



THE DRUM & BUGLE
Voice of the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table
March 2022, Volume 19, Issue 3

Speaker: Scott Mingus
Topic: Targeted Tracks: Cumberland Valley Railroad in the Civil war
When: Monday March 14, 2022
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

Ben Keller

Our Treasurer and loyal member Ben Keller passed away unexpectedly on February 1. His friendly and welcoming presence at our registration table will be especially missed.

A link to Ben's full obituary is below. RVCWRT has been designated by the family as a favorite charity to receive donations in his memory.

There will be a Celebration of Life on May 21, 2022 at Mullins Thompson Funeral Home in Stafford.

<https://www.dignitymemorial.com/obituaries/stafford-va/bennie-keller-10571627>

“Scott Mingus: Targeted Tracks: Cumberland Valley Railroad in the Civil War”

Scott Mingus, a retired scientist and executive in the global pulp & paper industry, holds patents in self-adhesive postage stamps and bar code labels. He was part of the research team that developed the first commercially successful self-adhesive U.S. postage stamps. He has written 28 Civil War and Underground Railroad books. His biography of Confederate General William “Extra Billy” Smith was nominated for or won multiple awards, including the Dr. James I. Robertson, Jr. Literary Prize. He also wrote several articles for Gettysburg Magazine and other journals. Scott maintains a blog on the Civil War history of York County PA (www.yorkblog.com/cannonball) and received the Heritage Profile Award from the York County History Center for his many contributions to local Civil War history. He also has written six scenario books on miniature war gaming and was elected to the hobby’s prestigious Legion of Honor.

The Civil War was the first conflict in which railroads played a major role. Although much has been written about the role of railroads in general, little has been written about specific lines. The Cumberland Valley Railroad, for example, played an important strategic role by connecting Hagerstown, Maryland, to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Its location enhanced its importance during some of the Civil War’s most critical campaigns. Despite the line’s significance to the Union war effort, its remarkable story remains little known.

Because of its proximity to major cities in the Eastern Theater, the Cumberland Valley Railroad was an enticing Confederate target. As invading armies jostled for position, the CVRR’s valuable rolling stock was never far from the minds of Rebel leaders. Northern military and railway officials knew the line was a prized target and coordinated—and just as often butted heads—in a series of efforts to ensure the railroad’s prized resources remained out of enemy hands. When they failed to protect the line, as they

sometimes did, Southern horsemen wrought havoc on the Northern war effort by tearing up its tracks, seizing or torching Union supplies, and laying waste to warehouses, engine houses, and passenger depots.

**“Unlike Anything That Ever Floated: *USS Monitor* and the Battle of Hampton Roads”
by Dwight Hughes**

A Review of the February 2022 Program by Greg Mertz

The first ironclad vessel was built in 1859 by the French and was called the *Gloire*. The next year the British launched the ironclad *HMS Warrior*. The U.S. Navy was content to let the European powers engage in costly experiments to perfect ships of iron, until the outbreak of the Civil War. With British intervention on behalf of the Confederacy a real possibility, and the belief that the British navy might come to America to support the shipping of Southern cotton to their textile mills, the U.S. changed their minds about their need for the newest type of floating fighting machines.

Among the enterprises that a three-sailor Ironclad board approved, was an unusual looking design by Swedish-born inventor John Ericsson. When completed, observers variously described it as a “washtub on a raft,” a “cheese box on a plank,” and a “hat on a shingle.” The most poetic of the reporters describing the ship wrote that it was “unlike anything that ever floated on Neptune’s bosom.”

Patterned after the Swedish lumber raft, the 179-foot-long semi-submerged hull featured an untried but innovative rotating circular turret that was 20 feet wide, armed with two eleven-inch cannon, and protected by eight inches of iron. A crew of 14 officers and 57 crewmen operated the ship called the *USS Monitor*, including eight men to load and fire each cannon. It arrived at Hampton Roads in the Chesapeake Bay about 4:00 o’clock on the evening of Saturday, March 8 amid a frenzied scene with the sound of gunfire, the smell of smoke and the flash of bursting shells in the darkening sky.

