

CAPTAIN PETRIE'S IRON CLADS

By Lannie Dietle

Pioneers in mechanized armored warfare

As is still true today, southern Somerset County, Pennsylvania had strong ties with Cumberland, Maryland during the Civil War, because Cumberland is the nearest significant commercial center and transportation hub. During the Civil War, Cumberland was the nexus of three major transportation arteries: railroad, canal, and national highway. The railroad system was the lifeline of the Union Army, and extremely vulnerable to attack.

My ancestor Christian Petenbrink is one of a number of Somerset County neighbors who volunteered to defend the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. He enlisted with Company K, Second Regiment, Potomac Home Brigade Infantry, Maryland Volunteers¹ on April 18, 1863, when he was 44 years old. The company was commanded by Wellersburg-area resident² Peter B. Petrie. Company K was not a typical Civil War company. Instead, the members of Company K were pioneers in mechanized armored warfare. Unlike most Civil War soldiers, they fought from armored railroad cars known as "*iron clads*" that could be rushed to defend threatened sections of the railroad. Tactical deployment was facilitated by another innovation, the telegraph.

This article is a compilation of information about two battles where the iron clads of Company K were hotly engaged. In each action, an iron clad was destroyed by rebel cannon fire. One iron clad was destroyed by a remarkable long distance shot at the July 4, 1864 battle of South Branch Bridge. The bridge was located near the confluence of the north and south branches of the Potomac River, about one mile east-southeast of Oldtown. Another iron clad was taken out by a daring shot from the perilous distance of a few hundred yards at the August 2, 1864 battle of Green Spring Station at Oldtown, Maryland.

Christian Petenbrink, was manning an artillery piece in the iron clad that was destroyed on August 2, 1864. By the time the car was hit, most of the Union forces had already fled to Cumberland by train — but the men in the armored car remained, bravely attempting to defend their hopeless position against overwhelming forces. When the cannonball entered the car, Christian was critically injured by flying debris, and suffered from his wounds for the remainder of his life.

An overview of Company K from 1906

The 1906 book “**History of Bedford and Somerset County Pennsylvania**” provides background information on Company K, and the Second Regiment in general, and provides a brief description of one of the battles:

While, as a matter of course, this was a Maryland organization, nevertheless Company K bore upon its muster rolls the names of a considerable number of Somerset county men. These were mostly from about Wellersburg and the adjacent township of Southampton, the Captain, Peter B. Petrie, according to the best information attainable to the writer, having been a resident of Wellersburg at the time of the outbreak of the Civil war.

"The regiment was mostly employed in guarding the Baltimore & Ohio railroad from New Creek (now Keyser, West Virginia) to points east of Cumberland, Maryland. At times the entire regiment was at Cumberland, but most of the time the companies were detached along the line of the railroad. The regiment, however, also saw some service of a more active nature in 1864, and took part in several engagements in the Shenandoah Valley. At Cumberland, a couple of gondola cars had been in some way roofed over or covered with iron rails, the sides were pierced by port-holes, and they carried small brass guns, probably three or four-pounders. These armored cars, or iron-clads, as they may be called, were run back and forth over the road to such points as were threatened by the Rebels, who were quite persistent in their efforts to burn the bridges and otherwise interrupt the free use of the railroad, the keeping open of which was a matter of vital importance. In one

of the frequent encounters that took place east of Cumberland, the enemy also had one or two light pieces of artillery, a well directed shell from which, entering a port-hole of one of these iron-clad cars, exploded and put it out of business. These iron-clad cars were manned and operated by Capt. Petrie's Company K through almost the entire war. Aside from this particular service, we have very little information about the company.

For such names of its members as are here given the present writer is indebted to Samuel M. Petrie, a son of the captain, and John H. Lepley, Esq., of Southampton township. ...

A 1901 description of the July 4, 1864 battle

The 1901 book “**The History and Government of West Virginia**” provides a brief description of the July 4, 1864 battle of South Branch Bridge:

Imboden on the South Branch.—On July 4, 1864, General Imboden led a raid, the object of which was to destroy the railroad east of Cumberland. He attacked a blockhouse and an armored car at South Branch Bridge. He blew up the car with a shell, but he was unable to capture the blockhouse, and he retreated.

Deffinbaugh describes the July 4, 1864 battle

The 2000 issue of the “**Journal of the Alleghenies**” (Vol. XXXVI) includes part one of “**The Deffinbaugh Memories**”, which is a memoir Benjamin Deffinbaugh wrote in the 1920s. While growing up in the Oldtown area, he witnessed the July 4, 1864 battle of South Branch Bridge. His memoir adds detail to the understanding of the battle.

The following extract from the memoir provides a description of the iron-clads: “*A party of Confederates were detailed to destroy the track and telegraph line that skirted the farm from one end to the other and [they] were busily engaged in this work but were surprised by a regiment of Federals stationed at PawPaw, a few miles below, under the command of Captain Petrie. These troops were loaded on flat cars with an iron clad [“tent”]*”

attached, which was constructed from rails taken from the road and made in this shape A and mounted on car wheels with an eighteen pound piece of artillery within. All this came around the point of the mountain very quietly, until they came in range of the Confederates who were so very busy at their work that the Federals were almost on them before they were observed."

If Mr. Deffinbaugh's description of "an eighteen pound piece of artillery" is accurate, it indicates that the ironclad was armed with a relatively large cannon. Cast iron weighs from 0.254 to 0.279 pounds per cubic inch. Based on this, an eighteen pound cannon ball would be sized in the range of 4.976" to 5.134". Using the median weight of cast iron, the cannon ball diameter would be 5.052".

