



THE DRUM & BUGLE
Voice of the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table
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Speaker: Eric Lindblade
Topic: “Newport Barracks and the 1864 New Bern Campaign”
When: Monday January 13, 2024
Location: Brock’s Riverside Grill
Times: Social Time Begins 6:00 pm, Dinner 6:45 pm, Meeting Begins 7:30 pm
Our Website: www.rappvalleycivilwar.org
Our Facebook: www.facebook.com/rvcwrt

Eric Lindblade “Newport Barracks and the 1864 New Bern Campaign”

Eric Lindblade was born and raised in North Carolina and began his study of the Civil War after a trip to Gettysburg at the age of six and has been a Licensed Battlefield Guide since 2016. He attended East Carolina University and is the author of "Fight As Long As Possible: The Battle of Newport Barracks" and is currently finishing up work on a regimental history of the 26th North Carolina. Eric is a frequent speaker on topics pertaining to Gettysburg and his research specialty, North Carolina, and the Civil War. He

is also the co-host of The Battle of Gettysburg Podcast with fellow Licensed Battlefield Guide Jim Hessler.

On February 2, 1864, a 900-man Union garrison near the small eastern North Carolina town of Newport found itself under attack by over 2,500 Confederates. Despite being outnumbered and facing almost three to one odds, the Union forces fought three separate engagements over an almost ten-mile front in western Carteret County. After a day of combat lasting over ten hours, Union troops were compelled to retreat in the face of an overwhelming Confederate onslaught. Ultimately three members of the 9th Vermont infantry were awarded the Medal of Honor for their actions which saved their comrades from certain capture. The Battle of Newport Barracks was the culmination of a brilliant operation commanded by Brigadier General James G. Martin and marked a rare Confederate victory in a theater of the Civil War where fortunes rarely favored Southern forces. Often viewed as a mere footnote to the larger Confederate attempt to recapture New Bern, this is the story of the men and the town caught in the middle of the largest and bloodiest battle to take place in Carteret County during the Civil War.

**“The Potomac Will be Effectively Closed” Actions along the Potomac:
May 1861 to March 1862**

by Rob Orrison

A Review of the December 2024 Program by Greg Mertz

During the first summer of the Civil War, after the July 1861 battle of First Manassas, the Confederate position across northern Virginia, ran from Leesburg east through Centreville, and continuing east with its right flank anchored on the Potomac River. Since the Confederacy had no navy in this early phase of the war, Confederate army commander Gen. Joseph E. Johnston, was concerned about his right flank and constructed fortifications at several points along the river.

While the river is very wide at places – extending up to a mile across, the navigable channel is very narrow, and runs very close to Prince William County on its western bank. Well placed Confederate batteries along that shore not only protected the flank of the infantry line, but had the potential to effectively block river traffic to the Federals – a route which provided 90% of the supplies going into Washington.

Even before First Manassas, the Confederates constructed river fortifications for other reasons. The Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac railroad ended on the Potomac at Aquia Landing, where goods were transferred between trains and ships making connections with Washington. Early in the war, even before Virginia had formally seceded from the Union, Virginia Gen. Daniel Ruggles had defenses built at Aquia. Robert E. Lee felt that the rear of these fortifications would be vulnerable to approach via land, and argued for the Prince William County location instead, but Ruggles established batteries at Aquia anyhow.

At this phase, the Washington Navy Yard contained only three ships under Commander James H. Ward. While gunboats, including the Pawnee and Pocahontas, could navigate the channel, Ward assembled the Potomac Flotilla predominantly of shallow draft passenger ships armed with a pair of cannon that were swift and could navigate outside of the channel. On June 1, 1861 he took two of these boats to Aquia Landing and spent five hours bombarding Ruggles' fortifications with 600 shells. When Ward returned the next day, he found that the Aquia defenses had been rebuilt.

Ward soon took four gunboats down to Mathias Point, where modern Rt. 301 crossed the river near the Dahlgren Naval Base. Ward desired support from the army, but it was not forthcoming, so he committed Marines to strike the rear of the position while the navy shelled the front during the June 27, 1861 engagement. Instead of finding fortifications, the Federal sailors and marines discovered a Confederate camp, primarily comprising men from the 40th Virginia. A Confederate rifleman shot and killed Ward on board the USS Thomas Freeborn, making him the first naval officer to be killed during the Civil War. Fort Ward in Alexandria was named for Commander James H. Ward. The Federals drove the Confederates from Mathias Point, and the Confederates gave up trying to defend the place.

The first place fortified by the Confederates in Prince William County was at Freestone Point, now located within Leesylvania State Park, where Robert E. Lee's father was born. While the fort was on a high point, it was too far from the river channel for its cannon to be a threat to Federal shipping. It was actually constructed to divert the attention of the U.S. Navy away from other more crucial points along the river. Ward's replacement, Captain Thomas T. Craven, realized that the battery at Freestone Point was no more

than a nuisance and was basically a ruse. On September 25, 1861, the Potomac Flotilla knocked out the battery, only to return the next day to find it had been rebuilt.

The vital Confederate fortifications include Cockpit Point, where eight guns captured from the Gosport Navy Yard were posted right next to the river channel. When being constructed, some trees directly in front of the guns were only partially chopped down, being left in place to screen their operations from view of the Federals, and then the final cuts felled the trees in a span of about twenty minutes and suddenly the impressive battery came into view.

