



THE DRUM & BUGLE
Voice of the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table
Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table Newsletter
June 2019, Volume 16, Issue 6

Speaker: Peter Vaselopulos
Topic: "Skirmishes in Virginia's Arlington County"
When: Monday, June 10, 2019
Location: Brock's Riverside Grill
Times: Social Begins 6:00 pm, Dinner 6:45 pm, Meeting Begins 7:30 p.m.

Peter Vaselopulos, "Skirmishes in Virginia's Arlington County," Monday, June 10, 2019

Peter Vaselopulos, a resident of Arlington County for the past 36 years, is a Living Historian and President of the Third US Infantry Reenactors. He graduated from George Washington University and American University with Masters degrees in Managing Information Systems and International Communications. He is the Acting Director of Information Technology at the US Agency for Global Media.

Arlington County's Civil War history is often trivialized due to its connection with Robert E. Lee's Arlington House and the National Cemetery. Many people are not aware that during the war thousands of Union and Confederate soldiers faced each other in its local hills and valleys. Arlington was host to 22 Union forts and numerous camps. For many of the northern soldiers, the county's rural landscape was their first encounter with the south. They wrote letters and diaries describing their experiences. These firsthand accounts tell a dramatic story of how both armies were unprepared and had to adapt to a new way of fighting.

Prior to the battle of First Bull Run, Arlington was on the frontline. Over the first year it became the birthplace of the Army of Potomac. From June to October 1861 small, limited engagements between pickets and skirmishers occurred on a daily basis. French military manuals of the day called this type of warfare a "petite guerre" or "little war". Until recently these minor events were not considered important enough for serious historical research. As the war progressed, they were dramatically overshadowed by larger battles that took place in the area. However, the popularity of

online historical resources, and transcription of soldier's letters, diaries, and other documents, is providing Civil War historians an opportunity to reevaluate Arlington's history during this important part of the war.

**“The Wartime Experience of Orson W. Bennett” by Geoff White
A Review of the May 2019 program by Greg Mertz**

Orson Bennet was born in Union City, Michigan and was living in Dubuque, Iowa when the war broke out. Bennett officially enlisted in the 1st Iowa on May 6, 1861 at the age of 19. He joined company I, known as the Governor's Greys, wearing gaudy grey uniforms. The unit was then accepted into Federal service on May 14 – an important 8-day distinction. John Bates, a politician, was elected the colonel, in a controversial vote.

The unit marched through Missouri, including a forced march in extreme heat to reinforce troops under Franz Sigel in Springfield, Missouri, where they had a horrible existence. It was in Springfield that the men of the 1st Iowa took the song “Hard Times Come Again No More” and reappropriated it into “Hardtack Come Again No More.” They named their bivouac “Camp Mush” after the corn mush they cooked there, which was so bad that they added another verse to the song that went: “Oh, hardtack come again once more.”

On August 3, 1861, the regiment became engaged in a skirmish at Dug Springs, in which they drove off some Confederate Home Guards and felt they had won a great victory. The 1st Iowa was a 90-day unit, and the members of the regiment thought their enlistments would end August 6th – 90 days from when they formed on May 6th. But because they were mustered into Federal service on May 14, the men of the 1st Iowa could not go home and their commanding general, Nathaniel Lyon, was very severe on the regiment to force it to stay. The men were constantly under arms, day and night, in the heat, with roll call every hour. With a battle evident, the 1st Iowa did not want to head home with their work undone.

A fight, called the Battle of Wilson's Creek, was indeed about to be fought. On August 10, the Federal forces were divided into two wings and attacked Confederates and pro-Confederate state guard troops under Gen. Sterling Price. The 1st Iowa was on the left flank of the main column under Gen. Lyon, while Col. Sigel marched around the Confederate forces to attack their rear. When Sigel's column approached troops in grey uniforms, they were fearful that the troops might have been some of grey-clad Federal troops such as the 1st Iowa. The troops were from Price's enemy army, who fired into Sigel's cautious men, and put Sigel's column to flight. When Price turned all of his attention on Lyon, the Union army was forced from the field, and Gen. Lyon was killed.

Private Orson Bennett was wounded in the Battle of Wilson's Creek. The extent of his wound is uncertain. Although Bennett was said to have a fractured left femur, he was

not captured on a battlefield which was left in Price's control, or in the Union hospital in Springfield, which also fell into Confederate hands. This suggests that Bennett was well enough to walk away from the battlefield or the hospital.

