



**THE DRUM & BUGLE**  
**Voice of the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table**  
**March 2024, Volume 21, Issue 3**

**Speaker:** Alex Rossino and Gene Thorp  
**Topic:** “The Tale Untwisted: General George B. McClellan, the Maryland Campaign and the Discovery of Lee’s Lost Orders”  
**When:** Monday March 11, 2024  
**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](http://www.rappvalleycivilwar.org)  
**Our Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/rvcwrt](http://www.facebook.com/rvcwrt)

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**Alex Rossino and Gene Thorp “The Tale Untwisted: General George B. McClellan, the Maryland Campaign and the Discovery of Lee’s Lost Orders”**

**Alexander B. Rossino** is an award-winning historian and the author of *Hitler Strikes Poland: Blitzkrieg, Ideology, and Atrocity*. He earned his Ph.D. in History at Syracuse University. He worked for a decade at the U.S. Holocaust

Memorial Museum while penning a number of scholarly articles and book reviews. His lifelong fascination with the Civil War was rekindled in 2013 when he moved to western Maryland, where he currently resides at the foot of South Mountain. Alex is also the author of the deeply researched and beautifully written *Six Days in September*, a novel about Lee's Army in Maryland during the 1862 campaign. He is currently researching and writing a companion book from the Union perspective. He is also the author of *Their Maryland: The Army of Northern Virginia from the Potomac Crossing to Sharpsburg in September 1862* and *Calamity at Frederick: Robert E. Lee, Special Orders No. 191, and Confederate Misfortune on the Road to Antietam*, which is a companion volume to his co-authored study, *The Tale Untwisted*.

Born in Baltimore, **Gene Thorp** is a senior cartographer at the U.S. Department of State Office of the Geographer. He spent 15 years as an award-winning graphics editor at The Washington Post covering daily stories from the 2000 Bush-Gore election to the rise and fall of the Islamic State. His custom maps can be found in numerous non-fiction books on the New York Times Best-Seller list and throughout museums and parks across America. Deeply knowledgeable about the history of the Eastern Theater in 1862, Gene is a co-author of *The Tale Untwisted: General George B. McClellan, the Maryland Campaign and the Discovery of Lee's Lost Orders*. It is the first of several Civil War writing projects he has underway.

The discovery of Robert E. Lee's Special Orders No. 191 outside of Frederick, Maryland, on September 13, 1862, is one of the most important and hotly disputed events of the American Civil War. For more than 150 years, historians have debated if George McClellan, commander of the Union Army of the Potomac, dawdled after receiving a copy of the orders before warily advancing to challenge Lee's forces atop South Mountain. But what if the history as it has been written so far leaves out key evidence and fails to take into account the poisonous political atmosphere present during the Civil War?

In *The Tale Untwisted*, authors Gene Thorp and Alexander Rossino document in exhaustive fashion how "Little Mac" in fact moved with uncharacteristic energy to counter the Confederate threat and take advantage of Lee's divided forces, seizing the initiative and striking a blow in the process that wrecked Lee's plans and sent his army reeling back toward Virginia.

This study is a beautifully woven tour de force of primary research that may well be the final word on the debate over the fate and impact of the Lost Orders on the history of the 1862 Maryland Campaign.

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**“Hearts Torn Asunder: Trauma in the Civil War’s Final Campaign in North Carolina”**

**by Ernest Dollar**

**A Review of the February 2024 Program by Greg Mertz**

As a new history major, our speaker, Ernest Dollar, got his first job working at the Bennett Place, a historic site in North Carolina. The site, near Durham, is where the largest number of Confederate troops were surrendered as the Civil War neared its end in the spring of 1865. Dollar was surprised that so many people felt that the war had ended on April 9 at Appomattox Court House when Robert E. Lee’s surrendered only his own army to U.S. Grant. A vastly larger number of Confederates had not yet laid down their arms and were still in the field elsewhere across the South. Several more surrenders, including the April 26, 1865 surrender of Confederate forces under Joseph E. Johnston to William T. Sherman at the Bennet Place, needed to take place before the fighting formally came to a close.

