



**THE DRUM & BUGLE**  
**Voice of the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table**  
**February 2026, Volume 23, Issue 2**

**Speaker:** Bert Dunkerly  
**Topic:** "The Final Bivouac: The Confederate Surrender Parade at Appomattox and the Disbanding of the Virginia Armies, April 10-May 20, 1865"  
**When:** February 9, 2026  
**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](http://www.rappvalleycivilwar.org)  
**Our Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/rvcwrt](https://www.facebook.com/rvcwrt)

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**Bert Dunkerly "The Final Bivouac: The Confederate Surrender Parade at Appomattox and the Disbanding of the Virginia Armies, April 10-May 20, 1865"**

What actually happened during the first six weeks of new-found peace once General Lee surrendered the remnants of the Army of Northern Virginia to General Grant? What were the initial reactions of the soldiers and Virginia

citizens to the devastating news of Lincoln's assassination? How did they handle the situation of the emancipated slaves? These and many other issues are covered in depth by the men themselves in *The Final Bivouac: The Confederate Surrender Parade at Appomattox and the Disbanding of the Virginia Armies, April 10–May 20, 1865*. Bert Dunkerly authored this work with Chris Calkins, former chief historian at Appomattox.

Robert M. (Bert) Dunkerly is an American Civil War historian, park ranger (*currently at Richmond National Battlefield Park*), and acclaimed author known for his detailed works on specific campaigns and surrenders, including the "**Emerging Civil War Series**," focusing on events like the Overland Campaign, Richmond during the war, and the Confederate surrenders at Appomattox and Greensboro. He is also an expert on the Revolutionary War, contributing to historic preservation and research with books and blogs for *Emerging Civil War*.

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**“The 1921 U.S. Marine Corps Maneuvers on the Wilderness  
Battlefield”  
by Eric Mink**

**A Review of the January 2026 Program by Greg Mertz**

Just what were some 4,200 Marines doing when they spent 5 days and nights on the Wilderness Battlefield in 1921, and why were they doing it? Eric Mink gave us some background to the Marines and their changing mission which resulted in this unusual event, and the possibility of it being related to the founding of the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park just under six years later.

World War I had ended less than three years prior to nine-day Marine expedition to the Wilderness that got underway on September 26, 1921. While the mission of the Marines had primarily been tied to ships, their critical role in the land battle of Belleau Wood marked the Marines as a capable ground force. Rumors circulated that if the Marines fought just like the army, perhaps they should be disbanded. The future of the Marines was being questioned.

In addition to the blurring of the functions of the Marines and the Army, changes in air power during World War I resulted in a questioning the role of the Navy as well. By the end of the war, Army Brig. Gen. Billy Mitchell commanded all air combat in Europe. Mitchell argued for an independent Air Force and contended that air power could do a better job at protecting our shores than the Navy. The first of the military exercises in 1921 was actually in July in the Chesapeake Bay, in which Mitchell's air planes sunk a ship, although he broke the rules of the training exercise to accomplish it.

So, it was within this context with both the role of the Marines and the dispute of air power versus sea power that prompted Marine Brig. Gen. Smedley Butler, in charge of Quantico, to bring his Marines to the Wilderness for demonstrations of his own. The exercises also reflected the influence of Commandant of the Marine Corps Maj. Gen. John A. Lejeune, said to be the architect of the modern corps, who was also in the Wilderness. Feeling that war with Japan was likely, Lejeune was an advocate of amphibious operations. The maneuvers in the Wilderness would serve to show the capabilities of the Marines to be superior in defending ships from air power, and their prowess in going from ship to shore and seizing island shorelines.

It is not known why the Wilderness Battlefield was selected for the demonstrations. There was no park. All events took place on private property. The three farms involved were the Willis Farm (much of which is currently in the park, including Ellwood), the Tanner Farm (now known as the Lyons Farm) and the Payne Farm (now known as the Link-Atkins Farm). The National Park Service and the Central Virginia Battlefield Trust currently own the northern portion of the areas where the Marines camped and held their demonstrations.

It was important to have influential people present for the event, who would be able to support the Marine Corps and its missions. President and Mrs. Warren G. Harding led the list of dignitaries. Many members of congress, including Gen. Butler's father, sixteen-term Congressman Thomas S. Butler, observed the exercises. Also present was the governor of Virginia, the Secretary of the Navy, and the Assistant Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt, Jr.

One exercise was designed to endorse Lajeune's promotion of amphibious operations for Marines. The Wilderness Run was designated as a shoreline with the ocean being the west side of the stream and an island held by the "enemy" being east of the run. Following an artillery bombardment to screen the attackers, the Marines succeeded in seizing the island, as well as storming the final line of the "enemy" on the crest of the hill.

