



THE DRUM & BUGLE

Voice of the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table

Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table Newsletter July 2015, Volume 12, Issue 7

Speaker: Edwin Bearss
Topic: *"Reassessing Stories of the Civil War"*
When: Monday, July 13, 2015
Location: Brock's Riverside Grill
Times: Social Begins 5:45 pm, Dinner 6:45 pm, Meeting and Speaker Begins 7:30 pm

Abstract on the RVCWRT July 13, 2015 Dinner Meeting Event *"Reassessing Stories of the Civil War"* Edwin Bearss, Speaker

Our Monday, July 13th dinner meeting of the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Roundtable will be a fund raiser, held in support of the *Edwin Cole Bearss Internship Fund*. Through this fund, we annually fund one summer Intern for the *National Park Service* at the *Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park*. The designated 2015 Intern will be introduced during this event on July 13th. Our speaker will be retired Edwin Cole Bearss, Chief Historian Emeritus of the *National Park Service*. Mr. Bearss has recently been nominated for the *U.S. Congressional Medal of Freedom* award.

The July 13 event features an upgraded three entree' buffet menu, which includes a carving station. Additionally there will be sales and personalization of some of the books authored by Ed Bearss. There will also be a silent auction of various items, e.g., special trips, tours and other donations. This event will be held at Brock's Riverside Grill on Sophia Street, Fredericksburg. Brock's restaurant will serve complimentary appetizers prior to the meal from 5:45 to 6:45 PM.

Full cost of the evening meal, including tax and gratuity will be \$40.00 for RVCWRT members and just \$45.00 for non-members. Please note: All reservations should be made through contacting Bob Jones, our RVCWRT Vice President, @ 3dognight@bigplanet.com

Note: No non-dinner attendees can be allowed on this night, as this is strictly a sit down dinner event!

"We are live Rebels Yet: The ANV and Confederate Veteran Magazine"

Presented by Kyle Bracken

A Review of our June Program by Greg Mertz

The Confederate Veteran Magazine published articles written by former Confederate soldiers from 1893 to 1932. The magazine was founded by Sumner Archibald Cunningham, a less than stellar soldier from the 41st Tennessee, who had, according to his biographer, started the publication out of personal shame for not doing his fair share during the Civil War. His stated goal was to provide a platform for the common soldier of the Civil War.

Cunningham's periodical struggled for the first few years, however, by 1900, magazine subscriptions had grown to a healthy 20,000. While the magazine published articles written by the soldiers serving in all of the Confederate armies, our speaker, Kyle Bracken, focused on a sampling from about 200 articles written by soldiers who had served in the *Army of Northern Virginia*. These articles penned by soldiers who had served under Robert E. Lee reflect the popular *understanding* of that army that many people continue to hold to this very day.

The most prominent topics that the CSA veterans wrote about were, of course, the many battles. The authors praised the bravery of their fellow soldiers, but in each of the samplings that Bracken examined, not one single soldier touted his own courage or bravery. Writers stressed the fighting prowess of the men or of particular units of the army. Many soldiers wrote on subjects about which they felt the civilians could relate to, including the aftermath of battles and how those civilians living on the battlefield were affected.

While the soldiers brandished their valor, they did not shy away from writing about the less than ideal things they had experienced. They wanted to be "*honestly and faithfully*" represented and countered what Bracken labeled as the myth of the "*idealized Rebel*." "*This was war*" as Bracken depicted their viewpoint, "*it wasn't fair, it wasn't just and it wasn't pretty*." The soldiers didn't want to present a sanitized version of war and instead many stressed the general ugliness of war. They wrote of losing, of death, of the personal bitterness that they held toward the enemy, and they indicated that they had stolen clothing, food and horses in their willful struggle to survive.

When writing about their stealing from the dead and dying, the soldiers sometimes rationalized their morbid behavior and sometimes they used humor to mask their various perverse deeds. When asked about a new watch that he had acquired, one soldier replied that he had taken it from a mortally wounded Yankee who certainly no longer had any use for it. At Chancellorsville a Confederate soldier looking for a new rubber blanket, saw a nice one supported by a couple of muskets being used as a canopy for what appeared to be a dead Federal soldier underneath it. As the Confederate started taking the blanket, the Federal soldier opened his eyes and spoke to him. "*Excuse me, sir,*" said the Confederate, "*I thought you were dead.*"

Writing about the South's Lost Cause was also very prominent. Kyle also noticed that those Confederates from the Army of Northern Virginia wrote that the Confederacy was never defeated, but instead had simply succumbed to the overwhelming numbers and supplies of the Union army. When compared with the Lost Cause writings of those from other Confederate armies, Bracken noted that men who were not from Lee's Army tended to defend the institution of slavery or support the constitutionality of secession. Perhaps the Confederates from the western armies wrote on those topics because they had suffered battlefield defeat early in the war, long before the superior numbers had been attributed as a factor for the battlefield defeats of those soldiers in the Army of Northern Virginia.

