



## Rienzi Knoll



NPS Image

### The Dinges Farm as it stands today.

#### The Land

Although not within the authorized boundary of Cedar Creek and Belle Grove National Historical Park, this 64 ½ acre property is “core battlefield” and was the first parcel preserved on the northern part of the field. This property is where a portion of the defeated Union army rallied in mid-morning on October 19,

1864; where Union General Phil Sheridan, having ridden some dozen miles from Winchester, arrived around 10:30 a.m. that morning; and finally, where the Union counter-attack, which was launched at 4:00 p.m., began.

#### The Property

In 1831, David Dinges, Sr. arrived in Middletown, Virginia, purchased this property, which for nearly a century remained in the family. The last of the Dinges family, Mrs. Frances Dinges, died in 1930. The farm is also called “Ripple,” because of the gentle waters of Meadow Brook, which pass through the farm. Although the house was restored in the 1980’s, the early 19th century structure retains much of its architectural integrity. Both the house and the barn were here during the battle of Cedar Creek; thus they are “witness structures.”

In 2012, the Civil War Trust (CWT) purchased the property, preserving both its Civil War history and its part in the history of the Shenandoah Valley.

Because the property is just outside of the current park boundary, the National Park Service (NPS) cannot take ownership of the farm. It is hoped that at some future date, the park’s boundary will be adjusted to include this property, at which point the NPS will be able to purchase it from the CWT. Until that time, the Trust will continue to own and manage the property. Currently, the Trust leases the house and the farmland, to keep the land productive and to raise funds for the property’s maintenance. In the future, with the cooperation of the CWT, the National Park Service hopes to offer special programming on this site.



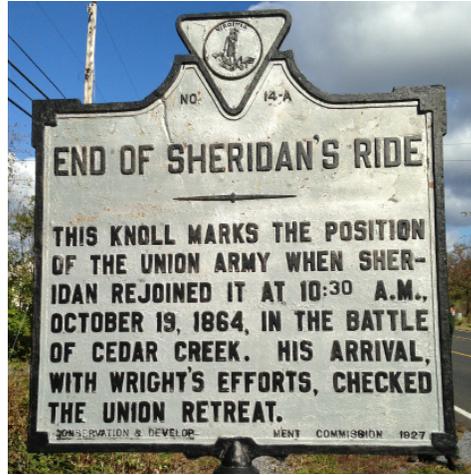
Sketch by Alfred A. Waud Sheridan's Ride, Battle of Cedar Creek  
Courtesy: Library of Congress

## Sheridan's Ride

At 7:00 a.m. on October 19, 1864, Sheridan, who had returned to Winchester the evening before after a day-long strategy conference in Washington, D.C., was awoken by a nervous staff officer. The officer had heard artillery fire from the south and worried that a battle was in progress. Although Sheridan waved it off as just a previously-arranged Union reconnaissance, he obviously was concerned, because two hours later he, some of his staff, and an escort of twenty troopers set off for the army's camps along Cedar Creek.

Just south of Newtown (now Stephen's City), as they crested a rise, it became clear something had gone wrong, as Sheridan recalled, *"there burst upon our view the appalling spectacle of panic..."* They saw *"a stricken army - hundreds of slightly wounded men, throngs of others unhurt but utterly demoralized, and baggage wagons by the score, all pressing to the rear in hopeless confusion, telling only too plainly that a disaster had occurred at the front."*

## Sheridan's Arrival



Continuing on, Sheridan and his escort reached this property at about 10:30 a.m. Here they found Gen. George Getty's 2nd division of the Sixth Corps. Col. Amasa Tracey, commanding the Vermont Brigade, rode over to his commanding general. *"General, we're glad to see you!"* Tracey said. *"Well, I'm glad to be here, by God!"* Sheridan replied. *"What troops are these?"* *"Sixth Corps! Vermont Brigade!"* the men nearby yelled out. *"All right, we're all right! We'll have our camps by night!"*

## Reorganizing the army and the Counter-Attack

Shortly after arriving, in preparation for a counter-attack, Sheridan ordered his troops to form up along George Getty's line. Then, on the suggestion of "Sandy" Forsyth, Sheridan rode the length of his line. *"His appearance was greeted by tremendous cheers from one end of the line to the other,"* Forsyth wrote later. *"He spoke to them all, cheerily and confidently, saying: 'We are going back to our camps, men, never fear...'"*

At 4:00 p.m., Sheridan ordered his troops forward. It wasn't easy; the Confederates put up stiff resistance. One Federal soldier remembered receiving a *"withering volley,"* and *"that the line at once became completely paralyzed, and was brought to a dead halt."*

Eventually, from west to east, the Confederate line began to crumble, and as one Vermonter wrote, became *"a great rushing, turbulent, retreating army, without line or apparent organization, hurrying and crowding on in mad retreat."*

## "...the thanks of the nation..."

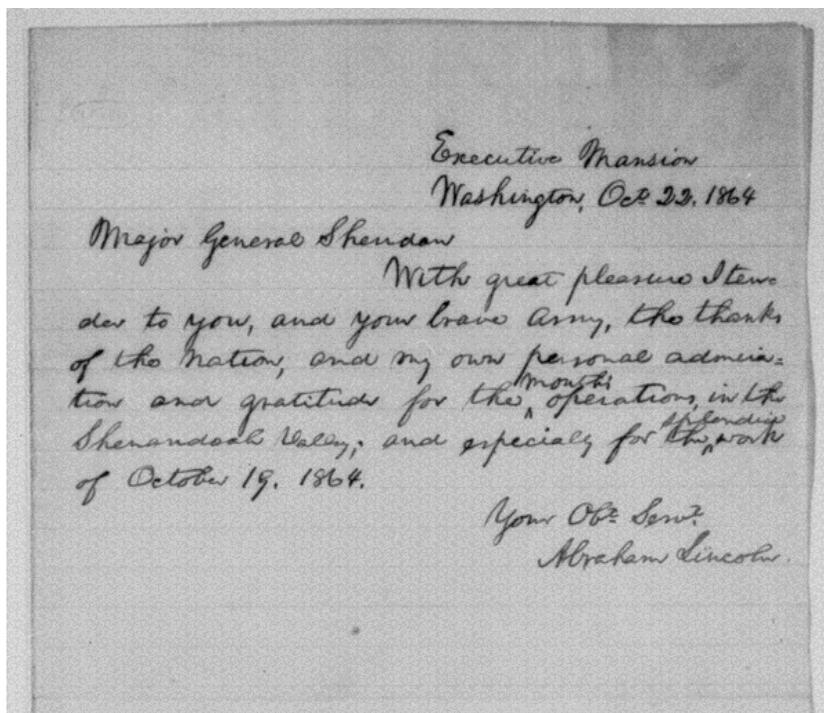


Image Credit: Library of Congress

Possibly no one was more grateful for the outcome of the Battle of Cedar Creek than President Lincoln. In his congratulatory message to Sheridan, the President must have realized how the Union victory would help his re-election chances. Indeed, on November 6, 1864, Lincoln was easily re-elected, and at least in part, he could point to what happened here as the reason.

*"Major General Sheridan  
With great pleasure I tender to you  
and your brave Army the thanks of the  
Nation and my own personal admiration  
and gratitude for the month's  
operations in the Shenandoah Valley  
and especially for the splendid work of  
October 19, 1864."*

*Your Obt. Servt.  
Abraham Lincoln*