

# DRUM & BUGLE

Voice of the Rappahannock  
Valley Civil War Round Table



## Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table Newsletter

December 2008, Volume 5, Issue 12

**Speaker:** Greg Mertz, Supervisory Historian, Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park  
**Topic:** "I'll Be Damned If I'll Cooperate: Gouverneur K. Warren at the Wilderness and at Spotsylvania Court House"  
**When:** Monday, December 8, 2008  
**Location:** Brock's Riverside Grill  
**Times:** Social: 6:30 p.m.; Dinner: 6:45 p.m.; Meeting begins: 7:30 p.m.

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### Abstract Of Our Scheduled December 8<sup>th</sup> Program

On the eve of the Battle of the Wilderness, Gouverneur K. Warren was the rising star in the Army of the Potomac. By the Battle of Spotsylvania Court House, both General-in-Chief Grant and Army commander Meade had agreed that Warren should be relieved if his men were not engaged. Eleven months later Warren was replaced, mainly because of his actions and arguments that occurred during the Battles of the Wilderness and Spotsylvania. Our December program will be presented by Greg Mertz, a current board member and a former president of the RVCWRT. Greg wrote an article for Blue and Gray Magazine on the Laurel Hill portion of Spotsylvania Battlefield – the scene of Warren's engagements on that field. The December program is an outgrowth of his being asked to speak on that subject after the publication was released. Greg will examine the impact that Warren had on these battles and the impact these battles had on his career.

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### The Battle For Kentucky: Perryville – October 8, 1862

A Review of November's Program by Greg Mertz

Abraham Lincoln stated "I hope to have God on my side, but I must have Kentucky," "I think to lose Kentucky is nearly the same as to lose the whole game." Chris Kolakowski, who served for three years as the Executive Director of the Perryville Battlefield Preservation Association, quoted the president in his introduction to demonstrate the impact the Battle of Perryville had upon the state and upon the nation.

Chris pointed out that if the Ohio River would have become the northern boundary of a Confederate Kentucky, it would have been a substantial obstacle to the Federal military. Should the Federal army lose Louisville, it would lose its main supply base for all operations further downstream. Then as now, Kentucky was horse country and a great supply source for this essential commodity. Furthermore, some felt that Kentucky was a Southern state at heart, with natives such as John Hunt Morgan projecting that a pool of 25,000 men would readily join the Confederate Army, i.e., should the state be liberated from Northern control. To gain Kentucky would have been a major coup for the Confederacy.

At the start of the campaign, Confederate Generals Edmund Kirby Smith commanded 15,000 men at Knoxville and Braxton Bragg massed 30,000 soldiers at Chattanooga. The opening battles of the campaign offered great promise for the Confederates. While the Second Battle of Manassas was raging in the east, Kirby Smith's men gained what may have been the most complete victory of the war at Richmond, Kentucky, where the Federals suffered about 4400 casualties while Confederates lost about 300. Then while the eastern forces were embattled at South Mountain then Antietam, Bragg laid siege to a Federal garrison at Munfordsville, Kentucky and captured 4,000 blue clad soldiers. Kirby Smith captured Frankfort – the only capital of a loyal state to fall into Confederate hands during the war. The campaign was off to an auspicious start for the Confederates.

However, the Confederates were spread out over a wide area because a drought made it difficult for troops to procure water and food. Federal General Don Carlos Buell responded by concentrating 55,000 men near Perryville, south of the state capital. As Chris observed, Bragg never met a piece of intelligence information that he didn't like to quibble with, and he failed to understand the numerical disadvantage he faced. As the opposing forces closed, Buell enjoyed a substantial numerical advantage, being able to bring about 37,000 Federals to the field against some 16,000 of Bragg's Confederates.

The initial clash occurred over a pool of water in Doctor's Creek. The Arkansas Confederates that fell back noted the Federals in strength, but Bragg never understood until the end of the day the odds that he faced. Ironically Buell would also be in the dark. Corps commander Alexander M. McCook waited until late in the day to inform Buell that his troops had been under attack by a major force, and the sounds of the engagement were blocked by an acoustic shadow phenomenon. Remarkably, Buell never fully understood that a significant fight was taking place. Both army commanders operated in the dark. Bragg launched an attack at 2:00 p.m., which was intended to strike the Federal left flank, but ended up being a frontal attack. Fortunately for Bragg's men, the Federal troops and their commanders were green. William R. Terrill had been an artillery captain at Shiloh that spring, but he had leapfrogged to Brigadier General of an infantry brigade, and then assumed command of a division early on in the Battle of Perryville, i.e., when the commander James S. Jackson was killed. Terrill was more comfortable focusing his attention on the eight cannon of Parson's artillery along his line than in leading his 3,000 infantrymen. After the Confederates fired three volleys, Terrill's men retreated, the Confederates captured Parson's guns, and Terrill was later killed.

