



**THE DRUM & BUGLE**  
**Voice of the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table**  
**Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table Newsletter**  
**October 2020, Volume 17, Issue 10**

**Speaker:** Lauren Thompson  
**Topic:** Friendly Enemies: Soldier Fraternization During the Civil War  
**When:** Monday October 12, 2020  
**Location:** Virtual Meeting Via Zoom  
**Times:** Start Time to be Announced

**“Virtual October Meeting”**

We are trying out our virtual format again this month. There will be no in-person dinner meeting in October. We will be presenting our program via the Zoom platform live on Monday, October 12<sup>th</sup>. RVCWRT members should keep an eye on their e-mail for an invitation. Virtual programming is the best course at present, given the uncertainties of the pandemic and changing

administrative requirements. We will be evaluating conditions for resuming in-person meetings on a month to month basis

Lauren Thompson is an Assistant Professor of History at McKendree University in Lebanon, IL. It is a small liberal arts college located 20 miles east of St. Louis, MS. She completed her PhD at Florida State University in 2015 and her MA at West Virginia University in 2010.

Her book entitled *Friendly Enemies: Soldier Fraternization During the American Civil War*, was published this summer by the University of Nebraska Press. She also has a chapter in a collection entitled *A Forgotten Front: Florida During the Civil War Era* (Tuscaloosa, AI University Press, 2018), an article in *Civil War History*, and a handful of book reviews in various journals.

Dr. Thompson received research fellowships at the Army War College in Carlisle, PA and the Virginia History Society in Richmond, VA. At McKendree, Lauren teaches the following course: Civil War Era, African-American History, Race & Ethnicity in U.S. History, American Revolution, Labor History, U.S. Women's History, and the U.S. History Surveys. In January 2019, she received McKendree University's Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Humanitarian Award. During her graduate school years, she worked as a seasonal ranger at Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park in Virginia.

### **The Passing of Ed Bearss**

Our friend Ed Bearss, the legendary historian, author, tour guide and preservation pioneer, died peacefully on September 15, 2020 at the age of 97. Ed was a Life Member of our Round Table and lent his name to our annual sponsorship of a National Park Service intern. He graced us with his presence at every July meeting and took great pleasure in interacting with our local interns. He was the most frequent speaker at RVCWRT meetings over the past decade. You can read more about Ed and donate in his memory at the American Battlefield Trust website:

<https://www.battlefields.org/preserve/champions/rememberingbearss>

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**"The Cornfield: Antietam's Bloody Turning Point" by David A. Welker**

## **A Review of the September 2020 Virtual Program by Greg Mertz**

Despite being a readily recognized prominent landmark by people familiar with the Battle of Antietam, the fighting in the famous “cornfield” is one of the least understood aspects of America’s bloodiest day. The struggle that took place among those rows of grain is sometimes very simply depicted as “back and forth fighting” and that the position of the cornfield frequently “traded hands.” Our speaker, David Welker, who recently published a book examining this phase of the battle indicated that these basic interpretations of the action are unfortunate, because understanding the cornfield is critical to understanding the battle.

The strategic reason why the Battle of Antietam was fought at Sharpsburg, Maryland was tied to the prospect of foreign intervention on behalf of the Confederacy. Support of England, France or both was deemed to be essential for Confederate independence to succeed. And before either of those countries could back the Confederacy, they needed to see that it could do more than simply protect their homes. The Confederacy had to prove that they were capable of taking the war into the North. While Robert E. Lee also desired for his Confederate army to live off of the land in pro-Union territory, the prospect of foreign assistance loomed large.

The offensive part of the campaign for the Confederacy, was in reaching Maryland. Lee planned to allow Union army commander George B. McClellan to attack him and wear down his army before the Confederates went after the Union forces. Both Lee and McClellan were aware that Washington officials would not permit the Union army to fight a defensive battle.

Welker stated that the leadership styles of the army commanders would make a difference. Lee considered multiple ways to accomplish his objectives. When Lee encountered an obstacle, he sought an alternative. McClellan was a linear thinker. After weighing options, McClellan developed what he considered to be the best plan, and he dealt with obstacles through the force of his will. Welker concluded that a good commander must be able to come up with different means of accomplishing the mission when hurdles appear.

