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RICHMOND

CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

AUGUST 2021

“The Civil War is the crux of our history. You cannot understand any part of our past, from the convening of the Constitutional Convention, down to this morning, without eventually arriving at the Civil War.”

Bernard de Voto

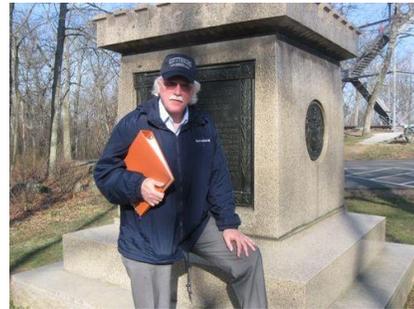
August 10, 2021, 7:30 p.m.

“Culp’s Hill:

The Final Frontier”

Dr. Charles Fennell

THIS WILL BE A ZOOM MEETING



The Battle of Culp’s Hill is in many ways the final frontier of interpretation. All other major parts of the battlefield of Gettysburg have been restored to near their 1863 appearance except Culp’s Hill. That is until now. A major restoration and rehabilitation project is currently under way to return Culp’s Hill to its 1863 appearance. There is no one alive today that saw the hill the way it looked in 1863, and it is nearly impossible to interpret something you can not see. The fighting on Culp’s Hill was most important in determining the outcome of the battle and is seldom visited by visitors and students alike because it was impossible

to see where the fighting took place. What was significant about the fighting on Culp's Hill and how the current restoration will help us understand the significance of Culp's Hill is the topic of this presentation.

Charlie Fennell is a native of Western Pennsylvania and became interested in the American Civil War at an early age. Charlie has received degrees from Frostburg State College, Clarion State College, and his Ph.D. from West Virginia University where his dissertation was "The Attack and Defense of Culp's Hill." Charlie has been on the History faculty of West Virginia University and currently is an Adjunct Faculty Professor at Harrisburg Area Community College, Gettysburg Campus, where he teaches history and geography. Charlie is a published author and has been conducting tours of Civil War battlefields as a Licensed Battlefield Guide since 1986. Charlie currently lives with his wife of 41 years, Joleen, in Hanover, Pennsylvania.

ZOOM SIGN ON INFORMATION

By Andy Keller

<https://tinyurl.com/RCWRT2021>

For Audio only call +1 301 715 8592. Long Distance Rates may apply

Meeting ID: 834 7150 6220

Passcode: 481366

To participate in a Zoom session, your computer will need a camera function, standard for most laptops, Smart Phones and tablets. I would suggest reviewing the camera function before that time. We recommend that you join 5 - 10 minutes before the meeting starts, to be sure that your equipment is working and review some of the features. You will be unmuted on admittance during

that time for project socializing, but you should mute yourself when requested. We hope to record the meeting so if you are unable to attend please send a request for the recording to Secretary.RCWRT@gmail.com.

A Word from the President

A while back my wife and I had the pleasure of taking an overnight trip to Harper's Ferry. The area offers something for everyone. As you are aware, it was the site of the capture of John Brown's band of insurrectionists in 1859 by Robert E. Lee and Jeb Stuart. The engine house where Brown's men were cornered still stands (although it has been moved a bit). It was also the site of Stonewall Jackson's fascinating campaign to capture the town and surrounding mountains during the Antietam Campaign in 1862. For those reasons alone it's a must see.



But there is more. The town itself is picturesque. While walking the streets and visiting the shops you are instantly taken back to the 19th century. The town sits at the convergence of the Potomac and Shenandoah rivers, and is

surrounded by mountains; it's simply breathtaking. If history isn't someone's thing (can you imagine that?), the shops alone are worth a visit. You can walk the ridges and mountains and see the action of the 1862 campaign happen. Antietam is only about 16 miles distant, and South Mountain, Monocacy, and Cedar Creek are not far away.

