



THE DRUM & BUGLE
Voice of the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table
May 2021, Volume 18, Issue 5

Speaker: Ryan Quint
Topic: Dranesville: A Troubled Town, 1861
When: Monday May 10, 2021
Location: Virtual Meeting Via Zoom
Times: 7:30
Our Website: www.rappvalleycivilwar.org
Our Facebook: www.facebook.com/rvcwrt

“Virtual May Meeting”

Ryan Quint was born in Maine, and after high school moved to Virginia. He received his Bachelor of Arts in history from the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg. Ryan has worked for a number of museums, including the George Washington Foundation, Colonial Williamsburg, and the National Park Service. His first book, *Determined to Stand and Fight: The Battle of Monocacy*, was published by Savas Beatie in 2017. He is currently

a Park Guide at the Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park, and is working on his second book, dealing with the Battle of Dranesville.

The town of Dranesville became a battlefield on Dec. 20, 1861 when it hosted a small clash that saw the Confederate forces, commanded by Brig. Gen. J.E.B. Stuart, turned back in defeat. However, the town's Civil War drama started well before the battle. This presentation will examine the tumultuous first year of the war that gripped the town and pitted Unionists against Secessionists within the same streets. While battles certainly garner the most attention, it is equally important to examine the lives and impacts of the civilian population as they geared up for a war that saw neighbor turn against neighbor. Home Guards, threats, and midnight patrols are all just small parts of the bigger story of Dranesville: A Troubled Town.

This month we will continue virtual Zoom programming with a presentation on Dranesville: A Troubled Town, 1861 by Ryan Quint. Watch for your invitation! Remember that you can watch all six previous RVCWRT virtual programs in their entirety by searching "RVCWRT" on YouTube. Our speaker lineup for 2021 is now available on our new website: www.rappvalleycivilwar.org.

"Preceding Pickett's Charge"
by Greg Mertz
Looking Back at Greg's Presentation from 1996.
Reviewed by Mac Wyckoff

We are saving the review of Joseph Gillespie's excellent presentation on Ball's Bluff (April 12 Zoom) until next month. In honor of Greg's retirement from the National Park Service, we remember Greg's program on Gettysburg from 25 years ago.

On the rainy night of August 12, Greg Mertz spoke to a packed house on "Pickett's Charge" at Gettysburg. Greg began by stating that many people stand at the Virginia Monument and as they view the ground that this famous attack occurred on they wonder why General Robert E. Lee did such a crazy thing. As Milton Ford well knows, many people come to Fredericksburg and draw the same conclusion about General Ambrose E. Burnside's attack upon Marye's Heights. Greg then posed the question, did General Lee use good judgement in ordering the charge at Gettysburg?

Greg acknowledged the importance of terrain in affecting the outcome of a battle, but added that there are other aspects worthy of consideration that are often overlooked by tourists and casual visitors to battlefields. In order to evaluate Lee's decision you need to examine his leadership style. Greg mentioned that Lee was always extremely aggressive and believed in the necessity of taking calculated risks. At Chancellorsville, Lee violated accepted military principles by dividing his small force in the face of a larger force, not once but actually three times. These gambles taken at Chancellorsville were far more dangerous than ordering Pickett's Charge because he risked having his army destroyed and hence losing the war. Yet, Lee's audacious behavior at Chancellorsville is praised (because it worked) and a less dangerous decision at Gettysburg criticized (because it failed).

Next, Greg examined what information Lee possessed at the time which led him to order "Pickett's Charge". The Army of Northern Virginia was coming off twin victories at Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville against a much larger foe. On the first day at Gettysburg, the Confederates drove two Union corps from the field. At Chancellorsville, Jackson's flank attack drove only one Union corps from the field. On the second day of the battle, Lee's army did well at both ends of the field. In fact, General James Longstreet referred to the fight at the southern end of the field around the Wheatfield, Peach Orchard, and Little Round Top as the finest three hours of fighting in the life of Lee's army. Also on the second day, General Wright's Brigade successfully attacked the Union center before being driven back. Encouraged by the success on the first two days of the battle and with high morale and confidence in his army, General Lee decided to again attack on the third day. Lee saw no reason to retreat or remain passive and it was not his nature to do so anyway.