After he recovered, Bennett joined the 12th Wisconsin regiment on December 12, 1861. After potentially being assigned to participate in some campaigns to have been based out of Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, none of them materialized. The regiment eventually found itself participating in the Vicksburg Campaign, and on May 22, 1863 the unit was on the left flank of the Union line in the siege of Vicksburg. When the Confederate garrison capitulated on July 4, the 12th Wisconsin exchanged their unreliable Belgium Rifles for some of the weapons the Confederates relinquished in the surrender.

After the Vicksburg Campaign, Bennett took a leave of absence to study how to become an officer. He took the examination on January 11, 1864, passed all subjects, and was commissioned a 1st Lieut. in the 1st Michigan Colored Infantry – redesignated the 102nd United States Colored Troops.

By that time, Orson's older brother, William Bennett -- who had been living in Australia when the Civil War began – had become a captain in the 1st United States Colored Troops. Evidence suggests that William may have been an abolitionist. He corresponded with Thomas Wentworth Higginson – who was one of the Secret Six funding John Brown's Raid and attempted insurrection. William took the officer's examination a few days after Orson had done so, and was commissioned the Lieut. Col. in what would become the 102nd United States Colored Troops with his brother. The regiment was recruited in Detroit. Many of its members were from Canada. Many were former slaves. They were sent first to Annapolis then to Hilton Head, South Carolina and ultimately to Florida, where they saw their first engagement on August 10, 1864 (the three-year anniversary of Orson's wounding at Wilson's Creek) near Jacksonville, before returning to South Carolina.

In late November, 1864, William T. Sherman's March to the Sea was nearing Savannah, Georgia. To aid in that movement, the Union forces to which the 102nd USCTs was a part, was assigned to cut the railroad serving as the Confederate supply line running from Charleston to Savannah. Fog delayed the Union transports and allowed the Confederates the time to construct earthworks and prepare a strong defensive position guarding the rail line.

On the afternoon of November 30, 1864 on a knoll called Honey Hill overlooking the pine swamps of South Carolina between Broad River and the Charleston-Savannah Railroad, the 3rd New York Artillery held an unenviable position 100 yards in front of the main Union line. The isolated position was under fire from the entrenched Confederate position. All of the Union artillerymen had either been made casualties of the battle or had been driven off. Three of the guns of the battery were abandoned and were in grave danger of being captured.

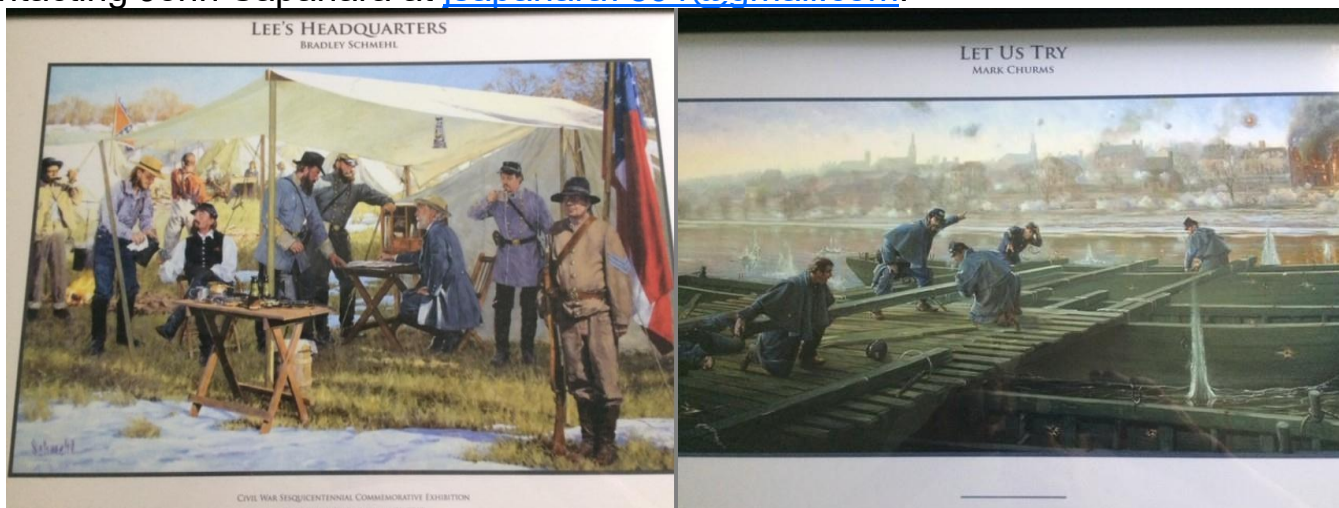
Even though several unsuccessful attacks had been made to recover three cannon, Captain Orson W. Bennett, commanding the small force of company A in the 102nd United States Colored Troops, were the next to receive the assignment to bring in the guns. Three times Bennett led his troops forward, and three times they fell back. Bennett avoided substantial casualties however, because he had earlier been trained in the firing of heavy artillery, understanding just when the enemy was about to fire and directing his men to drop to the ground at exactly the right time. The men did not rise back up as quickly as Bennett demanded, and his orders to his men became more severe. But under his leadership, Bennett successfully brought the pieces back within Federal lines, with the loss of just one man. Twenty-three years later, Bennett was awarded the Medal of Honor for the deed.

