



**THE DRUM & BUGLE**  
**Voice of the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table**  
**January 2023, Volume 20, Issue 1**

**Speaker:** Harold Knudsen  
**Topic:** “James Longstreet and the American Civil War”  
**When:** Monday January 9, 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](http://www.facebook.com/rvcwrt)

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**Harold Knudsen “James Longstreet and the American Civil War”**

Lieutenant General James Longstreet had long been the scourge of the south. Relegated to the background behind such figures as Lee and Jackson, Longstreet literature also took route of painting Longstreet in a negative light. Knudsen is one of my current authors that seek to right this wrong. This work details how not only was Longstreet an exceptional general, but he was also a forward thinking general. The tactics and on field prowess that Longstreet exhibited was on full

display during the war, and Knudsen argues that he was he was the general that “fought the next war.”

From Savas Beatie’s website: LTC Knudsen is an Illinois native. His career spans twenty five years of active duty Army service, and includes seven resident career artillery, command and staff Army schools and colleges. He has many years of tactical experience in the integration of fire support into maneuver plans and fire control computation for cannon units. He spent nine years in Germany training tactics offensive armored warfare, as well as peace-keeping and counter-insurgency training. A combat veteran of Desert Storm, he performed extensive artillery fire planning and execution in support of the U.S. breakthrough of the Iraqi line and penetration into Iraq. He has also served in the Iraq Campaign. His years of staff work at the Corps, Army, and Pentagon levels give him a strong understanding of army operations from the lowest to highest levels.

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**“The most successful in its work”: Orlando Willcox's division in the Maryland Campaign”**

**by Jim Smith**

**A Review of the December 2022 Program by Greg Mertz**

Landmarks such as the Dunker Church, the Cornfield, the Bloody Lane and Burnside’s Bridge are those most readily associated with the Antietam battlefield. None of those landmarks are directly associated with the final phase of the battle. The best known aspect of this least known phase of the battle is that “A.P. Hill came up” in the nick of time, saving the Confederates from being swept off of the field. Our speaker Jim Smith addressed the most overlooked part of the most overlooked phase of the battle. He told us about the Federal troops that were likely on the verge of making Antietam an even more substantial victory for the men in blue – a Federal attack that was disrupted by the arrival of A.P. Hill’s troops. This little known Federal assault was made by the division commanded by Orlando Willcox.

Willcox was a member of the West Point class of 1847 that included A.P. Hill, Ambrose Burnside and John Gibbon. One of his more amusing pre-war adventures with the army was hunting buffalo with cannon in 1850, using canister rounds to bring down the massive animal.

With the outbreak of Civil War, Willcox became colonel of the 1<sup>st</sup> Michigan from his native state, leading a brigade at 1<sup>st</sup> Manassas where he was wounded and captured. He was not exchanged until August of 1862, when he became a division commander in the IX Corps. Willcox replaced Gen. Isaac Stevens, who was killed at Chantilly during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Manassas Campaign.

Willcox was a Democrat, who despite his beliefs that slavery was horrific, was opposed to any anti-slavery political stands. Willcox felt that slavery was being destroyed by the war itself and that no other policies were needed to bring slavery to an end.

During the September 14, 1862 battle of South Mountain, Willcox's division was engaged during the afternoon at Fox's Gap. The Confederates were spread thin and were badly outnumbered as they fought a rear guard action. Col. William Withington, who had helped Willcox organize the 1<sup>st</sup> Michigan, now commanded the new 17<sup>th</sup> Michigan in Willcox's division. Willcox asked Withington just how well his green troops were trained and what they were capable of performing. Orders for the 17<sup>th</sup> Michigan to attack a battery was soon given. The inexperienced men successfully boxed in the Confederates. The actions of the regiment served as an example to even the most experienced men in the brigade, galvanizing the troops as a fighting force.

Following the Confederate delaying action at South Mountain, Confederate army commander Gen. Robert E. Lee selected the high ground around Sharpsburg, Maryland for his next position. The battle of Sharpsburg or Antietam, was fought on September 17, 1862. The Federal army commanded by Gen. George B. McClellan, developed a plan to first strike the Confederate left, then assault the Confederate right, and then follow that up with an attack on the Confederate Center. The IX Corps, including Willcox's division, confronted the Confederate right. The battle began early in the morning, but the fight did not progress to the sector where Willcox's 3,300 men were posted until mid-afternoon. His troops crossed Antietam Creek about 2:00 pm and at about 3:00 pm launched what Smith described as "probably the best coordinated attack of the day."