Deffinbaugh's memoir then goes on to describe the July 4, 1864 battle: "It was when the southern generals, McCausland and Bradley Johnson made their expedition thru western Md and Pa. In the last year of the War [that] the above-mentioned ironclad was put out of commission by what is said to have been two of the best artillery shots of the War. As near as I can judge the distance across the river from the Hill where the battery was in position at the lowest guess is close on to a mile distance. The battery was located on the hill at Oldtown where Capt. Michael Cresap built the stone house which was standing at the time. The artilleryman who sighted the gun was certainly master of his trade. The first shot went thru the boiler of the locomotive and put it out of commission. The second shell went thru the port hole of the ironclad and exploded, with the result that this creation of Yankee ingenuity was scattered all over the landscape. In cleaning up the field to make ready for the plow, I helped to gather up the chunks of iron, and especially I remember the shelter of the port hole, which was a heavy, solid piece of iron. Several of the crew of this war machine were killed and wounded."

Deffinbaugh's one-mile guess is no exaggeration. I checked the distance using an internet mapping service, and the straight-line distance between Cresap's house and the mouth of the South Branch of the Potomac River is 1.63 miles.

An 1897 description of the July 4, 1864 battle

Chapter LVL of the 1897 book “**History of Hampshire County West Virginia**” is titled “**Imboden's Raid**”. The chapter provides a vivid account of the July 4, 1864 battle of South Branch Bridge, and identifies the members of Company K³ who were manning the iron clad when it was destroyed:

Attack on an Armored Car.—On July 4, 1864, General Imboden made an attack on the railroad bridge over the South branch. He fired with artillery for some time, but was unable to do much damage, because a block house on the west side of the river, garrisoned by union troops with artillery, rendered it impossible for him to reach a position from which his guns were effective against the bridge. An armored car, covered with railroad iron and containing seven men and a twelve-pounder, stood on the track on the west end of the bridge. It was one of a number constructed to run up and down the road, guarding exposed and threatened places. The mission of this one was to guard the South branch bridge, as a sort of auxiliary to the block house. It was believed to be proof against small artillery. There was a porthole in each end, about six inches in diameter, just large enough for the muzzle of the cannon. Each porthole was provided with a trap door, which could be closed by a lever inside; and when closed, it was supposed that shells could rain upon the car all day without doing harm. There was a trapdoor two feet square in the bottom, and through this the garrison went in and out. The men who constituted the garrison of the car on July 4, 1864, belonged to a Maryland company, and were James L. Croston, Albert Bigford, Alexander B. King, Benjamin Closs, Lieutenant Moses M. Bigford, Dennis Dehaven and John W. Croston.

When Imboden found that he could not bring his gun to bear on the bridge, he tried the range on the car, from the distance of half a mile. The first shell passed over the car. The next struck it near the roof. The third went in at the porthole; and as it did so, it jarred the trapdoor shut, rendering the car as dark as a dungeon, except that the shell had a long fuse of a peculiar pattern, which gave a diabolical light as it sputtered and hissed, and went spinning

and gyrating about the floor of the car, scattering sparks and lurid smoke in all directions. The seven men in the car made a wild scramble for the trapdoor in the floor, trying to get out before the shell exploded, which it certainly would do in a few seconds, even if it did not set the car's magazine on fire and create a sudden and instantaneous volcano. While the men were scrambling for the place of exit in the floor, one of the portholes flew open from some cause, and on the spur of the moment John W. Croston tried to pick up the hissing shell and throw it out. But it spun about so rapidly that he could not get hold of it, although he severely burned his hands and face in the effort to grab it. By this time the other men had succeeded in opening the door in the bottom of the car, and out they went, Croston being the last to go, and barely escaped the explosion, being so near that his face was filled with powder. The car caught fire and what escaped the explosion was burned. The shells in its magazine kept up a furious bombardment for some minutes. The late garrison, after they escaped from the car, never looked back until they had crossed the Potomac into Maryland. In the meantime Imboden had turned his guns on the blockhouse, but, so far as he could see, he made no impression on it. However the garrison were hard put to it. The day was excessively warm, and the smoke in the building was stifling. They were about to raise the white flag when Imboden ceased firing and took his departure. He had done little damage to the bridge, and had not stopped travel on the railroad. After his departure, the union troops destroyed a portion of the pike up Breakneck mountain to prevent the confederates from bringing artillery by that route to the bridge in the future.

Medical treatment of Corporal Croston after the July 4, 1864 battle

The 1865 "**Cincinnati Lancet & Observer**" describes the medical treatment of Corporal J. W. Croston, who was suffering from the burns he received during the July 4, 1864 battle:

