



THE DRUM & BUGLE
Voice of the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table
July 2022, Volume 19, Issue 7

Speaker: John Roos
Topic: The Fall of 1863: The Most Important Unknown Time of the Civil War
When: Monday July 11, 2022
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

John Roos: "The Fall of 1863: The Most Important Unknown Time of the Civil War"

I am a 2018 graduate of Southern New Hampshire University with a BA in American history. I am currently going for my MA at the same school and same major. I received my teaching license from Shenandoah University. I am currently a 7th grade English teacher at Culpeper Middle School. I am a former intern with the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania Military Park. I

worked at two other parks for the NPS over the course of 2017-2018. My wife Sarah and I moved to Fredericksburg in 2019. I am also a battlefield guide for Fredericksburg Tours, which is owned by fellow round table member, John Kanaster. I specialize in the Fredericksburg area battlefields, and also Mine Run, North Anna, Haw's Shop, Totopotomoy Creek, Cold Harbor, and the Seven Days. I also have a couple articles published on the Emerging Civil War blog page.

The fall of 1863 in Virginia is one of the most glossed over periods of the war. The eastern theater of the war is usually looked upon as Gettysburg and then the Wilderness. The fall in Virginia however sets the stage for decisions on the battlefield and in Washington more than people realize. It also sets up the end of the war. This talk will focus on several personalities as opposed to battle analysis. We will see how the fall of Virginia influences and is influenced by other theaters of the war, and how it influenced a major decision by Abraham Lincoln.

“Emory Upton in Myth and Modern Memory”

by Tyler McGraw

A Review of the June 2022 Program by Greg Mertz

Our speaker, Tyler McGraw was a 2016 intern with the National Park Service during which he became fascinated by Emory Upton’s Attack during the battle of Spotsylvania Court House. In his research to learn more about Upton, he discovered that much of what he had originally believed to be true about Upton as the innovator of that attack and being actively involved in the selection of the troops making the attack, had been wrong. Those realizations drove him to want to discover the real Emory Upton.

Besides being associated with the attack utilizing some unique tactics at Spotsylvania, Upton is also known for his post-war reforms to the military. Upton’s first recommendation was that Congress should not interfere with the military. Upton saw this as an issue since the days of George Washington commanding the army.

Upton’s second issue was regarding the tactics applied, and particularly the tactics that he witnessed being used during the Civil War. McGraw indicated that Upton advocated reform because he had experienced some “very pivotal moments” in the Civil War.

Upton wrote to his congressman, Benjamin Pringle in 1854 seeking an appointment to the U.S. Military Academy. Pringle felt that Upton needed more education, so he attended Oberlin College for a year – a progressive school which had both coed and interracial students. That added education enabled him to successfully gain admission to West Point.

On June 3, 1860, Upton wrote a very optimistic letter, as he was looking forward to his final year at West Point. But just six months later, in the aftermath of Lincoln's election to the presidency, Upton's letters indicated an attitudinal change. "I believe the Union is virtually dissolved," Upton wrote to a sister, and "a terrible and bloody revolution will result." Upton graduated eight out of forty-five in the class of 1861.

Upton's first experiences in the war were in Washington, drilling troops and serving on the staff of Gen. Daniel Tyler. This gave Upton the opportunity to form his first impression of the way Congress intruded into military matters. Upton was slightly wounded at First Manassas, writing to a sister, "Our troops fought well, but were badly managed."

McGraw noticed a trait in Upton's writing, that is quite common among soldiers. His letters to his family reflect the brutal honesty of what Upton was thinking and how he felt, but when writing his official correspondence, he showed much more tact and restraint, usually concealing his personal views.

Once Upton recovered from his wounds, he was assigned to Battery D, 2nd U.S. Artillery, serving in the 1862 Peninsula and Maryland campaigns, before being placed in command of the 121st New York Infantry. The regiment had a minor role in the Fredericksburg campaign, got bogged down in the Mud March, and then saw heavy action in the Chancellorsville campaign at Salem Church on May 3, 1863.

Upton wrote that they advanced through the woods toward the church, toward an enemy they were told was retreating. But the Confederates were concealed in a ditch, opening fire on the 121st when it was just fifty yards away. Upton proudly wrote that his men did not falter, but rather cheered and drove the Confederates back. But the Confederates rallied, and the 23rd New Jersey to Upton's right could not move up beside the 121st New York, and Upton's men could not maintain their advanced position, suffering a staggering 60% casualties in the fight.

