



THE DRUM & BUGLE
Voice of the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table
Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table Newsletter
April 2020, Volume 17, Issue 4

Speaker:

Topic:

When:

Location:

Brock's Riverside Grill

Times:

**Social Begins 6:00 pm, Dinner 6:45 pm, Meeting
Begins 7:30 p.m.**

“No Meeting in April”

Based on guidance from the Center for Disease Control and concern for the safety and security of our members, your Executive Committee is canceling the April 13th RVCWRT dinner meeting. We will see how things progress and make a decision later about our scheduled activities in May.

The board would like to acknowledge the loss of Julie Olsen. Julie was one of the founding members of this roundtable. Her contributions over the years helped us grow into what we are today. We are grateful she was able to attend the 30th anniversary dinner in February and see what she helped build. Julie Olsen passed away on March 8th.

As this is a time of Women's history, we think it proper as we honor Julie we also tell you about our newest Ed Bearss Summer Intern. The Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park will welcome Emily J. Sherrard from Bayfield, WI this summer.

Emily attends the University of Wisconsin, where she is majoring in History and minoring in Anthropology. Emily will be completing her junior year in 2020. She has directed much of her study to U.S. conflicts, particularly the Civil War, but also has a big interest in American participation in the two world wars. She will be participating in our Seven Days Bus Tour and attending our Dinner Meeting in June. She will also be hosting Ed Bearss at our July dinner meeting.

**"Lee is Trapped and Must be Taken: Eleven Fateful Days After
Gettysburg "**

by Richard Schaus

A Review of the March 2020 program by Greg Mertz

The operations in the aftermath of the Battle of Gettysburg, had the potential to be significant due to two factors. First, rains caused the Potomac River to rise and swell. Second, a cavalry unit badly damaged the Confederate pontoon bridges on July 4, 1863. The result, stated our speaker, Richard Schaus, was that Union army commander George G. Meade was presented with an opportunity he did not expect: the chance to destroy the Confederate army.

As Confederate army commander Robert E. Lee retreated from Gettysburg to Virginia on the far banks of the Potomac River, he sent messages to Confederate President Jefferson Davis, but Davis was unable to communicate

with Lee. The Army of Northern Virginia commander operated on his own and made decisions independent of his government's political leaders.

Such was not the case for Meade. General in Chief Henry Halleck issued what Schaus described as "mixed messages" to Meade. The problems that Lee faced in getting across the Potomac gave Lincoln hope. If Union army could continue fighting, it had the prospect of destroying Lee's army and by doing so could end the war, reasoned Lincoln. That destruction of Lee's army never happened, and Schaus explained some of the reasons why.

Col. George Sharpe and his Bureau of Military Information provided Meade with accurate information about the Confederate locations and strengths, but the Union army commander was skeptical of Sharpe's reports and believed his army was outnumbered by the Confederates. Military railroad man Herman Haupt was a friend and West Point classmate of Meade. He urged Meade to pursue the Confederates immediately following the Battle of Gettysburg, but Meade felt that his battered army needed rest.

While Meade ordered a reconnaissance in force under Gen. John Sedgwick, he desired a feeble effort which would not result in an engagement with the Confederates. Union cavalry division commander Gen. John Buford was also unsuccessful in carrying out an assignment to seize Williamsport, Maryland on the Potomac. Confederate Gen. John Imboden, escorting the 17-mile long train of Confederate wounded, had reached Williamsport first. Between Imboden's command, some teamsters who were armed, and some of the wounded in the train who could shoulder a weapon, the Confederates were able to hold off Buford on July 6. The Union attempts at offensive operations in the immediate aftermath of the Battle of Gettysburg either never materialized or failed.

July 7-9 was marked by a large amount of rain, and roads became worse with every wheeled vehicle to cut a track in the mud. Meade requested reinforcements, and Halleck responded with what he could, sending militia units; there were no more veteran troops in the area that could be sent to the Army of the Potomac. As Meade selected replacements for the officers in prominent positions who had fallen at Gettysburg, he chose men noted more for caution than aggressiveness.

Confederate artillerist and engineer E.P. Alexander felt that the Confederate defensive line was satisfactory, but that the need for bridges resulted in Lee being more concerned than Alexander had ever seen the commanding

general. Meade's letters to his wife reveal that he first wanted to fight Lee again north of the Potomac, realizing that Lee was trying to retreat. But Meade's letter of July 10 demonstrated a change of heart. Meade observed that the Confederates were not retreating but were entrenched. Meade thought his enemy was inviting the Union army to attack, and Meade was resolved not to oblige Lee.