On July 4th, 1864, during an engagement on the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, at South Branch Bridge, a detachment of Co. K., 2d Md. P. H. B., was in an Iron clad railroad car, defending the bridge, a shell from the enemy

penetrated the car, and the powder, (previous to bursting the shell,) exploded in jets from the fuse and shell, which burned severely all that were in the car; they were sent to this hospital. One of them, Corporal J. W. Croston, came under my care upon the 5th, the next day after the engagement. When admitted, he had considerable constitutional disturbance, and upon examination, the whole of his face, neck, both ears hands, and ankles, were found to be severely burned; the epidermis was, or had been all over the unprotected surfaces of his body, separated by a serous fluid, forming a continuous blister over each burned surface. The previous treatment, as near as could be learned, consisted of olive oil and chimney soot mixed together, and spread over the raw surfaces. He presented a hideous aspect; his face as well as the remaining burned surfaces, was very much swollen, and encrusted over with the soot, which was dry and hard with serum and blood « issuing from numerous fissures in it. Patient was immediately stripped, and the unburned surfaces of his body sponged clean with soap and water, dressed clean, and placed in bed; a saturated solution of Alum with water, was immediately ordered, and lint saturated with it was applied to all the burned surfaces; the lint was kept wet constantly by an affusion of the same solution; an anodyne was given at bedtime. 6th. Patient rested well last night; his constitutional disturbance had in a great measure subsided; he complained of no pain at all when lying still; his diet necessarily consisted of gruels, in consequence of his not being able to open his lips readily. The lint was taken off, and all the crusts of soot and epidermis were removed, that could be detached without causing the raw surfaces to bleed; the lint was renewed, and the affusion of the saturated solution of Alum continued sufficiently often to keep the lint and raw surfaces saturated with the solution. 7th. Patient rested well; his circulation was natural, and appetite good; the lint, of necessity had to be renewed at least twice in twenty-four hours, from the fact that the Alum crystalized upon it, and rendered it impervious; with each renewal of the lint, an effort was made to remove all the old crusts. Diet and treatment continued. 15th. The patient has rested well since the 7th, without the aid of anodynes; his general health was good; the burned surfaces had all healed except upon his eyelids, some spots on his neck and fingers, or in other .words, all the

burned surfaces healed except those parts where the frequent corrugation of the skin caused by the contraction of the muscles retarded the healing process. Treatment continued, diet full. 19th. Patient was well; all the burned surfaces had healed without leaving a single cicatrix, or unnatural contraction of the skin which has universally attended all extensive burns that have come under my observation, except those that have been treated with astringent lotions exclusively. 22d. Patient was returned to duty by his own request. Upon the 6th of the same month, another patient was sent into my ward, who was burned at the same time, under the same circumstances, and equally as severe, but rendered a much more complicated case, in consequence of having been treated two days with olive oil and cotton. The same treatment was adopted that was used with the former patient, and the same results followed. Not a single cicatrix was visible after recovery, and the skin had as natural appearance in a few days after healing, as it had previous to being burned. Upon the 23d of the same month a patient was admitted whose face, ears, neck, shoulder, hands, and ankles, were likewise severely burned by the explosion of a caisson, near Bunker Hill, W. Va., July 1864. In consequence of not having any alum, I treated him with a saturated solution of tannic acid, until our stock of it was exhausted, and then with a saturated solution of extract of Catechu. His recovery was equally as satisfactory as the others, except that the integument of the burned surfaces, after recovery was not so clear as in the others, which was caused in all probability by the absorption of the coloring matter of the lotions used, hence I would prefer the transparent astringent. The advantages of this form of treatment are, that the irritation and smarting is immediately relieved; the secretion of pus, the formation of cicatrices, and contraction of the integument prevented.

Although each of the above cases were severe burns, yet no constitutional treatment was required in either.

Most Respectfully, Your Obedient Servant,

*David Shanor, Ass't Surgeon 6th West Va. I.
U.S. General Hospital, Clarysville, Md.*

The fog of battle

July 4, 1864 military correspondence related to battle of South Branch Bridge is included in the 1892 book **“The Miscellaneous Documents of the House of Representatives for the First Session of the Fifty-Second Congress, 1891-'92”**. The letters show that in the fog of battle, the blockhouse at the South Branch Bridge was believed to be lost. In truth, although Imboden’s artillery did destroy the iron-clad, he was never able to take the blockhouse or destroy the bridge.

Brevet Major-General Kelley’s message to Colonel Hoy at New Creek states: *“McNeill has retreated; our cavalry in pursuit. Nothing from Imboden’s force at South branch since my last.”*

Kelley’s message to Frank B. Miller at Green Spring states: *“Can you learn anything of amount of force of enemy at South Branch, or who it is?”* Miller’s message to Kelley states: *“Rebels now on towpath. I don’t know whether I can get out or not. Colonel Thompson and part of his command on other side river. I will keep instrument on until hear from him.”* Another message from Miller to Kelley, received at 9:10 a.m., states: *“Colonel Thompson wants to know if you want infantry to move across river to North Branch with him. Colonel Thompson is now in Maryland. Answer.”* Kelley replied: *“If Colonel Thompson moves across the river the infantry must move with him; but I do not wish him to abandon the post unless absolutely necessary. I send the 200 infantry by rail; start in a few minutes.”* In a message to Thompson, however, Kelley states: *“Fall back at once across the river and come up to the North Branch Bridge.”*

The book contains a number of messages from Colonel Thompson to General Kelley, written from Green Spring. One message states: *“There is no demonstration on this place yet. There is one canal boat of rebels coming up canal; supposed to have one gun. Our troops at South Branch still holding block-house. Answer.”* Another message states: *“Reliable men report seeing three regiments at once in the vicinity of South Branch. They estimate them at 2,000 or 3,000. I know the force is at least a brigade. I judge from the position*

