



THE DRUM & BUGLE
Voice of the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table
March 2021, Volume 18, Issue 3

Speaker: Elaine "Wolfie" Kessinger
Topic: Professionalization of Nurses
When: Monday March 8, 2021
Location: Virtual Meeting Via Zoom
Times: 7:30
Our Website: www.rappvalleycivilwar.org
Our Facebook: www.facebook.com/rvcwrt

“Virtual March Meeting”

Elaine “Wolfie” Kessinger has a life-long love of history and need to bring history alive for others. She has been researching and sharing history for over 20 years. Her interest in female staff for the Army Medical Department comes much as it did for the female staff themselves, a desire to Do something at events. She has been requested by several museums to portray a Directress for educational programs and history events.

Today, female nurses and matrons are the frontline heroes, but that has not always been the popular perception. Join us in Women's History Month for a look at the five years that turned perceptions around, from fussy Mother and flighty debutante to Warrior in the battle for health. Bust the myths and explore the stereotypes of the Civil War Nurse as she finds her professional feet.

This month we will continue virtual Zoom programming with a presentation on Professionalization of Nurses by Elaine "Wolfie" Kessinger. 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.

**"Fighting for Their Freedom: The United States Colored Troops" by
Steward Henderson
A Review of the February 2021 Virtual Program by Greg Mertz**

Our speaker is a founder of the 23rd United States Colored Troops (USCTs) living history unit. Henderson and his fellow living historians portray the unit that was the very first black regiment to fight any element of the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia. The action occurred on May 15, 1864 during the battle of Spotsylvania Court House at Alrich's Farm, at the intersection of the Orange Plank Road and the Catharpin Road. The 23rd USCTs were protecting supply wagons at the nearby Chancellorsville crossroads when they were called to assist the 2nd Ohio Cavalry, then being driven east on the Catharpin Road by Gen. Thomas Rosser's Confederate cavalry.

A photograph exists of Sgt. Nimrod Burke, a civilian teamster and scout for the 36th Ohio before he joined the 23rd USCTs. The regiment also had twelve members named "George Washington." It could mean that the soldier had no name, or more likely, they wanted to conceal their real name from their owner, and to protect their enslaved family members from retaliation.

As Henderson shares the history of the black Civil War soldiers, he found that many people tend to think that the 54th Massachusetts was the only black unit. The regiment, featured in the movie "Glory," is best known for spearheading an attack on Fort Wagner near Charleston, South Carolina. The 54th made it to the parapets of the fort, during an assault on

July 18, 1863, but could not take the position. They seized it on September 7, 1863 following a long siege and after the Confederates abandoned it.

By the end of the Civil War as many as 20,000 black men served in the United States army and perhaps 29,000 served in the navy. Black men comprised about 10% of the Union army in 166 regiments. They fought in 450 engagements and suffered 38,000 deaths, with 2/3rds dying from disease. The vast majority of officers in these black units were white – some 7,000 white officers were in USCT units.

Frederick Douglass was a strong proponent of the recruitment of black troops as an important step in the struggle for equality. Douglass wrote, “Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letter, U.S., let him get an eagle on his button, and a musket on his shoulder and bullets in his pocket, there is no power on earth that can deny he has earned the right to citizenship.”

The advent of black troops in uniform was not officially recognized by the United States government early in the war and the manner in which the first black troops were recruited and their designations were quite varied. It was not Massachusetts but Kansas to be the first Northern state to send black soldiers into combat. On August 5, 1862, Senator and General James H. Lane from Kansas issued an order based upon the Second Confiscation Act to raise a black regiment. The 1st Kansas Colored Infantry, later renamed the 79th USCTs, fought in the October 28, 1862 skirmish at Mound Island, Missouri, which was officially the first engagement involving black troops.

Though many black units eventually became redesignated as USCTS, Henderson indicated that four units maintained their state designations throughout their service: the 54th and 55th Massachusetts Infantry Colored, the 5th Massachusetts Cavalry Colored, and the 29th Connecticut Infantry Colored.