The Civil War hero's life ended on January 4, 1904 by suicide. White officers of the USCTs suffered high rates of both divorce and suicide. Grand Army of the Republic posts were segregated and the white USCT officers may have been ostracized by others in the white post to which he belonged. Bennett may have been left with no companions with which to discuss and empathize with the symptoms we recognize as PTSD today.

RVCWRT ART PRINT RAFFLE

RVCWRT is raffling off two professionally framed and matted Civil War prints, "Let Us Try" by Mark Churms and "Lee's Headquarters" by Bradley Schmehl. Each measures 18 ½" x 26 ½" including frame. These prints are from the 2012 Civil War Sesquicentennial Commemorative Exhibition at the Fredericksburg Area Museum.

Raffle tickets are **\$5 each or 3 for \$10**. A maximum of **150 tickets** will be sold. First ticket drawn wins choice, second ticket drawn receives the remaining print. Proceeds benefit the RVCWRT scholarship fund. Tickets will be sold at the June, July and August RVCWRT dinner meetings. Drawing will be at the September 9, 2019 dinner meeting. Winners need not be present to win. Tickets can also be reserved by contacting John Sapanara at jsapanara7891@gmail.com.



Ongoing Reminder

Please contact Bob Jones to order your dinner in advance or to confirm your dinner reservation. Please call Bob Jones @ 540-399-1702 or send him your e-mail at cwrt dinner@yahoo.com



The Civil War Round Table of Fredericksburg By Bob Jones

As a courtesy, the RVCWRT provides as a regular feature each month, the ongoing scheduled speakers for the CWRTF's 2018 Program Year. The Civil War Round Table of Fredericksburg normally meets on the fourth Wednesday of every month (except for one meeting held on the third Wednesday of June 2018). Dinner Meetings are held at the UMW's Jepson Center located at [1119 Hanover Street, Fredericksburg, VA](#), dinner cost is \$32.00 per person. Advance reservations should be made by email: dinner@cwrtf.org or telephone: 540-361-2105.

CWRTF's Scheduled Speakers for the 2019 Program Year:

June 19, 2019	Dave Bastion	"The Vicksburg Canal"
Sept. 25, 2019	Brian E. Withrow	"Ulysses S. Grant in Character"
Oct. 23, 2019	Michael K. Shaffer	"In Memory of Self and Comrades: Thomas W. Colley's Recollection"

2019 NPS Intern Scholarship

The Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table (RVCWRT) provides a \$2,000 scholarship to a National Park Service (NPS) intern serving at Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park. Under the provisions of this scholarship program, an intern will be defined as any individual who is, or will be, an undergraduate or graduate student at an accredited college or university; who has served at Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park (beginning their service between July 2018 and July 2019) and who has completed a minimum of 350 hours of service to the park in good standing. For complete details, go to the website, www.rvcwrt.org

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 \$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.

The RVCWRT Executive Committee:

President/Dinner Meeting:	Bob Jones	Membership:	TBD
Vice President:	John Sapanara	Member at Large:	Robin Donato
Secretary:	Melanie Jordan	Member at Large:	John Griffiths
Treasurer:	Bob Pfile	Member at Large:	Barbara Stafford
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