they occupy. All the roads or passes from here are guarded by them. Another scout just in says re-enforcements are coming in to the rebels.” Another message states: “Shall I order the infantry to leave Green Spring? I have just returned from South Branch. The rebels are in possession there. Infantry advancing to Green Spring.” Another message, received at 7:40 a.m., states: “The rebels have attacked South Branch bridge. The iron-clad has been firing for an hour. Have sent fifty men to find out the trouble. All quiet here. The rebels have artillery, and the report is that they are firing at the block-house.” Another message states: “Messenger just from South Branch says they are about abandoning the cars. The rebels have three pieces of artillery and firing two shots a minute. Shall I move all my men there? One end of the iron-clad is said to be knocked out by their guns.” Another message states: “Lieutenant of iron-clad just here, says they have abandoned the iron-clads. The block-house is gone up.” Another message, received at 10:15 a.m., states: “There is no demonstration on this place yet. Have sent scouts to see where they are. Bridge and block-house at South Branch reported destroyed.” Another message, received at 10:45 a.m., states: “I can hear of no force on the Romney road, or any place south of here. I have scouts in all directions. If no force is known to be above, we could, if forced, fall back to North Branch. It is reported that the rebels are moving on the Breakneck road south. I will know whether it is true soon. Just heard from Kelley’s ford. No rebels there.”

Captain J. L. McKinney, commanding the post at Green Spring Run, wrote the following message to General Kelley, which was received at 7:40 a.m.: *“I have just received the following message from South Branch: To Operator at Green Spring Run: Please telegraph to Cumberland that I cannot hold out much longer; my ammunition is almost exhausted. Send me re-enforcements if possible.”*

Prelude to the August 2, 1864 battle

At 5:30 p.m. on August 2, 1864, Kelly wrote the following message to Major-General Hunter: *“Enemy attacked me yesterday at 4 p.m. Fought him until dark. At 11 p.m. he retreated from my front, going by way of mountain*

road toward Old Town, on the Potomac River, leaving his killed and wounded, two caissons, quite a quantity of ammunition wagons and carriages, etc. Prisoners report Generals Bradley Johnson and McCausland in command. My force pursuing; I hope to overtake him at river."

An August 2, 1864 message from Brevet Major-General B. F. Kelley

Brevet Major-General B. F. Kelley wrote the following message, dated "Cumberland, August 2, 1864", to Major-General Hunter at Harper's Ferry: "*Johnson's and McCausland's forces recrossed the river at Old Town about noon to-day. They disabled the engine attached to the iron-clads by a shot through the boiler. Engine and cars were destroyed. They represented to a person at Green Spring to-day that Ransom would join them in a few days, and then they would take Cumberland and destroy the railroad west. May I respectfully ask that General Averell, or some other cavalry force, be ordered to follow them into the South Branch Valley. McNeill is doing a great deal of damage. I have no cavalry to follow after him."*

Lowdermilk describes the August 2, 1864 battle

Lowdermilk's "**History of Cumberland**" states: "*At Green Spring an iron-clad locomotive and cars, with a small piece of artillery, fell into the hands of the enemy, as also some eighty men in the block-house. The attacking force of probably 2,000 mounted men and a battery of artillery, under Generals Ransom and McCausland."*

An August 3, 1864 article about the overall course of battle

The following text is from the August 3, 1864 issue of "**The Alleganian**":

To this community, the past week has been a season of intense excitement. It was known that a rebel raiding force was operating in Pennsylvania; and it was deemed highly probable that in returning to Virginia, they might strike for the upper fords of the Potomac. Hence, during the latter part of last week, all the roads leading into town were heavily picketed. On Sunday, it was ascertained that they had captured and destroyed a portion of Chambersburg,

Pa., but had finally been driven out by Gen. Averill's forces and were retreating toward Maryland.

About noon on Monday, scouts reported that a heavy body of rebel cavalry and mounted infantry was approaching the town on the Baltimore Turnpike, and was then distant but about six miles. Gen. Kelley at once took to the field, in person; and the troops stationed here were marched out the Turnpike some 2-1/2 miles.

The enemy had formed his line of battle a short distance behind the residence of Jesse Hinkle, Esq. His troops holding the Turnpike and his artillery posted in the high positions in the neighborhood. As soon as our troops were formed into line, the rebels opened a brisk fire which was promptly replied to by our guns. The battle opened about 3 P.M., and the artillery firing interspersed with an occasional volley of musketry continued until about 6. When the rebels ceased firing, both sides occupied pretty much the same position as when they began. The dwelling, mill, and barn of John Folck, Esq. were pretty much in range of our guns and were struck several times by shell. The barn was fired by an exploding shell and was entirely destroyed with its contents, almost the entire product of the late harvest. The casualties were not very numerous, forty or fifty, perhaps less, will probably cover the entire number of killed and wounded on both sides. Fatal injuries were sustained by only one of our gunners, we believe. Two or three of the enemy are said to have been killed. In the morning, it was found the enemy had retreated.

Green Spring Run was captured and they paroled Col. Stowe and eighty of his troops. The RR Battery of Capt. Petrie was lying there, the engine attached which received a shell in its boiler. Gen. McCausland and Rosser with their brigades are supposed to have composed the rebel forces. A considerable number of horses and cows were taken from the farmers along their routes, in the lower part of the County.

The pickets were drivin in at Brady's Mill on the B&O RR last night, the telegraph wires cut, and the road is said to have been damaged.

“Col. Stowe” is a reference to Colonel Israel Stough, who commanded the 153rd Ohio Volunteer Infantry Regiment — a 100 day federal regiment established in the spring of 1864 from the 35th and 41st Ohio National Guard Battalions. The regiment was assigned to serve under Brevet Major-General Benjamin F. Kelley, whose responsibilities included guarding a long section of the Baltimore and Ohio railroad.

