



THE DRUM & BUGLE
Voice of the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table
January 2021, Volume 18, Issue 1

Speaker: John Roos
Topic: Ambrose Burnside and the Blame for the Battle of Fredericksburg
When: Monday January 11, 2021
Location: Virtual Meeting Via Zoom
Times: 7:30

“Virtual January Meeting”

John Roos is a graduate of Southern New Hampshire University with a Bachelor's degree in American history. During this time while working towards his degree, John was an intern and volunteer with Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park. John learned to give tours at all four of our area battlefields, and both Chatham Manor and the Jackson Death Site. He continued with the National Park Service working in the National Capital Region at Fort Washington/Oxon Hill Farm, and for a Summer in Utah with Glen Canyon National Recreation Area. John now lives in Fredericksburg with

his wife Sarah and continues his love for this area's history working with fellow roundtable member John Kanaster as a guide with Fredericksburg Tours. John is also now working towards his Master's degree in American history at Southern New Hampshire University and is a licensed teacher in Virginia with endorsements in History, Social Studies, Civics, and Geography.

John began his love of the Civil War when he visited Gettysburg with his family when he was 10-years-old. Like any novice to the Civil War, he took a lot of the stories at face value. Fredericksburg was no exception. John visited Fredericksburg with his Father many times and always had the same feelings like most do about General Burnside. Whether Burnside was described as incompetent, incapable to lead, or many other adjectives, John believed those descriptions. Through his work in his Bachelor's degree and his internship, John learned there was much more to the story. Though Burnside does carry much of the burden of blame for Fredericksburg, there were many other figures that should shoulder more blame than Burnside. John will share this argument with us.

This month we will continue virtual Zoom programming with a presentation on Ambrose Burnside and the Blame for the Battle of Fredericksburg by fellow roundtable member John Roos. Watch for your invitation! Remember that you can watch all five previous RVCWRT virtual programs in their entirety by searching "RVCWRT" on YouTube. Our speaker lineup for 2021 is now available on our new website: www.rappvalleycivilwar.org.

**"Broken Lives and Shattered Bones: Discovering a Field Hospital at Manassas Battlefield" by Brandon S. Bies
A Review of the December 2020 Virtual Program by Greg Mertz**

Even standard maintenance on National Park Service land calls for extra precautions to make sure that historic resources are not compromised. So, in 2014 when a utility line needed to be replaced on the Manassas National Battlefield, the park staff was very careful about the ground to be disturbed. The park examined the area with metal detectors and performed shovel test pits. The testing exposed domestic objects as well as military artifacts; the discovery of neither was surprising considering it had been both a farm and a battlefield. But these investigations did not reveal anything that would suggest the utility line would disturb a significant feature. While the

project proceeded, the careful monitoring of the project continued. The narrowest backhoe bucket available was used to dig the trench, and the contents of ground disturbed was examined.

When screening the dirt removed from the trench, some 200 splinters of bone each about the size of a pencil eraser were found and sent to the Smithsonian and the forensic anthropology team headed by Doug Owsley. They were able to piece the bone fragments together and discovered that they were human remains -- more specifically they comprised three leg bones and one arm bone all containing cut marks indicative of an amputation. It was obvious that a field hospital site had been found. At first thought, it appeared that a "limb pit" had been discovered.

Further archaeological investigation was called for and funding for five days of work was procured. The National Park Service does not search for graves per se, but did want to understand just what they had stumbled upon. After three days of finding nothing of note, on the fourth day the team found that the trench had struck the feet of three legs. If the trench had been eight or ten inches further away from the bottom of the feet, it would have completely missed the graves. By expanding the dig further up the legs, they discovered that it was not simply a limb pit, but that eleven limbs had been thrown on top of two complete bodies that were also in the burial trench.

It had not been known that Civil War field hospitals mixed the burial of soldiers who had died with amputated limbs. This was an unprecedented discovery. While science would enable much to be learned about the individual soldiers interred there, about the battle and about Civil War medicine, the subsequent treatment of the archaeological evidence was also very somber. These human remains were given the reverence due to soldiers who fell in service to the nation. The quality of the soil was such that if the complete bodies of the soldiers were simply covered back up where they were found after being exposed to the air, the remains would disintegrate in about five years. So after thoroughly documenting the human remains and the artifacts, they were removed for further study.

Because Manassas National Battlefield contains two Civil War battlefields, it was not obvious from the location (which is presently undisclosed to the public) either which battle the hospital was associated with or whether it was a Union or Confederate hospital. Several aspects of examining the remains and the artifacts recovered would make both obviously clear. A small portion of the bone from each specimen was ground up and used in a chemical isotope

analysis. Isotopes in the drinking water from the localities of where someone lived while growing up are found in the bones and can be used to identify regions from around the world. All of the remains in this trench were reared in upstate New York or New England, so this was a Union hospital. One of the soldiers with a near complete skeleton died from a wound to the right femur, and the bullet was still embedded in the bone. The bullet was fired from a .577 Enfield Rifle. This was a common weapon used by troops of both sides during the Second Battle of Manassas, but no regiments in the first battle were issued Enfields and the number of such guns in the first battle had to be exceedingly small. The other nearly entire body was wearing a standard issue four button federal sack coat and a standard issue shirt. Uniforms worn at the First Battle of Manassas were anything but uniform, but standard issue was commonly worn by Union soldiers in the second battle. So the evidence shows that this was a Union hospital from the Second Battle of Manassas.

