



Founded at Fort Harrison
on February 8, 1951

RICHMOND CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

JULY 2024

“The Civil War was the biggest thing that ever happened to us. It was our Iliad and our Odyssey – and it remains our least understood war.”

Bruce Catton

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July 9, 2024

7:30 p.m.

**At First Presbyterian Church
4602 Cary Street Road
Richmond, VA 23226**
(The parking lot is behind the church; go up the steps to fellowship hall on the left)

FRANK O'REILLY

**“STUART & SHERIDAN – AND THE
ROAD TO YELLOW TAVERN”**



The Battle of Yellow Tavern was fought on May 11, 1864 as part of the Overland Campaign. Union Cavalry under Major General Phil Sheridan was detached from Grant's Army of the Potomac to conduct a raid on Richmond, challenging Confederate Cavalry commander Major General J.E.B. Stuart.

The road to Yellow Tavern and the two principal players in the ensuing battle will be discussed by Frank O'Reilly at this month's meeting.

Frank O'Reilly received both his BA and MA in American History with a concentration on Early American Military History and Civil War Studies. He did his undergraduate work at Washington & Lee University before joining the National Park Service at the Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park. He worked briefly at Independence Hall in Philadelphia, and then returned to Fredericksburg as an historian in 1990.

His book, *The Fredericksburg Campaign: Winter War on the Rappahannock*, received a 2003 nomination for the Pulitzer Prize in Letters. Released by LSU Press in December 2002, it has won the 2002 Capital District (Albany, NY) Book Award; the 2003 James I. Robertson, Jr. Book Award; the 2004 Daniel Laney Book Award; and the 2004 Richard Barksdale Harwell Book Award.

Frank has written numerous articles on the Civil War and Mexican War for national and international journals; and introductions to quite a few books. In 1993, he released his first book on the Fredericksburg campaign titled, *Stonewall Jackson at Fredericksburg*. He has appeared in quite a few documentaries, on CSPAN, and has lectured extensively on military history to audiences around the world, from the

Pentagon to numerous conferences in the United Kingdom at Oxford.

Frank is currently writing a book on the 1862 Battle of Malvern Hill and the Seven Days' Battles around Richmond.



A WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT

Last month, Wayne Motts gave an inspired talk about a few of the soldiers who fought at Gettysburg; and, since that is Ulli's favorite battlefield, I thought I would repeat a short piece that I recently wrote for the Blue and Gray Education Society about one of my favorite spots on a battlefield, so here goes:

Like many other history buffs, I love to read books about the Civil War – the more the better. And when it comes to reading about the battles, I love the maps – the more the better. But there are things that happened back then that neither the books nor the maps can describe well – things that often established the tactical plan and things that changed the course of the battle. Oftentimes, things that the generals or their men could see or couldn't see determined the outcome in ways that books and maps can't capture. You need to go to the battlefield yourself, to see what they could see. These sights represent

some of the great reasons we try to save the battlefields.

The recent work at Gettysburg to cut many trees down at Devil's Den has been terrific. Now as then, from the top of Little Round Top, you can see the path of the onslaught of Benning's Brigade on the afternoon of July 2nd; and from below, you can see what those Georgia boys could see as they looked up at the rocky slope. But I think books, maps, and photographs can capture these views.

But further to the Union left, something happened that was probably more important than the fighting around Devil's Den. Joshua Chamberlain was deploying the 20th Maine as the extreme left regiment in the defenses of Little Round Top. He detached Company B and sent it out to his left front where they lay down behind a small, broken-down stone wall. The rest of his regiment refused its left flank and fought off several determined charges by Texans and Alabamians. At the critical point of the battle, with William Oates' 15th Alabama about to find and perhaps turn the left flank of the 20th Maine, the men from Company B rose and fired a volley into the rear of the Alabama boys, causing a panic in their overheated and dehydrated ranks as the supposed flankers found themselves flanked. The rest of the 20th Maine made their famous bayonet charge at exactly that moment, but the single volley from Company B had already turned the tide. Without that small company firing that small volley, Oates' men might indeed have turned the Union position and driven the men in blue off Little Round Top. Maybe 50 rounds turned the tide. Of the 9 million rounds fired at Gettysburg, none were more important.

