



THE DRUM & BUGLE
Voice of the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table
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Speaker: Kenneth R. Rutherford
Topic: America's Buried History: Landmines in the Civil War
When: Monday October 10, 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
Our Facebook: www.facebook.com/rvcwrt

Kenneth R. Rutherford "America's Buried History: Landmines in the Civil War"

Modern landmines were used for the first time in history on a widespread basis during the Civil War when the Confederacy, in desperate need of an innovative technology to overcome significant deficits in materiel and manpower, employed them. The first American to die from a victim-activated landmine was on the Virginia Peninsula in early 1862 during the siege of Yorktown. Their use set off explosive debates inside the Confederate

government and within the ranks of the army over the ethics of using “weapons that wait.” As Confederate fortunes dimmed, leveraging low-cost weapons like landmines became acceptable and even desirable.

The controversial weapon was the brainchild of Confederate General Gabriel J. Rains (who had experimented with explosive booby traps in Florida two decades earlier during the Seminole Wars), and other Confederates soldiers developed a sundry of landmine varieties, including command-controlled and victim-activated. The devices saw extensive use in Virginia, at Port Hudson in Louisiana, in Georgia, the Trans-Mississippi Theater, during the closing weeks of the war in the Carolinas, and in harbors and rivers in multiple states. Debates over the ethics of using mine warfare did not end in 1865, and are still being waged to this day.

Dr. Rutherford, who is known worldwide for his work in the landmine discipline, and who himself lost his legs to a mine in Africa, relies on a host of primary and secondary research to demonstrate how and why the mines were built, how and where they were deployed, the effects of their use, and the reactions of those who suffered from their deadly blasts. *America's Buried History* is an important contribution to the literature on one of the most fundamental, contentious, and significant modern conventional weapons. According to some estimates, by the early 1990s landmines were responsible for more than 26,000 deaths each year worldwide.

Ken Rutherford is a Professor in the Department of Political Science at James Madison University. He served as Director of the Center for International Stabilization and Recovery at JMU, Peace Corps Volunteer in Mauritania, UNHCR Emergency Refugee Coordinator in Senegal, humanitarian emergency relief officer in northern Kenya and Somalia, and as Fulbright Scholar in Jordan. Rutherford co-founded the Landmine Survivors Network and escorted Princess Diana on her last humanitarian mission to visit landmine survivors in Bosnia-Herzegovina. He was a prominent leader in the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, which won the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize. He is included among the "one hundred most influential people in armed violence reduction" by the London-based organization Action on Armed Violence, and the recipient of numerous awards, including the Leadership in International Rehabilitation Award (Northwestern University), the Humanitarian Award presented by Sir Paul McCartney (UNA-USA) and the Human Security Person of the Year Award

(University of California-Irvine). He has published five books, including most recently “America’s Buried History: Landmines in the Civil War.” He holds a Ph.D. in Government from Georgetown University, and B.A. and MBA degrees from the University of Colorado, where he was inducted into its Hall for Distinguished alumni.

**“The Battle of New Market Heights”
by Steward Henderson**

A Review of the September 2022 Program by Greg Mertz

In order to better grasp the role of the battle of New Market Heights, our speaker, Steward Henderson, quizzed some authors who wrote about the fight, asking why they felt it was significant. Jimmy Price, who wrote The Battle of New Market Heights: Freedom Will Be Theirs by the Sword, felt that it was one of the most important days in all African American military history. Doug Crenshaw, author of Fort Harrison and the Battle of Chaffin's Farm: To Surprise and Capture Richmond, indicated that if Federal leadership had done a more skillful job of coordinating their troops, their forces might have been able to march into Richmond.

Accordingly, Henderson decided that in order to understand the proper magnitude of New Market Heights, he needed to expand the scope of his talk and discuss actions at three different sites east of Richmond and north of the James River that were fought over on two different days. On September 29, 1864, Federal forces attacked at New Market Heights, Fort Harrison and Fort Gilmer. Then on September 30, 1864 Confederates counterattacked at Fort Harrison. New Market Heights was a part of a bigger picture, and telling the broader story was necessary to comprehend its meaning.

Federal Gen. Benjamin Butler, commander of the Army of the James planned the two-pronged attack. Infantry corps commander Gen. Edward O. C. Ord was to take position on the Union left and attack the largest fortification on the Confederate outer line at Fort Harrison at dawn. Meanwhile on the Union right, Gen. David Birney would attack Confederates holding New Market Heights with his corps at the same time. Grant approved the plan, but as he so often did during the Petersburg Campaign, he added another movement south of the James River to coincide with Butler’s attack.

