



THE DRUM & BUGLE
Voice of the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table
February 2022, Volume 19, Issue 2

Speaker: Dwight Hughes
Topic: Unlike Anything that Ever Floated
When: Monday February 14, 2022
Location: Virtual
Times: 7:30 on Zoom
Our Website: www.rappvalleycivilwar.org
Our Facebook: www.facebook.com/rvcwrt

February 14 Meeting Is Virtual

Due to the volatile COVID situation and continuing safety and health concerns, our February presentation will be presented virtually on the Zoom platform. Members will receive their email invitations about a week prior. Please note that Steve Norder's January presentation on Abraham Lincoln's 1862 visit to Hampton Roads is available for viewing on YouTube. Searching "rvcwrt" on YouTube will lead you to Steve's program and several earlier ones.

“Dwight Hughes: Unlike Anything that Ever Floated”

Dwight Hughes is a public historian, author, and speaker in Civil War naval history.

Dwight graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1967 with a major in History and Government. He served twenty years as a Navy surface warfare officer on most of the world’s oceans in ships ranging from destroyer to aircraft carrier and with river forces in Vietnam (Bronze Star for Meritorious Service, Purple Heart).

Lieutenant Commander Hughes taught Naval ROTC at the University of Rochester, earning an MA in Political Science. He later earned an MS in Information Systems Management from USC. In his final sea tour, Commander Hughes planned and conducted convoy exercises with over twenty ships of the Maritime Prepositioned Force, Diego Garcia, and Indian Ocean.

Dwight’s second career was software engineering, primarily in geographic feature naming data and electronic mapping under contract for the U.S. Geological Survey. A ridge in Antarctica is named after him in recognition of contributions to Antarctic databases and information services.

Dwight is author of *A Confederate Biography: The Cruise of the CSS Shenandoah* (Naval Institute Press, 2015) and a contributing author at the Emerging Civil War blog. His new book for the Emerging Civil War series, *Unlike Anything That Ever Floated: The Monitor and Virginia and the Battle Hampton Roads, March 8-9, 1862* (Savas Beatie) was published in March 2021. He has presented at numerous Civil War Roundtables, historical conferences, and other venues.

The USS *Monitor* was an ingenious but hurried response to both the imminent threat of the Confederate ironclad, CSS Virginia, and to the growing prospect of international intervention in favor of Rebels backed up by powerful British or French seagoing ironclads. The United States had no defenses against either menace. *Monitor* would become a cultural icon of American industrial strength and ingenuity; she embodied and popularized social and institutional as well as industrial revolutions. But this was largely a symbolic role that would far outshine her actual accomplishments beyond a single engagement in a specific set of circumstances. This presentation takes *Monitor* from her inception in the mind of her brilliant inventor through the dramatic first clash of ironclads at Hampton Roads.

**“Lincoln Takes Command: A Week with Lincoln – May 5-12, 1862”
by Steve Norder**

A Review of the January 2022 Program by Greg Mertz

For the first and only time in the history of our nation, the President of the United States directly exercised the role of commander in chief by taking control of both army and naval forces during the week of May 5-12, 1862. Abraham Lincoln not only took command of troops in a campaign to seize Norfolk, Virginia and the CSS *Virginia*, but he successfully accomplished his goals and did so without any loss of life.

Even though more has been written about Lincoln than probably any other American, our presenter Steve Norder noted that we are still learning more and more about the sixteenth president. By looking at the observations of others writing about the day-to-day events in the life of Lincoln over the week that he directed military operations, Norder discovered both additional examples consistent with the Lincoln we all know, as well as additional insights that further develop our understanding of the president.

On the evening of May 5, 1862 Lincoln boarded the U. S. Revenue ship *Miami* and set sail the next morning for Fort Monroe in Hampton Roads. Accompanying the president, were treasury secretary Salmon P. Chase, secretary of war Edwin M. Stanton, and army brigadier general Egbert L. Viele.

At the time, the Union Army of the Potomac under General George B. McClellan was stalled on the Peninsula. Lincoln wanted to persuade Union forces to resume active campaigning against the blocking force of Confederate general Joseph E. Johnston. Another of Lincoln's goals was to capture Portsmouth and Norfolk, including the enemy facilities at the Gosport Navy Yard. The president also wanted to destroy the *CSS Virginia*, which had already fought in its monumental battle against the *USS Monitor* in Hampton Roads on March 9, 1862, and was a threat to any subsequent Union operations in those waters.

While Lincoln's military decisions were the most significant aspects of his time on the *Miami* and at Hampton Roads, his stay was also filled with stories offering a glimpse of his personality. Lincoln saw an axe on the ship and held it out to his side by holding it at the end of the handle with only his thumb

and forefinger, demonstrating his powerful hand strength. Other sailors on the *Miami* tried to duplicate the feat, but could not.

