



THE DRUM & BUGLE
Voice of the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table
May 2026, Volume 23, Issue 5

Speaker: Michael Hardy
Topic: “Feeding Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia”
When: May 11, 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
Our Facebook: www.facebook.com/rvcwrt

Michael Hardy “Feeding Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia”

Carlton McCarthy, a former artilleryman with the Richmond Howitzers, noted after the war that historians would only write about big battles and campaigns, not how the common soldier fried his bacon and baked his biscuits. McCarthy was correct. Save for a few scattered references in a handful of books, no one has documented how an army was fed or has discussed in any detail the daily eating habits of Confederate soldiers until Michael C. Hardy’s *Feeding Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia*. Although

seldom studied, food (or the lack thereof) and the logistics behind it played a critical role during the war, contributed mightily to the success and failure of campaigns, and affected the overall outcome of the conflict. Understanding how soldiers prepared their food, how they ate and, very often, went hungry, is a vital tool to understanding their individual experiences and the larger history of supply and logistics within the Confederate army. Battles and campaigns would not have been possible without a proper diet and a functioning logistical system to support the men at the front. *Feeding Lee's Army of Northern Virginia* offers invaluable insight into this overlooked and understudied topic that made it all possible.

Award-winning North Carolina author and historian Michael C. Hardy has been chronicling the past for nearly three decades. His large body of work includes books, articles, and blog posts on topics ranging from the battles, regiments, and personalities of the American Civil War to the hidden gems of history in the Old North State. History has been a life-long passion for Michael, who has been enamored with the past since participating in his first history event at the age of ten. A graduate of the University of Alabama, Michael began his professional writing career in the mid-1990s. While he often explores under-researched corners of Civil War history, Michael also seeks to preserve and share the history of North Carolina, from histories of counties in the Images of America series to explorations of the forgotten past. Michael is a six-time winner of the Willie Parker Peace History Book Award from the North Carolina Society of Historians and the 2010 North Carolina Historian of the Year. Michael regularly volunteers as an interpreter at historic sites and works with a number of local historical societies and associations as well as numerous national organizations. He lives with his wife Elizabeth.

**“Race to the Potomac: Meade and Lee After Gettysburg”
by Dr. Brad Gottfried**

A Review of the April 2026 Program by Greg Mertz

Brad Gottfried shared with our round table his research on the Confederate wagon trains, Gen. Robert E. Lee's Confederate retreat, and Gen. George G. Meade's Federal pursuit following the Battle of Gettysburg. The Confederates assembled two wagon trains for their trek back to Virginia. One set of vehicles included the wagons and ambulances under Gen. John Imboden, transporting as many as 7,000 of the wounded, or the “wagon train

of misery.” The other, under the direction of Maj. John Harman, who had been known as “Jackson’s swearing quartermaster” consisted of the supplies collected in Pennsylvania.

Imboden’s train took 13 hours to assemble, and was strung out some 17 miles, pulling out of Gettysburg at 4:00 pm on July 3, 1863. The train was defended by the mounted brigades of Gen. Fitzhugh Lee, Gen. Wade Hampton and Gen. John Imboden, plus 24 cannon. The wagons used lacked any springs, so the wounded soldiers were in agony, with Imboden hearing at least one man pleading, “O God, why can’t I die.” Col. J. Irvin Gregg’s Federal cavalry brigade will catch up with Imboden’s column at Caledonia Furnace and began destroying wagons before Hampton and Fitz Lee drove him off.

At Greencastle, about 3 dozen civilians with axes chopped at the wheels of the wagons, destroying several until the Confederate cavalry drove them off. When the train reached Williamsport, Maryland, on the afternoon of July 5, it found that the anticipated pontoon bridge over the Potomac River that had been left there was destroyed by the Federal army. As the Confederates were forced to halt at Williamsport, the town became a vast hospital. Gen. John Buford’s Federal cavalry of 5,000 men attacked, while the Confederates armed teamsters and some of the wounded to hold off Buford long enough for the Confederate cavalry to arrive at the fight known as the battle of Williamsport.

The wagon train of wounded took a longer, more westward route to the Potomac, so Harman’s supply wagons could take a more eastward road network and could provide a screen between the Confederate wounded and the Federal army. They were guarded by two problematic Confederate cavalry brigades commanded by Gen. Beverly Robertson and Gen. William E. “Grumble” Jones.