Until recently, there was only a small sign pointing to an even smaller trail

that led to the stone wall of Company B. Last month, I asked Wayne if the work going on now on Little Round Top would make Company B's position more prominent, but he said no. So, in the future when you visit Gettysburg, look for this spot and sense why the Alabamians thought that their attack had failed, leading to their disorderly retreat. Only then can you understand why Longstreet's assault failed on the second day. It is one of the most important spots in the whole three days, yet it remains off the beaten path and is barely marked. And the books, photographs, and maps cannot capture its importance the way a visit to the spot can.

Waite



20th Maine Co. B Marker, Gettysburg NMP

**A Warm Welcome to Our
New Members:**

**MIKE BELL
JON LARSON
JOHN PIETRAS
DAVID SMITH**

From the Round Table Archives
RCWRT BULLETIN –
Volume 1, Issue 5, May 1958

General Frederick Von Boettecher Revisits Richmond

Several weeks ago we had the very great pleasure of welcoming to Richmond again a most charming and well-informed military expert and authority on the Civil War, General Frederick Von Boettecher, who was guest in the home of Ambler Johnston. Ambler writes of his visit as follows:

“Myths are hard to dispel and such is the legendary visit of General Rommel to the Valley of Virginia. As a matter of fact, he never crossed the Atlantic nor set his foot on American soil.

“One German general did, however, carefully trace Jackson’s movements in the Valley Campaigns. This was Frederick Von Boettecher. He was a general of artillery and on the general staff in World War I. An old student under Hindenburg, he knew personally all the high command. As military attaché of the German Embassy in Washington in 1922 he obtained permission from the State Department to trace Jackson’s steps. Hence the myth.

“Some years later when Freeman produced “Lee,” Von Boettecher became acquainted with Freeman and joined a group who visited many fields in northern Virginia, thus enabling the Civil War buffs of that day to become acquainted with him. He told how Hindenburg was so thoroughly familiar with the American campaigns. He also told us that the German military students consider

George Washington in a class with Caesar, Napoleon, Frederick the Great, and others and that he is surprised that American historians do not seem to appreciate Washington’s military ability.

“Some years ago Von Boettecher published in Germany an article entitled “Against Overwhelming Odds,” using Washington as one of the examples in history exemplifying the ability to save the army at all hazards and wait for the opportunity to effectively strike the enemy at a weak point.”

Mr. Damerel Raises an Interesting Question

Fellow member Damerel poses an interesting question out of his reading of Winston Churchill’s history of the English-speaking peoples. This four-volume history, covering nearly two thousand years, and spreading over parts of five continents, devoted one-twelfth of its content to the four years covered by the American Civil War. “Why,” asks Mr. Damerel, “would Churchill find this period of such vital significance? Does it all mean that what affected the United States in the mid-Eighteenth Century was of such vital importance to all of the English-speaking peoples of the mid-Twentieth?” “Or,” suggests Mr. Damerel, “is Mr. Churchill’s own love of war so strong and his admiration of Lee and Jackson so great that he automatically constitutes himself a member of his own personal Civil War Round Table?”

Mr. Damerel has presented a point of view that might well provide the basis for an interesting paper for a future Round Table meeting.

THANK YOU...

... *Members and Board*, from the bottom of my heart for the great honor bestowed on me at last month's meeting when I was awarded Life Membership in our wonderful Round Table. I think it was obvious that I was totally taken by surprise. This Round Table has become a major part of my life and it's an honor and a privilege to



be a part of it. I treasure the friendships I have made along the way.

The other Life Members are Dan Balfour, Hobson Goodin, Sandy Parker, and Jack

Mountcastle. Douglas Tice, who passed

away in February of this year, was another Life Member.

Ulli

RICHMOND NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD PARK EVENTS

By Bert Dunkerly

Saturday, July 6, 10:00 a.m.

Richmond National Battlefield Park staff will lead a walking tour of the Malvern Hill battlefield to commemorate the anniversary of the battle.