A 1900 description of the battle of Green Spring Run

The 1900 book “**The Maryland Line in the Confederate Army, 1861-65**” provides the following description of the August 2, 1864 battle of Green Spring Run:

... Averill put in an appearance and vigorously attacked McCausland's outposts. To repel this attack, and hold the enemy in check while the main body of the troops moved off, Colonel Gilmor with the two Maryland battalions was assigned. This duty he performed in his usual gallant style, and his little command constituted the rear guard in the retreat toward Cumberland, the vicinity of which was reached, after a forced night march, in the forenoon of the following day.

At Cumberland General Kelly was found with a large force strongly entrenched. With Kelly in his front and Averill in his rear, McCausland very wisely decided to move on, which he did after making a slight demonstration upon the enemy's outposts.

After a night march McCausland's command reached Oldtown, Gilmor's two battalions in the advance, where a considerable body of the enemy was found occupying a strong position in a block house, and also having an iron-clad battery attached to an engine on the railroad. This block house commanded the ford by which McCausland was to reach the Virginia side of the river, and as no time was to be lost it was imperative that this place should

be reduced. An attack was accordingly made, but it was repulsed with considerable loss. Things were growing desperate when under a galling fire Lieutenant McNulty, of the Baltimore Light Artillery, brought one of his pieces into play, with his best gunner, McElwee, to sight it. The first shell went through the boiler of the engine and the second entered the porthole of the iron-clad, which was filled with troops, and exploding created a panic, and the battery was deserted. But it was impossible to bring the artillery to bear upon the block house, and an attack was ordered, which was repulsed. In this desperate strait someone suggested that a flag of truce be sent to the block house, and a demand made for its surrender. Captain Booth, with McCaull and Kid, two of Johnson's scouts, carried the flag and this demand. Great was the surprise of all when this demand was complied with.

General Kelley's report on the August 2, 1864 battle

The “**United States Congressional Serial Set**” and the 1881 book “**The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies**” both contain the following report by General Kelley, which describes the August 2, 1864 destruction of the armored train that Christian Petenbrink was fighting from. It describes a battle in which most of the Union soldiers fled, but a few stood their ground and fought. One of the men who stuck to his gun was my ancestor Christian Petenbrink.

"I have the honor to submit the following report of operations in my command at Cumberland, Md., and New Creek, W. Va., and vicinity from the 27th of July to the 8th of August, 1864:

On the 28th of July I received intelligence that a force of rebels, variously estimated at from 2,500 to 4,500 strong, consisting of the brigades of Generals McCausland and Bradley T. Johnson, the former in chief command, was moving from Hancock toward Cumberland via Baltimore pike. In obedience to a telegram from Major-General Halleck I at once sent out details to blockade the roads leading from Hancock to this city, and placed my command in the best possible condition for defense. My command at this place then consisted of three regiments of Ohio National Guards, four companies Eleventh West

Virginia Infantry, one company Sixth West Virginia Infantry, two sections Battery L, First Illinois Light Artillery, one section Battery B, Maryland Light Artillery, and several hundred stragglers, mostly unarmed, who had stampeded from the front after the battle near Winchester, July 24. The One hundred and fifty-third Ohio National Guards, Col. I. Stough, was at once sent to Old Town, Md., to blockade the road and to dispute the passage of the river in case the enemy should attempt to move into Virginia by that route before attacking Cumberland, or in case of a failure before the city, should endeavor to effect a retreat in that direction.

On the 1st of August my scouts reported the enemy advancing on the Baltimore pike. I sent Lieut. T. W. Kelley, with a squad of volunteer cavalry, to watch the movements and retard the progress of the enemy until I could place my command in position. At 12 m. (sic) Lieutenant Kelley reported the enemy about twelve miles distant moving toward the city. I immediately posted the One hundred and fifty-sixth Ohio National Guards, Col. C. Marker; detachment Eleventh West Virginia Infantry, Maj. J. L. Simpson; one section Battery L, First Illinois Light Artillery, Lieutenant J. McAfee, in position about two miles east of this place on the heights west of Falck's Mills, overlooking the valley of Evett's Creek, under cover of timber, completely hid from view of the enemy, and held the fortifications in the vicinity with the balance of my command and awaited the approach of the enemy. His advance appeared about 3 p.m., composed of a squadron of cavalry, near Falck's Mills, a portion of them crossing the bridge at that place and coming within range of our muskets. At this juncture my guns on the heights opened fire upon them, which was the first intimation they had of the presence of my command. After their recovery from this surprise they took shelter behind the bridge, Falck's Mills, house, barn, &c., and from this cover their sharpshooters opened a galling fire upon my artillery, which was replied to and rendered ineffectual by our skirmishers. They then rapidly deployed a line of skirmishers, placed four pieces of artillery in position, and brought up the main part of their command. A sharp engagement ensued, lasting for several hours, until

darkness ended the combat, both lines maintaining nearly the original position of the day, my command resting on their arms.

A reconnaissance on the following morning developed the fact that the enemy had beat a precipitate retreat from my front during the night, taking an obscure road across the mountain toward Old Town, abandoning in his march his dead, 8 in number; his wounded, some 30-odd; 2 caissons, several carriages, and a large quantity of ammunition. About 5 a.m. August 2 he attacked Colonel Stough near Old Town, Md., who with his regiment defended the crossing until the enemy succeeded in flanking him, when he recrossed the river. By the time he had reached the Virginia side, his men had become so demoralized that all but five officers and seventy-seven enlisted men took the cars which had carried them down and moved out of reach of the enemy. Colonel Stough, with the small command now left him, assisted by the iron-clad cars, commanded by Captain Petrie, Second Regiment Potomac Home Brigade, Maryland Volunteer Infantry, continued to defend the crossing until the enemy succeeded in disabling the iron-clads, by a shot through the boilers of the engine, when Captain Petrie's command was compelled to take shelter in the woods, leaving Colonel Stough in the blockhouse, where he remained until the enemy's guns were brought to bear upon it, when the following demand for his surrender was received:

AUGUST 2, 1864.