Lincoln secretary John Hay wrote on July 11, that Meade would attack the next day. The Union army made significant maneuvers on July 12 and III corps units reported that attack orders were read to the men, but no battle was fought. Meade's own letter to his wife of this day, show him complaining that his order for spectacles had arrived but was wrong, and Schaus observed the irony of that being the main topic of the army commander's writings on a day when American history could have been changed.

There was no attack because Meade had called a council of war. Paradoxically, Meade was able to convince his corps commanders that the attack should not be made, while at the same time conveyed to them the understanding that he was in favor making the assault himself. The council of war voted not to attack. Meade delayed relaying the result of the vote to Halleck, who in turn told Meade to ignore the council of his corps commanders and attack anyway.

After Meade first wanted to attack Lee before he escaped across the Potomac, then thought that Lee welcomed a Union attack with Meade refusing to fall into the trap, and next apparently favored an attack that his subordinates argued against, Meade felt that the situation had changed once again. Meade next alleged that Lee was going to attack him. Meade sent chief engineer Gouverneur K. Warren on an inspection of the Union lines to assess the army's defensive readiness.

This phase of the Gettysburg Campaign, from the battle proper to Lee's retreat across the Potomac came to a close on July 14, 1863. As the day dawned, a Union reconnaissance in force advanced, only to find that the Confederates had disappeared. An intense rearguard action at Falling Waters resulted in the death of Confederate Gen. J. Johnston Pettigrew, but Lee's army had safely crossed the river. Whatever opportunity that may have existed to destroy the Confederate army when the high water and problems with pontoon bridges forced Lee's army to halt with their backs to the Potomac, had passed.

Lincoln was very disappointed. On July 14, Lincoln wrote what is arguably the most famous Civil War letter that was never sent to its recipient. The criticism that Lincoln wrote of Meade must have proved to have been cathartic. After venting his anger, Lincoln saved but did not deliver the letter to Meade.

Sensing the president's disapproval, Meade requested to be relieved of command. Though frustrated, Lincoln would not accept the resignation and Meade retained command of the Army of the Potomac to the end of the war. Despite holding the highest post in the largest Union army of the war, Schaus noted that Meade remains a relatively unknown general, largely because he delegated much of the particulars of the army's battles to his subordinates, and because U. S. Grant as general in chief, made his headquarters side by side with Meade's during the last year of the war.

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 cwrtedinner@yahoo.com.

REMINDER: Beginning in 2020, dinner will be \$26 for members and \$30 for non-members.

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 2020. Dinner Meetings are held at the UMW's Jepson Center located at:

[1119 Hanover Street, Fredericksburg, VA](https://www.google.com/maps/place/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 2020 Program Year:

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|---------------|------------------------|---|
| Mar. 25, 2020 | Dr. Caroline E. Janney | "Burying the Dead, But Not the Past. The Ladies Memorial Association" |
| Apr. 22, 2020 | Gordon Rhea | "The Generalship of Lee and Grant in the Overland Campaign" |
| May 27, 2020 | John Biemeck | "Civil War Ordnance" |
| Jun. 17, 2020 | Paul Kahan | "The Presidency of Ulysses S. Grant: Preserving the Civil War's Legacy" |



From the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States (MOLLUS)- Massachusetts
Photograph Collection.

Did You Know the 2020 Bus Trip is here already?

Did you know it is that time of year again?

This month, and maybe the next few months leading up to the bus trip, we will hold off on the obscure Civil War and Fredericksburg facts.

The 2020 bus trip is upon us. The topic is McClellan and Lee at the Seven Days. We will be visiting Chickahominy Bluffs, Beaver Dam Creek, Gaines Mill, and Malvern Hill. Our guide will be Col. Marc Thompson USAF (Ret). The price will include transportation, lunch, site fees, and guided tour.

Members & Guests are \$90, after May 1st it is \$100. Non-members are \$100.

Bus will depart from the Gordon Rd. commuter lot at 8:00 a.m and return at 6 p.m.

For information and reservations see Bob at the dinner or email at cwrtdinner@yahoo.com, Bobnpeg1954@gmail.com or call 540-399-1702.

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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. 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:

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