Terrill was a Virginian who remained loyal to the Union, but his brother James became a Confederate general who was killed at Bethesda Church. One of the war's most interesting examples of brother vs. brother, is the story of these two brothers each becoming generals in opposing armies and each being killed in action.

After capturing the hill and the eight cannon, the Confederates advanced into a cornfield in which the 21<sup>st</sup> Wisconsin was posted. A hand to hand struggle ensued and ten Federal guns opened fire on the cornfield, knowing that some of its rounds would cause harm to their own infantry. Ultimately the risk paid off and the Federal position held.

Confederate attacks launched in the mid afternoon threatened a key intersection called the Dixville Crossroads, but it was getting dark and the Confederates were running out of time. A Federal counterattack led by the 1<sup>st</sup> Wisconsin retook the position where Parson's guns had stood.

During one phase of the battle, Confederate General Leonidas Polk instructed a body of soldiers that they were firing into their own men. The soldiers ended up being Federal soldiers of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Indiana, whose colonel requested to know the identity of Polk. Bishop Polk displayed some quick deception for a clergyman. In a bluff, Polk declaring the colonel would soon find out who he was, and continued to shout that the troops should cease firing as he made his escape.

Though one of his brigades was close to achieving victory, Polk called off the battle. Bragg had only one brigade left in his reserves. Now, realizing how badly he was outnumbered and the predicament he was in, Bragg withdrew. The forces of Generals Bragg and Kirby Smith suffered from a failure to exercise the concept of "unity of command" and they never worked together to effectively oppose Buell. Never again would the Confederates enter Kentucky for anything other than a raid. The Confederate retreat from Kentucky was the start of a retrograde movement that did not end until the army surrendered at the Bennett Place. The high water mark of Bragg's army, argued Kolakowski, was at the Dixville Crossroads at Perryville.

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## **The Human Side Of The Warrior – Josiah Fitch Murphey**

**By Mac Wyckoff**

The 20<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts was one of the most famous units of the Civil War because of the important role it played in so many battles and for the number of well known people who served in the unit. It was known as the "Harvard Regiment" since initially the office corps consisted almost exclusively of Harvard men. However the rank and file contained men from a variety of backgrounds.

One of these soldiers was Josiah Fitch Murphey, though lacking a Harvard education, he kept an interesting diary and recorded his thoughts and experiences, much of these occurred in the Fredericksburg area. The short, 5' 3", blue-eyed Murphey lived on Nantucket Island, about 30 miles south of Cape Cod. Like many Nantucket men, Josiah was the son of a whaler. Also, like many young men on the island, he found jobs scarce. He found work as a grocery store clerk.

In August of 1862 there was intense pressure for young Nantucketers to enlist to meet the island's quota. Josiah admitted that at the time he "caught the war fever" and volunteered on August 12 along with his older brother and 46 other Nantucket men in Co. I, 20<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts. Only 16 years old, he needed permission from his parents to join the army.

Naïve about the realities of war, Murphey soon found himself in Washington where he talked to some Nantucket men who had enlisted the year before. Their talk of the hard times they had experienced on the march and in combat had little effect on him. A taste of reality occurred shortly thereafter on September 14 near Frederick, Maryland. Josiah heard the sound of fighting and witnessed several dead Confederate bodies. He cut off some buttons to send home as mementoes.

Murphey more fully realized the grim reality of war three days later at Antietam. The 20<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts marched toward the West Woods, Murphey's brother, Franklin, was struck by a shell fragment in the left knee. Josiah stopped to help his brother, but was quickly ushered back into line by a file closer. His unit was soon flanked, lost heavily, and fell back.

The cold night of December 10, 1862 found his regiment picketing along the Rappahannock River near Falmouth, Virginia. Murphey admitted that he fell asleep while huddled around a campfire. At 3:00 a.m. he awoke to orders to fall in! They would be crossing the river and assaulting the heights beyond the city of Fredericksburg. Murphey's nativity was now gone, he knew the dangers that he would face. He talked with his comrades as they prepared for combat. "Many of us would never see the light of day," he wrote in his diary and then added "We were soldiers and must take our chances."

