



THE DRUM & BUGLE
Voice of the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table
December 2021, Volume 18, Issue 12

Speaker: John Kanaster
Topic: The Battle of Fredericksburg: Bloody Plain Revealed
When: Monday December 13, 2021
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
Our Facebook: www.facebook.com/rvcwrt

Please make dinner reservations through John Sapanara via email rappcwevents21@gmail.com or by phone 540-479-1299. He will contact you with confirmation. Please reserve by the Thursday before the Monday dinner meeting date. If you wish to be placed on the "permanent reservation" list, please advise John. Members on this list do not need to make reservations every month - their attendance is assumed unless they cancel beforehand. Member dinner price is **\$30**. This price also applies to non-member attendees who join at the meeting, or to guests invited by members. Non-member dinner price is \$35.

DINNER MEETING NOTES

We will continue to award two door prizes - \$50 gift certificates to Brock's Riverside Grill – at every meeting. Every dinner attendee receives a complimentary ticket and is automatically entered into the drawing. Used books contributed by members will now be available for a donation of your choosing – no raffle tickets needed. A “free” table near the stairway will usually have a variety of magazines, pamphlets, ephemera and books in lesser condition. Notices of events and other items of Civil War interest will be posted on bulletin boards across from the “free” table.

“John Kanaster: The Battle of Fredericksburg: Bloody Plain Revealed”

John Kanaster is originally from Torrance, California. He served in the U.S. Army and attended the University of Alabama. John was the education & events director for the Fort MacArthur Museum in San Pedro, California. He currently works for the Department of Defense in the Washington area. John is also the owner & operator of “Fredericksburg Tours”, a private battlefield guide service of the Fredericksburg area battlefields and beyond. He is also a member of the “Friends of the Wilderness Battlefield”. John is a member of the “Rappahannock Whalers”; a historic sea-shanty singing-group. Today he resides on a portion of the Fredericksburg battlefield below Marye's Heights.

On the 159th Anniversary of the battle of Fredericksburg, we will explore an area of the battlefield between the city and the stone wall known as “Bloody Plain”. Our conversation will start where the National Park property ends. This was a very confusing area to be for the Federals as they made their assaults on Marye's Heights. Today, this is also a very confusing place for visitors due to a neighborhood built on top of the battlefield. We'll take a closer look and discover the various features and impediments on the battlefield which made it difficult for the Federals to bring their full weight to bear. In an orderly fashion, we'll sort out the method to the madness on the battlefield with the worst lopsided defeat in the Civil War. We'll also learn why there's a neighborhood on the battlefield today and how one can still find traces of it by using a set of “battlefield-detective” eyes.

“The Seven Days Battle for Richmond”

by Doug Crenshaw

A Review of the November 2021 Program by Greg Mertz

With the wounding of Gen. Joseph E. Johnston on May 31, 1862 during the Battle of Seven Pines, Gen. Robert E. Lee ascended to command of the main Confederate army. Less than a month after taking over the helm, Lee would engage the Union army for a week-long battle named for the duration of the fight rather than a landmark – the Seven Days Battle. While the speed with which Lee launched his first campaign was impressive, it occurred before he got to know his subordinates very well. The subsequent battle would provide him with ample opportunities to size up the talents of his senior generals. During the Seven Days, Lee would determine which generals he would depend upon and would become the key figures associated with the Army of Northern Virginia, and which officers proved to be disappointing and had to go.

One of the first things Lee did with his new army was to erect earthworks which not only helped in defending the Confederate capital, but also enabled him to accomplish that task with a small number of troops and free up a substantial portion of his army to maneuver and attack vulnerable portions of the Union position. A ride around the Union army undertaken by Confederate cavalry leader J.E.B. Stuart gathered information about Union troop dispositions and revealed their weakness – the Union right flank. Union army commander George B. McClellan had four corps south of the Chickahominy River, while only one corps under Gen. Fitz John Porter held the Union right, isolated north of the stream.

