



THE DRUM & BUGLE
Voice of the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table
February 2023, Volume 20, Issue 2

Speaker: Eric Buckland
Topic: “Mosby’s Rangers vs. Cole’s Cavalry”
When: Monday February 13, 2023
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

Eric Buckland “Mosby’s Rangers vs. Cole’s Cavalry”

Eric graduated from the University of Kansas with a B.A. in English and a commission as a 2LT in the United States Army. Most of his 22-year military career - he retired from the Army as a LTC - was spent in Special Operations (Special Forces, Psychological Operations and Civil Affairs). He had multiple deployments to Panama, Honduras and El Salvador in the 1980's. He believes that his military experience provides him with a unique understanding of Mosby's Rangers. Some of his awards include the Special

Forces and Ranger Tabs, Master Parachutist Badge, Combat Diver Badge and the Combat Infantryman's badge. He retired in 1999 as a Lieutenant Colonel.

His interest in Mosby's Rangers began when he was a young boy and increased during his time in the military. His first book, Mosby's Keydet Rangers (which has been re-titled From Rockbridge to Loudoun: Mosby's Keydet Rangers and contains almost 200 more pages of information and 60 new photos), began as a tribute to both the Rangers and his youngest son, who was then a Rat at VMI. While working on that book, he constantly found bits and pieces of information on other Rangers (not affiliated with VMI) and all of those became the genesis for my next books. He is in his third term currently as the President of The Stuart-Mosby Historical Society.

“James Longstreet and the American Civil War”

by Harold Knudsen

A Review of the January 2023 Program by Greg Mertz

James Longstreet was once held in high esteem as a gifted Confederate general. But he fell out of favor, being criticized for not properly supporting Lee at Gettysburg -- contributing to that defeat, for backing reconstruction measures, and for joining the Republican Party. “Lost Cause” proponents lambasted Longstreet, blaming his actions as prominent reasons for why the Confederacy was defeated.

But our speaker Harold Knudsen has examined Longstreet through the lens of a professional military officer. He has been able to put aside the politics and propaganda that has influenced the Lost Cause assessment of the general. Knudsen views Longstreet as a forward-thinking general and presented examples contributing to this appraisal.

Longstreet and his fellow West Point classmates were instructed in the methods of Napoleonic warfare in which, as Knudsen noted, “tactical offense was dominant.” It was while making one such assault in the Mexican War at Molino del Rey when a young Lieut. Longstreet was wounded in the leg. Knudsen suggests that Longstreet learned valuable lessons from that fight.

Longstreet grew to appreciate the value of fighting on defensive, as he did in the battle of Antietam or Sharpsburg. A portion of Longstreet’s command

occupied a sunken road that would later be called the Bloody Lane. Though the Confederates were outnumbered, they made good use of the terrain. However, the Confederates in the lane were lower than the attacking Federal troops. When the Federal soldiers reached a point above the Confederate line where they could open fire, the sunken road only offered protection for the lower portion of the legs of Confederate soldiers. The Confederates only withdrew from the Bloody Lane when Federals were able to flank it and fire down the length of the road. Longstreet would learn important lessons from his fighting in the Bloody Lane as well.

Longstreet's next battle was at Fredericksburg, where Lee sent him ahead of the rest of the army to select a position from which to block the Federal army. A portion of Longstreet's line occupied another sunken road, only one that was much stronger than the one his men utilized at Sharpsburg. The Fredericksburg position overlooked a large open plain of a half mile that sloped down. The Sunken Road was lined with a stone wall that not only protected Confederate soldiers from the chest on down, but riflemen could steady their guns by resting them on top of the wall, improving their accuracy. Federal soldiers could not maneuver through the ground on either side of the plain and were practically forced to move through the plain across what modern soldiers call a "kill zone."

In addition to the benefits the Sunken Road and stone wall offered to the Confederate infantrymen, the gray-clad artillerymen were also able to deploy to advantage due to some organizational changes. The Confederate army had shifted to an artillery battalion system, grouping the guns together rather than attaching them to infantry commands. That artillery battalion commander was free to select where the guns were to be deployed, and the cannon no longer needed to select a position within the bounds of ground held by the infantry it had been assigned to accompany. When attached to an infantry command, artillerymen were often confined to fire at targets directly in front of them, which was often a target with little depth and not a situation that enabled the cannon to be used most effectively.

