



THE DRUM & BUGLE
Voice of the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table
February 2025, Volume 22, Issue 2

Speaker: Steve Cowie
Topic: “When Hell Came to Sharpsburg”
When: Monday February 10, 2024
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

Steve Cowie “When Hell Came to Sharpsburg”

Steven Cowie earned a degree from California State University, Long Beach. As part of the Los Angeles film industry, he penned spec screenplays and sold his award-winning short to the Sundance Channel. A lifelong student of the Civil War, he dedicated fifteen years to exclusively researching the Battle of Antietam. When Hell Came to Sharpsburg is his first book.

“When Hell Came to Sharpsburg” investigates how the battle and opposing armies wreaked emotional, physical, and financial havoc on the people of Sharpsburg. For proper context, the author explores the savage struggle and its gory aftermath and explains how soldiers stripped the community of resources and spread diseases. Cowie carefully and meticulously follows the fortunes of individual families like the Mumma’s, Roulettes, Millers, and many others—ordinary folk thrust into harrowing circumstances—and their struggle to recover from their unexpected and often devastating losses.

**“The Time is At Hand:” Pickett’s 1864 New Bern Campaign”
by Eric Lindblade**

A Review of the January 2025 Program by Greg Mertz

Eastern North Carolina was a “thorn in the side” of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee, declared our speaker, Eric Lindblade. The Confederates needed 12-20,000 soldiers to protect the vital Wilmington & Weldon Railroad supply line. As 1864 got underway, Lee saw an opportunity to defeat what he felt was a lackadaisical Federal garrison protecting a large amount of supplies at New Bern, the second largest city in the state. If the Confederates could take New Bern in the winter, such a success could force the Federal army to shift troops from central Virginia to the Carolina coast prior to Lee’s Spring campaign season.

Davis approved the plan, but contemplated who would be available to lead such a Confederate incursion. Davis feared such a move would fail without Lee’s guiding hand, and the president even envisioned that he might need to take command of the expedition himself! Lee favored North Carolinian, Robert Hoke, who actually planned much of the proposed campaign, but Hoke was a brigadier general, and the size of the force called for a soldier of the rank of major general. One of the soldiers of the appropriate rank being discussed was George E. Pickett.

Pickett’s report on the Battle of Gettysburg was not accepted by Lee, and their relationship was strained for the remainder of the war. The upcoming campaign would be an opportunity for Pickett to gain some confidence and build Confederate morale, Lindblade suggested. It was logical that Hoke, as the architect of the campaign, be assigned to accompany Pickett, but they would not be able to work together effectively.

Besides Hoke, other Confederate brigade commanders include Thomas Clingman, Mathew Ransom, Seth Barton, Montgomery Corse, and William Terry, with the artillery under James Dearing. Also attached was a hand-picked naval-marine contingency under John Taylor Wood. While the main Confederate force operated against New Bern, the Wilmington garrison was to assist by moving on the Union supply line 40 miles to the south at Newport, where the Atlantic and North Carolina Railroad crossed the Newport River. The plan was for the Confederates to move on the formidable New Bern fortifications from three directions. This complex campaign, designed by Hoke and Lee, was given to Pickett to execute.

Hoke initiated the attack on February 1, 1864 moving on New Bern from the northeast. As the Federals retreated, Hoke moved up to the outskirts of the city and awaited the other Confederate movements. Seth Barton's brigade of Pickett's Charge survivors advanced from the southwest, coming under fire of the 3rd New York artillery, causing Barton to conclude that his opponent was too strong, so he halted. When the third prong, advancing south under Dearing, confronted a fort, he too felt the defenses too formidable and stopped. At a time when an effective leader was needed to coordinate the various columns, Pickett vacillated.

But at 2:30 am on February 2, the force under Wood was able to overwhelm the crew of the USS Underwriter, and in fighting with cutlasses and pistols, captured the ship. They then sailed southeast down the Neuse River, hopefully to provide support to Dearing to the east and Hoke to the west. But Federal artillery in Fort Stevenson, on the west bank of the Neuse River, opened fire on the Underwriter. The Confederates had to set the ship on fire, and it soon exploded. With that, the potential for Confederate naval support was gone.

The wing from the Wilmington garrison moving against Newport Barracks consisted of 2,000 Confederates under Gen. James G. Martin. The barracks were occupied by 700 men of the 9th Vermont Infantry and company D of the 2nd Massachusetts Heavy Artillery, under Capt. Russell Conwell. The Vermonters were supposed to join the Army of the Potomac's famed Vermont brigade in 1862, but were sent to Harpers Ferry during the Antietam Campaign, and were part of the garrison captured by Confederate Gen. T.J. "Stonewall" Jackson.

On February 2, Martin captured two blockhouses and moved on to his objective – the barracks. The 9th Vermont hoped to delay Martin's Confederates long enough to allow them to fall back and occupy the impressive forts protecting the barracks, and its artillery support.

A few days before the battle, however, battery commander Conwell believed that some local civilian/guerilla had taken a shot at him and the officer went out searching for the culprit. He was thus absent on the day of the battle and unable to provide leadership to his gunners, when his men panicked. Just as the infantrymen of the 9th Vermont reach the earthworks, they discovered that the Massachusetts gunners had spiked their guns and retreated. The Vermonters set up three rear guard actions, including one at a railroad trestle and another at a bridge, safely crossing the river while holding back the Confederate pursuit. Medals of Honor were awarded to one soldier in each of the three rear guard actions.

Newport Barracks was in the hands of Martin and his Confederates, who waited to hear word on how the main action at New Bern had gone. Martin would learn that the attacks at New Bern had failed and that he was to fall back to Wilmington.

Eastern North Carolina contained a sizeable pro-Union sentiment, including many men who had been impressed into state guard service early in the war, who later joined the Federal army when they had the chance to follow their true sentiments. Some of the Federal soldiers at New Bern included men of the 2nd North Carolina Federal troops. Several of those soldiers were captured, including some who had been Confederate soldiers and were officially Confederate deserters.

Pickett declared these men to be traitors who deserved to be executed. On February 5, two of these captors were put to death. Federal district commander Gen. John Peck corresponded with Pickett on February 13, sharing with him the names of 53 North Carolina soldiers whom were duly mustered in to Federal service and should be treated as prisoners of war. Pickett responded by passing along the names of those convicted via court martial of desertion from Confederate service. In all, Pickett executed 22 captured Federal soldiers as Confederate deserters. When the Civil War concluded, Pickett escaped to Canada for fear of being convicted of war crimes over these executions. Not until U.S. Grant promised not to bring up

charges against him, did Pickett return to the United States.

Hoke took over command in eastern North Carolina, and would win a victory in Plymouth in April, 1864, after which his troops were recalled to join the Army of Northern Virginia in time to fight at Cold Harbor in June.

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.cwrta.org, and will be updated here when the schedule is released for 2025.

February 26, 2025 Zachery Fry – A Republic in the Ranks: Loyalty and Dissent in the Army of the Republic

March 26, 2025 John Coski – Hunter Davidson (CSN)

April 23, 2025 Kevin Pawlak – Bristoe Station

May 26, 2025 Barton Myers – General Winfield Scott

June 18, 2025 Patrick Schroeder - Forgotten Friday: April 7, 1865
Actions in Cumberland County VA

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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