They were pursued by Gen. Judson Kilpatrick’s Federal cavalry division, and fought the first rearguard battle on the night of July 4-5 at Monterey Pass, Pennsylvania, in the South Mountain range. George Emack, with only 90 men of the 1st Maryland Cavalry battalion, CSA, and Tanner’s Battery with very few rounds remaining, did an amazing job of fighting in the dark and keeping Kilpatrick’s 4,500 men at bay for 3-4 hours. In another action on July 5 at Smithsburg, Maryland, Kilpatrick posted a brigade on each of three

hills, engaging Gen. J.E.B. Stuart with the cavalry brigades of Col. John Chambliss and Col. Milton Ferguson.

Lee sought to simplify his retreat by proposing an exchange of prisoners of war. While Meade desired to make the exchange, he could not do so. Lee paroled 1,500 of his 5,000 Federal prisoners and marched the rest with his army in the retreat.

Meade received supplies by railroad only as far as Westminster, Maryland and then by wagons to his troops at Gettysburg. He also received reinforcements of two divisions. One from the Department of the Susquehanna under Gen. William F. Smith, and another from Harper's Ferry commanded by Gen. William French.

Meade issued congratulatory orders to his troops on July 4, 1863 that what his men had done was to "drive from our soil every vestige of the presence of the invader." Lincoln was beside himself. Anywhere Lee's Army of Northern Virginia went was "our soil," including Virginia, and Lincoln hoped that Lee's forces would be destroyed, not simply sent back to Virginia. Lincoln seeming held this against Meade for the remainder of the war.

Meade has also been disparaged for holding three councils of war with his subordinates, suggesting that he didn't know what to do and needed to see what his other generals thought should be done. Gottfried argued that since Meade had only taken command of the army three days before the battle, it was important for him to both gather information on the condition of his army as well the advice of his commanders before making decisions.

Gen. A.P. Hill had initially been selected to lead the Confederate retreat, but Lee had become frustrated with his irascible and tardy subordinate. Gen. James Longstreet was delayed in marching his corps because Hill was so slow. Instead of following Hill, Longstreet was ordered to take a parallel road, overtaking Hill and taking the lead. In an epic march, Longstreet's men marched for 19 hours, took three hours of rest, then marched another 14 hours, reaching Hagerstown by sundown on July 5. Gen. Richard S. Ewell brought up the rear, being alone on the Gettysburg battlefield until he departed at noon on July 5.

Gen. John Sedgwick's large and mostly unengaged VI corps was the most logical choice to lead the pursuit, but his performance was disappointing.

Ordered to make a reconnaissance at Gettysburg at 4:30 am on July 5, he did not move until 12:30 pm that day. On July 6 Sedgwick again hesitated because the fog prevented him from learning as much as he desired about Confederates in the mountains.

Not until July 7 did Meade's forces confront Lee, and rain all day on July 8 caused the Potomac River to reach 18 feet. Once the July 8 rains had swollen the Potomac, Lee laid out a line of fortifications the Federal artilleryman, Col. Charles Wainwright declared to be the strongest line he had ever seen. Confederate engineers had recovered some of the materials from the bridge that had been at Williamsport and constructed another pontoon bridge at Falling Waters on July 12. It took 26 hours for the Confederate wagons to cross the river.

Meade held one of his councils of war on July 12. With the river falling and the opportunity for the Confederates to cross the Potomac at hand, the question was whether the Federal army should attack. Meade's subordinates did not favor an assault and the commanding general yielded to their judgement.

On July 14, Kilpatrick heard of Confederate forces at Falling Waters and rode toward the enemy lines. Gen. J.J. Pettigrew presumed that cavalry approaching his position were Confederates under Fitzhugh Lee, enabling Kilpatrick to ride into Confederate lines, with Pettigrew becoming mortally wounded.

Meade informed Washington that the Confederates had made it safely across the Potomac and that he had failed to carry out his orders to attack Lee. Meade offered his resignation, but despite Lincoln's frustration with what he felt were missed opportunities, he retained Meade in command.

Important Information about the Park's Buildings

At this time, both Chatham Manor and the Fredericksburg Battlefield Visitor Centers remain closed. The grounds are open, with park staff manning the bookstore in Fredericksburg, and offering talks at Chatham. Recent information looks like Chatham will reopen at some time in July, with the visitor center being later in the summer. We will keep you updated as

information come into us. Chancellorsville is open, and Elwood will be opening up for the season in May.

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://www.nps.gov/frsp-tours). Park staff look forward to welcoming visitors to our upgraded facilities in spring and summer 2026!

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.

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. Below is the schedule starting in September 2025 and going to June 2026.

May 27, 2026

The Appomattox Campaign

Speaker: Hampton Newsome

June 17, 2026

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

Speaker: Christopher Grasso

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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