Lee's plan involved the entire army. Infantry would demonstrate against both flanks, the artillery would soften the Union center before the major attack, and the cavalry would sweep behind the Union army to harass the retreat. The attack would begin at 7:00 a. m. Lee would use all three of Longstreet's divisions in striking the Union center. But Pickett's Division was late in arriving and Lee decided to rest Hood's and McLaws' divisions which had been heavily engaged the day before. Instead he would have Trimble's and Pettigrew's divisions join Pickett's men. Lee also could not control what the Union would do. An attack by General Slocum against General Ewell's

Southerners began at 4:00 a.m. and lasted until after 1 p.m. throwing Lee's schedule off. At about the same time, the Confederate artillery began to bombard the Union center with 152 cannon. The Union responded with 120 cannon in the biggest artillery duel of the war. On the average, about three rounds were fired per second. But instead of a 15-20 minute barrage, the duel lasted 1 1/2 hours. Union artilleryman Henry J. Hunt tried to stop the fire to save ammunition. Confederate artilleryman E.P. Alexander urged Longstreet to launch the attack before he ran out of ammunition. However, the nine howitzers that were supposed to accompany the attack as well as ammunition chests had been sent by somebody to the rear and could not be found.

As the three Confederate divisions crossed the mile of open ground, several dips in the ground actually protected them from artillery fire. However, both flanks were exposed and although several hundred men made it to the Union lines the famous charge in the end failed. In the final analysis, Greg believed that when you closely examine the ground and consider Lee's leadership style and high Confederate morale you can conclude that Lee used sound military judgement when ordering the famous charge. Although not everyone agreed, Greg's analysis made logical sense to me. Now if someone, other than Bill Marvel and Milton Ford, could justify Burnside's assaults against Marye's Heights?

Greg Mertz Retires

Greg Mertz, a founding member of our round table and its first president, recently retired from the National Park Service. He served for four decades and had a profound influence on the Civil War historical community, especially here in the Fredericksburg area. In 2018, Greg received the first Thomas Greeley Stevenson Award, given by Emerging Civil War (a highly-respected website and blog presenting original scholarship about the Civil War) to the person or organization that has made a major contribution to ECW's success. At the time, ECW Editor-in-Chief Chris Mackowski commented "The hundreds of historians he has trained have, in turn, influenced millions of battlefield visitors. In that way, he has had a

monumental impact on the Civil War community and most people don't even realize it."

You can read more about Greg and his award on the ECW website at:

<https://emergingcivilwar.com/2018/08/23/ecw-honors-greg-mertz-with-stevenson-award/>

ECW also hosted a recent podcast about Greg and his illustrious career:

<https://emergingcivilwar.com/?s=mertz>

We all wish Greg well as he turns the page and starts a new chapter in life!

**Dr. Jonathan Letterman
and Civil War Medicine
By Ronald Wolf**

As we are looking forward to warmer temperatures and beautiful days, for the two armies that faced each other across the Rappahannock River in 1863, they knew battle was to come soon. The Army of the Potomac was coming out of its worst winter camp of the war in Falmouth. Reinvigorated, reenergized, and ready for battle, this army owed a lot to the organizational skills of its new commander Joseph Hooker. There is often an overshadowed figure when it comes to that winter camp. Dr. Jonathan Letterman did more to clean up the camps and bring about hygiene, cut down on sickness, and better diets than many realize. Wolf's article is a brief history on what Letterman was able to pull off for the Army of the Potomac.

https://www.army.mil/article/216935/techniques_of_civil_war_medical_innovator_jonathan_letterman_still_used_today

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.rappvalleycivilwar.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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