Yet there is more to do. If you like hiking, this is a great spot. In addition to the town and paths, the Appalachian Trail runs through here (if you have an interest in the Trail, contact Bert Dunkerly for more information). There are also a lot of really nice bed & breakfasts in the area, and obviously the scenery is fantastic.

So, if you are looking for a quick getaway, give Harper's Ferry some serious consideration. I promise you'll have a great time.

Doug

PLEASE NOTE

Due to the vacancy created by the recent resignation of one of the round table's officers, the following amendment to the Constitution will be voted on before the meeting:

Article IV – OFFICERS AND GOVERNMENT Section 5: Succession. In the event of the death, resignation, or disability (as determined by the Executive Committee) of any officer, occurring between annual meetings, the President may in his or her discretion appoint another member in good standing to fill such vacancy for the unexpired term. In the event of the death, resignation, or disability of the President, the First Vice President shall become the President, and the Second

Vice President shall become the First Vice President for the unexpired term. If deemed necessary, the new President may then appoint a new Second Vice President.

ADOPT-A-MONUMENT

By Bert Dunkerly

In 2017 Richmond National Battlefield Park created an Adopt-A-Monument program. Similar programs have been in place for years at parks like Antietam and Gettysburg. Volunteers adopt a monument and care for it by checking for damage, weathering, and maintenance needs, and perform basic cleaning.

Richmond National Battlefield Park has four monuments, and the last to be adopted is that of the 2nd Connecticut Heavy Artillery. Cold Harbor was their first battle, fighting as infantry. The rookie unit, 1500 strong, lost 330 men on the afternoon of June 1, 1864. Their charge helped break through the Confederate lines and set the stage for the larger Union attack on June 3.

Dedicated in the 1990s, the monument includes the Sixth Corps badge (a cross), summarizes their attack, and lists the names of those lost in the engagement. It stands at the site of their charge, and nearby is a wayside marker that provides more detail about the battle and the unit.

The round table has been asked by the park if they would like to adopt this monument. The duties include checking conditions quarterly:

- Looking over the wayside and monument for damage
- Picking up litter
- Pulling weeds
- Cleaning the wayside with water and a rag

- Reporting back to the park on conditions and anything that needs attention

In addition, the stone monument has some algae-type growth and once a year park staff will meet with volunteers to do a cleaning of the stone with a special bio cleaner. Below are photos of the monument and wayside. I am happy to answer any questions or concerns:

bert_dunkerly@nps.gov.

Thank you for your consideration!

The membership will also vote on this issue before the meeting.



Future Generals as Battlefield Tourists By R.E.L. Krick

As many know, the term “staff ride” refers to an event where military professionals visit battlefields. Such

exercises aim to extract lessons from the past, ones that have practical application in modern military affairs. Here in Virginia we think of bus loads of officers touring Chancellorsville, or following the sinuous path of Stonewall Jackson’s Shenandoah Valley Campaign. More often than not, those groups leave the state to see Sharpsburg and Gettysburg, too. Staff rides are not confined to Civil War battlefields, of course. Waterloo and Normandy and countless other fields of conflict can be valuable historical classrooms.

Our proximity to Washington, D.C., and to Fort Lee, and certainly to the hive of Marine Corps training at Quantico, has made the Richmond-area battlefields a popular destination for staff rides across the years, although the frequency has diminished greatly in the last decade or so. It is interesting to ponder the effect our sites have had on some famous American soldiers.

The first staff ride to Richmond (as far as I know) took place in May 1909 as a field exercise connected to the relatively new Army War College, based then in Washington. The Army War College exists as a professional development venue for promising officers. Most of the students in those early years held mid-level ranks such as captain and major, but selection to the course suggested a positive career trajectory. The 1909 class consisted of only 32 men. They spent a full day at Seven Pines and Malvern Hill and a second full day around Cold Harbor, Gaines’s Mill, and Mechanicsville.