McClellan developed a good plan for the Battle of Antietam. The challenge, Welker contended, was how well that plan would be implemented. The Union right would attack first, and part of its objective was to draw reserves from the Confederate center to that sector of the battlefield. The second part of the plan was an attack by the Union left, which would also hopefully force the

Confederates to shift some troops from away from their center. Then the Union center would attack the weakened Confederate center for the third step of the plan. Regarding the implementation of the plan, McClellan would decide when each phase of the battle would proceed and launch the respective attacks when he felt the timing was right.

In the gathering darkness of the evening of September 16, 1862, Gen. Joseph Hooker, commanding a pair of corps on the Union right, examined the ground where he would initiate the battle the following morning. Hooker saw what he thought to be the Confederate left flank. Though he was mistaken, given his objective to draw troops to the Confederate left away from the Confederate center, it was not particularly important that Hooker was unsure about the true position of the troops in that locale.

Hooker's examination included the Miller cornfield, bounded by woods on three sides, called the North Woods, East Woods and West Woods. The Miller farmhouse, orchard and fenced in garden were significant obstacles to attacking Union troops heading for the Confederate left.

Hooker's plan for attack for his Union I Corps was for the division of Abner Doubleday to attack on the extreme right in column, the division of James Ricketts to attack on the left, with George G. Meade's division in reserve. The objective of all of the assault troops was the easily recognized, white Dunker Church at the south end of the cornfield. The plan was good, but it fell apart almost from the start.

John Gibbon, leading Doubleday's column, received fire from an unexpected place, due to Hooker's cursory reconnaissance which did not locate the true Confederate left flank. Then Gibbon tried to go through the Miller farm buildings, but could not tear down the stout Maryland fences. Half of the attack force was thus stalled.

Among Ricketts's three brigades, George Hartsuff soon fell wounded and his second in command had not been informed of their orders. William Christian ran away from his brigade as it came under fire, and like Hartsuff's brigade halted and waited. So, of the two divisions that were to attack, only the brigade of Abram Duryee engaged the Confederates on their front, and became the first troops to occupy the cornfield.

Col. Marcellus Douglass led a brigade of Confederates into the cornfield and the fight turned into a slugfest. Although Duryee tried to hold on until promised

reinforcements arrived, he had to give way and Douglass's men became the second troops to hold the 24-acre cornfield.

Gibbon was able to make some progress entering into the West Woods and the western part of the cornfield while Hartsuff's troops got back underway, arriving just as Duryee departed. Hartsuff wrestled the field from Douglass to become the third troops to occupy the famous field. One of Hartsuff's regiments, the 12<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts, suffered 64% casualties – the greatest Union regimental loss on the bloodiest day in American history.

John B. Hood's troops would have the honor to be the fourth to hold the ground, and 1<sup>st</sup> Texas would gain the distinction of suffering the greatest percentage loss of any regiment -- not just at Antietam -- but during the entire war; they lost a staggering 82.6%. Evander Law's brigade advanced deeper into the corn than any other Confederate advance, reaching all the way to the north end of the field. But the progress of Hood's troops came to a halt when the brigade under William T. Wofford had to deal with fire into their left flank coming from Union troops in the West Woods and when the officers on the right of the division lost control of their troops and the enlisted men instinctively gravitated to the East Woods.

The fifth troops to occupy the field occurred when Hooker committed his reserve and Meade's men fought among the cornstalks, devastating the center of Hood's command. With the Confederates able to retain possession of the East Woods, the brigade of Roswell S. Ripley next entered that side of the cornfield, striking Meade in the left flank and taking possession of the cornfield for the sixth time. Next change of control of the field resulted in the Confederates still holding the rows of corn, as Alfred H. Colquitt's brigade moved up, allowing Ripley to withdraw.

Joseph Mansfield was mortally wounded leading his XII corps into action, but he had accomplished the all-important role of properly positioning his troops. The advance of the corps through the East Woods coincided with confusion on the part of Col. Duncan McRae's Confederate brigade sent to the East Woods without realizing that it was already occupied by fellow Confederates. Colquitt was nearly surrounded in the cornfield and the Confederates broke. George S. Greene's Union troops took the Bloody Cornfield for the eighth time in two hours of fighting, and the Union army held the famous landmark for the remainder of the battle.

