



THE DRUM & BUGLE
Voice of the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table
April 2021, Volume 18, Issue 4

Speaker: Joseph Gillespie
Topic: The Battle of Ball's Bluff: Civilian's Viewpoint
When: Monday April 12, 2021
Location: Virtual Meeting Via Zoom
Times: 7:30
Our Website: www.rappvalleycivilwar.org
Our Facebook: www.facebook.com/rvcwrt

"Virtual April Meeting"

Joseph Gillespie is a historian, working at the George Washington Masonic National Memorial in Alexandria, Virginia. He graduated with a M.A. and B.A. in United States history from George Mason University. His research focused primarily on early American Military history, and the history of slavery during the Early Republic. His thesis research was on the battle of Ball's Bluff, and its impact on civilians and politicians.

The first year of the American Civil War is one that is often overlooked in Civil War lexicon. While many remember the first major battles, Fort Sumter, and First Bull Run, many of the small battles have been relegated to footnotes. These small battles, however, had an equally important impact on how civilians and soldiers came to understand the war. Ball's Bluff is no exception. In fact, this battle impacted the rest of the war by helping to create the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War. Understanding how these small battles impacted the civilian, and political aspects of the war sheds light on the changing cultural, and social values the United States faced during the war. This presentation will explore how civilians and politicians understood the disaster at Ball's Bluff, and how the aftermath of the battle began to convince them this war was going to be longer, and bloodier than expected.

This month we will continue virtual Zoom programming with a presentation on The Battle of Ball's Bluff: Civilian Viewpoint by Joseph Gillespie. Watch for your invitation! Remember that you can watch all six previous RVCWRT virtual programs in their entirety by searching "RVCWRT" on YouTube. Our speaker lineup for 2021 is now available on our new website: www.rappvalleycivilwar.org.

**"Professionalization of Nurses During the American Civil War"
by Elaine Kessinger
A Review of the March 2021 Virtual Program by Greg Mertz**

The nurses of today are a product of the Civil War era nurses and the progressively increasing levels of professionalism they gained throughout the war. The lack of standardized terms, including standard names of the job titles with standard duties, complicates the assessment of those who helped care for sick and wounded soldiers. However, those with job titles of "nurse" and "matron" were later recognized in 1892 as positions eligible to receive government pensions for their service.

Our speaker, Elaine Kessinger, selected a few prewar years as a baseline for comparing the roles of women in providing medical care. In 1809, it was not unusual to find women providing care in military hospitals. It was viewed as fitting because in a typical family it was the mother who cared for ill members of her family.

But in 1846, amid an era of separate spheres for men and women, fewer and fewer women were providing medical care for soldiers. Women belonged in the domestic sphere. Typically, the only women permitted to assist the soldiers were laundresses, who were usually wives of the non-commissioned officers. Civilian hospitals were considered to be a last resort for medical care, often serving the poor who had no other means of medical attention. Most hospitals were associated with religious charities and the work might be done by female prison inmates, immigrant women, or Catholic nuns.

At the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, the prevailing attitude was that war was “men’s business.” Hospital care was provided by enlisted men, and by the patients who were well enough to help provide assistance but not well enough to return to the ranks. Many of the soldiers wrote home detailing the bad conditions in hospitals and women responded by coming to the hospitals to correct the deficiencies.

One such woman who heard awful reports of conditions one Sunday at church was Mary Ann Bickerdyke. She gathered food, went to a hospital and began instructing the mobile patients to do certain tasks, bringing some order out of the chaos she had discovered. When a doctor observed Bickerdyke and asked what she was doing, he allowed her to continue, as long as she stayed out of his way.

By 1862 an organized military hospital system was in place. On the battlefield, soldiers received initial bandaging of their wounds at a dressing station a short distance behind the battle line. Next, they were taken to a field hospital where the doctors treated men and performed surgeries when needed. The first step in the evacuation from the battlefield was ambulance transportation to a staging area where the sick and wounded awaited water or rail transport to a sizeable city where a general hospital was located. Those needing long-term care were sent to a convalescent hospital or were sent home on a furlough.

Civilian relief organizations and purveyor nurses such as Clara Barton and Cornelia Hancock brought first aid services and immediate need supplies to the front. They provided important stop-gap measures until army medical supplies reached the front. (Bringing ammunition to the front, was a higher military priority than medical supplies.) Women who lived on or near

battlefields often had no choice but to suddenly respond to wounded soldiers appearing on their doorsteps.