At the outset of the war, the Louisiana Native Guard in New Orleans consisted of black men filling not only its ranks, but its officer corps as well. They first offered their services to the Confederacy, but were turned down. After Union Gen. Benjamin F. Butler’s request for reinforcements through proper channels was declined, he took it upon himself to raise three predominantly black Native Guard units in October, 1862.

The 1st South Carolina Colored Infantry claims the distinction of being the first black unit to be officially raised by the authority of the War Department. In

May of 1862, Union Gen. David Hunter announced the emancipation of slaves and began recruiting troops near Port Royal, South Carolina. Lincoln required Hunter to rescind the emancipation order and disband the unit. But with the release of Lincoln's own Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, officially authorizing the recruitment of black troops, Hunter reformed the regiment which was formally accepted at the end of the month.

The experiences of the black soldiers were dramatically different than those of the white soldier -- either by the Confederates or by their own government. While white Union soldiers were paid \$13 per month along with a \$3 per month uniform allowance, the black soldiers made only \$10 per month plus were *charged* \$3 per month for uniforms rather than being provided the uniform stipend. The USCTs protested but when the pay was equalized in 1864, only the soldiers who had been free received the back pay. When in combat, on several occasions black troops found that Confederates would not honor their surrender and executed them rather than take them prisoner.

Some light-skinned African-Americans passed as white and served as officers. It is generally recognized that Lt. Col. William N. Reed of the 1st North Carolina Colored, later 35th USCTs, who was mortally wounded in the February 20, 1864 battle of Olustee, Florida, was the highest ranking African-American of the war. However, Col. John Wayles Jefferson, who lived most of his life as white and commanded the 8th Wisconsin, a unit comprised of only white men. Originally going by the surname of Hemings, his paternal grandmother was an enslaved woman named Sally Hemings, and it is widely believed his paternal grandfather was her owner President Thomas Jefferson.

Henderson concluded with a quote from Gen. Benjamin F. Butler regarding his promise to never forsake the USCT men who fought so bravely at New Market Heights on September 29, 1864, where they were awarded fourteen Medals of Honor. Butler vowed "to defend the rights of these men who have given their blood for me and my country this day and for their race forever! and God help me, I will keep that oath."

A Reminder About Our Friends at CVBT

The following may be "old news" to many of our readers, but a gentle reminder about a great organization is always in order.

Central Virginia Battlefields Trust (CVBT) is a non-profit dedicated to the preservation of historic sites associated with the Battles of Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Wilderness and Spotsylvania Court House. They have helped save over 1350 acres of battlefield terrain since their incorporation in 1996. RVCWRT has been a regular contributor since 1997. We have donated \$40,000 in support of their important work and will continue to do so despite today's financial challenges.

CVBT and RVCWRT have had a long and fruitful relationship for over two decades. Several CVBT officers/board members are also members of our round table. RVCWRT was honored to receive the first ever Dr. Michael P. Stevens Preservation Award in 2017. This recognition from the CVBT Board of Directors honors those who have made notable contributions to the preservation of Civil War resources in Virginia.

Check out their website at www.cvbt.org. You can learn about the CVBT mission and current projects, see maps of battlefields saved, watch informative videos and more. CVBT not only preserves our local battlefields, but seeks to "protect the memory, meaning, sacrifices and stories of the brave men who fought and fell here."

Snowball Fight

My wife lived in Arizona for quite a few years. February thus far has had quite a few snow and ice storms in our area. This always excites her as she missed the cold temps and snow from her days of growing up in Iowa. We went out to our front lawn during one of these storms to attempt a snowman (big failure), make snow angels (that was even too cold for her), and of course I got hit with quite a few snowballs. This prompted me to reflect on a humorous story from the Confederate camps in Fredericksburg during the 1862-63 winter. A snowball fight ensued to the level that battle plans were drawn up. Below is an excerpt from the American Battlefield Trust's site and it is written by an officer in the 3rd SC brigade under General Kershaw. I hope you enjoy the article.

<https://www.battlefields.org/learn/primary-sources/desperate-snow-battle>

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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