

On The FRONT LINE

Winter 2022

CENTRAL VIRGINIA BATTLEFIELDS TRUST

www.CVBT.org



ADVANCING THE PRESERVATION CAUSE



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Where has the year gone? It is hard to fathom we have come to the holiday season already. It's been a year of challenges again, but a better year for sure. In spite of the Covid-19 situation, CVBT was able to present our 25th Anniversary Conference, and what a weekend it was!

Our CVBT staff, Terry, Sarah, Lisa, and Board member Mike Greenfield created an outdoor event under the stars as we had frequently done years ago. Attendees were treated to BBQ, live music, noteworthy surprise guests, and an enjoyable time finally seeing each other in person. It was great to see, and thank, so many of our members and partners from across the country. At our battlefield tours, friends and historians Kris White and Frank O'Reilly shared riveting accounts of the action at both Salem Church and Fredericksburg's Sunken Road/Willis Hill. You can read more about the entire milestone event in the pages of this issue.

It was also a very productive year for CVBT preserving battlefields. Yes, there was a seemingly long gap between announcements since Myer's Hill, but negotiations take time these days and CVBT does not announce an acquisition until the ink on the contract is dry. We proudly announced the preservation of three parcels, one each on the Chancellorsville, The Wilderness, and Spotsylvania Battlefields. These three acquisitions have preserved 48.2 acres of important battlefield land worth more than \$1.1 million, for a total cost (less legal fees) of \$310,000. You will have already received our appeal for the Chancellorsville Battlefield Beckham Property. Negotiating time well spent, I think you would all agree! Read specifics regarding these preservation wins in the News Section, Delving Deeper, and Then & Now pages of this magazine.

Alas, by the time you are reading this issue of *On The Front Line*, we will have lost a key cog in the CVBT management machine. Sarah Kay Bierle, our chief administrative officer of two years, has decided



Tom Van Winkle

to move on in her career. Although I can not emphasize enough what a loss Sarah is to our CVBT team, I am comforted by her new career choice. Sarah has accepted a position as an education associate with the American Battlefield Trust. She will be creating education curriculum for students, a worthy and needed endeavor in this day and age. We wish Sarah only success in her new position and thank her for her tireless work making CVBT a better organization.

Now, it is time to look forward. Yes, I need to say it yet again, CVBT is currently working on at least two preservation opportunities! And yes, it may be a little while before we are able to announce them.

What will 2022 bring — we can only hope better times. You can bet your organization, CVBT, will press on to follow our preservation mission statement, save battlefields, and do the right thing.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Van Winkle".

Tom Van Winkle
President, Central Virginia Battlefields Trust

From the Executive Director

I would like to second what Tom Van Winkle said in his opening dispatch about how great it was to see and meet so many of you at the Annual Conference. Your enthusiasm for our work is contagious and is a reminder of how important



Terry Rensel

battlefield preservation is and how much it matters!

Sarah Kay Bierle has played a huge part in so much of what we have accomplished over the last two years, and I wish her the best in her new job with the American Battlefield Trust. Looking

to the future, I am anticipating welcoming a new team member to the CVBT office and continuing the work of saving hallowed ground.

The year is ending on a strong note for CVBT. Including General Battle's Counterattack (the project we collaborated on with American Battlefield Trust early in the year), we have preserved four separate pieces of hallowed ground. I look forward to saving even more land in 2022.

Stay well, have an enjoyable holiday season, and together we will continue doing the vital work of preserving the ground where history happened.

Saving an Artillery Position at Jackson's Flank Attack on Chancellorsville Battlefield

For years, Central Virginia Battlefields Trust has been working to save land from Jackson's Flank Attack at the Chancellorsville Battlefield. At a triangular corner of the historic Orange Plank Road and the historic Orange Turnpike (modern Route 3), all that remains to complete the preservation puzzle is a 1.2-acre parcel — and we now have the chance to save it!

The current owners of this small tract approached CVBT and are supportive of preservation. The price tag is \$310,000, but we anticipate a 4-to-1 dollar match through preservation grants, leaving \$60,000 for us to raise to save this piece of hallowed ground and secure the final acreage in this historic triangle of Flank Attack land.

This is an extraordinary opportunity, and the history connected to the land is quite unique. During the Battle of Chancellorsville on May 2, 1863, 26-year-old Confederate Maj. Robert F. Beckham moved his cannons from the Stuart Horse Artillery to the Orange Turnpike. When Jackson ordered his infantry forward in the Flank Attack, Beckham's guns fired off the opening artillery shots of the famed Flank Attack.

Near the intersection of the Turnpike with the Orange Plank Road, Beckham posted on the slightly sloping ground and fired into the Union defensive line that was forming a little farther to the east. In the midst of the attack, Beckham caught "Stonewall" Jackson's attention. "Young man, I congratulate you," Jackson told Beckham. This new tract of land, ready for preservation, is the position of Major Beckham's two guns as he confronted the Buschbeck Line.