The men of the *Army of Northern Virginia* believed that as long as they were still in the field, the Confederacy had a chance to succeed. The war could not end, they surmised, as long as Lee's army was in the field intact. They saw their army and their leaders as the most important components of the Confederacy. Many that didn't write about their own experiences or about the bravery of their comrades, chose to write to *The Confederate Veteran Magazine* about both, Robert E. Lee and Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson.

The most written about incident that Bracken encountered in his samplings were the thirteen accounts of the "*Lee to the Rear*" episode during the *Battle of the Wilderness*. Naturally, the accounts varied rather dramatically in their particulars. Overall, the authors of these articles concluded that the details of what happened were not important, but the most significant point of the incident was that Lee had chosen to ride forward with the Texas Brigade. Recognition from Lee was the highest praise any unit could receive.

One of the lasting values of *The Confederate Veteran Magazine* is the degree to which it contributes to the narrative of Civil War that reflects the understanding that most people possess today. Bracken noted that even growing up in New Hampshire, he learned from his second grade teacher that the South had the best generals; the Confederates won most of the battles; the Confederates lost only due to superior numbers of the Union, and that the only names associated with the Confederate cause

were Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson. Even in the north, Bracken noted, the *Lost Cause* appears to be the enduring legacy of the Civil War.

As a veteran of *Operation Enduring Freedom* in Afghanistan with the *New Hampshire National Guard*, Bracken made comparisons with how two recent movies affect the perception of today's Americans about the war in which he fought and with how the articles such as those in *The Confederate Veteran Magazine* can affect our views about the Civil War. Bracken feels that movies about Navy SEALs Chris Kyle and Marcus Luttrell have contributed to the understanding by many Americans of the war in Afghanistan as a special operations war. In much the same way, we have learned to view the Civil War through the *Lost Cause* viewpoint of the soldiers in Lee's army via their articles in *The Confederate Veteran Magazine* and other such writings.

A Truly Unique Gift Time Travel Coupon (Come enjoy a 19th century soldier's life)

By Paul Stier

At our July 13th event a very unique item will be a part of the *Silent Auction*; a **Time Travel Coupon** offering a priceless experience to the highest bidder: Have you ever wanted to experience what Civil War soldiers experienced while on campaign? Are you or someone you know interested in re-enacting, but you don't know how to get started? This really is your chance! Perhaps you have a friend, husband, son, grandson, brother, uncle, or nephew, or any combination thereof who would like this truly perfect gift! Step up, bid, win the chance of a lifetime and also help a worthy cause at the same time. The entire bid for the *Time Travel Certificate* goes to the *Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table*. The highest bidder wins a weekend for two living the life of a Civil War era U.S. Regular Army Soldier. We supply for the weekend use of all equipment needed, outfitting you from head-to-toe, including uniform, leathers, musket, rounds, canteen, a tent on the company street to sleep with 5 meals, and coverage of all event registration costs. The experience will leave them/you with memories that'll last a lifetime.

Experience the camaraderie of camp life, drill with your Pard'sengage in combat defending the Union, i.e., if the need arises, shared tales of the day with new friends around the evening campfire, and enjoy a weekend like no other. If you are the winner, you and a guest will work with our unit's leadership and choose one of our unit's events that will give you the best experience according to your area of interest.

People who choose to fully immerse themselves into this method of Civil War study are known as *Re-enactors* or *Living Historians*. We make every attempt to wear the same types of material found in the clothing and uniforms from the Civil War. We wear the same type of equipment, carry the same type of weapons, and march and fight using the original drill manuals that they would have used. We normally arrive at a historical site on a Friday evening and not leave until Sunday afternoon while living in the field. Sleeping in the same types of tents we will prepare and eat the foods that they would have over cooking fires on similar types of cooking equipment. The personal experiences that are gained when we study the American Civil War in this manner are priceless. We even have a term for re-enacting, it's called, "*Having a Civil War Moment*."

Other Silent Auction Items on July 13, 2015

With a few variations, our normal Book Raffle will be held on July 13th only there will be only ten or twelve special books being raffled and we'll draw only five winning tickets on that night. Other items in the Silent Auction, include a complete 29 book encyclopedia set along with several tours and other valuable prizes.

Parking for the July 13 RVCWRT Fund Raising Dinner Meeting

Remember that if parking in Brocks lot or along the nearby streets appears unavailable, there are other close-by parking options. The *Parking Lots* for train passengers is one answer (these lots are open and free for public parking after 6:00 p.m. daily). In a pinch there is always the Parking Garage, just one

block away. Please note: Brock's has recently painted new white lines in their Parking Lot. Remember Brocks is a public restaurant and we are not their only customers.

Remember: Contact Bob Jones to order your July 13th Dinner Reservations

To Confirm Your Reservations: Telephone 540-399-1702 or e-mail 3dognight@Bigplanet.Com

RVCWRT History Alert Program

By Jim Smithfield

RVCWRT member Alan Zirkle, provides a totally free service, which notifies subscribers about any/all upcoming local history events in the general Fredericksburg area. This is done via subscribers recorded e-mail address, it concerns upcoming history-related events. RVCWRT members receive Alan's important messages. If you do not now, but would like to receive Alan Zirkle's "History Alerts" please send your e-mail address to Alan noting this fact @ az@azirkle.com.