It was a day late from preventing the Confederate ironclad, the *CSS Virginia* from wreaking havoc among Union wooden gunboats. The *USS Cumberland* had sunk. The *USS Congress* was in flames, and the crew of the *Monitor* would witness her blow up about 2:00 the next morning. Other

vulnerable vessels were fleeing – scattering in every direction. The most powerful ship in the fleet, the *USS Minnesota* had run aground, and the first assignment of the *Monitor* was to anchor next to her and try to protect her from the anticipated return of the *Virginia*. Ironically the *Virginia* was constructed with the hull and engines of the *USS Merrimack*, a sister ship of the *Minnesota*.

The Lincoln administration called a cabinet meeting on the morning of Sunday, March 9 that Secretaries John Nicolay and John Hay claimed “was perhaps the most excited and impressive of the whole war.” For the moment, the war had changed. It appeared that the U.S. Navy was without the means of stopping this destructive sailing weapon.

Secretary of War Edwin Stanton was said to have been the most frightened – even panicked. Stanton was concerned that the *Virginia* could steam up the Potomac and destroy the capitol. Army General-in-Chief George B. McClellan was said to be “dumbfounded and silent.” Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles, assured his fellow cabinet members that the *Virginia* was too weighted down with armor to leave Hampton Roads, and sarcastically observed that it could not fight every northern city along the eastern seaboard at once. A telegraph wire had been cut but eventually restored allowing a message to reach the cabinet announcing that afternoon the *Monitor* had in fact arrived in Hampton Roads the previous evening.

Lieut. John L. Worden, a 27-year Navy veteran, commanded the *Monitor*. Captured in April 1861 delivering dispatches to Fort Pickens in Florida, he was said to be the first Union prisoner of the war. When he took the helm in March of 1862, he was still weak from being imprisoned for eight months. Lieut. Samuel B. Greene, an 1859 graduate of the Naval Academy, was the executive officer, assigned to take charge of the turret and the firing of the cannon. Green wrote that “the pygmy aspect of the newcomer did not inspire confidence among those who had witnessed the destruction of the day before” at the hands of the massive *Virginia*.

Worden and the *Monitor* charged the *Virginia* to the sound of a long-distance artillery duel between the Confederate ironclad and the grounded *Minnesota*, including several “friendly” shots that bounced off of the *Monitor*. At about 8:45 am, the *Monitor* fired its first rounds. The *Virginia* replied with her broadside guns and harmless musket fire. The curvature of the *Monitor*'s

turret aided in deflecting enemy projectiles, but a growing concern was whether a direct hit might jam the turret's revolving mechanisms. But a 150-pound shell, fired head on just 30 yards away, only produced a 2 ½ inch dent in the armor. When a plate was knocked loose on the deck edge, Worden crawled out himself to examine the extent of the damage. He returned reporting that the *Virginia* could not sink the *Monitor* if they let it blast away for a month.

Despite being late winter, most crewmembers stripped to the waist, using their shirts or other cloth to wrap around their head for some measure of ear protection. Two sailors were leaning against the bulkhead when a Confederate shell struck the outside. They were knocked senseless, with one thrown over the gun, but both recovered by the next day and were the only injuries suffered by enlisted men on the *Monitor*.

Between the very small area above the gun port to see out of the turret, the ability of the ship to move in one direction while the turret turned another, and the noise and smoke, Greene was often disoriented. Greene developed a procedure of turning the turret away from the *Virginia* when loading the guns so the crew did not have to spend time closing the gun ports. Then when the turret was on line with the *Virginia*, both cannon fired together and the process repeated. *Virginia* Lieut. John Taylor Wood acknowledged the effectiveness of Greene's method of firing, noting that the *Monitor* fired every seven or eight minutes, with nearly every shot striking the large target presented by the *Virginia*.

