



THE DRUM & BUGLE
Voice of the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table
December 2025, Volume 22, Issue 12

Speaker: Kristopher White
Topic: "Christmas in the Civil War"
When: December 8, 2025
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

Kristopher White "Christmas in the Civil War"

Kristopher White is the deputy director of education at the American Battlefield Trust. White is a graduate of Norwich University with an M.A. in Military History, as well as a graduate of California University of Pennsylvania with a B.A. in History. For nearly five years, he served as a ranger-historian at Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park. White is the co-founder and founding chief historian of Emerging Civil War and is also the co-creator of the Engaging the Civil War Series. An award-winning speaker

and editor, White has authored, co-authored, or edited nearly two-dozen books. He frequently leads tours in the United States and abroad.

The Civil War took many fathers, brothers, sons, and more away from their homes. Christmas back then, just as today, holds a special place for many when it comes to family, friends, and togetherness. Today we have easy ways to communicate with loved ones during Christmas. What was it like in the 1860s though? Kristopher White will walk about this topic at our next meeting.

**“The Battle of Cool Springs”
by Jonathan Noyalas**

A Review of the November 2025 Program by Greg Mertz

Gen. Jubal A. Early with a force of about 10,000 Confederates had advanced up the Shenandoah Valley and had threatened the defenses of Washington on July 11-12, 1864. Many of Early’s men felt that they had accomplished their mission just by firing on the fortifications guarding the capital. One soldier noted that had they actually captured Washington, “the advantages to us perhaps, would have been temporary.”

The exhausted Confederates retraced their steps back into the Shenandoah Valley, crossing the Blue Ridge at Snicker’s Gap, and taking position on the west side of the Shenandoah River at Castleman’s Ferry. While Federal General in Chief Ulysses S. Grant intended to pursue Early, he first needed to place someone in command of the task. That person was Gen. Horatio Wright. His mission was to destroy the enemy forces to such a degree that Early would be unable to threaten Washington again.

The day after Federal cavalry probed Confederate positions, the Federal Army of West Virginia, under Gen. George Crook was ordered to attack. On July 18 Crook sent his cavalry under Gen. Alfred Duffie further south to Ashby’s Gap in the Blue Ridge, placing the horsemen between Early and Richmond. Crook then crossed an infantry division of 5,000 men under Col. Joseph Thoburn further north of Castleman’s Ferry at Cool Spring, planning to flank the Confederates out of their position along the bank of the Shenandoah River.

Even though the region was experiencing drought conditions, pockets of the river were still deep, and the river contained other hazards that were often difficult to recognize. John Gundy of the 170th Ohio, got his left leg caught, requiring several of his fellow soldiers to pull him out. But his groin ruptured in the process and he died from an enemy not often considered to be as deadly as it was – the environment.

As Thoburn's men captured Confederate prisoners, the Federals soon realized that the lone blue-clad division was facing three times their number. Thoburn informed Crook that he risked being annihilated. Thoburn's mission was then changed. They should forget about the movement downstream, and instead stay in place.

Crook then observed the sun's reflection off of the gun barrels of Confederate soldiers moving on Thoburn and argued that Wright should withdraw Thoburn's men. Instead, Wright ordered the division of Gen. James Rickett's to cross over and go to Thoburn's aid. But before any Federal help could arrive, a Confederate division under Gen. Gabriel Wharton applied pressure to Thoburn's left as a demonstration, while another division commanded by Gen. Robert Rodes struck Thoburn's right flank.

About 1,000 dismounted Federal cavalymen, who had turned in the carbines they had been accustomed to firing just two weeks before the battle, had little time to get acquainted with their muzzle loading rifled muskets. They got off perhaps two rounds before they broke for the rear.

Rickett's arrived on the east bank of the river in time to see the panic-stricken dismounted troopers fleeing the field. Rickett's declined to commit his forces to what appeared to be a losing proposition and argued with Crook about the proper course of action. Many of the men in the ranks of Rickett's division wanted to help Thoburn's men and could not understand why they were not ordered to do so. But instead of going to Thoburn's aid, Rickett's men sustained some casualties from Confederate artillery fire, watching as Thoburn's men held against three attacks by Rodes' division. Some of Rodes' men considered their fighting at Cool Spring to be the most severe combat they experienced during the entire war. Thoburn's men retreated across the river under the cover of darkness.

