



THE DRUM & BUGLE
Voice of the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table
September 2026, Volume 23, Issue 9

Speaker: Ben Cwayna
Topic: "The Invincible Twelfth South Carolina"
When: September 14, 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

Ben Cwayna "The Invincible Twelfth South Carolina"

At a regimental reunion in 1880, former Confederate Brig. Gen. Samuel McGowan lauded the 12th South Carolina as "The finest of that immortal army," "foremost in the charge," and "the invincible Twelfth." The regiment, along with four others, served under McGowan from early 1863 through the end of the war. The aging brigadier, wounded four times in combat, was an authority on the regiment's reputation. "It would be impossible on an

occasion of this kind, to give anything like a history of the Twelfth Regiment, or tell half of its gallant deeds. That,” he declared, “would require a volume.” With Benjamin L. Cwayna’s new *The Invincible Twelfth: The 12th South Carolina Infantry of the Gregg-McGowan Brigade, Army of Northern Virginia*, that volume has finally arrived.

Benjamin L. Cwayna is an attorney in private practice and a prominent leader in the Civil War reenacting and living history community. For many years, Ben commanded the 12th South Carolina/4th Michigan Volunteer Infantry, Inc., a nationally recognized reenacting organization. He has been featured on the “Addressing Gettysburg Podcast” with Matt Callery and has dedicated his life to preserving the memory of the Civil War through living history demonstrations, presentations, and tours on numerous battlefields. A graduate of Michigan State University and Michigan State University College of Law, Benjamin resides with his son, Grant, in Grand Ledge, Michigan. An active member of the community, Cwayna is a member and past president of the Grand Ledge Rotary Club, volunteer coach, and participant in numerous other civic organizations.

**“John Pelham: The Fall and Rise of a Confederate Legend”
by Sarah Bierle**

A Review of the August 2026 Program by Greg Mertz

During the March 17, 1863 Battle of Kelly’s Ford, both Confederate cavalry commander Gen. J.E.B. Stuart, and horse artillery commander Maj. John Pelham were coincidentally nearby when the fight broke out, and both rode to the battlefield. Deciding that his subordinate, Fitzhugh Lee, should fight the battle as he saw fit, Stuart took on the role of an observer. While Pelham also concluded that he would not interfere with his battery commander engaged at Kelly’s Ford, it is unclear just what he was doing when the 24-year-old received his mortal wound. Henry B. McClellan indicated that Pelham fell while participating in a cavalry charge, being wounded directly in front of the Federal position. Harry Gilmore, however, wrote that Pelham was struck while in the Confederate rear where he was observing the battle, as Stuart had been doing.

While a small shell fragment slicing into the base of his skull would end Pelham’s life, our speaker, Sarah Bierle, indicated that it was also the

beginning of a legend. The true story that can be supported by facts is often different and contradictory with the legend. Bierle noted that delving into and determining the truth often offers us the more impressive story, and the romantic legend not only isn't needed, but often does a disservice to the figure being written about.

Pelham was one of seven siblings, and the third of six rambunctious boys who were known throughout their community for their mischief. He was appointed to attend the U.S. Military Academy in 1856, where he struggled with the classwork, but did well at fencing, boxing and horsemanship. His writings demonstrated his convictions that a man must display courage. John wrote to his younger brother Samuel, "I do not think a man can be strictly honorable unless he is brave." Though he stayed out of the public debate regarding the sectional differences the country faced, privately he was a strong secessionist.

Just weeks before he was due to graduate, he resigned from West Point. Since a newspaper had inaccurately reported that Pelham had received a Confederate commission, his resignation form included the statement: "I have accepted no place or appointment from any state or govt." Ironically, Pelham apparently told classmate Adelbert Ames "I shall be in two or three fights and then be killed." Pelham and his West Point roommate Thomas Rosser, both departed the academy together.

Pelham helped to train Alburis' Battery, leading them into the First Battle of Manassas. After the battle he wrote that "war is not glorious as novelists would have us believe," yet he also stated that he was embarrassed to admit that "the whistling bullets and shells were music to me."

In the fall of 1861 J.E.B. Stuart sought to have a horse artillery battery -- in which every member was mounted -- added to his cavalry. Young Pelham was his third choice as the commander for this extremely mobile artillery unit.

Stuart would soon recognize Pelham's talent, as would other prominent generals. Gen. Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson declared, "With a Pelham on each flank I believe I could whip the world." At Fredericksburg Gen. Robert E. Lee was heard to say, "It is glorious to see courage in one so young," and in his official report referred to Pelham as being "gallant."

Pelham participated in the Seven Days battle and it was at the Gaines' Mill engagement that Jackson first noticed the young artilleryman. Though Jackson was notorious for warning his subordinates to avoid straying from their orders, he gave Pelham the authority to select any position he found to be advantageous at Second Manassas. At the battle of Sharpsburg, Pelham arrayed his guns so they peppered the right flank of the Federal attack across the cornfield. Pelham's Horse Artillery also performed exemplary service in the little-known actions in the fall of 1862, including the Chambersburg Raid of October 10-12, and the Loudoun Valley Campaign of October 26 to November 10.

Bierle described the December 13, 1862 Battle of Fredericksburg as the peak of Pelham's career and of his life. It was daring, consequential and because it was the only military action taking place at the time, it was noticed by many soldiers from the Confederate army commander on down. Pelham took a Napoleon cannon and its gun crew a mile in advance of the rest of the Confederate line under the cover of fog to a position further concealed by a hedge row.

As the Federal forces lined up in preparation for an assault on the Confederate line at Prospect Hill, Pelham opened fire down the left flank of their line. Federal cannon on both sides of the Rappahannock River responded, and except for quickly knocking out a second cannon sent out to assist Pelham's initial gun, the cannoneers of the lone Napoleon continued to fire until nearly out of ammunition before returning to the main line. Because Lee's report touting Pelham's daring was so widely reprinted, Bierle asserted that Pelham received international acclaim for his Fredericksburg feat.

So, when Pelham appeared upon his next battlefield at Kelly's Ford, where he lost his life, he was quite well-known – particularly because of his Fredericksburg exploits. Bierle reported that Pelham's death was recognized throughout the Confederacy as a national event.

Pelham became so prominent in Civil War memory for a variety of reasons. Bierle pointed out that Pelham died at the zenith of the Confederate success in the east and was not associated with any Confederate defeat. Romantic stories would be linked to the young, handsome bachelor. Both historical and fictional accounts of the Civil War place Pelham next to the

Confederacy's most prominent officers – Lee, Jackson and Stuart. After the war, Confederate veterans wrote of Pelham with esteem as the ideal young Confederate officer.

Mort Kunstler

The Roos family is purging. Specifically, we are downsizing because we are moving out to Culpeper. While we do have plenty of all space in the house we are building, we have accounted for everything we have already hung. While going through stuff, I found my father's print of "Review at Moss Neck" by Mort Kunstler. I am not sure if we will raffle it, or auction it, regardless, I want it to go to someone that will be able to frame it and enjoy it in their home. Be on the lookout for it at the next meeting.

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. 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.cwrtf.org, and will be updated here. Below is the schedule starting in September 2026 and going to June 2027.

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.

Newsletter Editor and Webmaster: John Roos

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