Lincoln read a humorous poem in the newspaper that he wanted to clip, and so he spread the newspaper out on the deck, borrowed a knife from Viele, and was sprawled out over the paper on his hands and knees as he carved the paper. He joked that it was hardly a flattering posture for a president, but it worked perfectly for clipping a newspaper. Lincoln then read the poem out loud, over and over to those accompanying him, even calling down the captain of the ship to hear it.

Norfolk, Portsmouth and the Gosport Navy Yard are all on the Elizabeth River, which flows into Hampton Roads from the south. The mouth of the river is defended by Confederate forces at Sewell's Point and Craney Island, opposite Union held Fort Monroe to the north. Union general John E. Wool commanded the army's forces around Fort Monroe, while flag officer Louis M. Goldsborough commanded the naval blockading squadron in Hampton Roads.

Shortly after Wool boarded the *Miami* to greet his visitors, Lincoln asked about the army's ability to attack Norfolk. Wool replied that he could not do it without the support of the navy. The next day the entourage took a tugboat to Goldsborough aboard the *USS Minnesota* to discuss the proposed joint operations. A plan was made for the navy to attack Sewell's Point and Craney Island, while the army crossed Hampton Roads.

As Wool organized his men for the mission, Lincoln's party visited the ram *USS Cornelius Vanderbilt* – the largest ship in the squadron, and namesake of the wealthiest man in the nation. They also visited the *USS Monitor*. Lincoln's lip quivered as he approached the historic ship, and as he toured the boat, he took great interest in learning of its mechanics.

Lincoln also passed the time as preparations were being made by reviewing some of the troops at nearby Camp Hamilton. As their mounts were being prepared for the trip, the men waited in the telegraph office. A young civilian telegrapher named John Emmett O'Brien -- not being aware that dignitaries were in the office -- walked into the room whistling "Dixie." O'Brien's brother Richard, who also worked there, openly criticized John for performing the song so closely associated with the Confederacy. But Lincoln told Richard that it was alright, sharing that "Dixie" was his favorite tune.

Lincoln and a sizeable entourage on horseback went to hear the 1st Delaware band play as part of the review of the troops. The dignitaries followed the band as it marched, but when the band turned around, Lincoln found himself face to face with the drum major at the head of a column of musicians. After an awkward moment eliciting some laughter among spectators as both parties came to a standstill, Lincoln moved out of the way to open up a path for the marching band to continue.

The following day, May 8, the campaign got underway. The naval force at Hampton Roads bombarded Sewell's Point for four hours. The plans to land the army near the Confederate defenses were put on hold, however, when the *CSS Virginia* sailed out of Norfolk. Union ships pulled back in hopes of luring the *Virginia* into deeper water of Hampton Roads where large ships like the *Vanderbilt* could ram it. Lincoln was disappointed when the *Virginia* did not take the bait, yet still remained a threat to any barges of Union troops that might be sent across Hampton Roads.

Wool's adjutant Col. LeGrand B. Cannon had given Lincoln a book of Shakespeare's plays, and after reading for a couple of hours, the president invited Cannon to join him. As Lincoln read a passage aloud from "King John," his voice tremored. Lincoln shared how the reading related to the way he remembered his son Willie, who had died in February of 1862. Both men wept openly and Cannon left the room to allow the president to be alone in his grief.

Lincoln sought out an engineer and a map to come up with an alternative as the campaign had stalled. Scouts had located a potential landing site for the army, and Lincoln went to personally see the site. As the troops prepared for embarkation on the transports, one observer noted that no one worked harder at the task than Lincoln. Early on the morning of May 10, Union forces landed south of Hampton Roads, and Lincoln heard artillery fire, but could get no communications from Wool on whether the operation was succeeding or failing.

That evening, after both Lincoln and Stanton had gone to bed, when Lincoln heard some commotion, opened his bedroom window and shouted out to learn what was happening. The noise was made by Wool who shouted back that the operation had been a success. Wool then went up to Lincoln's bedroom and the president became quite amused at the sight of secretary

of war Stanton in his nightshirt hugging Wool in his uniform. At 5 am on May 11, the *Virginia* was destroyed by Confederate authorities. Lincoln sailed up the Elizabeth River on the *USS Baltimore*, observing the results of the campaign from the water, including seeing the smoke of the burning Gosport Naval Yard. Lincoln returned to Washington to a hero's welcome.

SOME ANNIVERSARIES

February 14 is the 95th anniversary of the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park (FSNMP), established through an act of Congress on February 14, 1927. The park was transferred from the War Department to the National Park Service on August 10, 1933. February is also the anniversary month of the RVCWRT, founded 33 years ago in 1989. The first meeting was held at the Chancellorsville Visitors Center and featured Karen Rehm, then Supervisory Historian at FSNMP, speaking about "The Civil War Veterans Who Gave Us Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park."

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.cwrftf.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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