



THE DRUM & BUGLE
Voice of the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table
Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table Newsletter
May 2020, Volume 17, Issue 5

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 May or June”

Based on guidance/orders from federal, state, and local governments and health authorities, RVCWRT is canceling or postponing all scheduled activities through at least June 10, 2020. This includes dinner meetings on May 11 and June 8 (canceled) and the May 16 bus trip (postponed until further notice). Paid bus trip

participants will be contacted individually regarding refunds. Ed Bearss will not be speaking to us as scheduled in July due to health and safety concerns. Please continue to visit our website periodically for any updates. The Executive Committee hopes everyone remains safe and healthy during this difficult time.

"The Battle of Dranesville: December 20, 1861 "
by Ryan Quint

A Review of Ryan Quint's Emerging Civil War Symposium Lecture by John Roos

Located 15 miles east of Leesburg, VA and 20 miles west of Washington DC, Dranesville, VA would become the site of a small, but significant battle. Fought on December 20, 1861, speaker Ryan Quint argues that the Battle of Dranesville was essentially two foraging expeditions that collided. The Union expedition was led by Edward Ord and the Confederate expedition was led by JEB Stuart. He also argues that coming on the heels of losing Ft. Sumter, losses at 1st Manassas, Wilson's Creek, and Balls Bluff, Dranesville did a lot to boost morale for the Union.

The Battle of Dranesville is not fought until December 1861, but how the armies came to be there began on July 22, 1861, the day after the Battle of 1st Manassas. Confederate forces pursue the retreating Union army and hold up in Fairfax Courthouse. George McClellan is called in from western Virginia to take command and reorganize the demoralized Union army in Washington. Many of the new recruits coming to join the army are from Pennsylvania. Having exceeded the state's call for volunteers, Pennsylvania reserve units are formed. They are known as the Pennsylvania Reserves for the remainder of the war. By early fall, the Union army, with all the new soldiers, created a buffer around Washington. Their line stretched from Arlington to Alexandria while the Confederates had the majority of their troops in Fairfax. The Confederates also had outposts in Vienna, Falls Church, and Bailey's Crossroads. These outposts and the Confederate flag can be seen clearly from Washington. This infuriates Lincoln. Quint notes that these sites and most of the area discussed here are long gone due to the expansion of Washington and its suburbs.

The commanding officer of these outposts was Brigadier General James Longstreet and the mounted soldiers were commanded by Colonel JEB Stuart. These two officers worked very well together, and their successes gave Stuart confidence to attack closer and closer towards Washington. The largest outpost sat atop Munson's Hill. The flag there could be seen clearly from Washington. Constant skirmishing during the late summer and early fall made it a target, but also gained Stuart credibility. Lincoln pressured McClellan to do something about that flag and on August 28, 1861 a Union force attacks, but Stuart repulses them. This was Stuart's first big test and he succeeded. That action also gave Union high command the idea that if they cannot go directly at the outposts, then go around them.

Marching towards Chainbridge, VA, Union commanders William "Baldy" Smith, Colonel Isaac Stevens, and Captain Charles Griffith arrive there in early September 1861 and setup Ft. Ethan Allen. Their goal is to secure the town of Lewinsville, VA six miles away because of its road network. Smith ordered Stevens to go to Lewinsville to forage, gather intelligence and then return without bringing on a major engagement. Stevens with his division of 1800 men from New York, Vermont, and Indiana, arrive in Lewinsville on the morning of September 11, 1861. Stevens sets up a force in defense of skirmishers circling around the town and the rest of troops in town. Griffith's four artillery guns are on each road in and out of town. Stuart is made aware of the Union soldiers in Lewinsville and gathers a mixed force of 300 men of the 13th VA and 200 mounted soldiers, as well as two artillery pieces of Captain Thomas Rosser's Washington Artillery. Major William Terrill splits the 13th VA and attacks two spots driving the Union skirmishers back. Rosser's two guns duels with Griffith's guns for about 45 minutes. After 60-90 minutes, the Union army retreats from Lewinsville to Ft. Ethan Allen. This small engagement had conflicted opinions of the outcome. The Union felt they won the skirmish because Stevens did what he was supposed to do. Forage, gather intelligence, and he did not bring on a major engagement. The Confederates felt it was their victory because the Union retreated. Stuart is promoted to Brigadier General for this. Quint states that Lewinstown is a foreshadow of Dranesville.

Late September, Union forces move back out to Lewinsville, but in force. The Pennsylvania Reserves are a part of this, and they establish Camp Pierpont at Langley. This move prompts Confederate commander General Joe Johnston to order all forces back to Centerville. This gives Washington breathing room and Union forces can forage northern Virginia. The Pennsylvania Reserves'

three brigades will forage around Dranesville three different times. The first and second forages were under familiar officers. One brigade was under General John Reynolds and the other was under General George Meade. One of those expeditions was on October 19-20, 1861. This coincided with the Union defeat at Balls Bluff. Though a defeat, it did give intelligence to road networks leading from Dranesville to Leesburg. These expeditions also gave Union forces a better understanding of the layout of the town and land surrounding Dranesville. In early November 1861, the third brigade of Pennsylvania Reserves gets General Edward Ord as their commanding officer.