Murphey watched the bombardment of the city of Fredericksburg, which he described as both a “grand and terrible sight.” He tried to guess where the next round would hit and then noted that the “puff of splinters, bricks and mortar” would reveal the accuracy of his prediction.

Although the massive bombardment did tremendous structural damage to the city, it failed to evict its Mississippi defenders. The 7th Michigan rowed across the river in pontoon boats and established a bridgehead at the foot of Hawke Street. Behind them came the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts. Since the men of Co. I of the 20<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts were whalers and sons of whalers they were assigned the job of rowing. When one man, missed his stroke, Murphey was ordered to take the oar. As he did, Rebel bullets splashed in the nearby water, some hit the boat and oars. Arriving onshore the unit proceeded up Hawke Street. The 13<sup>th</sup> Mississippi waited, largely concealed in the houses. Murphey recorded in his diary, “They opened a terrible fire on us at short range and our men began dropping at every point.”

Reaching the intersection with Caroline Street, Murphey turned to the left to look for a target when he felt pain and “presto I knew no more.” A bullet had sliced through 2 inches of his right cheek carrying away some bone, permanently impairing his right eye. The same bullet slammed into a private’s chest with enough force to knock him backwards for 10 yards.

Murphey soon regained consciousness laying facedown on Caroline Street, bleeding severely and with bullets flying all around him. He had been left for dead and, in fact, a Boston newspaper reported him as mortally wounded. He clasp his hand to his head to try and control the bleeding and although faint, managed to stand up. Suddenly filled with rage, he began swearing, “I cursed the whole southern confederacy from Virginia to the Gulf of Mexico,” he wrote. But then realized this was war and “banished such thoughts from my mind.” By this time, the pontoon bridge had been completed. Murphey walked across the bridge and up the hill to Chatham. He was greeted by a nurse who offered to stitch his face, but then left and did not return. He lay down on the floor next to a wounded member of the 13th Mississippi. On the other side of the Confederate was a Federal soldier with a head injury. Murphey, in horror, saw “the brain oozing out of the hole made by the bullet.” He then witnessed a soldier brought into the room with the back of his legs shot off. This man soon bled to death. Like Walt Whitman, he recorded seeing a massive pile of arms and legs in front of the building.

Murphey, who had earlier in the day exchanged shots with this unit, struck up a friendship with the Mississippian. He described him as “a bright fellow,” and they talked for several hours about the war and its causes. At some point a fellow Nantucket was brought in screaming in pain. Seeing Murphey, the man begged Murphey to kill him to end his suffering. Instead, Murphey tried to calm the man and after being given opiates, the man fell asleep. The next morning the man’s pain was gone. Murphey asked him if he still wanted to be killed. The man declined. After four days, Murphey was furloughed.

Murphey returned in time to again fight in the city streets during the 2nd Battle of Fredericksburg. He was amazed by the destruction he saw in the city, “such is war, cruel, resistless war,” he wrote. On the way to Gettysburg, he fell sick and was hospitalized with typhoid fever. He returned in the fall to participate in the Mine Run Campaign, and then the long bloody campaign from the Wilderness to Petersburg. His diary contains rich details of the fighting at the Wilderness and at Spotsylvania.

Finally on July 18, 1864, Josiah’s 3-year enlistment ended with the rank of sergeant and after what he had experienced, he choose not to re-enlist. “We leave for home today,” he wrote, “yes, home, the dearest spot on earth to me, how it thrills my every nerve to think of going home.” Once home, his thoughts turned toward employment. Because of his service to his country, he was offered his old job back at the grocery store. He gratefully accepted and worked there for the rest of his long life. But his memoirs indicated that he never forgot what he saw and experienced at Fredericksburg.

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### **2009 Speaker’s Schedule**

The following schedule is presented by Greg Martin, reflecting the RVCWRT 2009 Speaker’s Program:

January: Kevin Levin – The Demobilization of the Army of Northern Virginia

February: Guy Stratton – The Battle of Franklin

March: Brian McEney – The West Point Class of 1862

April: Calvin Zon – The Good Fight - H.P. Goddard’s Accounts of the Civil War and Peace

May – TBD

June: Lee Stone – European Perspectives on the Civil War

July – NPS Intern \*

August – NPS Intern \*

September – TBD

October: Marc Leepson – Subject to be Announced

November – TBD

December – TBD

\* Greg Mertz has NPS Interns lined up for July and August; their names/topics will be announced at a later date.

