

## **THE DRUM & BUGLE**

**Voice of the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table**

**Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table Newsletter  
June 2017, Volume 14, Issue 6**

**Speaker:** Kathleen Logothetis Thompson  
**Topic:** "Morality or War Experience?: Definition and Treatment of Mental Illness in the Union Army"  
**When:** Monday, June 12, 2017  
**Location:** Brock's Riverside Grill  
**Times:** Social Begins 6:00 pm, Dinner 6:45 pm, Meeting Begins 7:30 p.m.

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### **Abstract on our Scheduled Speaker, Kathleen Logothetis Thompson**

Our scheduled speaker for the June 12, 2017, *Dinner Meeting* will be Kathleen Logothetis Thompson. In May 2010, Ms. Thompson graduated from Siena College with a B.A. in History and a Certificate in Revolutionary Era Studies. She earned her M.A. in History from West Virginia University in May 2012. She is currently pursuing her PhD at West Virginia University with research on mental trauma in the Civil War.

In addition, Kathleen was a seasonal interpreter at Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, this was between 2010 and 2014. Kathleen is the co-editor of Civil Discourse, a blog on the long Civil War. Ms. Thompson has been giving presentations to Civil War Roundtables since 2013 and she greatly enjoys interacting with the members of these groups.

While PTSD is in itself a modern diagnosis, mental trauma and insanity were both present during our American Civil War. Ms. Thompson's presentation will explore how the war affected the soldiers mentally and how mental trauma and insanity were treated within the Union army. The experience of soldiering and battle took a mental and physical toll on soldiers.

By the middle of the Civil War, the Union army had policies in place to treat mentally ill soldiers at the Government Hospital for the Insane, a result of the asylum movement in the antebellum period. Once placed there, soldiers recuperated under a system of *moral treatment*. Thus, the Civil War armies understood the existence of insanity and had measures in place to treat it. Most believed it to be a result of moral or physical weakness. They did not acknowledge the impact of Civil War service on the mental state of the soldiers.

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**Reminder: Please contact Bob Jones to order your dinner in advance To confirm reservations: Telephone Bob Jones @ 540-399-1702 or send an e-mail to [cwrtddinner@yahoo.com](mailto:cwrtddinner@yahoo.com) or [bobnpeg1954@gmail.com](mailto:bobnpeg1954@gmail.com)**

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## **"Burnsides Mud March"**

**Presented by Frank O'Reilly**

**A review of our May 8, 2017, program by Greg Mertz**

The *Mud March* was a nearly bloodless campaign that came nearer to ruining the Union Army of the Potomac than many of their campaigns in which the army had suffered very heavy casualties. That's how our May speaker, Frank O'Reilly, introduced this obscure but instrumental campaign. Even after some of the army's worst defeats in battle, the morale of the army had remained relatively high, but in the aftermath of the January 18 – 23, 1863, *Mud March*, the spirit of the troops were never lower.

Though the pressure of delivering a victory for Abraham Lincoln prior to the release of the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, had greatly contributed to the disastrous Battle of Fredericksburg, on December 11 – 13, 1862, Union army commander Ambrose E. Burnside had not given up hope of delivering to the president a triumph before the issuance of the controversial decree. On December 31, Burnside had planned to cross the Rappahannock River south of Fredericksburg, there to launch a new campaign.

However, one day before the campaign was to get underway, two Union generals, John Newton and John Cochrane, traveled to Washington and obtained an audience with President Lincoln. O'Reilly stressed that the generals presented Lincoln with some of the negative symptoms from which the army was suffering, but they stopped short of indicating that the source of the problems or in offering their solution – the removal of Burnside -- to the commander in chief.

Lincoln informed Burnside that he must not move his army without his first meeting with him. Lincoln explained that not a single officer in the army had confidence in Burnside's plan, which was rather puzzling to the army commander since he had not shared it with anyone. It became evident to Burnside that someone within the army had provided Lincoln with some information about the conditions in the army. However, the president would not share with his commander who it was who had betrayed him.