At Rappahannock Station on November 6, 1863, Upton's superior, Gen. David Russell was given the task of assaulting a Confederate redoubt. In order to succeed, Russell also needed to take another redoubt to its right. The assignment to take that other redoubt fell to Upton with two regiments attacking at dusk. Upton ordered the troops to load on the move, and not to fire until they reached the enemy works. Upton took the first line of enemy works and then gave the men a speech delivered loud enough for the Confederates in the redoubt to hear. Though Upton only had two regiments, he shouted out that if his men were fired upon, he would forward six regiments to their aid. The talk apparently intimidated the Confederates, who did not offer much resistance. The Federal forces -- and Upton -- gained a small but complete victory.

Upton's superiors felt that he deserved to be elevated to the rank of general, but army commander Gen. George G. Meade informed him "that without political influence I will never be promoted." Sixth Corps commander Gen. John Sedgwick felt that Upton was the colonel in the corps who was most deserved of promotion, yet two other colonels were advanced ahead of Upton. Upton's letters about his promotion again reflect the theme of criticizing the impact of political influence upon the military.

In May of 1864, Gen. Russell and engineer Randal Mackenzie scouted for a weakness in the Confederate position at Spotsylvania and found one at Doles' Salient. Russell, perhaps thinking of Rappahannock Station, felt that Upton was the man to attack the salient. With what Upton called "a splendid command" of twelve regiments formed in a column, "the enemy's lines were completely broken," but the division that was supposed to exploit the gap in the line Upton had created "did not arrive." While the overall attack had failed, Upton took stock in knowing that he had succeeded in his specific role.

Upton's brigade was reinforced by troops that had yet to see combat -- men of the 2nd Connecticut Heavy Artillery, sent down from the defenses of Washington for action on June 1, 1864 at Cold Harbor. The regiment suffered horrific casualties. Upton wrote to a sister, "I am disgusted with the generalship displayed" and their handling of soldiers who were "foolishly and wantonly sacrificed." "Thousands of lives might have been spared," projected Upton, "by the exercise of a little skill."

The Sixth Corps was next sent to the Shenandoah Valley where Upton was wounded at the battle of Third Winchester and went home to Batavia, New York to recover. His next assignment was in the cavalry; Upton fought in all three branches of service during the war. Early in the war, Upton had been opposed to the destruction of civilian property, but by the time he served under Gen. J.H. Wilson's cavalry in Alabama and Georgia, late in the war, he actively participated in ripping up railroads and other aspects of the hard hand of war. The course of the war had apparently changed his perspective on the issue.

After the war, Upton was given a detail, and travelled extensively to observe and study the policies and practices of as many military forces and operations as possible – including witnessing some of the Franco-Prussian War. The goal was for him to recommend reforms for the United States military. Upton concluded that America needed to copy the Prussian practices.

Upton would be in position to implement these changes by being the commandant of cadets at West Point, being an instructor of artillery at Fort Monroe and by writing important documents. He wrote an incomplete study that was published in 1904 called *The Military Policy of the United States from 1775*, which only went through 1862, because Upton committed suicide before completing the treatise. Upton suffered from severe headaches from what is thought to have been a brain tumor.

Civil War Music at Chatham

Here's a note from our friends at the Civil War Round Table of Fredericksburg:

Join us on Wednesday, July 27th on the upper terrace of Chatham Manor for an entertaining evening with

Geoff White. Geoff is a talented musician who enjoys playing and singing Civil War era music.

We had a lot of fun with him last year. Program begins at 6:00 p.m. Bring chairs and your singing voice. Water will be provided on site. No reservations are needed and there is no charge.

During the pandemic, Geoff was our moderator/video editor for all

RVCWRT Zoom meetings. He is as gifted musically as he is with online coordination. Come out and see him in person!

8th Annual Emerging Civil War Symposium at Stevenson Ride - August 5-7, 2022

Theme: **Great "What If's?" of the Civil War**

Keynote Speaker: Gary Adelman: "Speculation Run Amok: Fun with Gettysburg's What If's."

Early Bird Tickets – \$200.00

Visit <https://emergingcivilwar.com/2022-symposium> to learn more

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. As with our round table, things are subject to change due to the ups and downs of Covid.

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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