December 19, 1861, Ord is given command to go to Dranesville to secure citizens believed to be enemies of the Union and to forage, then return to Langley. Ord's brigade will have 5500 men. Stuart receives word of this movement and is given command to go at the Union and forage himself. Stuart has between 1600-2500 men (Quint believes it is closer to 2500). Around noon on December 20, 1861 the two skirmish lines run into each other near Dranesville. The Union army did win the foot race to Dranesville which gave them the better and higher ground. The position of Union Skirmishers, the Bucktails and Pennsylvania Rifles, caused Confederates to get tangled in pine trees on their approach to Dranesville. The Union skirmishers fall back to the main Union line at Dranes Hill. This allows Union artillery under Captain Hezekiah Easton to have a clear line of sight at the Confederates in the trees. Lt. Col. Thomas Kane takes the 13th Pa Res. (Bucktails) to a line at the Thornton House which adds an extra layer of protection and clear fire on the attackers. A.S. Cutt's Confederate battery of four guns cannot get online despite Stuart's urging. Due to the trees and narrow road, Cutt can only deploy two guns at a time and this makes easy targets for Easton's guns on the hill. Stuart starts sending in Confederate infantry units to try to dislodge the Union artillery. These regiments attack at the same time but described here separately. The 11th VA under Colonel Garland can't see due to the trees and smoke. Two of its companies gets lost for the duration of the fight. The 10th AL under Lt. Col. James Martin ran into Pennsylvania infantry and are raked with fire as soon as they emerge from the trees. The 10th AL loses two colonels in the attack. The 6th SC are also having trouble seeing due to the trees and are ordered to take to the ground. The 1st KY Inf comes up behind the 6th SC and believe they are Union forces. The 1st KY fires on them and this causes the 6th SC to flee from the battlefield. This puts the 1st KY in the front. They get so close to the enemy that they can shout at each other in

confusion of wondering who is in their front. The 9th PA Res. realize it's the enemy when they are fired upon. This action is as close as 50-60 yards apart. Colonel Thomas Taylor of the 1st KY is separated from his command and waits until nightfall to get back to friendly lines. When the 1st KY begins to withdraw, Union infantry follows but does not press an attack. The Battle of Dranesville lasts two hours.

The aftermath of the battle saw Stuart being blamed. Many in the confederacy thought he was not worth the promotion and the high command, Johnston and Beauregard, were not impressed with him. For the Union, they held the town and loaded 100 wagons of forage. Northern press wrote about Dranesville as a huge victory and it boosted the low morale felt in the North. Gov. Andrew Curtin of Pennsylvania visited the PA Res. and wanted Dranesville sown into their flags. Confederates pushed this loss to the back of their minds as winter turned to spring and a new campaign season began with McClellan moving towards The Peninsula. Larger battles in 1862, coupled with more defeats, also pushed Dranesville back in Union memory. Yet, after the war, the 9th Pa Res. hold reunions at Dranesville to commemorate their first major engagement on the anniversary of the battle. Other PA Res. units hold events as well in the post war years as close to December 20th as possible.

The Union will suffer 68 casualties, the largest being the 9th PA Res. losing 27 men. The Confederates suffer 204 casualties. The largest ones being the 6th SC losing 69 men and the 10th AL losing 68 men. Dranesville saw 272 casualties in total.

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](#)

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

**Reprint of a write up done by Mac Wyckoff of Frank O'Reilly's
December 13, 1999 Talk**

There have been many exceptional programs during the 30+ year history of our Round Table. Frank O'Reilly's presentation in 1999, described below by Mac Wyckoff, was one of them. We are highlighting some of these treasures from the past while we look toward a brighter future.

**New Perspectives on the Battle of Fredericksburg by Frank O'Reilly
December 13, 1999, Program Reviewed by Mac Wyckoff**

On the 137th anniversary of the Battle of Fredericksburg, the second largest crowd in the ten-year history of the Round Table gathered to hear Frank O'Reilly speak on this sanguinary engagement. This listener was not disappointed. Frank, one of the co-founders of the Round Table, had finished on this very day his second book on the battle. I asked Frank, rather than simply to give a chronological review of the battle, which we all know, to speak about new interpretations he had made and new information he had discovered during his many years of research.

Frank's first new revelation was that the idea of the change of base from Warrenton to Fredericksburg was George McClellan's, not Burnside's. The reason for this shift was not because James Longstreet's Corps had blocked the Orange and Alexandria Railroad at Culpeper, but because the O & A did not have the capacity to supply the Army of the Potomac with all the materiel it needed to operate in that area. McClellan had assembled at Warrenton the largest force yet gathered on this continent, and a single-track railroad simply could not meet its needs.

On November 6, 1862, McClellan ordered a cavalry patrol under Captain Ulric Dahlgren (better known for his sinister 1864 raid on Richmond) to ascertain the strength of the Confederates in Fredericksburg and the condition of the Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Potomac rail line. He then ordered the pontoon boats sent from storage near Point of Rocks and Harpers Ferry down the Potomac to Aquia Creek. Five hours later, McClellan received word that Lincoln had replaced him with Burnside.