Surgeon General William A. Hammond appointed Dr. Jonathan Letterman to organize the battlefield medical services. Letterman had a dedicated ambulance corps placed under the medical department. The talents of the surgeons, assistant surgeons and stewards were all assessed and the men reassigned accordingly. When field hospitals were established on the battlefield, all of the best surgeons came together in a brigade or division hospital, treating anyone who came to the hospital regardless of their regiment. They also established a priority of treatment system similar to today's triage.

By the time of the battle of Fredericksburg, the army medical department had progressed to a remarkable point of proficiency. The U.S. Sanitary Commission and Christian Commission were amazed to find that the only thing that any of the 18 division hospitals needed was more blankets – not surprising for a December battle. The commissions observed less suffering than on any other battlefield and were able to turn their attention to other needs, such as convalescence hospitals and Soldier's Rest – the foundation for what would become the USO.

The general hospital of 1863 had a surgeon with a hospital steward under him. Reporting directly to the hospital steward was a hospital attendant and a directoress. The steward's manual directed the surgeon to appoint the most intelligent and reliable woman to the directoress position and assign her to designate duties to all of the other women on the staff. The hospital steward was responsible for keeping records, taking inventory of supplies and keeping track of the personal effects of the patients. The steward oversaw all of the cleaning, laundry and food preparation. The steward directed the care of the patients including distributing medicine, assisting those needing help with feeding, and assuring that those visiting the patients behaved.

Women were generally only permitted to clean the hands and face of patients – men performed the general bathing. A source of conflict was cooking – the army preferred it to be done by men. Some women could change dressings, while in some hospitals the men did that and turned the soiled

dressings over to women for laundering. Letter writing for the soldiers was one of the preferred duties performed by the women.

In 1864 the world noticed the medical advancements made during the Civil War and wanted to follow the example that was set. The concept of establishing a healthy diet of nutritious, soft foods to promote healing gained prominence. An official culinary matron, with both men and women under her, was responsible for preparing meals.

When the war ended, some of the women who had assisted soldiers during the war took on social reform issues, and some sought to take the improvements in patient care they had learned and transfer them to civilian hospitals.

SAVING 36 CORE BATTLEFIELD ACRES AT THE WILDERNESS

American Battlefield Trust, with timely assistance from Central Virginia Battlefields Trust (CVBT), is seeking to save a critical portion of the Wilderness Battlefield. These 36 acres comprise the area where Confederates launched part of the counterattack that stymied the Union advance along the Orange Turnpike on May 5, 1864. This is hallowed ground where both sides moved cross country through dense forest in the first major battle between Grant and Lee.

RVCWRT recently contributed over \$500 to CVBT to help “seal the deal” in this preservation effort. CVBT President Tom Van Winkle acknowledged the donation with some kind words in a message to RVCWRT President John Sapanara:

John,

As has always been the case, the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table has risen to the occasion and pledged their support for CVBT and our mission to preserve our history. As the frequency of these challenges grows in our area, and the cost to save these tracts of important land increases, the cooperative efforts of our respective organizations become more important. The CVBT has always lauded our relationship with the Rappahannock Valley

Civil War Round Table and I personally thank you and all our friends there for your donation to close this gap and save more of the Wilderness battlefield.

I will assure you there will be many more challenges this year with price tags that will stagger all of us, when it rains it pours, as they say. Stay tuned and again, please pass along my thanks to all at the RVCWRT.

Thanks, Tom

You can read more or make an individual donation before the April deadline at www.cvbt.org/wilderness.

**General John Reynolds
By John Roos**

I had a huge achievement recently. Hopefully many of you follow the Emerging Civil War webpage. I recently had my very first article published with them. My article is not a referendum on General Reynolds, rather, I try to take approaches. I argue about our own abilities to sometimes look at a figure from the war, and maybe we look at things in a bubble, but we do not look at the whole picture. Reynolds has gained this status at Gettysburg of being one of the best corps commanders in the Union Army. My article challenges this belief by arguing that while Reynolds was a top notch soldier, giving him the moniker of one of the best “corps” commanders may not be the right label for him. The other argument I make is that I am not scathing his reputation in the war. This is a specific look at Reynolds as a corps commander. I hope all of you enjoy my article.

<https://emergingcivilwar.com/2021/02/18/general-john-f-reynolds-great-corps-commander-or-just-famous-for-dying-at-gettysburg/>

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. Each month, The Drum and Bugle newsletter is also placed on our

web-site, www.rappvalleycivilwar.org. Yearly membership dues are \$35.00 for an individual, \$45.00 for families, and only \$7.50 for students. Membership is open to anyone interested in the study of the Civil War and the ongoing preservation of Civil War sites.

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