



THE DRUM & BUGLE
Voice of the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table
April 2024, Volume 21, Issue 4

Speaker: Greg Elder
Topic: “Intelligence at the Battle of Shiloh”
When: Monday April 8, 2024
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

Greg Elder “Intelligence at the Battle of Shiloh”

Greg Elder is the chief historian at the Defense Intelligence Agency and a graduate lecturer in intelligence at the Johns Hopkins University.

During his 25-year career with the Intelligence Community, Elder served roles as a President’s Daily Briefing briefer, deputy defense intelligence officer, senior intelligence officer, analyst, and interrogator. He also completed rotations as a course director and instructor in the Office of the

Director of National Intelligence and an instructor of tradecraft at the Academy for Defense Intelligence; in his role as course director, he was one of a six-member team recognized with the 2023 National Intelligence Professionals Award for Teaching. As the chief historian, Elder initiated and oversees a nine-battlefield IC staff ride program focusing on leadership and intelligence and developed a 20-part lecture series on intelligence in the Civil War.

Elder is a routine guest on podcasts such as Addressing Gettysburg and Ed Helms' *SNAFU*, which won the 2023 Signal Award for best history podcast series. He is the recipient of two gold and one silver Telly Awards for excellence in broadcasting and has consulted on projects such as Hulu's *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Elder holds Master of Arts degrees from Northeastern University and the United States Naval War College and completed graduate studies at National Intelligence University, Norwich University, and the University of Maryland. He holds more than thirty professional certifications.

**“The Tale Untwisted: General George B. McClellan,
the Maryland Campaign and the Discovery of Lee’s Lost Orders”
by Alex Rossino and Gene Thorp
A Review of the March 2024 Program by Greg Mertz**

Dawdling, tentative, timid and cautious; arrogant and pompous; incompetent: those are just some of the words that Civil War enthusiasts typically use to describe Federal Army of the Potomac commander George B. McClellan. Such perspectives are supported by the depictions of McClellan found in several films and books on the battle of Antietam and a recent biography of the general. These various sources and forms of media repeat the same criticisms of McClellan without delving into the original sources and so they perpetuate some of the same caricatures of “Little Mac” in what speaker Alex Rossino dubbed “The McClellan Myth in the Modern Era.”

Steven Sears is perhaps the most prominent critic of McClellan at Antietam through both his book on the battle and his biography of the general. Rossino declared that the repetition of Sears’ disparagement of McClellan had “enshrined” that assessment in the modern historiography.

Rossino identified three different reasons for the McClellan Myth. One is “deliberate slander.” An example is the surrender of the Federal garrison of 13,000 troops under Col. Dixon Miles at Harpers Ferry to Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson on September 15, 1862. Blame has been attributed to McClellan’s inability to come to their aid. General-in-Chief Henry Halleck testified that McClellan’s relief column only advanced six miles per day, and could have protected Harpers Ferry before Jackson’s arrival.

But McClellan had warned Halleck of the threat to Harpers Ferry, recommending its evacuation several times, as early as September 5. Halleck did nothing until September 12, when he gave McClellan authority to deal with Harpers Ferry – a date that was too late for McClellan to do anything that might save the garrison. Halleck’s assertion that McClellan had marched too deliberately was an attempt to deflect blame for his own ineptitude in dealing with the issue -- hence “deliberate slander.”

A second intention of the McClellan Myth is “politically motivated character assassination.” Two years after Antietam, McClellan ran for the office of President of the United States on the ticket of the Democratic Party. His reputation and character became a target of the Republican Party and reporter William Swinton, who admitted that he was not going to let the facts get in his way. Swinton, through a series of articles in the New York Times, declared McClellan a failure who did not move his army rapidly based his assertion upon Halleck’s slander.

Finally, the McClellan Myth was intensified by the “use of flawed sources.” Federal General Jacob Cox, utilizing the newly published Official Records, found the so called “trophy telegram” from McClellan to Lincoln sent at “12 M” on September 13, 1862. The telegram shared with Lincoln the discovery of a copy of Robert E. Lee’s Special Orders 191, outlining the disposition of Confederate troops and their assignments for the opening of the campaign. Even though “M” was intended to mean “midnight” Cox interpreted it to mean “midday” or noon. Cox concluded that McClellan had waited a condemning eighteen hours before moving toward Lee’s army after learning just where each of the five factions of the opposing army were located. But Cox was off by twelve hours.

Our second presenter for the program, Gene Thorp, then outlined the Maryland Campaign, demonstrating that McClellan performed much better

in the campaign than has been depicted. Thorp began by delving into Special Orders 191. The McClellan Myth declares that the Federal army commander learned of the Lost Order on the morning of September 13 while speaking with a Maryland citizen at his headquarters, declared exuberantly that he now knew what to do, telegraphed Lincoln of its discovery at noon on that same day, but inexcusably waited eighteen hours, until the morning of September 14, before moving on Lee. McClellan, the myth concludes, was too slow in reacting to the Lost Order and as a consequence, he missed a golden opportunity to destroy Lee's army, and the Harpers Ferry garrison was forced to surrender.

The Lost Order was found wrapped around some cigars on September 13 by Federal soldiers in the 27th Indiana in a field east of Frederick, Maryland at the end of a morning's march. Although one of the soldiers who found the order indicated 30 years after the incident that it had been found between 9 and 10 am, others, including the regiment's Col. Silas Colgrove, indicated that the orders were not passed along to him until after the morning's march had concluded, which was about noon. Other accounts agree with Colgrove about the time when the march concluded. McClellan could not have sent a telegram at noon to Lincoln announcing the discovery.

