it was disabled, as shown in Poague's report. I still endeavored to rally the remainder of this force, and succeeded in getting the Seventh Louisiana, under Major Penn, the colonel and lieutenant-colonel both being wounded, and Fifth Regiment, under Funk. I placed two pieces of Poague's battery in the position previously occupied, and again opened fire on the enemy, he having halted in his advance.

A sharp fire from the wood on [the] right told General Taylor's and Allen's forces were engaged. I directed the Parrott gun on the enemy's battery, which was now turned on those forces. I was gratified to learn from General Taylor this fire was of service to him. The enemy now moved to his left flank, apparently to surround this command in the woods. Seeing two regiments lying quietly on their arms to the right under the woods, I dispatched Lieutenant Garnett to order them forward rapidly to press the enemy's rear. I then moved forward the artillery with its supports and obtained a far better position. Captain Chew here reported to me and did good execution with his battery, displaying great skill and accuracy in his fire. I soon met General Jackson and reported my impressions to him, and was told he had ordered up other troops. Lieutenant-Colonel Garnett (Forty-eighth Regiment) came up, reporting for orders. I directed him to follow the road in double-quick, pressing the enemy hotly in rear and driving him from his position. Major Holiday (Thirty-third Regiment) rode up at this time, and through him I sent orders to Colonel Neff to do the same. The batteries arriving, I continued to advance them as rapidly as possible, pouring in a heavy and well-directed fire on the retreating columns of the enemy, who were now driven from the field, routed at every point. A section of Captain Brockenbrough's battery joined me just as the retreat commenced and was ably handled. The road and woods were shelled and the enemy scattered in every direction.

The pursuit was continued some 4 miles, when I met General Jackson, who was in advance, and by his orders halted all the artillery except two pieces of Chew's battery. The enemy being again driven from their ambushade, I followed with my command to a point some 8 or 9 miles below Port Republic, when I received orders to return and camp with my wagons, which order was executed, my advance reaching camp on the summit of the Blue Ridge at Brown's Gap at midnight and the batteries at daylight.

It again affords me sincere and great gratification to bear testimony to the courage, gallantry, fortitude, and good conduct of the officers and men under my command, and to them I return my heartfelt thanks. They fought gallantly and desperately, as our holy cause urged them to do, and though temporarily repulsed, it was only from overwhelming numbers. Although exposed to such a withering fire, the killed are few in number, a kind Providence having guarded many from the great dangers to which they were exposed. Colonels Allen and Ronald were so far separated from me I must refer to their respective reports for the operations of their regiments. To my staff, Captain O'Brien, Lieutenants Howard and Garnett, I tender my sincere thanks for their assistance in transmitting my orders to different points (though under heavy fire frequently after the fight became general), ever ready and prompt. The casualties were: Killed: officers, 2; privates, 11. Wounded: officers, 6; privates, 148. Missing: privates, 32. Total, 199. The strength of the brigade was 1,313, rank and file. For detailed accounts of the affair I respectfully refer to the reports of the several commanders herewith transmitted.

*I am, sir, very respectfully,
CHAS. S. WINDER
Brigadier-General, Commanding.
Maj. R. L. DABNEY, Assistant Adjutant- General
Headquarters Valley District.*

The following is the official report submitted by Colonel Grigsby, commander of the 27th Virginia, detailing the regiment's participation in Port Republic:

CAMP NEAR PORT REPUBLIC, VA., June 13, 1862.

CAPTAIN: I have the honor to submit the following report of the Twenty-seventh Regiment Virginia Volunteers, under my command, in the engagements of the 8th and 9th instant, near the town of Port Republic. The engagement of the 8th was with artillery; the infantry did not participate. The Twenty-seventh Virginia Regiment was ordered to support Captain Carpenter's battery, and remained near it during the day. At an early hour Monday morning the command crossed the South River and moved down the road leading to Swift Run Gap.

The command had proceeded about 1 miles when the enemy made their appearance and commenced shelling our advance guard. Captain Poague's battery was ordered up and took position in the field to the left of the road. My (the Twenty-seventh) regiment was ordered to support his battery. I immediately took position a short distance in rear of it, and remained under a heavy fire of shell for over an hour. The battery, by order, changed its position. I made a corresponding change, keeping near it. My regiment was afterwards ordered to move to the

left to support a battery placed near a barn. Upon reaching the position the battery was limbered up to move.

I was ordered to form in line of battle, move to the front, and take position on the right of the Seventh Louisiana. This I promptly did, when both regiments moved forward across an open field under a heavy fire of grape, by which my ranks were considerably thinned. The Seventh Louisiana took position under cover of a fence; my regiment still advanced some distance farther. Finding myself unsupported, I ordered my command to drop back on a line with the Seventh Louisiana. We remained under a perfect shower of balls for near an hour. In this position my horse was shot twice and so disabled that I was compelled to leave him.

My command, though small, boldly maintained its position until two regiments of the enemy came within 20 paces of their line, when they fell back, by my order, amid a perfect shower of balls, the whole line giving way about the same time. The enemy did not retain his advantage long, as they were compelled to fall back, and were soon driven from the field. A part of my regiment joined our pursuing forces.

In this engagement the Twenty-seventh suffered severely, having lost in killed, wounded, and missing 47 officers, non-commissioned officers, and privates. Too much praise cannot be given my officers for the gallant manner in which they bore, themselves throughout the entire action, braving every danger coolly and deliberately. The non-commissioned officers and men behaved well and gallantly, moving forward in good order under a heavy fire of grape, obeying all orders cheerfully. To make mention by name of any of my officers would be invidious where all behaved so well. The same of my non-commissioned officers and privates. Strength, rank and file, 150.

*Respectfully, your obedient servant,
A. J. GRIGSBY, Colonel Twenty-seventh Virginia Volunteers.
Capt. J. F. O'BRIEN, Assistant Adjutant-General.*