The forensic work revealed other fascinating things about the physical characteristics of the soldiers and how they were wounded. The soldier who died from a wound to the femur was 5 foot 7 inches tall, 25-29 years old and was of a muscular build. The bullet entered his backside before striking the femur, and the bullet went in sideways. Bies showed a photograph of the back of a crowd of soldiers, pointing out the cartridge boxes, haversacks and canteens that hang behind the buttocks of Civil War soldiers. He suspects that the bullet had its trajectory altered by striking some type of soldier accoutrement just prior to delivering the fatal blow. Science also shows that at the moment this soldier was struck in that leg, it was bearing the full weight of his body; while walking or running away from the enemy, the foot of that leg had just landed on the ground with some force. The bullet also had a distinctive cross hatch pattern, meaning that the kersey trousers of the soldier made an impression in the soft lead as it carried a piece of the cloth into the wound.

The second soldier with a majority of his skeleton was 30-34 years old, five foot five inches tall, less muscular than the other soldier, and smoked a pipe. He put the pipe in his mouth at the same place almost every time and had worn a pipe faucet in his teeth. He died from a wound to the shoulder, where he was struck by a .65 caliber round ball and three .31 caliber buck shot. A common smoothbore round is called buck and ball, comprised of three buck shot and one ball. Bies surmised that this soldier was either shot at very close range and was struck by all three projectiles fired from the same musket, or he was struck by a volley, where the spray of several weapons

fired at the same time could have permitted him to be hit by projectiles from as many as four different weapons.

The amputated limbs demonstrate that the surgeon who removed them was very skilled and may have been aided by someone holding down the limbs to keep them from moving. The skill of the surgeon is evident by the very small “terminal snap” – the portion of bone that breaks just before the saw goes all the way through the bone. The surgeon may have been Captain Benjamin Howard, who was had amputated thirteen legs in one day at Second Manassas. (Once again, the limbs thus far discovered in this grave numbered eleven legs and only one arm.) Dr. Howard kept detailed records including the names of his amputation patients. Some descendants of New York soldiers who lost legs fighting at the Deep Cut feel that the remains found may be from their ancestors.

The park is currently working through a process of determining what will become of the limbs and whether any additional archaeology will take place. The two nearly complete skeletons were laid to rest in the same grave at Arlington National Cemetery in September of 2018. The U.S. Army has requested that no DNA testing be done on the remains. Perhaps there will be an exhibit on the archaeology that could include an artificial leg of a Second Manassas veteran from upstate New York.

POETIC LICENSE FROM HERMAN MELVILLE

Iconic American author Herman Melville published Battle-Pieces and Aspects of War, a collection of original Civil War poems, in 1866. Among the seventy-one entries is a short verse titled “Inscription for Marye’s Heights, Fredericksburg.” Here it is, in its entirety:

To them who crossed the
flood
And climbed the hill, with eyes
Upon the heavenly flag intent,
And through the deathful

tumult went
Even unto death: to them this
Stone –
Erect, where they were
overthrown –
Of more than victory the
monument

Flood? Maybe he's talking about the canal that bisected Union approaches. Climbed the hill? Union attackers never made it to the stone wall, much less Marye's Heights. No stone monument either. Melville obviously fails to furnish an accurate account of events. But he does offer some memorable word pictures about the Civil War experience. Poetic license reigns here over historical fact.

How does it sound to you?

Winter Camps

Below is a link to an article done by the American Battlefield Trust. As we are getting ready to settle into another winter, it is easy to enjoy the luxuries of indoor heating, hot water, and grocery stores for food. For many of the soldiers of the Civil War, winter was one of the worst periods of the four years of the war. This article has links to numerous primary sources and videos describing life in winter camps for the soldiers.

https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/winter-encampments?fbclid=IwAR0g2ZUfmogaPwD5-mlsjgzb6RupuA_ygvKzdFhx6SO4SBkTmzBmojpWFC4

This section will be dedicated to some photos of the upcoming topic to give us some insight into places or figures to be discussed in the upcoming talk.



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. Each month, The Drum and Bugle newsletter is also placed on our web-site, www.rappvalleycivilwar.org. Yearly membership dues are \$35.00 for an individual, \$45.00 for families, and only \$7.50 for students. Membership is open to anyone interested in the study of the Civil War and the ongoing preservation of Civil War sites.

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