At Fredericksburg, the guns in the vicinity of the Sunken Road were under the direction of Col. E. P. Alexander. He positioned some of the cannon to the north and south of the Sunken Road so that they could fire at an angle across the ground in front of the Sunken Road. The ensuing cross-fire of

cannon meant that every portion of the field was covered by some artillery piece. The result was a synchronization of both branches of the army for interlocking fields of fire. As a consequence of Longstreet's employment of both his infantry and his artillery, the engagement along the Sunken Road was the most lop-sided Federal defeat of the entire war.

In the aftermath of the battle of Fredericksburg, Longstreet demonstrated an understanding of the broad strategic front as well. Longstreet felt that the Confederacy could win militarily if they could frustrate the Federal war effort until the November 1864 presidential election when the United States might elect a leader who would not be committed to bringing the Civil War to a successful conclusion for the North. Longstreet advocated for the "defensive offensive" in which Confederate forces east of the Mississippi River held a defensive posture, but utilized the advantages of interior lines of transportation to mass troops against a targeted Federal force. By stripping some Confederate armies to reinforce other armies, the Confederates might achieve parity or even superior numbers at the point where they chose to engage the Federals. The proposal was that in the summer of 1863 Lee might either reinforce Gen. Braxton Bragg in Tennessee, or Gen. Joseph E. Johnston in Mississippi.

In the end, Lee would not send any troops out west until late in the summer and would instead spend the late spring and early summer engaged in what would become the Gettysburg Campaign. Knudsen was critical of Lee's conduct of the campaign in three respects. First, Lee did not declare an objective of the campaign – he did not identify a location that was to be the army's target nor its purpose and what the army should do when it reached the selected place. Second, when Lee was within reach of taking Harrisburg and had an opportunity to embarrass the Lincoln administration by seizing the capitol of Pennsylvania. Lee chose to concentrate his army in the Cashtown-Gettysburg area. Third, when Lee ordered the attack on the Union left flank for July 2, 1863, he was unable to anticipate that the Union line might change between the times when the orders were issued to the time when the assault would be made. The Confederate army was unable to reassess the situation and make necessary adjustments that might have offered opportunities for greater Confederate success.

Knudsen did not have time to elaborate on Longstreet at Chickamauga. He briefly explained that Longstreet demonstrated a grasp of a concept that was military doctrine during World War II but was not fully understood during the Civil War about packing a lot of power along a narrow front at the point of the main attack. When Longstreet assaulted the Brotherton Farm at Chickamauga, he put that concept into practice, and with the help of a Federal division being moved at an inopportune moment, the Confederates blew a huge hole in the Federal line.

Longstreet demonstrated an understanding of when the defensive was a better option than the offensive as well as how to make adjustments that increased the chances of offensive operations being successful. In each Knudsen felt that Longstreet was following modern principles that were not typically understood during the Civil War.

News from the Central Virginia Battlefield Trust

Below is a link to a letter from the Central Virginia Battlefield Trust about a new program they are starting. This email did go out to the roundtable, but if you did not receive it, we wanted to supply it here. If you are unable to open it, we will have information at the meeting.



Dear Civil War
Enthusiasts and Pre:

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.cwrtf.org, as well as below. As with our round table, things are subject to change due to the ups and downs of Covid.

CWRTF Schedule

February 22, 2023 - Col (R) John Biemeck, CIVIL WAR ORDNANCE

March 22, 2023 - John Quarstein, THE POWER OF IRON OVER WOOD

April 26, 2023 - Codie Eash, US SIGNAL CORPS

May 24, 2023 - Stephen Cushman, THE GENERAL'S CIVIL WAR: WHAT THEIR MEMOIRS CAN TEACH US TODAY

June 21, 2023 - Paul Brueske, THE LAST SIEGE - 1865 MOBILE CAMPAIGN

September 27, 2023 - John Vagnetti, THE CIVIL WAR, A POSTAL SYSTEM DIVIDED

October 25, 2023 - Sarah Kay Bierle, THE BATTLE OF CEDAR CREEK

November 15, 2023 - Ken Rutherford, AMERICA'S BURIED HISTORY: LANDMINES IN THE CIVIL WAR

March 27, 2024 - Christian Keller, SOUTHERN STRATEGIES

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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