In another demonstration, a battleship was delineated south of Route 3 and north of the old Orange Turnpike, which is basically a driveway today. When "enemy" aircraft approached, the Marines demonstrated their prowess over air power by driving them off with anti-aircraft guns. This important exercise was apparently duplicated three times during the span that the Marines were in the Wilderness. An outline of an aircraft carrier was made south of today's Lyon's Lane, from which planes could take off.

A "canvas White House" was constructed. In addition to observing the demonstrations, the president met with Civil War veterans of both sides, and addressed the troops. The Marines formed a living portrait of President Harding's profile in the valley of the run, which he could view from the ridge.

When it comes to mishaps, one plane wrecked while landing in a ditch and one Marine came down with pneumonia. The son of Fredericksburg's postmaster, Charles Hunter

found an unexploded grenade, which clearly had no shrapnel, otherwise he would have fared far worse after he put his foot over the hissing and it exploded.

The Marines made the excursions from Quantico an annual event for the next four years, going to Gettysburg, New Market, Antietam and Manassas from 1922-1925. Park Historian Ralph Happel, in writing an administrative history of the park, stated that the 1921 Marine Corps expedition had a decisive role in the establishment of the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park on February 14, 1927, although he cites no sources as evidence to support the claim.

In the question-and-answer session following Mink's talk, he provided a detailed explanation of just what can be documented about the story of Smedley Butler ordering some of his Marines to dig up and reinter "Stonewall" Jackson's Arm. The only sources are from the Willis-Jones family with Mink finding nothing about it in Butler's papers. Neither could he find any record of the plaque Butler placed on the Jackson's arm stone in the Ellwood Cemetery. Even though some of the newspapers reporting on the maneuvers told of the Marines cleaning up the cemetery and erecting a new fence around it, they mention nothing of the plaque or the disturbance of the limb.

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## **Twenty-seventh Annual Appomattox Court House National Historical Park and Longwood University Free Civil War Seminar**

### **From Manassas to the Big Screen**

Saturday, February 7 from 8:30a.m. To 4:00 p.m. ***This annual seminar is sponsored by:*** Appomattox Court House National Historical Park; The Department of History, Political Science, & Philosophy, and the Center for Southside Virginia History at Longwood University; and Eastern National Bookstore. This event is free, and lunch is available at the Longwood University Dining Hall.

Speakers include John Hennessey, Ryan Quint, Brian Steel Wills, Abbi Smithmyer, and Robert Girardi.

**Signs will be posted on the Longwood University Campus. For directions to the campus go to [www.longwood.edu](http://www.longwood.edu). For more information contact Dr. David Coles at 434-395-2220 or Patrick Schroeder at 434-352-8987, Ext. 232 or [patrick\\_schroeder@nps.gov](mailto:patrick_schroeder@nps.gov).**

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## **Important Information about the Park's Buildings**

I would like to thank Alan Zirkle for putting this message out with his History Alert emails. If you are not subscribed to Alan's emails, here is some important maintenance and hours information for the Fredericksburg Battlefield Visitor Center and Chatham Manor. Upcoming maintenance projects will cause Fredericksburg Battlefield Visitor Center and Chatham to close on August 4, 2025. Fredericksburg Battlefield Visitor Center will close for 6 to 7 months while the building undergoes multiple construction projects including the installation of a fire suppression system, a waterline upgrade project, and an electrical system upgrade. The Park Store next to the Fredericksburg Battlefield Visitor Center will remain open daily, 9 am-5 pm, and park staff will be available to provide education and orientation to the battlefield through mid-October, after which park staff will be available on a reduced schedule.

The Chatham gate will remain open 9 am-5 pm through the duration of the project. Chatham will close for about a year for an interior rehabilitation project that will include lead paint encapsulation, new carpet, and plaster repair. Chatham underwent a fire suppression system installation this past year, but it has been partially open throughout the summer for increased visitation in the interim between these two large projects.

To explore these locations independently, check out the self-guided audio tours of the Sunken Road and Chatham available on the NPS App and online at [go.nps.gov/frsp-tours](https://go.nps.gov/frsp-tours). Park staff look forward to welcoming visitors to our upgraded facilities in spring and summer 2026!

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## **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](mailto:executivedirector@cvbt.org) .  
Office: 540-374-0900

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## **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.cwrtf.org](http://www.cwrtf.org), and will be updated here. Below is the schedule starting in September 2025 and going to June 2026.

February 25, 2026

**Meade and Lee’s Commanding Machines at Gettysburg**

Speaker: Doug Douds

March 25, 2026

**The Richmond Bread Riots**

Speaker: Ashley Whitehead Luskey

April 22, 2026

**John Brown: Igniting the Keg**

Speaker: Dennis Frye

May 27, 2026

**The Appomattox Campaign**

Speaker: Hampton Newsome

June 17, 2026

**Teacher, Preacher, Soldier, Spy: John R. Kelso**

Speaker: Christopher Grasso

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**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](http://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.

**Newsletter Editor and Webmaster:** John Roos

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**The RVCWRT Executive Committee**

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