Grant hoped to perhaps confuse the Confederates as they tried to direct reinforcements, or force them to overextend their lines to intercept the Federal flanking maneuver south of the James, and then hopefully break through a weakened Confederate line. That supplemental action was the battle of Peebles Farm, fought September 30-October 2, 1864.

The action at New Market Heights entailed three attacks from dawn to about 8:30 am. During the first attack, Colonel Samuel Duncan launched his two-regiment brigade – the 4th and 6th United States Colored Troops (USCT) – against the famed Texas brigade. Duncan's troops were unable to take the Confederate position and the Texans inflicted heavy losses on the USCTs.

As an example of Crenshaw's accusation of poor management of Federal forces, Henderson pointed out that Birney had enough troops to extend his line further left, enabling them to strike the right of the Texas brigade. But subsequent to the second attack of the day, the Texans had fallen back.

In the third attack, Colonel Alonzo G. Draper's brigade of USCTs, was supported on its right by a brigade of white troops under Col. Abbott, and succeeded in driving the Texas brigade back, while other Federal attacks also succeeded in sending the Confederates rearward. Many Confederates admitted it was a rout as they retreated from New Market Heights to Fort Harrison.

Sixteen USCT Medal of Honor recipients fought on the New Market Heights battlefield – fourteen black enlisted men and two of their white officers. The citations for the enlisted men typically touted either deeds related to saving their battle flags or displaying leadership in heading up attacks or extricating the men in an orderly manner from trying predicaments.

While the Confederates driven from New Market Heights joined with the mere 200 southern defenders at Fort Harrison, the USCT troops moved on Fort Gilmer. While significantly smaller than Fort Harrison, its walls were much stronger. The USCTs were sent against Gilmer just one regiment at a time, never with enough strength to come close to taking the fort.

Meanwhile Gen. George J. Stannard's division of Ord's corps was selected by General-in-Chief U. S. Grant to lead the attack against Fort Harrison. Though in another example of the Federal high command not properly coordinating their efforts, the troops to the right of Stannard did not follow

their orders, moving too far to the right. Eventually the Federal troops took Fort Harrison from the rear, and hastily constructed works for their own defense in the fort's unfortified rear.

Lee had sent another 11,000 reinforcements to launch a counterattack on Fort Harrison, the next day, September 30. After losing 1,000 Confederate casualties with nothing to gain, Lee called off the attacks.

While the battle of New Market Heights is indeed an important milestone in African-American military history as tangibly marked by the numerous Medals of Honor awarded, Henderson pointed out that the success of the USCTs against the famed Texas brigade was exaggerated. He stated that the withdrawal of the Texas brigade prior to the second attack somewhat diminished the accomplishments of the black troops.

Could better management of Union troops enable them to reach Richmond in late September or early October 1864? Despite some tactical blunders preventing a prompt turning of the Confederate right at New Market Heights, or moving more quickly upon the rear of Fort Harrison, Henderson suggests that the likelihood of Richmond's capture likely hinged on the respective abilities of Lee to rush defenders to the inner works, and Grant's abilities to mass reinforcements for substantial blows that the Confederates could not resist.

CVBT Annual Conference for 2022

Please take note of the Central Virginia Battlefields Trust 2022 Annual Conference "1862: The War Comes to Fredericksburg" September 30 - October 2. All-inclusive weekend tickets are \$195 and the Saturday night Banquet only ticket is \$95. Historian John Hennessy will be the Keynote Speaker, talking about the Union occupation of Fredericksburg in the summer of 1862. Details can be found at <http://www.cvbt.org>.

RVCWRT Bus Trip - Second Manassas

Our annual bus trip "Lee vs. Pope: The Battle of Second Manassas" is on Saturday, October 22, 2022. Marc Thompson will be the guide for this six hour tour, which includes a professional military analysis at nine battlefield

sites, transportation, water, box lunch and a 20 page spiral-bound color handout. You can pay the \$110 trip cost through our website at www.rappvalleycivilwar.org/membership. You can use PayPal or pay directly with a credit card . You also have the option of mailing a check to RVCWRT, PO Box 7632, Fredericksburg VA 22404; or paying at a future dinner meeting. Attendance is limited to 40 people.

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. As with our round table, things are subject to change due to the ups and downs of Covid.

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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