Dollar wondered why the post-Appomattox surrenders have been largely forgotten. It was just the start of his discovery of efforts by people who wanted to either forget or alter portions of our history that were uncomfortable to deal with, or did not fit into the narrative of the way they wanted the war to be remembered. As Dollar studied North Carolina’s final campaign, he noticed a theme emerging: “a concerted effort to change the story.”

When the “Unity” monument was proposed for the Bennett Place in the 1920’s the United Daughters of the Confederacy voiced their opposition to what they saw as an attempt to memorialize and honor the downfall of the Confederacy. The monument was erected nonetheless, in 1923.

As soon as 1866 Raleigh resident Cornelia Phillips Spencer wrote, *The Last Ninety Days of the War in North Carolina*. Her attempt was to give a truthful version of what occurred that would indict the victorious Federal soldiers of their horrific wrongdoings as they forced their way through the heart of North

Carolina. But she had to grapple with a problem: how would she explain the often equally appalling misconduct of Confederate troops during that same span. Dollar quoted her rationalization: *“What our soldiers did or did not do in those last dark days of confusion and utter demoralization, we record with sad and tender allowance. Wrong was done in many instances, and excesses committed; but we feel that the remembrance of their high and noble qualities will in the end survive all temporary blots and blurs. And for those who perished in the wrong-doing engendered by desperation and failure and want, their cause has perished with them. So perish the memory of their faults!”*

When she wrote of the fall of Raleigh on April 13, 1865, she provided one of two known accounts of the same incident. Former governor David Swain met with Federal cavalry Gen. Judson Kilpatrick in advance of his approach to Raleigh, seeking to surrender the capitol city in order to prevent its looting and destruction, and promising that no Confederate troops were there to offer resistance. Kilpatrick accepted, but warned of dire consequences if Confederate forces opposed him. Shortly after the agreement was made, Swain was aghast to see the Confederate 11<sup>th</sup> Texas Cavalry ride into town and loot a jewelry store. Swain approached the soldiers, informing them that their presence jeopardized the truce that he had just arranged. The soldiers responded, “Damn Sherman and damn the town too. We care for neither.” But when they heard the bands announcing the advance of the Federal soldiers, the Texans rode out of town ... except for one who defiantly made a stand in the middle of the street. Waiting until the Federals got within range, he opened fire and then tried to ride off. His horse fell and he was captured.

Spencer’s version of what happened next is that the soldier was asked why he had violated the truce, to which the soldier replied that he was not aware of a truce. Kilpatrick responded that such was too bad, and ordered his men to take him to some place where women could not see them and hang him. The condemned soldier begged for an opportunity to write a last letter to his wife but the Yankees denied him the final request.

But another account exists from an enslaved person name Millie Henry. She indicated that Kilpatrick asked him his name, and he answered that it was Robert Walsh. Next Kilpatrick asked Walsh why he violated the truce. Henry said that Walsh responded “Because I hate Yankees and wish they were

dead in a pile.” When orders that he be hung were issued, Henry indicated that he laughed and facetiously responded how that was “kind of you.”

The Federal soldiers entering North Carolina had just completed Sherman’s March, which Dollar called the largest and most successful “psychological warfare operation of the war.” The objective of the campaign was not just to destroy food and other things that could support the Confederacy, but to gut the will of the people to support the war effort. Disciplined combat hardened veterans were selected for Sherman’s March, but Dollar noted that the trauma of the battlefield got the better of many of them. Besides the destruction sanctioned by Sherman, the march included acts of arson, rape and murder.

Samson J. North, an officer in 74<sup>th</sup> Indiana, wrote to his wife that he would have to explain to her in person what he witnessed during Sherman’s March. North was so thoroughly disgusted by what he saw that he refused to write about what he labeled as a “disgrace to the American army.” Despite this acknowledgement, North also felt that when it was written about, it needed to be done “in a less repulsive form.”