Another critical position was at a place called Shipping Point at the mouth of Quantico Creek, which is now within the Quantico Marine Corps base. A total of fifteen huge naval guns were posted at Shipping Point. A total of 37 cannon were along the river between Cockpit Point and Shipping Point.

Most of the gunners, however, had no experience and the effectiveness of even these well positioned cannon was wretched. Union Gen. Joseph Hooker, on the Maryland side of the Potomac, declared that Federal boats were more likely to be struck by lighting than by the cannon fire of the Confederate batteries. U.S. Navy ships continued to go up and down the river, and while some had been hit by Confederate gunners, damage was slight and not one navy ship was ever sunk by the Confederate batteries. The real impact was on shipping cargo, most of which would not take the risk of going past the enemy guns without a naval escort. Shipping had halted for about six months.

Federal infantry under Daniel Sickles was posted in pro-Confederate southern Maryland to stop smuggling across the river. They were not very effective and the men were bored. Sickles and Hooker proposed to Gen. George McClellan that they cross the Potomac and knock out the Confederate batteries, but the idea was rejected.

The St. Nicholas was a passenger steamer that was being used to supply the Pawnee, one of the largest Federal gunboats at this phase of the war. Confederates theorized that if they could seize the St. Nicholas, they might get close enough to the Pawnee to storm and capture it. While Secretary of War LeRoy P. Walker rebuffed the idea, Virginia Governor John Letcher both liked and funded it. A Confederate colonel who spoke fluid French, dressed

as a woman, pretended to be the wife of another officer. The “French couple” along with two servants would board the St. Nicholas at Point Lookout, Maryland and once they set sail, overwhelm the crew. That aspect of the plan worked.

However, the Pawnee was not on the river; it was in Washington for the funeral of Commander Ward. So, the St. Nicholas went into the Chesapeake Bay and captured several supply ships. It concluded its expedition by going to Fredericksburg, where the St. Nicholas was outfitted with a pair of guns and became part of the Confederate brown-water navy.

The Potomac blockade included several firsts, in addition to Ward being the first U.S. Naval officer killed during the war. The first use of torpedoes, that we would today call mines, was done by the Confederates in the Potomac. The U.S. Navy considers the first aircraft carrier to be the George Washington Parke Custis, a coal barge that launched the balloon of Thadeus Lowe to enable better observation of the Confederate batteries.

The period of the Potomac blockade was exceedingly embarrassing to Lincoln. British Ambassador to the U.S. Lord Richard Lyons pointed out that although Lincoln had ordered a blockade of all Confederate ports, his own capital was the only city in America that was effectively blockaded. McClellan’s movement to go around the Confederate position and Johnston’s subsequent abandonment of northern Virginia in the spring of 1862 ended the blockade and this little-known aspect of the Civil War

Friends of Central Virginia Battlefield Trust

As you know CVBT is a land trust. We focus on purchasing endangered battlefield properties. We do produce a large three-day annual conference, standalone events and need to interpret and maintain our lands, we need help in all of these. In the past, CVBT has had individuals from organizations assist us, and we are grateful, but now we would like to create an official volunteer group who would enjoy being part of CVBT’s volunteer core.

We have created “**The Friends of CVBT.**” The intent is for this all-volunteer group is to be the “On Call” core of CVBT’s volunteer group assisting in events and battlefield related needs. Active volunteer members will have the

unique opportunity to be involved with events hosted by nationally acclaimed historians, assist in tours, and work on preserved battlefields. Participating volunteers will also be enrolled in the membership ranks of CVBT every year they contribute. CVBT will provide each volunteer with a CVBT volunteer staff shirt and CVBT official hat to wear at events or whenever wanted. We will be limiting this new group to 18 volunteers.

CVBT is now beginning our 27th year of preserving our local battlefields, the very battlefields you study and walk upon. We would be honored to have you join the ranks of CVBT volunteers to help us further our mission of preserving our Nation's history.

If interested please email our Executive Director **Terry Rensel** at executivedirector@cvbt.org .

Office: 540-374-0900

CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE OF FREDERICKSBURG (CWRTF)

CWRTF meets 9 times a year on designated Wednesdays at Mary Washington Jepson Alumni Executive Center, 1119 Hanover Street. They offer a buffet dinner followed by a Civil War-themed presentation. Reservations are required. Speaker/topic schedule can be found on their website at www.cwrftf.org, and will be updated here when the schedule is released for 2025.

January 22, 2025 Charlie McDaniel – Witness to History: The Sentry Box House

February 26, 2025 Zachery Fry – A Republic in the Ranks: Loyalty and Dissent in the Army of the Republic

March 26, 2025 John Coski – Hunter Davidson (CSN)

April 23, 2025 Kevin Pawlak – Bristoe Station

May 26, 2025 Barton Myers – General Winfield Scott

June 18, 2025 Patrick Schroeder - Forgotten Friday: April 7, 1865 Actions in Cumberland County VA

Who We Are

The Drum and Bugle Newsletter is published monthly by the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table, Post Office Box 7632, Fredericksburg VA 22404. The newsletter is available on our website at www.rappvalleycivilwar.org. Yearly membership dues are \$40 for individuals and \$50 for families. Students are free. Membership is open to anyone interested in the military, political and social history of the American Civil War.

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