Better information exists for a reprisal of the trip in 1910, with an entirely new class of officers. Details suggest just how seriously the Army

War College viewed the undertaking. Major Eben Swift, a history-minded cavalryman, led the expedition, and nearly the entire trip – which lasted for three weeks – took place on horseback. The 26 students covered 250 miles and visited virtually every battlefield between Bristoe Station and Malvern Hill. That class included then-lieutenant colonel John A. Lejeune, future Commandant of the Marine Corps. Secretary of War Jacob M. Dickinson even joined the officers for a three-day spell and toured Seven Pines, Savage's Station, and Malvern Hill with them.

The army hierarchy considered the trips both beneficial and successful, and the rides grew in scope as time passed. The 1913 expedition numbered about three-dozen officers, but they covered 465 (!) miles on horseback in three weeks. The logistical complexities must have been substantial. Apparently anyone could camp anywhere they wanted in that era, so after a day of riding and studying, the men simply set up camp. One newspaper even provided a list of camping sites. Local bivouacs included the North Anna River, French Hay, Walnut Grove Church, Seven Pines, and the South Anna River. Before the decade ended, some of the men who rode Virginia's dusty roads that spring, following the Civil War armies and learning what they could, held very elevated positions among the American organizations that fought in Europe during the final two years of World War One.

That same class of 1913 also hosted some British guests. One of them, Colonel George Paley, returned to Europe and was killed on October 31,

1914, at Ypres, while on duty as the senior staff officer for the British First Division.

If the annual battlefield tours continued after World War One, then men like Dwight D. Eisenhower and George S. Patton likely received some direct exposure to the Seven Days battlefields, Cold Harbor, and other local landmarks. The Army War College spring battlefield tours certainly had resumed by 1937. That tour holds special interest for the Richmond-area battlefields, because Richmond National Battlefield owns photographs of the class visit to Malvern Hill. It was mid-June 1937, just two weeks short of the 75th anniversary of the battle, and the students (nearly 100 of them that year) can be seen wearing ties and slacks, sitting on camp chairs beneath the shade trees at the West House, on the crest of Malvern Hill.



Clearly someone is lecturing to them about the battle. Some are studying maps; others stare out across the historic landscape, trying to picture the Confederate attack there. One of those shade trees remains in the West House yard today, 84 years later, as the modern comparison shows.



Somewhere in that photograph are at least three men who remain household names today (at least in history-minded households), and a fourth well known to Civil War students: Matthew B. Ridgway, Mark W. Clark, Walter B. Smith, and John W. Thomason, Jr. In 1944, just seven years removed from being photographed beneath the trees at Malvern Hill, Ridgway commanded the 82nd Airborne Division, Clark led the 5th Army in Italy, and “Beetle” Smith served as Eisenhower’s chief of staff. Thomason’s notoriety stems more from his career as an author than from his service as a Marine officer. His biography of Jeb Stuart had reached print in 1930, and his novel Lone Star Preacher (1941) remains a much-admired piece of Civil War fiction today. Thomason had grown up among veterans of Hood’s Texas Brigade, men who had fought through the Seven Days. Perhaps he added some on-site commentary of his own in 1937, based on what he had heard from them.

The Army War College toured our local battlefields again in June 1939. One surviving photograph, reproduced here, shows the officers gathered at the beginning of the tour road at Cold Harbor. The Confederate entrenchments are immediately behind the men, who are looking east across

the fields toward the Federal line. Conditions in 1939 contrasted favorably to what students had endured back in 1913. Rather than ride all across the Old Dominion on horseback, the officers in the Class of 1939 used the Jefferson Hotel in Richmond as their base of operations and traveled by bus.



The tremendous differences between 19th and 21st century military operations means that modern staff rides focus not on strategy and tactics but rather on timeless topics such as leadership, decision making, and logistics. Our round table’s own Jack Mountcastle has led several such expeditions over the years. Hopefully, succeeding generations of young officers will continue to visit the Richmond-area battlefields and draw upon that experience as they lead our armed forces through whatever events the future may hold.

*Sincere thanks and appreciation to
Bobby Krick for his contribution to the
newsletter*