

Battle of Falling Waters July 2, 1861



Area Where Lt. Colonel Stuart Captured the 15th PA

Early in the war, General Joseph E. Johnston was ordered into the lower Shenandoah Valley to command the Confederate forces there. Second in command was Colonel Thomas J. Jackson, a professor at the Virginia Military Institute. When Jackson left VMI for the Valley, he brought the VMI cadet cannon; Captain William Pendleton, an Episcopal minister; and the Rockbridge Artillery. Jackson established his base camp at Camp Stephens, about five miles south of the site of the battle next to the Valley Pike, named

after Confederate Vice President Alexander Stephens. This was north of Martinsburg in an area known as the Four Mile Wood.

Jackson's eyes and ears in the valley was Lieutenant Colonel J.E.B. Stuart. Jackson knew there was a large detachment of Union Soldiers collected at Williamsport, Maryland, under the command of General Robert Patterson and comprised mostly of volunteers from Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. On several occasions and at different locations, they acted as though they were going to move into Virginia, but did not. However, at 4:00 a.m. on the morning of July 2, 1861, the Union troops began moving across the Potomac and along the Valley Pike towards Martinsburg. Stuart's Cavalry, which was spread out along the Potomac, hidden in the woods and made up of many local Berkeley County men, fired upon the Union soldiers as they foraged the river.

Stuart immediately sent word of the Union movement to Jackson at Camp Stephens, about nine miles away. Jackson moved his troops north to intercept Patterson. Patterson's orders were to keep Johnston confined to the Valley and pinned down in Winchester. He had at his disposal approximately 20,000 men. Jackson, with only a fraction of that number, had only a portion of those available due to other actions including the destruction of the rolling stock of the B&O yard in Martinsburg. Although there were more than 380 Confederates at Falling Waters, it was reported this was about all that were actively engaged in the main battle.

The Confederates were set up and waiting for the Union army. The site they chose was the Porterfield Farm. Much of this property and the house are still as they were on that day. The farmhouse was built by Davy Crockett's grandfather. One of the VMI cannon was placed in front of the house. Confederate sharpshooters were in the windows of the house. The main line formed across the Valley Pike past the house and into the hills and fields beyond. At about 10:00 a.m., the Union army crossed the crest in the road and the Confederates opened fire. The battle lasted about two hours.

Lieutenant Colonel Stuart and his men were to the west of the battle and not engaged. Today this spot is just west of I-81 and the area is much as it was in 1861. At the end of two hours, Jackson knew he was becoming vastly outnumbered and ordered his men to begin pulling back. Stuart, seeing this, also started moving south. Climbing over the hill into Stumpy Hollow, he came upon the entire 15th Pennsylvania Infantry except for their Captain. Stuart, still wearing his Union Blues, was mistaken for one of them. Riding up to them, he pulled his pistol and announced they had been captured. The rest of his unit arrived just about this time. Out of 48 men, three resisted and were killed. In Jackson's Official Report, he noted two of these men were killed by 'Negro Cavalrymen' under the command of Stuart's officers. Jackson withdrew to

Darksville. Patterson stopped first at Camp Stephens and then at Martinsburg, disrupted and confused enough to not follow orders and continue after Johnston. It was at this time that Confederate Spy Belle Boyd shot and killed one of Patterson's men for attempting to hoist a Union flag up her mother's flag pole.

General Lee promoted Jackson to Brigadier General and Stuart to full Colonel. General Johnston and Brigadier General Jackson moved over the Blue Ridge and joined with Beauregard to defeat the Union army at First Manassas/Bull Run. Following First Manassas, Jackson became known as 'Stonewall' and Patterson lost his command.

The Battle of Falling Waters was the first engagement of the Civil War for both Jackson and Stuart. The first cannon fire of the war in the Shenandoah Valley was from the VMI cannon at this battle. It was recorded that Negro Confederate soldiers participated in this battle. The first Pennsylvanian to die in the Civil War was killed at Falling Waters: Amos Suppinger of Danville, Pennsylvania.

The Committee on Conduct of the War, formed by the United States Congress, officially laid the fault for the loss of First Manassas on General Robert Patterson due to his inability to keep General Johnston in the Valley. What started Patterson's downfall in the Valley? Jackson and Stuart at Falling Waters on July 2, 1861.

Future of Falling Waters Battlefield: In August 2004, the Falling Waters Battlefield Association (FWBA) was formed to acquire, save, restore and preserve areas of the battlefield not already developed. The most important sections are still intact with the area where Lieutenant Colonel J.E.B. Stuart captured the 15th Pennsylvania Infantry almost exactly as the day of the battle. While in the early days of formation, the Civil War Preservation Trust (CWPT) and the National Park Service (NPS) are already working with the FWBA. FWBA is in contact with the National Trust of Historic Preservation and is hopeful they too will join the effort. At this time, one landowner is working with FWBA for one parcel of the battlefield, 5 acres, at a cost of \$375,000. Applying for private and corporate donations, and asking for help along the way, once a substantial amount has been accumulated, FWBA can apply for matching grants from numerous sources. There is much to acquire and expenses have been required to form and establish FWBA. Any help would be gratefully appreciated and can be given to the [Falling Waters Battlefield Association](#) by contacting Charles 'Chuck' Walker, Stuart-Mosby Historical Society member, at 573 Butlers Chapel Road, Martinsburg, WV 25401, (304) 754-7259 or by [e-mail](#).