A chaplain concluded that Wright refused to provide assistance because he hated Crook. After Cool Spring, the two generals did not get along, not only for the remainder of the campaign, but for the rest of their lives.

After Early's victory at Cool Spring, Federal cavalry under Gen. William W. Averell moved toward Early's rear from Martinsburg to the north. So, Early withdrew west to Winchester and thence south to Strasburg. Wright followed Early for a few miles, concluding that the Confederates had returned back to Petersburg to rejoin Lee's army. Wright reported to the War Department that his mission had been accomplished.

But on July 24, 1864, just six days after the Battle of Cool Spring, an outnumbered Crook was once again defeated by Early in the Second Battle of Kernstown. Early followed up this victory by sending Gen. McCausland to burn Chambersburg, Pennsylvania on July 30. It was obvious that Wright had not only been wrong about Early leaving the Shenandoah Valley, but he had utterly failed to destroy Early's capabilities to wreak havoc in the Valley. Grant soon replaced Wright with Gen. Philip H. Sheridan as the new commander of the Shenandoah Valley and a new phase of the campaign that would deliver Federal victories.

Noyalas poignantly concluded his program by pointing out that while the Battle of Cool Spring may not have had the consequences, or quantity of troops, or the number of casualties for it to be considered a major battle, but for the soldiers and their families who suffered because of what happened at Cool Spring, it was the most important moment of the war for them. Among the examples of anguish resulting from the battle that Noyalas shared during his closing remarks, he indicated that two friends of a color bearer were killed in the battle, and he was certain that those bullets were intended for him. He was tormented by that belief for the rest of his life.

Important Information about the Park's Buildings

I would like to thank Alan Zirkle for putting this message out with his History Alert emails. If you are not subscribed to Alan's emails, here is some important maintenance and hours information for the Fredericksburg Battlefield Visitor Center and Chatham Manor. Upcoming maintenance projects will cause Fredericksburg Battlefield Visitor Center and Chatham

to close on August 4, 2025. Fredericksburg Battlefield Visitor Center will close for 6 to 7 months while the building undergoes multiple construction projects including the installation of a fire suppression system, a waterline upgrade project, and an electrical system upgrade. The Park Store next to the Fredericksburg Battlefield Visitor Center will remain open daily, 9 am-5 pm, and park staff will be available to provide education and orientation to the battlefield through mid-October, after which park staff will be available on a reduced schedule.

The Chatham gate will remain open 9 am-5 pm through the duration of the project. Chatham will close for about a year for an interior rehabilitation project that will include lead paint encapsulation, new carpet, and plaster repair. Chatham underwent a fire suppression system installation this past year, but it has been partially open throughout the summer for increased visitation in the interim between these two large projects.

To explore these locations independently, check out the self-guided audio tours of the Sunken Road and Chatham available on the NPS App and online at go.nps.gov/frsp-tours. Park staff look forward to welcoming visitors to our upgraded facilities in spring and summer 2026!

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 .
Office: 540-374-0900

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, and will be updated here. Below is the schedule starting in September 2025 and going to June 2026.

January 28, 2026

Disaster in Pursuit of Lincoln's Killer

Speaker: Karen Stone

February 25, 2026

Meade and Lee's Commanding Machines at Gettysburg

Speaker: Doug Douds

March 25, 2026

The Richmond Bread Riots

Speaker: Ashley Whitehead Luskey

April 22, 2026

John Brown: Igniting the Keg

Speaker: Dennis Frye

May 27, 2026

The Appomattox Campaign

Speaker: Hampton Newsome

June 17, 2026

Teacher, Preacher, Soldier, Spy: John R. Kelso

Speaker: Christopher Grasso

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.

Newsletter Editor and Webmaster: John Roos

The RVCWRT Executive Committee

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