Lee held a meeting with key subordinates at Richmond’s Dabbs House to develop the campaign plan. Gen. Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson would bring his forces from the Shenandoah Valley to reinforce Lee. As Lee aligned his men along the southern banks of the Chickahominy in the vicinity of Mechanicsville, Jackson was to arrive on the north bank of the river. Jackson could outflank Porter’s forces and clear away any Union opposition confronting Lee’s army, hopefully enabling them to have an easy crossing to the north side of the Chickahominy.

Gen. A. P. Hill held the left or west end of Lee's line, and was to listen for the sound of Jackson's guns striking the Union flank as the signal for him to advance and join the attack. But Jackson was late, and Hill grew impatient. Even though he had not heard the sounds indicating that Jackson was engaged, Hill presumed that Jackson must be in place as the end of day neared. At 3:00 pm, Hill initiated the crossing of the Chickahominy, advancing before Jackson had performed his role in the plan. Hill, therefore, encountered stiff resistance.

Issues with coordination and communications hampered the campaign from the start. Lee had a very small staff which was unable to carry out the needs of keeping the army commander informed of conditions, synchronizing movements, and clarifying the commander's intent. Jackson was not familiar with the Richmond area. When he arrived, he was unsure of just where he was located and his orders were not clear. Even though Hill's attack was premature, and Lee was nearby, Lee did not try to stop Hill. Though the Confederates achieved a strategic victory and pushed Union troops back in the first battle of the Seven Days fought at Beaver Dam Creek on June 26, 1862, it was achieved at a high cost in Confederate casualties.

The Confederates presumed that Porter's Union forces would fall back to the east from Beaver Dam Creek to a position behind Powhite Creek and based the next phase of the battle on that presumption. Hill moved against the supposed Union position only to find that Porter was behind Boatswain Swamp instead – the next watercourse to the east of Powhite Creek. Hill attacked across Boatswain Swamp on June 27 in what would be known as the battle of Gaines' Mill, calling upon Gen. James Longstreet for support, while again expecting Jackson to strike the enemy flank. But Jackson got lost trying to get into position. Informing a guide that he wanted to go to "Cold Harbor," Jackson was unaware that there were actually two locations that went by that name – a "New Cold Harbor" and an "Old Cold Harbor." As a result of going to the wrong "Cold Harbor," Jackson was out of position. The Confederate army finally consolidated as darkness approached, and Lee ordered the largest assault of the Civil War with from 35,000 to as many as 50,000 Confederate soldiers attacking. While Porter's troops were driven from the field in a Confederate victory, he retreated south of the Chickahominy. Lee had been unable to destroy Porter's isolated corps, and the entire Union army was then assembled south of the river.

While the Union army was in position to attack the lightly defended capital, Lee assessed the situation and concluded that the Union forces were instead trying to withdraw to the James River and the cover of Union gunboats. Lee saw an opportunity to attack a divided Union force, retreating along bad roads, moving across the front of the portion of his army defending Richmond and a portion of his that had been able to cross back south of the Chickahominy. Lee had five different roads that he could use leading to different points along the Union retreat route.

Lee relied upon generals John Magruder, Benjamin Huger and Theophilus Holmes to harass and slow down the Union retreat, but none of them acted aggressively. The army chief of staff Col. Robert Chilton delivered orders calling for Jackson to keep an eye on the Chickahominy, when what Lee actually wanted communicated to Jackson was that he should cross the stream at White Oak Swamp and attack the enemy rear. In the June 29 battle of Savage Station and the June 30 battle of Glendale, the Confederates were unable to take advantage of the divided Union forces in front of them. The inactivity of Huger and Holmes permitted Union troops to shift reinforcements to the most threatened points at Glendale.