Virginia Lieut. Catesby Jones spent about 90 minutes maneuvering to ram and board the *Monitor*, but was only able to muster a single glancing blow. As evidence of the close combat, Greene indicated the ships actually touched five times. After the Confederates stuck the pilot house of the *Monitor* and Worden was partially blinded (permanently losing sight in his left eye). He was forced to turn command over to Greene. The *Monitor* pulled back to shallow waters to once again defend the *Minnesota*. Jones retired the *Virginia* as well, being low on ammunition and suffering some damage, but he was denounced for not destroying the *Minnesota*. Though the fighting of the day was a draw, the *Monitor* had prevented the *Virginia* from continuing with the level of destruction that it had inflicted the previous day, and the sailors on the new ship were congratulated by Union observers.

Emerging Civil War Symposium A Review of the August 2021 Symposium by Paul Stier

Emerging Civil War Symposium at Stevenson Ridge - 2021 A recorded observation by fellow member - Paul Stier

On the weekend of 6-8 August 2021, numerous students of the American Civil War came together just outside of Spotsylvania Courthouse at Stevenson's Ridge.

At this great location they enjoyed each other's company sitting in air-conditioned comfort while listening to over a dozen different speakers give their perspective of this year's theme, "***Fallen Leaders.***"

Instead of narrowing the focus of this year's Symposium to just those military leaders who fell on the battlefield, it expanded this topic of discussion to leaders who fell in battle, in public opinion, or in a resulting military investigation for their apparent failure. The below schedule is just a brief outline of who was presenting and what the focus of their topic was at it pertained to this year's theme. Rather than giving a report on each presentation, I would encourage you to visit **CSPAN 3** and enjoy viewing each of this year's presentations, as they have done in previous years, having been recorded and saved.

Now at this point, you might be asking yourself, why should I purchase a ticket to attend these lectures when I can watch them for free? My response to that question is that while you can do that, what you cannot do is to:

- Talk face-to-face with each of the presenters, all of whom are noted authors, and are happy to answer your questions with detailed responses.
- Update your library and have the purchased books signed by the authors, who either presented at this years, or previous years Symposiums.
- Tour two different battlefields:
 - **Payne's Farm** with *Theodore P. Savas*
 - **Longstreet's Wounding at Wilderness** with *Greg Mertz*
- Donate money to battlefield preservation while having the chance to win great Civil War Prints or related door prizes

- The opportunity to purchase the 2022 Symposium tickets at \$175 each, versus the current Early Bird price of \$200
- Last but not least, enjoying the camaraderie with friends new and old, who are just as passionate about this topic as you are

This year the symposium started and finished with Battlefield tours, both of which were not recorded by **CSPAN 3**.

On the morning of Friday the 6th of August, Theodore P. Savas lead those interested attendees on one of the few areas of the Mine Run Campaign where fighting actually took place, at the Payne's Farm. In addition to discussing this little covered battlefield, he also provided incite on its discovery and preservation. Afterwards the participants broke for lunch and regrouped later that afternoon at Stevenson's Ridge for the official start of that evening's programs.

On the morning of Sunday the 8th of August, Greg Mertz, lead those interested attendees on a normally inaccessible walking tour of what lead up to the wounding of Longstreet, the resulting actions afterwards, and how this impacted how the Army of Northern Virginia responded during the remainder of the Overland Campaign. Afterwards, those who were able, visited what is left of the unfinished railroad cut that used on that day's fight. From there, sad farewells were given among the departing participants but with the anticipation of returning for next year.

Speaking of which, the **8th Annual Emerging Civil War Symposium at Stevenson Ride - August 5-7, 2022**

Theme: **Great "What Ifs?" of the Civil War**

Keynote Speaker and other presenters to be announced in the Autumn of 2021.

Early Bird Tickets – \$200.00

Visit <https://emergingcivilwar.com/2022-symposium> to learn more

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.cwrwf.org. As with our round table, things are subject to change due to the ups and downs of Covid.

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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