Lincoln, Burnside and general-in-chief Henry W. Halleck developed a new plan. Instead of moving downstream from Fredericksburg as Burnside had originally planned, the new proposal was to only demonstrate downstream then to turn and make the army's main thrust upstream toward Banks' Ford and U.S. Ford. The high officials distanced themselves from the plan, neither approving nor disapproving Burnside's designs.

Burnside put the Union army in motion. Yet while on the Confederate side of the Rappahannock River, Union spy Reuben McGee reported that the enemy had shifted west towards the U.S. Ford and that they had marched past Banks' Ford without paying it any heed.

Confederate army commander, Robert E. Lee, was absent in Richmond, so James Longstreet as the ranking officer was in charge. Though Longstreet correctly calculated the Union movement to be upstream from Fredericksburg, *Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson* thought that the diversion downstream from Fredericksburg was actually the main thrust. Longstreet had ordered Jackson to shift to the west, but the quirky corps commander would only obey orders from General Lee.

McGee pocketed \$1,500.00 for risking his life to deliver the news of the Confederate reaction and Burnside adjusted his plan. Now directing all of his forces to the lightly defended crossing. Since Banks' Ford had no bridge, the pontoon bridges that had had a hapless role in the recent Fredericksburg Campaign, would once again have a major role in the maneuver.

The weather, the road conditions and the morale of the army were all superior. But that all changed very quickly, starting with a turn in the weather. At 7:00 p.m. the patter of rain woke an exhausted Burnside. Next, the roads deteriorated from the downpour. The hard clay surface of the ground had a sandy base to it. As soon as the clay softened everything on top of it sank, including wagon wheels and the legs of draft animals as well as soldiers.

As many as 28 horses were attached to a caisson to try to tug it out of the mud, but this was to no avail. Efforts by the teamsters to swear the horses and mules out of the mud earned one ravine the sobriquet "*Profanity Gulch*" – the foul language being audible at Burnside's headquarters. The obedient animals tried to pull their loads until they got so weak that they collapsed and drowned in the muddy water. It was reported that 52 dead horses and mules were counted along one mile of the road that the army traversed.

Of the 80 pontoons being hauled along the road, only 15 of them were anywhere near the river – five short of what was needed to construct just one bridge. When forage could not be brought up to feed the weakening animals, some mules began eating the wooden pontoons. In an effort to salvage the specialized equipment, Union soldiers fed the mules nearby fence rails. Some animals ate the manes and tails off of each other.

When Lee concluded his visit to Richmond and returned to Fredericksburg, he moved upstream, including a concentration of troops at Banks' Ford. Confederates opened fire with artillery across the river in the vicinity of Banks' Ford, but no Union cannon could get into position to respond with counter-artillery fire. Union morale, like everything else in the army, also sank. Confederates taunted the Union soldiers by painting messages on the roofs of barns such as "*Burnside stuck in the mud.*" As with the animals, the soldiers got hungry, and when men with empty stomachs were issued alcohol, the situation went from bad to worse. Many soldiers felt that it would not be possible to save the Union.

Though Burnside gave up on his campaign, admitting that he could no longer go forward, neither could he go back for the time being, as the army had no choice but to stay put and wait for the rain to stop and, of course, for the mud to dry. The army that was so anxious to remove the stain of the *Battle of Fredericksburg* upon its reputation instead added yet another blemish to its record.

Burnside drafted an order to dismiss a dozen high ranking officers from the army for ruining morale in the ranks. A member of his staff pointed out to Burnside that he did not have that authority to cashier the officers. The army commander then, wrote out his resignation, offering Lincoln a choice of accepting one or the other. In the end,

Lincoln accepted Burnside's resignation. O'Reilly concluded that in the aftermath of Burnside's downfall, the Union Army became a more hardy entity of the war effort.

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## **The Civil War Round Table of Fredericksburg**

**By Bob Jones**

As a courtesy, the RVCWRT is providing as a regular feature every month, the ongoing scheduled speakers for the CWRTF's Program Year. The *Civil War Round Table of Fredericksburg* normally meets on the fourth Wednesday of every month (except for the meeting being held on the third Wednesday in June 2017). Their Dinner Meetings are held at the MWW's Jepson Center located at 1119 Hanover Street, Fredericksburg, VA, dinner cost is \$32.00 for each person. Advance reservations should be made by telephoning 540-361-2105. As noted below, the scheduled speaker for the upcoming June 21, 2017\* meeting will be Shannon Pritchard. Ms. Pritchard will present "*Collecting the Confederacy*."