COMMANDER OF THE FORCES IN THE BLOCK-HOUSE:

You will surrender the block-house and your force at once. If you do not you will not receive any terms.

BRADLEY T. JOHNSON,

Brigadier-General, Confederate Forces.

Colonel Stough returned the following answer as the terms upon which he would surrender his command, deeming it useless to longer attempt a defense:

First, that his men should be immediately paroled; second, that private property should be respected; third, that the men should retain canteens, haversacks, blankets, and rations; fourth, that he should have a hand-car with which to transport his wounded men to Cumberland. The propositions made by Colonel Stough were accepted and his command at once paroled. The enemy lost from 20 to 25 killed in the engagement and from 40 to 50 wounded; our loss, 2 killed and 3 wounded. After destroying the block-house and iron-clad cars, the enemy moved south toward Romney. On the 3d instant a detachment of the enemy, McNeill's guerrillas, crossed the Potomac at Brady's Mills, six miles west of Cumberland, and destroyed several culverts, &c., indicating clearly that the enemy meditated an attack on New Creek and to prevent the sending of re-enforcements to that place. In anticipation of their probable movements I at once, on the night of the 3d, had the road repaired and put in running order. On the same day a scout discovered a camp of the enemy at or near the Wire Bridge in Hampshire County.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

B. F. KELLEY,

Brevet Major- General."

A Confederate description of the August 2, 1864 battle

Goldsborough's 1866 book "**Four Years in the Saddle**" gives a detailed firsthand account of the August 2, 1864 battle of Green Spring Run from the Confederate point of view:

About 1 A.M. we had reached to within a mile and a half of the river, the road leading along the side of a ridge, through a thick undergrowth of oak, pine, and laurel. I was riding with the advance guard, ahead of the column, sound asleep on my horse, when five or six shots were fired immediately in front, and, before I was fairly awake, another volley came from the right. I knew well what was up there, so, telling the boys to charge, and leading off myself with a yell, which of course, they all responded to, we dashed on. Their

bullets flew over our heads, and, although we could see nothing, we heard them retreating at a gallop. It was only a picket-post that must have been informed of our approach, for they did not challenge. It was to answer the challenge that I rode with the advance, hoping to capture the picket and take possession of the bridge over the canal. It was not safe to advance farther in the dark, and without support; I therefore turned off into the wood, planted an ambuscade for anything that might approach, and sent scouts to explore the ford and give information. I sent a courier to hasten up Johnson, established vedettes, and then laid down to get some sleep.

Daylight came, and with it our couriers, who reported eight hundred infantry and an iron-clad battery at the ford to dispute our crossing, and also a courier from Johnson, saying he would soon join me, so I started out on a reconnaissance.

When I reached the canal I found they had burned the small bridge about a mile above Oldtown, but there was another of larger dimensions directly opposite the ford. A heavy fog enveloped the country for miles along the river and canal, and nothing could be seen. This caused my advance, under Kemp, to run into an ambuscade, by which he lost one man (Gorman) killed and two wounded.

I deemed it prudent to dismount and wait for Johnson, who soon came up; and as the enemy in ambush had retired after giving us a volley, I went forward with two or three men to bring off the wounded, and see if Gorman was really dead. I found the poor fellow perfectly conscious, lying on his back, shot in the abdomen by a Minie ball, which had torn a great hole, from which his entrails protruded. He was suffering intense pain, yet calm and rational, although he knew he had but an hour to live. He told me his name was not Gorman, but Aristo. He joined us from a Louisiana regiment under a false name; told me not to waste time with him if I had any thing to do, and bade me good-by. His hand, as I pressed it, was then cold, and he died soon after. His comrades rolled him up in his saddle-blanket, and buried him where he fell.

When Johnson came up the mist had partially cleared away. We could see Oldtown, and a few Federal soldiers seemed to be taking up the bridge. Johnson thought we should make a dash for it, and went with me at the head of the column, his head-quarter flag in the rear, borne by a courier. There was a level stretch of road along the canal leading into town, and on the other side of the canal, between it and the river, a high ridge, partly cleared, and partly covered with trees and undergrowth. Not a man was to be seen, and we started for town, but had not proceeded half a mile before a line of infantry opened upon us a rapid and continuous fire. The distance was about three hundred yards, but I presume they had fixed their sights for even a greater distance, as they often do, for not a man was hit, and but two or three horses. We were just opposite the mouth of a ravine. With one accord we left the road, ran up the ravine, and took shelter behind the hill.

The 1st Maryland had come no farther down than the bridge. Captain Welch went to work and built a new one, over which McCausland marched three regiments, dismounted them, and formed line of battle between the river and canal. Quite a lively fight ensued, but it resulted in the retreat of the enemy to the Virginia side of the river, where they took possession of a train of house-cars, walled up on the inside with heavy cross-ties for breast-works. There was an iron-clad battery, formed of rail-bars, at each end, with the locomotive in the centre. A large number of the enemy crowded into these cars, and the whole train was moved down the track directly opposite the ford, within easy musket range of the bridge, and of the space between the river and canal, and this was the only place on which we could place a gun to bear upon the train.