McClellan's troops retreated to an ideal artillery position at Malvern Hill. Lee's plan for the July 1 assault on the hill called for massing artillery on the Confederate left, to position the infantry brigade of Louis Armistead where he could judge the effect of the Confederate batteries and decide when to strike, yelling as they attacked as a signal to other infantry units to join in the assault. With the Union cannon already in position when Confederate artillery units attempted to go into battery, the blue-clad gunners pounded enemy gunners the moment they came upon the field. When Lee observed Union cannon being withdrawn, he felt that the timing was right to attack. Magruder, who had just arrived upon the field to attack, thought that Lee wanted him to attack, yelling as they went forward. When Confederate Gen. D. H. Hill heard cheering among the southern troops, he presumed that was his notice to attack and his infantry moved toward the Union position. Instead of finding a withdrawing Union army, the Confederates found that fresh batteries soon took the place of the Union gunners who had run low on ammunition and been pulled out of the line. Malvern Hill proved to be a lopsided affair with heavy Confederate losses. The Union forces

successfully established a new supply base under the protection of the Union fleet on the James.

Though Lee lost 20,000 men during the Seven Days, while McClellan lost 15,000 casualties, he had saved Richmond. As Lee determined that Huger, Holmes, Magruder were poor generals, they were all transferred to less important assignments. Lee likewise concluded that Longstreet A. P. Hill and Richard Ewell had done well, and while Jackson did not perform in a stellar manner, he had proved to be an aggressive officer in the Shenandoah Valley, and Lee had found the officers who would be his future corps commanders.

From the Union perspective, the Seven Days indicated that the war would be more prolonged than originally thought and Lincoln decided that a deadline was needed for when the states in rebellion would still be allowed to rejoin the Union with slavery still intact, as had been the United States policy at the time. Though the release of the Emancipation Proclamation would be delayed until it could be issued following a Union victory, this important policy was born in the aftermath of the Seven Days.

A Visit from CVBT

Tom Van Winkle. President of the Central Virginia Battlefields Trust, will be visiting us at our December 13th dinner meeting. Tom, who is also a member of our round table, will give us a brief rundown on the recent activities and successes of this fine organization. Remember that all donations from our used book offerings go directly to CVBT to support battlefield preservation.

Right now there is an effort to purchase and preserve a key battlefield property here in our own backyard. The Beckham Tract, part of Stonewall Jackson's flank attack at Chancellorsville on May 2, 1863, has been offered for sale. CVBT seeks to raise \$60,000 which, when combined with grant money, will enable this 1.2 acre tract to be preserved forever.

This hallowed ground was an artillery position occupied by Confederate troops under Major Robert F. Beckham during the Battle of Chancellorsville. Beckham advanced two guns from the Stuart Horse Artillery to this location, in support of Jackson's flank attack. Their fire was

so effective that Jackson personally praised Beckham's skill by telling him "Young man, I congratulate you."

You can learn more about the Beckham Tract initiative and other CVBT projects on their website at www.cvbt.org.

2022 Speaker List

We have reached the end of another year. It has been so great having live meetings again. While so many things have changed, the most important being the loss of the venerable Bob Jones, our round table continues to put together stellar guests and talks. Here is what we have to look forward to in 2022.

January 10: Steve Norder – Lincoln Takes Command

February 14: Dwight Hughes – Unlike Anything that Ever Floated: The Monitor and Virginia

March 14: Scott Mingus – Targeted Tracks: Cumberland Valley Railroad in the Civil War

April 11: Brian Briones – Defenses of Washington during the Civil War

May 9: Ron Kirkwood – “Too Much for Human Endurance” The George Spangler Farm Hospitals and the Battle of Gettysburg

June 13: Tyler McGraw – Emory Upton in Myth and Modern Memory

July 11: John Roos – The Forgotten Fall: The Most Important Unknown Period of the War

August 8: Charles Knight – From Arlington to Appomattox – Robert E. Lee’s Civil War

September 12: Steward Henderson – Battle of New Market Heights

October 10: Kenneth R. Rutherford – America’s Buried History: Landmines in the Civil War

November 14: Frank O’Reilly – Topic to be announced

December 12: Jim Smith – Final Assault at Antietam: Burnside Bridge, Orlando Willcox & 9th Corps, Arrival of A.P. Hill

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 \$35 for individuals and \$45 for families. Membership is open to anyone interested in the military, political and social history of the American Civil War.

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