



**THE DRUM & BUGLE**  
**Voice of the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table**  
**November 2023, Volume 20, Issue 11**

**Speaker:** Peter Rasmussen  
**Topic:** "Military Justice During the Civil War: the Court Martial of Fitz-John Porter"  
**When:** Monday November 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](http://www.rappvalleycivilwar.org)  
**Our Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/rvcwrt](https://www.facebook.com/rvcwrt)

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**Peter Rasmussen "Military Justice During the Civil War: the Court Martial of Fitz-John Porter"**

Peter majored in history at DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana and holds a law degree and a master's degree in history from the University of Illinois. In addition to his legal work, he was an adjunct history professor for many years. You can often find him at George Washington's Ferry Farm, where he serves as a volunteer guide, or performing in Community Theater.

Fitz John Porter found himself at the intersection of law, politics and war in late 1862. Tried for alleged misconduct at Second Manassas, Porter was convicted and cashiered from the army and barred from government service. A review board convened years later found quite differently, that his conduct was "faithful and judicious." Which panel was right? Both, or neither.

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**"Remembrance and Legacy: John Reynolds and his Time as Corps Commander"**

**by John Roos**

**A Review of the October 2023 Program by John Roos**

The speaker started by bringing up the fact that it was the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the premiere of the movie Gettysburg. He used this to describe the scene when General John Reynolds arrived on the field in the movie. This setup the chance to make a point of how the Civil War has a strong tendency to be romanticized. Using General Reynolds as a case study, the speaker started talking about how we remember Civil War figures.

He makes it a point to say that he could do this with almost anyone from the Civil War. Reynolds is just a great case study figure. He also makes it a point to clarify he does think Reynolds was a very good soldier and commander. The part of the Reynolds story that made the speaker question its validity is the idea that so many people think he was "the best, or greatest, corps commander killed at Gettysburg.

As a child, the speaker was enamored, like most are, with the Reynolds story at Gettysburg. When he became an intern at the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania Military Park, his understanding of the war grew. So too did his understanding that sometimes popular history has a tendency to become the dominant narrative. Reynolds has four monuments in Gettysburg. A huge equestrian monument, a wounding marker, the building he was brought to has a plaque, and a monument in the national cemetery. It is easy with all of this memorialization to see Reynolds in this larger than life persona.

What the speaker discovered is that during his time as a corps commander, Reynolds was not what the Gettysburg lore has come to portray. First, at Fredericksburg, it was the complete opposite of Gettysburg. Where at Gettysburg was so far to the front he got killed in action, at Fredericksburg, Reynolds was so far from the front that he had no idea the progress his

troops had made, nor did he know the validity of the situation. The speaker did acknowledge that this was Reynolds's first campaign as a corps commander and everyone does make mistakes, he also acknowledges that as a seasoned soldier and officer, Reynolds should not have been unreachable by his subordinate commanders. Reynolds's second campaign as a corps commander was Chancellorsville. Reynolds and his men were nonfactors in the battle or overall outcome of the campaign.

The next campaign was Gettysburg. With one campaign not being present on the battlefield when his men needed him, and another where he and his men were not involved, the speaker asked the question, where is this greatness that gets associated with Reynolds as a corps commander. He reiterated that this is not a talk on Reynolds as a soldier, rather, a talk on how we remember these men and women from the Civil War. Do we use the correct terminology on them when we talk about them, or do we just take things at face value as pop culture has given us? He ended with asking everyone to think for a second if they know where the Hancock and Sickles' wounding markers are at Gettysburg. Reynolds is very prevalent on the Gettysburg battlefield in several ways. The ultimate challenge by the speaker was for us to do our own research and don't take what everyone says about these figures at face value.

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## **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](mailto:executivedirector@cvbt.org) .

Office: 540-374-0900

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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.cwrft.org](http://www.cwrft.org), as well as below.

#### CWRTF Schedule

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

January 24, 2024 – Bert Dunkerly, THE BROWN'S ISLAND EXPLOSION

February 28, 2024 – Scott Boyd, *THE HUNLEY*

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

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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**

**President:** Charlie Seifert

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