



**THE DRUM & BUGLE**  
**Voice of the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table**  
**May 2022, Volume 19, Issue 5**

**Speaker:** Ron Kirkwood  
**Topic:** Too Much for Human Endurance: The George Spangle Farm Hospitals and the Battle of Gettysburg  
**When:** Monday May 9, 2022  
**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](http://www.rappvalleycivilwar.org)  
**Our Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/rvcwrt](http://www.facebook.com/rvcwrt)

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

Ron Kirkwood is the author of “Too Much for Human Endurance: The George Spangler Farm Hospitals and the Battle of Gettysburg,” which was published in June 2019. The book’s two hardcover editions sold out and it is now available in paperback, audio and E-reader.

Kirkwood argues in “Too Much for Human Endurance” that the George Spangler farm was the most important farm in the Battle of Gettysburg, revealing factors that have been overlooked for generations. The book and his presentation also offer newly found information about Confederate Brig. Gen. Lewis A. Armistead’s time at Spangler, the Spanglers, the Army of the Potomac Artillery Reserve and stories of the suffering and heroism of the surgeons, nurses, wounded and mortally wounded at the two hospitals on the Spanglers’ land.

Kirkwood is retired after a 40-year career as an editor and writer in newspapers and magazines including USA TODAY, the Baltimore Sun, the Harrisburg Patriot-News and the York Daily Record. He edited national magazines for USA TODAY Sports and was National Football League editor for USA TODAY Sports Weekly. He won numerous state, regional and national writing and editing awards during his career and managed the 32-person copy desk in Harrisburg when the newspaper won a Pulitzer Prize in 2012. Kirkwood is a Michigan native and graduate of Central Michigan University, where he has returned as guest speaker to journalism classes as part of the school’s Hearst Visiting Professionals series.

Kirkwood has been a Gettysburg Foundation guide at the George Spangler Farm Civil War Field Hospital Site since it opened in 2013. He lives in York, Pa., with his wife of 45 years, Barbara.

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**“Shield of Earth: The Civil War Defenses of Washington”  
by Brian Briones  
A Review of the April 2022 Program by Greg Mertz**

On May 26, 1861 the Virginia ordinance of secession went into effect. With the neighbors to the nation’s capital being enemies of the United States, Federal soldiers secured the bridges linking Washington with Virginia, posting guards and erecting barricades. But the defeat of Federal forces at the July 21, 1861 first battle of Manassas caused authorities to give greater consideration to the defense of Washinton. Proper protection of the seat of government and the city’s facilities supporting important functions of the war effort required more substantial defenses.

The task of laying out and constructing earthworks to defend the city fell to Brig. Gen. John G. Barnard. The officer was well qualified for the task – he

would spend 48 years in the army corps of engineers. Forts placed about a half mile apart dotted the landscape forming an “integrated defensive network” from Silver Springs to the north, the Anacostia River to the east, Alexandria to the south, and Falls Church to the west. Washington and Alexandria would become the most fortified “city” in the western hemisphere – and perhaps the most heavily defended place in the world.

The many military activities of Washington and environs demanded substantial defenses. The railroads passing through Alexandria made it a hub and it also contained a deep-water sea port for the transportation of troops and supplies. Washington was a central staging area for troops, including a facility appropriately named “Soldier’s Rest,” where the U.S. Sanitary Commission provide newly arrived troops a place where they could eat and sleep after debarking from their trains. The area also contained multiple military hospitals.

Barnard’s earthworks were a model of military engineering. In the gaps between the forts along the front, other forts were constructed along a line further to the rear. Any attacking force would endure a destructive crossfire. Bombproofs were constructed of wooden frames with dirt piled on top and around the protective rooms. Dirt was the preferred material for the defensive works. Brick forts were expensive, required trained masons to build, and brick shattered when struck by artillery. But dirt was both cheap and readily available. The construction required no special skills – anyone can dig up the ground. Earth absorbed artillery rounds. Briones indicated that the troops declared that “spades were trumps and every man had a full hand.”

The troops also cleared fields of fire for about two miles in front of the fortifications. When chopping down trees on the hillsides in front of the high ground upon which forts were placed, the men started at the bottom of the hill. They chopped the trees until they were about to fall, and then moved on to the trees just uphill. When they reached the top of the hill, a bugle call instructed all of the men to make the final chop to the top trees. As the felled trees at the top of the hill landed on the trees below it, the weight caused them to also fall, initiating a domino effect as the trees came down in a “wave of falling timber” as Briones described it. The tree limbs were sharpened and interwoven to create another barrier in front of the earthworks.