The second part of Dollar’s presentation addressed the impact of trauma. He began by recognizing two Civil War era doctors who advanced the understanding that symptoms such as being unable to sleep, unable to concentrate, nervous conditions and unusual cardiovascular problems were related to combat experiences. Dr. Jacob Da Costa called it “soldier’s heart.” Dr. Isaac Sterns (sic?), consulted with a British doctor who treated such conditions in soldiers of the Crimean War, and Sterns called the condition “post bellum neuro kinesis.” Dollar then gave multiple examples of individuals who were participants of Sherman’s final campaign and experienced combat related debilitation, describing their behavior or symptoms, often including how war survivors fared after the war ended. Often their lives ended as tragically and as violently as the events that caused their problems in the first place.

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## **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.

CVBT is now beginning our 27th year of preserving our local battlefields, the very battlefields you study and walk upon. 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](mailto:executivedirector@cvbt.org) .

Office: 540-374-0900

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**"War at Our Doors: The Civil War Diaries of the Bernard Sisters of Virginia"  
Edited and annotated by Rebecca Campbell Light**

Rebecca Campbell Light is an accomplished researcher, editor and preservationist recently honored with awards from HFFI and CVBT for her exceptional historical preservation efforts. Her 1998 work cited above is a rich narrative reflecting the anxiety and tension experienced by Fredericksburg area residents, especially Confederate women, between 1861 and 1865. The following excerpt is from the writings of Helen Struan Bernard, who grew up at Gay Mont, the Bernard family home in Caroline County. She began a diary at thirteen years of age in 1848 and continued it throughout the Civil War. Here Helen is writing from Beaumont in Spotsylvania County, the wartime residence of her older sister, Mary Eliza Bernard and Mary's husband George Guest.

“April 4<sup>th</sup> [1862]. On rising in the morning heard that Gen’l [John Bell] Hood’s Brigade had been ordered off during the night to meet a body of the enemy, 8,000 strong, reported to have landed at Aquia Creek. We were therefore all day in momentary expectation of hearing the roar of cannon & the news of a battle. Heard in the evening that the enemy were retiring towards their boats. Nothing is known as to the movement of our troops. These are days of breathless anxiety & suspense. I miss seeing the soldiers at their morning & evening parade, & the camps yesterday looked so silent & sad, like deserted villages. There is such a feeling of comfort & security while surrounded by our own brave army. I dread so lest they should fall farther back towards Richmond and leave us again without the lines.

April 18<sup>th</sup>, 1862

Good Friday. I write while the smoke of the burning bridges, depot, and boats, is resting like a heavy cloud all around the horizons towards Fredcksbg. The enemy are in possession of Falmouth, our force on this side too weak to resist them, are retiring, & what is to follow, who can say? We are not at all frightened but stunned and bewildered waiting for the end. Will they shell Fbg., will our homes on the river be all destroyed? There have been so many false alarms of Yankees in the neighborhood lately, that we had almost ceased to regard them & this morning, I came out to breakfast all dressed & ready to drive down to “Gay Mont” with Mr. Guest to spend the day & night. We were first startled by an explosion in the direction of the town, & then the thick columns of smoke rising all around told but too well the cause. It is heartsickening to think of having our beautiful valley that we have so loved and admired all overrun & desolated by our bitter enemies, whose sole object is to subjugate & plunder the South.”

More from Helen’s diary will be presented in future newsletters.

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## **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.cwrft.org](http://www.cwrft.org), as well as below.

## CWRTF Schedule

February 28, 2024 – Scott Boyd, *THE HUNLEY*

March 27, 2024 – Christian Keller, SOUTHERN STRATEGIES

April 24, 2024 – Doug Crenshaw, RICHMOND SHALL NOT BE GIVEN UP

May 22, 2024 – Gary Gallagher, PATHWAYS TO NEW NATIONAL LOYALTY

June 19, 2024 – Paul Brueske, THE LAST SIEGE: THE 1865 MOBILE CAMPAIGN

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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. The newsletter is available on our website at [www.rappvalleycivilwar.org](http://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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### **The RVCWRT Executive Committee**

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