



THE DRUM & BUGLE
Voice of the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table
November 2024, Volume 21, Issue 1

Speaker: Nathan Hall
Topic: “The Richmond Resistance: Those Who Secretly Fought the Civil War from Inside the Confederate Capital”
When: Monday November 11, 2024
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

Nathan Hall “The Richmond Resistance: Those Who Secretly Fought the Civil War from Inside the Confederate Capital”

Nathan Hall has been a Park Ranger at Richmond National Battlefield Park and the Maggie Walker National Historic Site for seven years. He is a native of the Richmond area, and an award-winning filmmaker. He received his

master's degree in history from Louisiana State University in 2011, where he specialized in the history of American law.

The Richmond Resistance': A discussion of the men, women, and children, Black and white, enslaved and free, who secretly fought the Civil War from inside the Confederate capital. New research reveals insights into the actions of the Union operatives of Richmond and the relationships that led a diverse group of civilians to risk their freedom, their property, and their lives in the service of the United States.

“Moments of Contingency and the Rise of Grant”

by Chris Mackowski

A Review of the October 2024 Program by Greg Mertz

Our speaker, Chris Mackowski, began his presentation by noting that different historians stress different battles as being the most significant in launching the career of Ulysses S. Grant – a career that brought him to accepting the surrender of Robert E. Lee’s army and eventually to the White House. But Chris noted that with every giant step that took Grant toward greatness, he also took a step backward that could have derailed his path to prominence. The focus of his talk was on those “moments of contingency” that accompanied each of his accomplishments.

The battle of Belmont, Missouri, fought November 7, 1861 was Grant’s first sizeable engagement and the start of his rise to eminence. He punished Confederate Gen. Leonidas Polk’s forces for violating Kentucky’s neutrality by attacking a portion of his command on the opposite side of the Mississippi River from his stronghold at Columbus, Kentucky. Grant gained valuable experience, grasping logistics by applying his skills as a Mexican War quartermaster, and demonstrating the initiative that defined his military style. Although Grant’s attack was initially successful, his men prematurely celebrated, and then panicked when Confederate reinforcements arrived. Grant calmly explained that his men had cut their way in and could also cut their way out, as Grant directed a successful withdrawal to their steamers.

But Belmont came close to being a battle that would not propel his career. When retrieving one of his regiments that had been misplaced, Grant was nearly captured. When back on board his steamer, Grant had laid down on his cot, but rose to observe some Confederate cannon fire, only to find upon

his return to his quarters that one of those projectiles had passed through the boat and hit his cot. And if not for one of Grant's subordinates, John A. McClernand, informing Lincoln of the battle while seeking to enhance his own cause, the president may not have even learned of Grant's contributions.

Grant next gained twin victories at Fort Henry guarding the Tennessee River on February 6, 1862 and Fort Donelson protecting the Cumberland River, fought February 13-16, 1862. During those battles, Grant established a strong working relationship with the United States Navy, which would also serve him well in the upcoming Vicksburg Campaign. The navy took Fort Henry before the army arrived on the scene. But at Fort Donelson, naval efforts to run past the fort failed, and Grant responded by sealing off all of the land approaches to the fort.

Fort Donelson was the war's first complete victory, with Grant accepting the surrender of nearly the entire Confederate garrison, but it was one of Grant's subordinates who came up with the idea that would result in Grant gaining a famous sobriquet. It was Charles F. Smith, who suggested to Grant that he should demand an "unconditional surrender" of Donelson. Matching Grant's initials, the first war hero for the United States became known as Unconditional Surrender Grant.

But in the aftermath of the most impressive victory of the war to date, Grant ran into problems with his department commander, Gen. Henry W. Halleck. A Confederate sympathizing telegraph operator was not forwarding Grant's reports to Halleck, who had taken credit for Grant's victories and was attempting to expand his own department. Halleck removed Grant from command of the army for failing to follow administrative procedures, until Lincoln demanded that Halleck either prefer specific charges against Grant or restore him to command.

Grant resumed command just days before the Confederates attacked his army initiating the April 6-7, 1862 battle of Shiloh, Tennessee. Although Grant would never admit that his command was surprised at Shiloh, he displayed his audacity and determination on that field. After the army had been brutalized on the first day of the battle, Grant and subordinate Gen. William T. Sherman met in the rain after the fighting had died down.

Sherman commented that the army had had the “devil’s day.” Grant agreed but responded that they would “lick ‘em tomorrow, though.”