Additionally, Greg Martin is in communication with both the National Firearms Museum and the National Archives for potential speakers. Greg indicates that he has more contact information for prospective 2009 speakers on its way to him. His goal is to complete 2009’s schedule ASAP and then begin plans for 2010.

## Robert E. Lee Symposium on Civil War History

January, 22 – 24, 2009

Held at Stratford Hall, Symposium highlights include:

- Participation in stimulating discussions with Civil War Historians
- Attend Battlefield Tours (Focusing on lesser known facets of these important battles)
- Lodge at Stratford Hall (Packages are available)
- Enjoy Friday evening meal and activities at Carl Melchers home and studio at Belmont in Falmouth, VA

For registration contact Laura Lawfer at:

Stratford Hall / 483 Great House Road / Stratford, VA 22558

Telephone: 804-493-8038, Ext. 1920 or Fax 804-493-0333

' \$450.00 Per-person (Double Rm.) ' \$275.00 (No Lodging) ' \$550.00 Per-person (Single Rm.)

' Students interested in Scholarship (Send resume with writing sample and letter)

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### December's Programs at the Park

#### December 7. Old Salem Church Holiday Music Program:

- At 6:00 p.m. the decorated and candle-lit church will come alive again with choral music in a program sponsored by the congregation from the New Salem Baptist Church.

#### December 13. Anniversary of the Battle of Fredericksburg:

- From 1:00 – 2:00 p.m. & 4:00 – 6:00 p.m.: Bullet scarred Innis House will be open
- At 2:00 p.m.: Infantry firing demonstration in the Sunken Road at Fredericksburg. Meet in the Sunken Road behind the Fredericksburg Battlefield Visitors Center.
- At 6:00, 6:30 and 7:00 p.m.: Candlelight tours of the Sunken Road. View the Sunken Road by candlelight and hear the stories of soldiers and civilians and how the battle changed their lives. Meet at the battle painting behind the Fredericksburg Battlefield Visitors Center.

#### December 14. Anniversary of the Battle of Fredericksburg Ceremony:

- At 12:00 p.m.: The Irish Brigade at Fredericksburg. Join park historian Frank O'Reilly and re-enactors as they follow the footsteps of the famed Irish Brigade into battle. Meet at the Fredericksburg City Docks.
- At 2:00 p.m. The annual anniversary program at the Kirkland Memorial honors the troops of both sides. The battle is commemorated with keynote speaker Kevin Levin, the presentation of wreaths and the playing of Taps.

#### December 21. Santa Claus visits Chatham:

- From 2:00 – 4:00 p.m. Civil War era dressed Santa Claus explains the history of Santa Claus followed by the children's visit with Santa. Enjoy period music performed by Evergreen Shade while waiting for the next program with Santa Claus.

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**Reminder:** The upcoming meeting on Monday December 8<sup>th</sup> is our regular meeting of the RVCWRT and the speaker will be our own Greg Mertz. Parking at Brocks continues to be at a premium, so note the following; The parking garage is FREE for the first 2 hours, after that it's only \$1.00 per hour. Also, be aware, after 6:00 p.m. the city lot on Sophia St. is FREE TO ALL. Prior to 6:00 p.m., a city sticker is required to park there, cars without stickers are ticketed and towed.

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**Remember:** Contact Bob Jones to confirm you and your guest's dinner in advance and save a buck!

Telephone 540-399-702 or e-mail [3dognight@bigplanet.com](mailto:3dognight@bigplanet.com)

The Drum and Bugle is published monthly by the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Roundtable, Post Office Box 7632, Fredericksburg, VA 22404. Dues are \$30.00 for individuals, \$40.00 for families, and \$7.50 for students. Membership is open to anyone interested in the study of the Civil War and the preservation of Civil War sites. Marc Thompson, President; Joe Bongiovi, Vice President and Program Chair; Bob Jones, Secretary; Bob Pfile, Treasurer; Barbara Stafford, Assistant Treasurer; Dan Augustine, Web Site Administrator; Jim Smithfield, Newsletter Editor; John Graham, John Griffiths, Greg Martin, Greg Mertz and Tom Quigley; Members of the Board of Directors.