One attempt was made to carry the ford with dismounted cavalry and my second battalion. We gained the river, and charged across under a heavy fire of shells and musketry, but could not go out on the other side. I drew up my squadron in single rank under the Virginia shore, in water knee-deep. The dismounted men waded through, and lay down on the edge of the water. There

was but one way out, and that was up the steep hill where the road went forth from the river, under an enfilading fire from the batteries.

Green Spring Run Station, on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, is exactly opposite. Besides the train there was a new block-house, built in the most approved style with bomb-proof, having one hundred men in it, commanded by Colonel Stowe, of Ohio. The block-house covered the ford at a distance of one hundred and fifty yards, with an open flat between, except just before the house, where the trees were.

It must be acknowledged that our prospects were none of the brightest. We had lost about a dozen men in the fight, and yet gained nothing. I waited some time for McCausland to come to our aid, but, as he did not make his appearance, I went over to learn his movements and make some suggestions. I found him and Johnson in consultation; explained to them fully the position on the other side, telling them it was absolutely necessary to bring one or two pieces to bear upon the train and shell the infantry out of the cars. I described the country on the Virginia side, which I knew well, and convinced them of the fact that Kelly was sure to bring down any number of troops from Cumberland when he found that we were checked at the river.

They acknowledged the truth of my remarks, but said that artillerymen could not live under the musketry from the train, and that the horses would be killed before they could bring the guns into position.

My horse had not been killed coming from the ford, and in the charge we had but five men killed; so, leaving them to their deliberations, I went back to Oldtown to see Lieutenant McNulty, of the Baltimore Light Artillery, and get him to take the almost desperate position. I found him, as I expected, ready for any thing. Accordingly, we took two pieces down to the bridge; crossed it at a gallop; had two horses killed, which we dragged along dead in their harness; got a position on the ridge; unlimbered the pieces, already shotted and primed. The gunner was a Baltimorean named McElwee, and, though a brisk fire was opened on him, he coolly sighted his piece, and put a six-pound shell

through the boiler, which exploded with a loud report. That was one of the best shots made during the war, judging from its effect, for every man except those in the ironclad stampeded. The third or fourth shot entered the porthole of the iron-clad, dismounted the brass pivot-gun, whereupon both were evacuated. But the way was still not clear; for there stood the block-house, really the greater obstacle, from the fact that it could not be seen from the Maryland side of the river. Lieutenant McNulty wasted about fifty shells feeling for it, only one of which pierced it through the roof.

When the iron-clads were deserted, one of Johnson's Virginia regiments charged up the bank and received the fire from the block-house, by which it suffered severely in officers and men.

Thus matters continued for an hour and a half, McCausland and Johnson being unable to decide on what course to pursue. We were all collected in a body under the Virginia shore, and if any one showed his head above the bank a bullet was sure to whistle very near it.

At length it was determined by McCausland to make a sudden and fierce assault, and the 8th and 21st Virginia were ordered to be put in position to make the attack. Just then it was suggested by some one to demand a surrender, notifying the commanding officer that, unless he complied, no quarter would be given after the place was taken. The two generals wondered that this had not been thought of before. Johnson wrote the message, which I sent by two of my men, Kidd and McCaul, one of whom was afterward in prison with me. They tied a white handkerchief to a cane, and advanced boldly to the block-house. The officer replied that his time was nearly out, and, if his men and officers were paroled, he would surrender. Most fortunate for us; it, no doubt, saved us many lives.

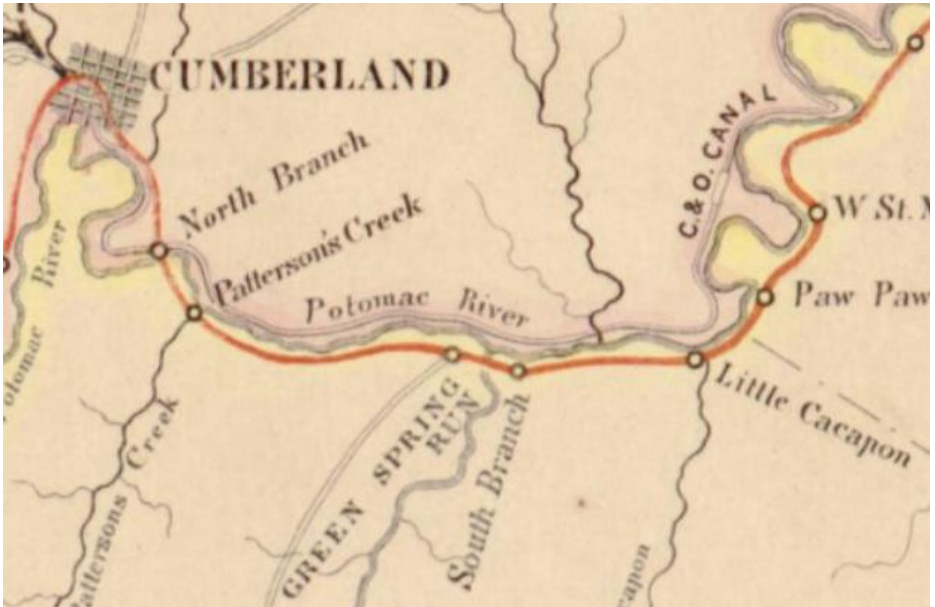
I mounted my horse and rode forward to assist in forming the men, and soon after was ordered to scout the country and find out what had become of the escaped enemy. They had gone to Cumberland.