## **CWRTF's Scheduled Speakers For the 2017 Program Year**

June 21, 2017*	Shannon Pritchard – Collecting the Confederacy
Sept. 27, 2017	James R. (Bud) Robertson – Robert E. Lee and the Quest for Peace
Oct. 25, 2017	Eric Buckland – Mosby's Men
Nov. 15, 2017	Robert Lee Hodge – Filming The Civil War With Historical Accuracy Part 2

\*This meeting date occurs on the 3rd Wednesday during the month of June

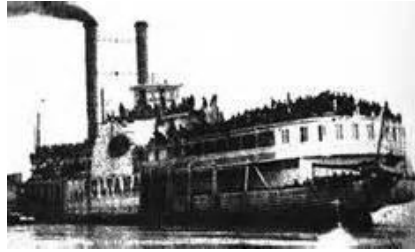
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## **The RVCWRT Bulletin Board**

**By Jim Smithfield**

The RVCWRT maintains a special bulletin board that is placed against the right side wall where guests enter the dining room. This Bulletin Board is utilized during each of our dinner meetings. Members will find many different articles about the Civil War placed there. These are there to be requested by members for personal reading. Also, there is information posted on the bulletin board on upcoming Civil War related events, along with various items of interest. Along with the various posted announcements, Civil War articles and related material will be placed there. These items may each be requested or borrowed to take home and read.

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## **The SS Sultana Disaster, April 27, 1865**

**By Jim Smithfield**

Before dawn on the morning of April 27, 1865, three of the four boilers on the Union steamboat, SS *Sultana* exploded, killing more than 1,700 recently released POWs and civilians. This tragedy has often been called the worst maritime disaster in United States History.

This occurred when towards the end of the Civil War, where huge numbers of recently paroled military prisoners needed to be sent home. This was most often done via steamboats with government contracts. These were previously imprisoned Union soldiers from Cahaba (Alabama) and Andersonville (Georgia). The men had been sent to Camp Fisk, near Vicksburg, Mississippi. At Vicksburg, these paroled soldiers were to be discharged and sent home.

Since the various steamboat captains were each paid by the head, over 2,155 of these paroled soldiers were crammed onboard the *Sultana* to begin their journey home. However, the *Sultana* had a legal capacity to carry a total of 376 passengers, not the well over 2,000 on board. Between the private passengers (including women and children), the soldiers, and the boat's crew, there are several estimates placing the number aboard the *Sultana* as high as 2,155 passengers. In fact, there were so many passengers standing on the various decks of the steamboat that each deck of the multi-level boat had to be reinforced. This was done just to keep those decks from collapsing under the massive weight being placed upon them.

Leaving Vicksburg, the now extremely overcrowded and notably top-heavy steamboat made its way up the Mississippi River toward Cairo, Illinois. There, they picked up and let off a few of the private passengers. Having passed Memphis, it was around 2:00 a.m. on the morning of the 27th, when three of the *Sultana's* four boilers exploded. There were some who later suggested that this had occurred due to sabotage. The exploding boilers released scalding steam and set the steamboat on fire. Many of the people jumped into the water, but since most of the POWs aboard were in such a weakened condition, they quickly drowned.

About an hour and a half later, the first survivors had drifted downriver to Memphis, where their cries summoned help. Rescue parties were sent out, but by the time they were called off that same afternoon, only about 700 individuals had been saved. About 200 to 300 of those who had been saved from the waters died very soon after from injuries and general exposure. Estimates vary, but the one commonly accepted death toll for the disaster is 1,700 total dead.

No one was ever really held responsible for the *Sultana's* fate. Yet, the assistant adjutant general for the region, Captain Frederick Speed, was, however, found guilty at a court-martial. This was performed for his role in the massive overcrowding onboard the *Sultana*. Somewhat later, that verdict was reversed.

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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](http://www.RVCWRT.org). Yearly membership dues are \$35.00 for individuals, \$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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