Even though Grant held on at Shiloh and delivered a victory, Grant was caught off guard, the casualties were high, and some called for his dismissal. When Halleck came to Corinth, Mississippi to take command of the two Federal armies that had fought at Shiloh, Grant was relegated to second in command. Grant had nothing to do and requested a transfer. But the undeserved credit for Grant’s victories that Halleck had claimed for himself, ended up elevating him in July 1862 to the position of General-in-Chief in Washington, DC, and Grant was back in command of his army.

Halleck would continue to hamper Grant’s operations, but eventually Grant set his sights on Vicksburg, Mississippi. Problems curtailed the campaign. Confederates struck the Federal supply depot. Attempts to build canals and cut through bayous failed. While Halleck grew impatient, Lincoln allotted Grant the time to figure out what would work. With the cooperation of the navy once again, Grant was able to reach a point where he could invest Vicksburg and gain the most complete victory of the war with the surrender of Vicksburg’s large garrison.

Grant already had his next target in mind – Mobile, Alabama. But Halleck, still jealous of Grant’s success, instead sent portions of Grant’s army on less significant assignments. In the fall, however, setbacks of the Federal Army of the Cumberland, resulting in the army being besieged at Chattanooga, Tennessee, demanded attention and relief. Grant was sent with his own Army of the Tennessee, and a contingent of the Army of the Potomac under Gen. Joseph Hooker to lift the siege. Grant, in charge of all armies in the west, successfully coordinated this army group to defeat the Confederates in the November 23-25, 1863 battle of Chattanooga.

While the next step in Grant’s progression was to become the General-in-Chief on March 4, 1864, even that seemingly obvious move had contingencies to be met before it could happen. If Grant were to be successful in the spring of 1864, he might be elevated to presidential candidate in the fall of 1864. Not until Lincoln was convinced that Grant had no designs on running against him for the presidency, would Grant be elevated to General-in-Chief.

Once appointed to be the nation's top soldier, Grant's plan was to get all Federal armies moving at the same time, putting constant pressure on the limited Confederate resources. During the summer of 1864, Lincoln felt that the military stalemate then occurring would mean that he would lose the election and with it, lose the war. But Grant's plan of constant pressure worked, enabling Sherman to take Atlanta and facilitating Gen. Philip H. Sheridan's victory at Cedar Creek, securing the Shenandoah Valley – both successes coming prior to the fall election and contributing immensely to Lincoln's return to the White House.

Mackowski concluded by pointing out that it was not inevitable that Grant's series of successes throughout the war would result in him being seated at a table across from Robert E. Lee at Appomattox Court House. Rather Grant had the resiliency to make it through a series of contingencies that led to both Lee's surrender and Grant's presidency.

Friends of Central Virginia Battlefield Trust

As you know CVBT is a land trust. We focus on purchasing endangered battlefield properties. We do produce a large three-day annual conference, standalone events and need to interpret and maintain our lands, we need help in all of these. In the past, CVBT has had individuals from organizations assist us, and we are grateful, but now we would like to create an official volunteer group who would enjoy being part of CVBT's volunteer core.

We have created "**The Friends of CVBT.**" The intent is for this all-volunteer group is to be the "On Call" core of CVBT's volunteer group assisting in events and battlefield related needs. Active volunteer members will have the unique opportunity to be involved with events hosted by nationally acclaimed historians, assist in tours, and work on preserved battlefields. Participating volunteers will also be enrolled in the membership ranks of CVBT every year they contribute. CVBT will provide each volunteer with a CVBT volunteer staff shirt and CVBT official hat to wear at events or whenever wanted. We will be limiting this new group to 18 volunteers.

CVBT is now beginning our 27th year of preserving our local battlefields, the very battlefields you study and walk upon. We would be honored to have

you join the ranks of CVBT volunteers to help us further our mission of preserving our Nation's history.

If interested please email our Executive Director **Terry**

Rensel at executivedirector@cvbt.org .

Office: 540-374-0900

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.cwrtof.org, and will be updated here when the schedule is released for 2025.

November 20, 2024 Frank O'Reilly - Ambrose Burnside's Military Career

January 22, 2025 Charlie McDaniel – Witness to History: The Sentry Box House

February 26, 2025 Zachery Fry – A Republic in the Ranks: Loyalty and Dissent in the Army of the Republic

March 26, 2025 John Coski – Hunter Davidson (CSN)

April 23, 2025 Kevin Pawlak – Bristoe Station

May 26, 2025 Barton Myers – General Winfield Scott

June 18, 2025 Patrick Schroeder - Forgotten Friday: April 7, 1865 Actions in Cumberland County VA

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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