The source of the story that McClellan was speaking with a civilian at 11:30 am when the order was handed to him, and the general's enthusiastic reaction comes from Robert E. Lee. The story was based upon Lee's recollection of what Confederate cavalry commander J.E.B. Stuart had told him immediately after the September 14 battle of South Mountain, and Lee passed it along to two others on the faculty of Washington College after the war – E.C. Gordon and William Allen.

Records show that McClellan did not set up his headquarters in Frederick until 3 pm, and prior to that time, McClellan had already written to cavalryman Alfred Pleasanton that he had received the Lost Orders. The purpose of corresponding with Pleasanton was to verify the information found in the Lost Orders and see if it meshed with what Pleasanton had discovered regarding Confederate movements.

By 8 pm on September 13, William B. Franklin and his VI corps were moving to the relief of Harpers Ferry, expecting to meet with Miles on Maryland Heights. But Miles had abandoned the heights and withdrawn into the bowl

of Harpers Ferry, surrendering 24 hours earlier than he had informed McClellan that he could hold out. On September 14 McClellan attacked and seized three of the passes at South Mountain, effectively taking away any additional offensive options of Lee.

Friends of Central Virginia Battlefield Trust

As you know CVBT is a land trust. We focus on purchasing endangered battlefield properties. We do produce a large three-day annual conference, standalone events and need to interpret and maintain our lands, we need help in all of these. In the past, CVBT has had individuals from organizations assist us, and we are grateful, but now we would like to create an official volunteer group who would enjoy being part of CVBT's volunteer core.

We have created "**The Friends of CVBT.**" The intent is for this all-volunteer group is to be the "On Call" core of CVBT's volunteer group assisting in events and battlefield related needs. Active volunteer members will have the unique opportunity to be involved with events hosted by nationally acclaimed historians, assist in tours, and work on preserved battlefields. Participating volunteers will also be enrolled in the membership ranks of CVBT every year they contribute. CVBT will provide each volunteer with a CVBT volunteer staff shirt and CVBT official hat to wear at events or whenever wanted. We will be limiting this new group to 18 volunteers.

CVBT is now beginning our 27th year of preserving our local battlefields, the very battlefields you study and walk upon. We would be honored to have you join the ranks of CVBT volunteers to help us further our mission of preserving our Nation's history.

If interested please email our Executive Director **Terry**

Rensel at executivedirector@cvbt.org .

Office: 540-374-0900

Part II - "War at Our Doors: The Civil War Diaries of the Bernard Sisters of Virginia"

Edited and annotated by Rebecca Campbell Light - Reprinted with kind permission of the editor

Rebecca Campbell Light is an accomplished researcher, editor and preservationist recently honored with awards from HFFI and CVBT for her

exceptional historical preservation efforts. Her 1998 work cited above is a rich narrative reflecting the anxiety and tension experienced by Fredericksburg area residents, especially Confederate women, between 1861 and 1865. The following excerpt is from the writings of Helen Struan Bernard, who grew up at Gay Mont, the Bernard family home in Caroline County. She began a diary at thirteen years of age in 1848 and continued it throughout the Civil War. Here Helen is writing from her home during the Battle of Fredericksburg.

"Thursday [December 11, 1862]...About 10 o'clock [AM] the firing above commenced again & has continued without intermission & very heavy throughout the day...The night closes rather sadly. The battle which has now begun must be a terrific struggle to either side. Defeat is ruin. May God give us the victory. In him alone is our hope. We feel solitary & deserted at parting with friends of whom we have seen so much lately...

Friday [December 12, 1862]...We can gain no certain information from Fredcksbg. Scarcely a rumor has reached us with regard to yesterday's engagement. Today the firing commenced about 2 o'clock and still continues fast & furious. We are consumed with anxiety to know the result.

Saturday, Dec. 13th [1862] As far as we can judge from the firing a terrific battle has raged the entire day. The roar of artillery has never ceased & from time to time the Library bell rung by the shock & the difference between discharge of heavy guns & the volleys of musketry was plainly perceptible.

Sunday 14th [December 1862] Rumors of all kinds reached us from the army. It is hard to tell which are reliable. All we know is that the enemy have twice attacked [General James] Longstreet's position & have been repulsed, but they still show an unmoved front along the river & have advanced several miles on this side of Fbg. and the great battle is still to be fought...

Tuesday [December 16, 1862]...During the morning we had visits from Genls [Rooney] Lee, Stuart, Major Pelham etc. etc. We were delighted to see them,

especially the first and to hear accounts of the battle. It must have been a great victory for us than we at first supposed as the enemy have all recrossed the river & are now nowhere to be seen. The [Confederate] Army is moving down in this direction again. Major Green came to tea & to post a strict guard around the premises as he says our nearest neighbors, the 6th La. Vol., bear a very bad character, being addicted to poultry lifting, etc"

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 well as below.

CWRTF Schedule

March 27, 2024 – Christian Keller, SOUTHERN STRATEGIES

April 24, 2024 – Doug Crenshaw, RICHMOND SHALL NOT BE GIVEN UP

May 22, 2024 – Gary Gallagher, PATHWAYS TO NEW NATIONAL LOYALTY

June 19, 2024 – Paul Brueske, THE LAST SIEGE: THE 1865 MOBILE CAMPAIGN

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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