



**THE DRUM & BUGLE**  
**Voice of the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table**  
**September 2024, Volume 21, Issue 9**

**Speaker:** T.J. Bradley  
**Topic:** “Second Manassas”  
**When:** Monday September 9, 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](http://www.rappvalleycivilwar.org)  
**Our Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/rvcwrt](http://www.facebook.com/rvcwrt)

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**T.J. Bradley “Second Manassas”**

T.J. Bradley is a non-profit professional with a specialization in civil wars, conflict and military history. He’s a past contributor to Emerging Civil War, and other publications, and has been a lifelong student of the American Civil War. He has a Bachelor’s degree from Heidelberg University and a Master’s degree from American University. T.J. has presented on Civil War topics to a wide variety of public, student and volunteer groups; to include military staff rides in Virginia. T.J. is also a member of the Sons of Union Veterans of the

Civil War and Sons of Veterans Reserve. He is an active participant and presenter in the Civil War Roundtable community.

Second Manassas has been called Lee's greatest victory. Yet, in all of Lee's victories he was unable to destroy a Federal army in the field. In 1862 at Manassas, he might have come the closest. What kept total victory out of reach? Did the Confederates fail to finish off the Federals? By exploring the actions of the United States Regulars at key points on August 30th, we will seek to better understand an often misconstrued portion of the battle and delve deeper into its climax.

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***“On the Verge of Liberty”*: The Point Lookout Refugee Camp  
by Maddie Hollis**

**A Review of the August 2024 Program by Greg Mertz**

In mid-1862, the Federal government purchased a three-year-old, seaside resort on a portion of the Maryland coast called Point Lookout, and turned it into the Hammond General Hospital treating wounded Federal soldiers. The following year, after the breakdown of prisoner exchanges and the Gettysburg Campaign, the property also became prisoner of war Camp Hoffman for some 52,000 Confederate soldiers captured over the last two years of the war. Our speaker, Madelyn Hollis, shared the results of her research on a third facility at Point Lookout – the refugee camp for escaped slaves experiencing their first sample of freedom.

The refugee camp was not established by the Federal military as a location where the formerly enslaved could go. Rather it was “selected” by the enslaved who showed up at the hospital seeking assistance. They came from nearby Maryland communities as well as some from Virginia who successfully crossed the Potomac River.

One of the best sources of information on the refugee camp is from social reformer Abby Hopper Gibbons. Raised in Philadelphia in a Quaker family, with parents who were active abolitionists, the family had moved to New York City by the time of the war. Prior to the Civil War Abby was instrumental in having separate prisons established for men and women convicts. Even though she was in her 60's in 1861, Gibbons became a volunteer nurse with the U.S. Sanitary Commission. She was at the hospital when it opened,

staying until the fall of 1863. During the Civil War draft riots in the New York City in 1863, her home was targeted and burned down.

As Gibbons documented the conditions of the Point Lookout refugee camp, she learned to cope with a U.S. policy on dealing with escaped slaves that was often contradictory. Early in the war, when Federal Gen. Benjamin Butler at Fort Monroe in Virginia was called upon to deal with escaped slaves who had been constructing Confederate earthworks, he used the Confederates own policy viewing the men as “property” to refuse to return the slaves, declaring them to be “contraband” of war.

Since the state of Maryland was a slave state that remained in the Union, the provisions established by Butler did not apply. Although the First Confiscation Act declared that the property of disloyal citizens could be taken by the government as contraband of war, if a Maryland slaveholder took the oath of allegiance to the United States, they were not disloyal citizens and they could re-take any of their slaves who had escaped. A Wisconsin soldier noted “the policy of the government on this question of contrabands is as much a riddle and a mystery as the ancient oracles of Egypt.”

May 28, 1863, an enslaved man named Sandy Dorsey knocked on her door. With shackles around his ankles from being chained to a tree, Dorsey had escaped from his owner, William Taylor, who lived only three miles away from Point Lookout. Dorsey knew Gibbons from working in hospital for four months. But since Maryland was a loyal slave state, the terms of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law were in effect and Taylor had legally retrieved Dorsey, who had now escaped again. Hospital workers were forced to deal with the escaped enslaved and often ignored laws in order to protect the people in the camps.

Many runaway slaves from Maryland went to Washington, DC where they felt they were less likely to be returned. Some felt their chances of being sent back to their owners would be less if they claimed they were from Virginia. Gibbons reported that a slave owner named Comb indicated that 40 of his enslaved had escaped. The route they followed was first across the Potomac River to Virginia and then re-crossing to Point Lookout. Comb evidently recognized one of his slaves at Point Lookout named Sam, and addressed him. “Excuse me sir, but I have never seen you before,” Sam insisted, “I’m from Virginia.”

Even though laws protecting slave owners had not changed, the practice of the army at Point Lookout returning slaves changed over time. Federal soldiers would turn slave owners like Comb away. The camp grew in numbers of refugees in 1863 and 1864. In August of 1863, Frank Nicholls, a soldier at the hospital, indicated that the refugee camp contained about 1100. In 1864, Asa Bartlett, in the 12th New Hampshire, one of the guard units, indicated that at times there were not less than 2000.

Gibbons wrote that slaves gauged the risk of trying to escape in part by the reception they would receive, and word of mouth spread that they would be welcomed at Point Lookout. Abby shared a story from September, 1863 when three refugees arrived at Point Lookout on a boat. Upon seeing their reception, they commented that if they had known that they would have been treated so well, they would have brought their wives along. They soon disappeared, only to return again three days later with their families.

While the reception was good, the conditions they faced were poor. Since the refugees just showed up, the Federal government had no plans for dealing with the former slaves and no structure for accommodating them. No shelter was available at first, but later four barracks were constructed. A measles outbreak in the summer 1863 took many lives. Soldiers in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Maryland instead of protecting the refugees, committed violence against them. The refugees endured many hardships in their quest for freedom.

Gibbons tried to improve conditions, and when she found government officials to be unresponsive, she used her connections to get friends to send supplies. Clinton Wagner, in charge of the hospital, threatened to dismiss her after she intervened in his punishment of a refugee who worked in the hospital. Gibbon dared Wagner to put the discharge in writing, pointing out that she had the ear of several important politicians. But William Gardner took over in September, 1863, and he replaced Gibbons and all of the protestant nurses with Catholic nuns.

In January 1864, United States Colored Troops arrived to serve as guards. The 36<sup>th</sup> USCTs vowed to free others in the area and during a June 1864 expedition into Virginia, two soldiers were killed trying to rescue an enslaved person. One of the fatalities was 37-year-old Peter Wilson, from North Carolina, who is buried in the Fredericksburg National Cemetery. Enough

able bodied formerly enslaved men made it to Point Lookout to raise two USCT regiments.

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### **Friends of the Wilderness**

The Friends of the Wilderness are now offering tours of Payne's Farm on the Mine Run Battlefield. Fought from November 26-December 2, 1863, Mine Run is a largely forgotten campaign. The truth is the battle was, in some ways, a dress rehearsal for the Battle of the Wilderness in 1864. Take advantage of the opportunity to get an expert tour of a field many don't know exists. Information can be found at <https://www.fowb.org/post/payne-s-farms-2024-summer-hours>.

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### **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](mailto:executivedirector@cvbt.org) .  
Office: 540-374-0900

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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.cwrftf.org](http://www.cwrftf.org), and will be updated here when the schedule is released for 2025.

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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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