Hooker was on the verge of success when he grew faint from a wound in the foot, as blood was poured out of his boot. The first phase of McClellan's battle plan had ended. Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson had held on at the Confederate left – but just barely. Hooker's troops had taken the Dunker Church, even though they did not need to take that objective to be successful – the goal was to draw Confederates away from the center and weaken that sector for the main attack to come later in the fight. The most horrific two hours of American's bloodiest day was over, and the outcome of the battle depended upon McClellan's handling of the other two phases of his plan.

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### **A Bit of RVCWRT History**

Here are the speakers who appeared most frequently at our meetings between 2011 and 2020. Our thanks to all for sharing their time and considerable expertise over the years!

(1) ED BEARSS - 6 appearances

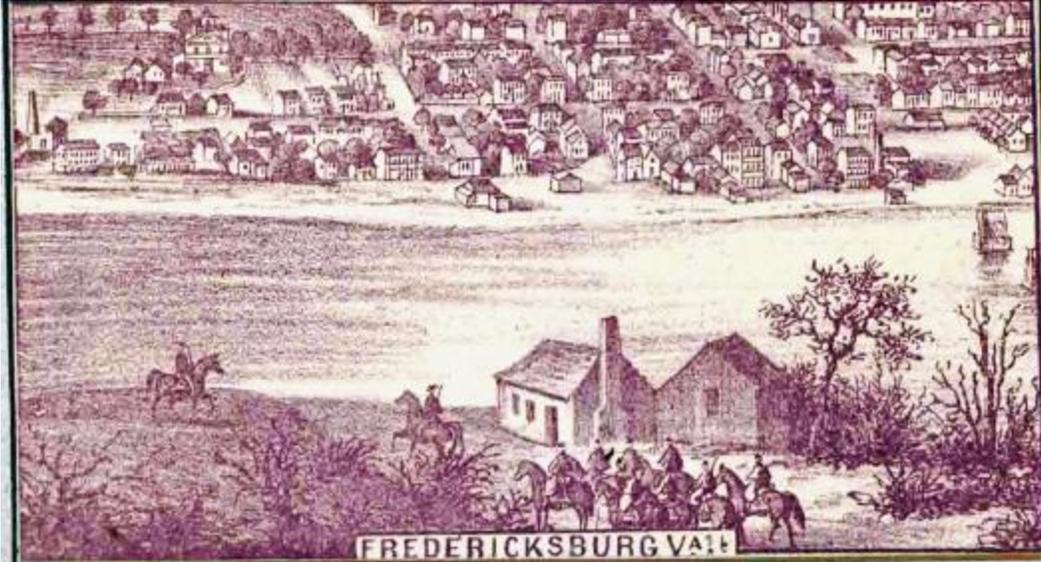
(2) GARY CASTELLINO - 5 appearances

(3) ERIC MINK and MARC THOMPSON - 4 appearances each

(4) DANIEL DAVIS, JOHN HENNESSY, CHRIS MACKOWSKI, PETE MAUGLE, BETH PARNICZA, MAC WYCKOFF - 3 appearances each

We have always welcomed appearances by our own RVCWRT members. These programs, by the likes of GREG MERTZ, SCOTT WALKER, MARC THOMPSON, JIM SMITHFIELD and RYAN QUINT, have often been among the most illuminating on our schedule.

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From the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States (MOLLUS)- Massachusetts Photograph Collection.

## **Lots of Civil War Content on Youtube**

Searching the following items on YouTube will lead you to many hours of informative and entertaining Civil War-related videos:

- (1) "emerging civil war" Lectures, battlefield tours and short takes on a variety of subjects from this innovative blog site
- (2) "cwrt congress" An organization formed to help round tables nationwide, Civil War Round Table Congress has begun uploading lectures by prominent Civil War historians.
- (3) "civil war battle series" Lectures on Civil War battles sponsored by the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum
- (4) "Tony Willoughby" this channel on Youtube includes 150th anniversary tours of Chancellorsville, Wilderness and Spotsylvania Court House. The same channel also has videos of 150th anniversary tours of Shiloh, Chickamauga, 2nd Manassas, and much more.

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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. Each month, The Drum and Bugle newsletter is also placed on our web-site, [www.RVCWRT.org](http://www.RVCWRT.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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**The RVCWRT Executive Committee:**

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