The fighting at Malvern Hill in the early summer of 1862 was the culmination of the Seven Days. In his first foray as commander of the Army of Northern Virginia, General Robert E. Lee took on a two-fold task: drive the United States Army of the Potomac away from Richmond, and destroy it.

The hope of success in this began to wane as the Union army made its way back to the safety of the James River. For Lee, Malvern Hill offered him a last chance to destroy this army but he would find himself plagued by erroneous maps, vague orders, and poor communication with his officers.

The tour is one hour, and starts at the parking lot at Malvern Hill. Wear good walking shoes and bring sunscreen and bug spray.



The Battle of Malvern Hill

Daily Walking Tours

Rangers will lead walking tours at Cold Harbor battlefield daily at 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m., through Labor Day weekend. The tours are free and start at the visitor center.

In case you missed it: November Dinner Meeting Speaker Update

We welcome Robert Hancock, Director of Collections & Senior Curator, American Civil War Museum, as our November dinner meeting speaker.

Gary Gallagher sent notification last month that he was very sorry, but he had to cancel his November presentation to the RCWRT. He has divided his time between Charlottesville and Los Angeles for the past 23 years and is making a permanent move to Los Angeles in July.

We wish him all the best and thank him for his many years of support of the RCWRT.

EVENT OF INTEREST

July 20, 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.: History at Sunset Tour, Petersburg National Battlefield – “Spectacle of Appalling Grandeur: Artillery Use at Petersburg”

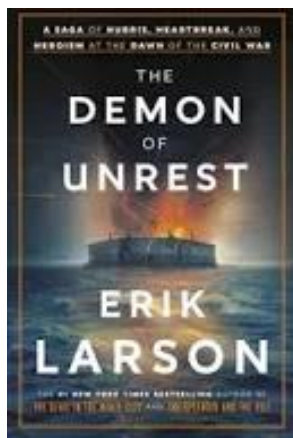
Cannons and mortars were used extensively throughout the Siege of Petersburg. Learn the tactics, see how they were fired, and understand why they were so terrifying. The program will start at the Eastern Front Visitor Center at 6:00 p.m., and the types of artillery will be discussed. Then, we will caravan down to stop 3 on the Eastern Front to see a cannon demonstration. The next stop will be stop 5 and a discussion about the use of artillery at Fort Stedman. Lastly, we will go to stop 7 to discuss its role during the Battle of the Crater.

Meet at Visitor Center parking lot at 5001 Siege Road, Petersburg.

The tour is co-sponsored by Petersburg National Battlefield and the Petersburg Battlefields Foundation. The program is free. Call 804-732-3531 ext. 200 if you have any questions.

BOOK RECOMMENDATION

Round Table member Ernie Zike highly recommends Erik Larson’s latest book,



“The Demon of Unrest: A Saga of Hubris, Heartbreak, and Heroism at the Dawn of the Civil War.”

In typical Erik Larson fashion, it is a thoroughly researched, well-written and entertaining book.

VIRGINIA'S NEW STATE PARK

On June 8, 2024, Governor Glenn Youngkin officially dedicated Virginia's newest State Park, Culpeper Battlefields State Park. The park opens with 263 acres, centered around the crest of Fleetwood Hill at Brandy Station Battlefield.

The park will be comprised of more than 2,200 acres of land preserved as the sites of the Civil War battles of Brandy Station, Cedar Mountain, Kelly’s Ford, and Rappahannock Station.

“This dedication celebrates a preservation process decades in the making,” said American Battlefield Trust



President David Duncan. “It is an honor to come together with so many

outstanding partners at the culmination of much work over long years to safeguard these historic landscapes.”

<https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/culpeper-battlefields>

UPCOMING MEETINGS

August 13: Brad Gottfried, “The Antietam Paintings by James Hope”

September 10: Scott Mingus, “If We Are Striking for Pennsylvania: The Army of Northern Virginia and the Army of the Potomac March to Gettysburg”

October 8: Bobby Krick, “W.H.F. ‘Rooney’ Lee”

November 12: Annual Dinner Meeting
Robert Hancock, TBA

December 10: Sarah Bierle, “John Pelham: His Five Years at West Point”

Attendance at June Meeting: 90