A Look at our Scheduled Speaker, Edwin Cole Bearss

By Jim Smithfield



Ed Bearss

Our speaker, Edwin Cole Bearss was born on June 26, 1923. He is a *United States Marine Corps* veteran of *World War II*. Mr. Bearss is a military historian and author known for his work on both the *American Civil War* and *World War II* eras. Ed Bearss served from 1981 to 1994, as the Chief Historian for the *U.S. National Park Service*. To this day Ed, remains a very popular tour guide of historic battlefields for *The Smithsonian Associates*.

Mr. Bearss was born in Billings, Montana, the eldest son of Omar Effinger Bearss and Virginia Louise Morse Bearss. He grew up on their rugged family cattle ranch, the "E bar S", located near Sarpy, Montana. During the depths of the Great Depression, his father, a Marine Corp Veteran of *World War I*, would read many accounts of military campaigns to both Ed and his younger brother. However, Ed's lifelong interest in military history was jump-started after he read a biography on dashing Confederate cavalry general J.E.B. Stuart, written by John Thomason. After reading this book, Ed is known to have named many of the ranch animals after famous Civil War generals and battles; in fact his favorite milk cow was actually named "Antietam".

After graduating Hardin High School in May of 1941, Ed hitchhiked across the United States visiting his first Civil War battlefields. He enlisted in the Marine Corps on April 28, 1942, and by July he was on a troop transport to the war in the Pacific. Ed was with the 3d Marine Raider Battalion in the invasion of Guadalcanal and the Russell Islands and then, he was with the 7th Regiment, 1st Marine Division, in New Britain.

On January 2, 1944, Ed was severely wounded at "Suicide Creek" (Cape Gloucester, New Britain) by Japanese machine gun fire. Evacuated to California, he spent 26 months recovering in various hospitals. Honorably discharged from the Marine Corp, as a corporal on March 15, 1946, he returned home to Montana. After a lengthy recuperation period, Ed went on to earn a bachelor's degree from Georgetown University and master's from Indiana University.

It was after Ed visited the *Shiloh National Military Park* had demonstrated to him, the importance of merging the study of the Civil War with an examination of the actual ground upon which the Civil War soldiers fought. This had sparked his interest in a career with the *National Park Service*. Thus began his 40 year career at Vicksburg, and then after a time, Ed became the Chief Historian of the entire Park Service in 1981.

Last year, i.e., in 2014, here at the *Fredericksburg National Cemetery* in a moving Memorial Day presentation, Ed shared his memories of those men who had fallen by his side during *World War II* and did not make it home . . .

As noted previously Edwin Cole Bearss has been nominated to receive the *U.S. Congressional Gold Medal*, “*this is in recognition of his contributions to the preservation of American Civil War history and his continued efforts to bring our nation’s history alive for new generations through his interpretive storytelling.*”

It will be through Ed’s storytelling skills that he will share stories with us at July’s special meeting. On that night he will also meet John Launius, the designated 2015 recipient of the *Edwin Cole Bearss Internship award*.

The origin of Ed’s topic for the July meeting is taken from his study of the *Battle of Pea Ridge*, Arkansas. One of the unique aspects of this battle is the role of the Indians, under Stand Watie, i.e., those Indians who fought for the Confederacy. When Ed delved into the role of those Indians that fought at the *Battle of Pea Ridge* and the various stories of Confederate Indians taking scalps from dead Federal soldiers, something didn’t seem quite right. Ed has a well-rounded background in all aspects of American history and utilizing his knowledge and understanding of the nature and practice of scalping, he came up with a new interpretation of what had happened at Pea Ridge.

Ed will share with us, his analysis of this and other such stories that he feels should now be reassessed – things we may have all heard or read about, but still may not be true. Hopefully, Ed will have other stories about discoveries he’s made and his contributions toward a more accurate understanding of the Civil War.

Over the years Ed has become the consummate tour guide, bringing history alive to visitors of all knowledge levels, revealing encyclopedic stores of memory and always with enormous personal energy. All of this, he has done along with rich and colorful anecdotes.

A Washington Post reporter once described Ed’s style as “*Homeric monologues.*” The Wall Street Journal wrote that Ed Bearss evokes “almost hallucinatory sensations.” Historian Dennis Frye said a “battlefield tour with Ed Bearss is a transcendental experience.” Admirers suggest that, if the United States ever recognizes our *Living National Treasures*, as has Japan and Australia, Ed Bearss should be the immediate honoree.

The popular *Smithsonian Associates* include Ed’s retelling of the *Battle of Antietam*, *Booth’s Escape Route*, *the Battle of Cold Harbor*, and *the Shenandoah Valley Campaign* to name but a few.

At 92 years old, Ed Bearss, continues to lead numerous tours, still traveling as many as 200 days each year around the United States, the Pacific, and Europe. He routinely outpaces his much younger guests in his charging over rough terrain, this while recreating the color of famous infantry and cavalry attacks . . .

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. Yearly membership dues are still just \$30.00 for individuals, \$45.00 for families, and still 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.

The RVCWRT Executive Committee:

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