Rain was the greatest threat to the earthworks. Sod was necessary to hold the dirt in place. Walking on the grass, and the potential of compacting the soil so that grass roots would not grow in it, was a punishable offense. Wooden cannon platforms were built in areas where the soldiers must stand.

Garrison duty in the Washington defenses had its advantages when compared with troops assigned to a field army. The soldiers were rarely under gunfire, and their main duty was drilling. Being stationed at a fort meant they were not sent on long campaign marches. The men lived in barracks with bunks and other furniture, and the leadership had brick officer's quarters. Meals were served in mess facilities. The troops had an opportunity to be tourists when on leave. Briones showed a photograph of an artifact taken by a soldier as a sightseeing souvenir; it was the letter "O" from a sign at the "Marshall House" in Alexandria, where Col. Elmer Ellsworth had been shot and killed – one of the war's early martyrs for the Union cause.

The soldiers stationed in the forts belonged to "Heavy Artillery" units, but the men were also trained as infantrymen. Should the forts ever be assaulted, advancing troops would first come under artillery fire. They were forced to endure being shot as they slowed their pace to pick their way through the abatis of interwoven tree limbs. They next faced another space of open ground where they came under both short range artillery rounds and infantry fire. Beyond that was a 10-foot-deep ditch they dropped into and a steep parapet of about 20 feet to climb. Even if attackers overwhelmed the defenders on top of the parapet, the garrison could still fall back and regroup on the firing steps of the magazines on the interior of the forts.

The only time Confederates tested the Washington defenses was on July 11-12, 1864. Confederate Gen. Jubal A. Early attacked the northern portion of the defenses at Fort Stevens in Silver Springs, Maryland. The goal of the Confederates was to be enough of a threat to Washington that Federal forces would be compelled to take some of the pressure off of Lee's army in Petersburg.

The forts on either side -- Forts De Russey and Slocum -- provided supporting fire, as Barnard's plan to subject attackers to a crossfire was put into practice. Since many of the Heavy Artillery units had been sent from the Washington defenses to the field armies for the Overland Campaign in the

spring of 1864, guns were provided to government employees working in Washington offices to join in the battle of Fort Stevens.

Famously Abraham Lincoln became the only sitting president to ever be under enemy fire when he went to Fort Stevens to witness the battle. Confederate projectiles were close enough to cause Lincoln to duck and a man a few steps away from the president was shot in the leg. Future supreme court justice Oliver Wendel Holmes was one of the veteran soldiers sent to defend the capital, and he is said to have shouted "Get down you dang fool" to the chief executive.

The battle of Fort Stevens showed that the Washington defenses had accomplished what they were intended to do. The fortifications allowed the defenders to hold off the Confederates long enough for Federal troops from the VI and XIX corps to arrive and make further Confederate assaults futile.

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## **Castle Pinckney**

Having toured around Charleston, SC, I thought I had seen a ton of historic locations connected to the Civil War, and earlier American history. This one slipped through the cracks. Here is an article about the forgotten POW camp for some of the earliest Union POWs from 1<sup>st</sup> Manassas and beyond.

[https://www.historynet.com/sumter-overlooked-castle-pinckney/?utm\\_source=facebook&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_campaign=fb\\_civilwartimes&fbclid=IwAR3P2JX0rjBi-Mpdt\\_ibUgy9Njw1JUUtPO8iaaWbmW6Zxn6IAXpL7tvNxIE](https://www.historynet.com/sumter-overlooked-castle-pinckney/?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=fb_civilwartimes&fbclid=IwAR3P2JX0rjBi-Mpdt_ibUgy9Njw1JUUtPO8iaaWbmW6Zxn6IAXpL7tvNxIE)

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## **8th Annual Emerging Civil War Symposium at Stevenson Ride - August 5-7, 2022**

Theme: **Great "What Ifs?" of the Civil War**

Keynote Speaker: Gary Adelman: "Speculation Run Amok: Fun with Gettysburg's What If's."

**Early Bird Tickets – \$200.00**

Visit <https://emergingcivilwar.com/2022-symposium> to learn more

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## **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](http://www.cwrftf.org). As with our round table, things are subject to change due to the ups and downs of Covid.

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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. The newsletter is available on our website at [www.rappvalleycivilwar.org](http://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.

**Newsletter Editor and Webmaster:** John Roos

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## **The RVCWRT Executive Committee**

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