From Antietam Creek to the Confederate position, the ground rose 200 feet in elevation. The opposing forces comprised part of Gen. D. R. Jones' 3,500 men, which were thinly spread out but supported by some 30-40 cannon.

About 4:20 pm, the Confederate line broke and Willcox began to drive the enemy through the streets of Sharpsburg. With the Confederates on the run and Willcox's men potentially in position to turn the battle into a rout, Burnside sent orders to Willcox calling off the attack. Moments later, Burnside changed the order from simply halting the offensive to executing a retreat, abandoning the ground Willcox had gained. The reason for the sudden change in the role of Willcox's division was the arrival of A.P. Hill's Confederate division on the left flank of the Union army. Burnside was unnerved by his West Point classmate from Culpeper, Virginia.

Burnside had entered the campaign in command of a wing comprised of two corps – the I Corps under Joseph Hooker and the IX under Jesse Reno. But the exigencies of the campaign altered that arrangement. Jesse Reno was killed in the fighting on South Mountain at Fox's Gap. Jacob Cox then assumed command of the IX corps. Then Joseph Hooker's I corps ended up going into position at Antietam on the extreme Union right while the IX corps lined up on the Union left, with the remainder of the Union army positioned in between. Burnside could not possibly oversee two corps so widely separated on the field of battle, so he was relegated to return to the command of his old IX corps. In a display of ego, Burnside refused to be demoted and played the supernumerary role by leaving Cox in command of the IX Corps, and supervising them directly.

Reno was seen to be a more aggressive general than Burnside. Some soldiers lamented Reno's death at Fox's Gap, feeling that he would have kept up the pressure on the Confederates retreating through Sharpsburg and possibly changed the results of the battle. But at 5:00 pm, Burnside withdrew his troops and brought an end to the fighting.

Willcox lamented that he was not permitted to perpetuate the attack. His wife visited him after the battle and was given a tour of the field by her husband. While it is not surprising that she would agree with her husband's assessment, she wrote to her mother about the visit and was astonished at the poor judgement utilized by her husband's superiors during the battle.

The Confederates confronting Willcox lost 30% of their troops fighting on the defensive. Willcox's attackers had the benefit of some cover and lost 10%. The struggle was intense in that sector; a Union brigade next to Willcox's division suffered 50% casualties.

Even though this important fighting is not interpreted as extensively as the more famous landmarks and in the areas resulting in fighting that was bloodier, there are three tour stops that provide some level of information helping visitors understand this action: Burnside's Bridge, Final Attack and the National Cemetery. A Final Attack Trail now provides better access to this often forgotten engagement area. Four of the regiments are represented by markers or monuments: a marker to the 17<sup>th</sup> Michigan at Fox's Gap and monuments to the 45<sup>th</sup>, 50<sup>th</sup> and 100<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania at Antietam.

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### **D.P. Newton's Legacy Lives On**

For many of us, D.P. Newton is a local treasure. His wonderful museum helped me with a project for one of my Bachelor's classes back in 2017. I will never forget my first time walking through his collection. It was incredible. My words I'm sure resonate with many of your personal feelings of D.P. Newton, and his collection. That collection now has a home at the Bull Run Winery. Below is an article about how the collection came to find itself in Centreville. This new location will open doors for countless more that visit this winery and take in the passion that we all know D.P. had.

[https://wacotrib.com/ap/state/civil-war-collection-on-permanent-display-at-winery/article\\_5047ad1b-2848-5543-8f89-74de3ae5cfd.html](https://wacotrib.com/ap/state/civil-war-collection-on-permanent-display-at-winery/article_5047ad1b-2848-5543-8f89-74de3ae5cfd.html)

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

#### **CWRTF Schedule**

January 25, 2023 - David Welker, A KEYSTONE REBEL

February 22, 2023 - Col (R) John Biemeck, CIVIL WAR ORDNANCE

March 22, 2023 - John Quarstein, THE POWER OF IRON OVER WOOD

April 26, 2023 - Codie Eash, US SIGNAL CORPS

May 24, 2023 - Stephen Cushman, THE GENERAL'S CIVIL WAR: WHAT THEIR MEMOIRS CAN TEACH US TODAY

June 21, 2023 - Paul Brueske, THE LAST SIEGE - 1865 MOBILE CAMPAIGN

September 27, 2023 - John Vagnetti, THE CIVIL WAR, A POSTAL SYSTEM DIVIDED

October 25, 2023 - Sarah Kay Bierle, THE BATTLE OF CEDAR CREEK

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

March 27, 2024 - Christian Keller, SOUTHERN STRATEGIES

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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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