Learning that there were few grey-clad defenders in Fredericksburg, and that the R F & P Railroad was in good condition, Burnside adopted his friend McClellan's plan of moving overland to Falmouth. However, Lincoln opposed this option. He sent Henry Halleck to meet with Burnside on November 12 in

Warrenton. Herman Haupt, the railroad superintendent, accompanied Halleck to help convince "Old Burnie" of the need to stay on the O & A Railroad. Unknown to Halleck, he had chosen the wrong person to help argue the case, since Haupt agreed with Burnside that the shift eastward should be made.

The Army of the Potomac thus made its way Falmouth. However, Burnside did not know that he would be delayed in crossing the river. Halleck knew that the pontoons could not possibly arrive on the banks of the Rappahannock by the time the army arrived there, and yet chose to conceal this vital information from the army commander. Burnside left the meeting thinking that Halleck would take care of the pontoons, and that he would soon be moving down the R F & P toward Richmond.

The tale of the pontoons is a comedy of errors that would cause the slaughter of patriotic American boys on the plain of Fredericksburg. On November 6, fearful that his orders might be intercepted by Southern guerrillas, McClellan sent his message about moving the pontoon bridge to Aquia Landing to Harpers Ferry via Washington. From Washington, the orders went to Harpers Ferry by boat on the C & O Canal. It took six days for the orders to reach Harpers Ferry. The pontoons arrived in the nation's capital on the 15th, the same day that the Army of the Potomac left Warrenton for Falmouth. Since McClellan had been replaced, an engineer officer assumed that the pontoons were no longer needed and put them in storage.

This misconception was corrected on the 16th, but a day was spent looking for the stored ~boats. Once the pontoons were found, the officer in charge needed to find horses to move the wagons that hauled the pontoons. Another day was lost. Quartermaster General Montgomery C. Meigs provided horsepower to pull the wagons, but a large part of the motive force consisted of unbroken mules. The fiasco continued on the next day, as the rookie drivers, horses, and mules underwent rudimentary training. As Burnside's tired men trudged through the deep mud of Stafford County into Falmouth on the 19th, the pontoon train finally left Washington, part via water and the rest overland.

Mother Nature now contributed to the growing list of problems. The rain slowed the advance of the wagons on the overland route. When the wagon train reached the Occoquan River, the pontoons had to be used to cross the stream, then reloaded for their journey to the Rappahannock. Meanwhile, the pontoons sent via water arrived at the Aquia Creek supply base on the Potomac, but their arrival was a surprise. No one had arranged for wagons to

be available to haul the pontoons to the Rappahannock. By this time, Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia was well positioned to contest Burnside's movement towards Richmond, and the scene was set for the upcoming catastrophe of the 13th of December. While Burnside is perceived by late 20th century Americans as a bungling idiot, Halleck, and to a lesser extent others in Washington, are the unseen villains behind this tragic tale.

There were other culprits behind the Fredericksburg fiasco. In Frank's earlier book, finished exactly six years ago, he laid the blame on Generals Burnside, Franklin, and Reynolds for the problems in attacking Prospect Hill. He has now added one more character to this list, General James Allen Hardie. The adjutant general of the Army of the Potomac was assigned by Burnside to carry his orders to Franklin and to keep Burnside informed of developments on the southern half of the battlefield. Growing hungry during his ride from Burnside's headquarters at the Phillips House to deliver the instructions to Franklin, Hardie dismounted to have breakfast. While Hardie satisfied his hunger, Lee shifted his men to meet the expected attack. Burnside's ~ambiguous wording confused Franklin as he read the tardy orders. While Hardie knew the spirit of his commander's instructions, he stood idly by as Franklin chose to interpret the wording in the most conservative way possible. Nor did Burnside's aide notify his boss of the misunderstanding. In the aftermath of the battle, the Republican-controlled Congress placed the blame on Franklin, a member of the Democratic Party. James Hardie, like Henry Halleck, has escaped blame by his contemporaries and by historians. At least until now.

Frank imparted some other information that I found fascinating. After McClellan was relieved of his command, some of his young staff officers wanted to do something about it. Since the army couldn't march on Washington, the young men decided to take their anger out on the newspapermen who had disparaged McClellan's leadership. George Custer thrashed the New York Tribune reporter attached to the army, and got away with it. Perhaps half of the refugees who fled Fredericksburg when warned that the town would be shelled had returned to their homes by the time the battle started. The Confederate casualty rate for the battle is inflated, because many men were listed as wounded so that they could go home to get shoes. And over 27,000 Union soldiers deserted after the battle, which gave rise to the Peace Democrats on the home front.

When it appears in print, Frank's book will be a must read for everyone around Fredericksburg interested in the Civil War. For 13 years, Frank and I have

discussed the Battle of Fredericksburg. While I have only limited space to cover all the points he made in his 45-minute talk, I have never heard as thorough a presentation on the aspects of the battle that he chose to elaborate upon.

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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.

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