After destroying the train we moved round to Springfield, nine miles on the Romney Road, camped two days to refresh our horses, and on the 3d of August went to Romney. Here all the wagons, dismounted men, and crippled horses were sent to the Valley.

We marched out in the direction of New Creek, which McCausland had determined to capture, and which I believe would have been done had there been proper concert of action but we spent two days uselessly, and were foiled most signally in that expedition, although McCausland did assault and capture one fort. We lost forty or fifty men, gaining nothing by the trip. Most of the regiments were demoralized, principally because of the amount of plunder they were allowed to carry.

This account mentions the use of a canal bridge and a Potomac River fording site. The referenced bridge crossed the C&O canal at Oldtown, due south of the historic stone and brick house of Michael Cresap on Green Spring Road. The bridge was necessarily a high structure, in order to allow passage of canal boats. The Potomac River fording site was south of the canal bridge, and west of the island. The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad and the blockhouse were south of the Potomac River. The capture of the blockhouse and armored train cleared the fording site of all opposition, opening the way for the Confederates to return to Virginia.

This account also reveals that the battle of Green Spring Station pitted a Confederate Maryland outfit – the Baltimore Light Artillery – against a Union Maryland outfit – The Second Potomac Home Brigade.



This image is from the 1858 Jacobi map of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. It shows the location of the railroad, in red, at the Green Spring Run Station, relative to the Potomac River and the C&O Canal. The blockhouse was also on the south side of the river. The railroad crossed the South Branch of the Potomac River one mile east-southeast of the Green Spring Run Station.

Petenbrink recovers in the Cumberland hospital

Christian Petenbrink's 1880 pension application states: *"That while ... in the line of his duty at Green Springs, in the State of West Virginia on or about the Month day of July, 1864, he received a Severe injury in both my legs caused by the explosion of a shell near by me affecting my Right Side as if it was paralytic, giving me great pain. I am still affected and unable to perform Manual labor one half of my time. That he was treated in hospitals as follows: In the Hospital at Cumberland M.d. Entering Shortly after being wounded in 1864 and continuing only two or three weeks."* He was later able to determine that his injury really occurred on August 2, 1864.

Affidavit of William Taylor

The affidavit of William Taylor states: *“I...was present at Green Springs Depot when we had a battle about 2nd August 1864 with the Rebels, at that time and place there was a shell Exploded & a cannon ball hit the car in which Christian was standing with others defending the car, and firing with a brass howitzer from the car at the Rebels, when the car was hit with a shell a cannon ball, the splinters a timber hit the claimant in his right side and leg, and was severely injured. I thought at the time, he could not live – this I saw with my own eyes at the time.”*

Affidavit of Jacob Shoemaker and Jesse Cook

The affidavit of Jacob Shoemaker and Jesse Cook states: *“That we were members of Co. K 2nd P.H.B. Md ... and that Christian Peppenbrink was of the same Company and regiment and that while the company was stationed at Green Spring in July 1864 we were on an iron clad car and were fired upon by the Rebels and one of the cannon balls fired from the Rebel’s guns pass through in the cars where we were and Mr. Peppenbrink was injured by some of the pieces of timber which struck him as the cannon ball passed in the car. We first thought he was killed but on examination we found that he was still living but was very badly hurt about his legs and side his side was black from the bruises and also his legs were black and we have been living close neighbors to Mr. Peppenbrink since his return from the war in 1865 up to the present time. In our estimation he is over half disabled for manual labor and has been each and every year since 1865. We also have often been working with said Peppenbrink and he had to quit work on account of the pains in his legs and side this we know from personal knowledge and observations.”*

Affidavit of Benjamin Boyer and Daniel Shoemaker

The affidavit of Benjamin Boyer and Daniel Shoemaker states: *“That we were members of Co. K 2nd P.H.B. Md vols and that Christian Peppenbrink was of the same company and regiment and that while the company was stationed at Green Spring Va we were with Mr. Peppenbrink on an Iron Clad car on the B&O R.R. and a cannon ball being thrown from the Rebel guns*

struck the car where we were in and passed through the car close by Mr. Peppenbrink some of the pieces of the car is what struck him and injured him very badly. We first thought he was killed. This was some time in July 1864. We are living close neighbors to Mr. Peppenbrink ever since 1865 up to this present time and the applicant often complains to us of his legs and side and has to walk with a cane. In our estimation he can not do more than half days labor each and every year since his discharge in 1865. These facts we know from personal knowledge and observation. We often worked with him and he had to quit work on account of his legs and pain in his side.”

The genesis of this research

While growing up in the 1960s, I asked my grandmother Korns what she knew about my ancestors. She stopped whatever she was doing in the kitchen of her Somerset County farmhouse, and grabbed a sheet of paper. Using an ironing board as a desk, she drew a remarkably accurate family tree from memory, listing my ancestors back to the 1700s. When she came to Christian Petenbrink, she mentioned that he was “*in the war*”. I asked her what war, but she didn’t know. Several decades later, I decided to find the answer. This article is the culmination of that effort. Thank you, Grammy Korns, for turning me on to history at a young age. I dedicate this article to you.



This photo of Christian Petenbrink is an enlargement from a multi-generation family portrait. The fact that he posed with a Civil War musket in a family portrait indicates that he was proud to be a veteran of the Union Army.

-
- ¹ The Second Regiment was organized at Cumberland, Maryland in 1861.
 - ² Lowdermilk's "**History of Cumberland**" mentions "*a company from Wellersburg, with Captain Petrie*".
 - ³ The named individuals appear in the roster of Company K.