As we raise funds for this piece of the historic puzzle, you'll hear us refer to this property as the "Beckham Tract" in recognition of the artillerist's presence there.

CVBT Joins "The Wilderness Battlefield Coalition"

Once again, The Wilderness Battlefield faces challenges and threats from modern development. This year, the Wilderness Crossing Development Proposal appeared, proposing a development with the potential for 4,750 residential units and 260 acres of commercial development along Route 3. This would significantly impact traffic through the hallowed ground of the battlefield and proposed road changes and re-routing could directly threaten historical resources.

In response, CVBT has joined "The Wilderness Battlefield Coalition," headed by the Piedmont Environmental Council and rallying with the American Battlefield Trust, National Trust for Historic Preservation, Friends of Wilderness Battlefield, National Parks Conservation Association, National Park Service, and Lake of the Woods Association, to advocate for consideration and protection of historical and community resources. CVBT has listed additional information about this development, including maps and links, on the website: <https://bit.ly/CVBTJoinsCoalition>

47 Acres of Land Donations to CVBT for Battlefield Preservation Valued at more than \$1,000,000

It has been months of behind-the-scenes work, but in autumn 2021, CVBT announced the exciting news of two donations of battlefield land from local developers at The Wilderness and Spotsylvania Court House.

Fawn Lake Holdings, LLC, has graciously gifted 30.4 acres of The Wilderness Battlefield to Central Virginia Battlefields Trust, increasing the preserved land along historic Orange Plank Road near the Widow Tapp Field. CVBT extends special thanks to Mark Doherty, Lee Garrison, and John McManus (CVBT Board member) for their dedication to preserving this land where history happened.



The donated acreage at The Wilderness Battlefield is both hallowed ground and woodland greenspace. Sarah Bierle

On the morning of May 6, Ulysses S. Grant launched a major assault against Confederates along the Orange Plank Road, spearheaded by Winfield Scott Hancock's Second Corps, which pushed from east to west. Even as things looked dire for the routed Confederates, James Longstreet's First Corps arrived on the scene and counterattacked, pushing from west to east. The donated acreage saw major fighting in both phases of this see-saw action. Describing this blood-soaked area of the battlefield, John Haley of the 17th Maine said, "The great, dark woods are filled with dead and wounded from both sides." Another soldier likened it to a "vast, weird, horrible slaughter pen." This is hallowed ground, and it is an honor to be able to preserve it.

At Spotsylvania Court House, Rappahannock Plantation, LLC, has made a generous donation of approximately 17.75 acres of the Myer's Hill Battlefield, along and within the Woodbury Manor subdivision. The hallowed ground will also provide an important access and future interpretation point



Part of the donated land at Myer's Hill includes earthworks! Sarah Bierle

for the battlefield. This generous gift brings the total preserved land at Myer's Hill to a little over 91 acres. Special thanks goes to Sean Haynes, the owner and manager of the company, and Chris Hornung, the engineer who works for Sean as part of his other company, Rappahannock Development Group, LLC, and CVBT Board member John McManus for facilitating this gift that adds to the understanding of what happened at the lesser-known Battle of Myer's Hill.

On May 14, after the failed attack against the Mule Shoe salient, Grant tried to shift his Fifth and Sixth Corps to his left for another major attack, this one targeted against the unsuspecting Confederate right flank.

Because of rain and muddy roads, he could not get his army to move fast enough. He settled instead for a smaller assault to take a piece of high ground called Myer's Hill that would have provided Confederates with an artillery position.

Federals took the hill and then occupied it with a brigade under newly minted Brig. Gen. Emory Upton, whose regiments dug in. The remains of their earthworks are easily visible on this newly acquired property at Woodbury Manor.

Confederates launched a counterattack against the position that drove the Federals off the hill and nearly led to the capture of Army of the Potomac commander George Gordon Meade, who responded with a massive counterattack of his own, retaking the hill once more by evening. Lee abandoned the position and pulled his army back along Court House Road.

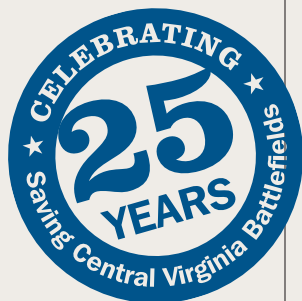
Aside from the new property's historical value, it has incredible value to CVBT because our previous holdings of 73 acres at Myer's Hill were effectively landlocked, but this new donation gives us an easy public access point to the property.

According to CVBT President Tom Van Winkle, "Months of work have been rewarded by making the best of our resources and finding exceptional individuals and companies willing to work with CVBT."

Celebrating 25 Years at the CVBT Conference

On October 8–10, 2021, Central Virginia Battlefields Trust hosted a history conference and 25th Anniversary Celebration. The weekend event included:

- Friday evening President's Reception at the CVBT Office
- Battlefield tour at Salem Church with Kristopher D. White from the American Battlefield Trust
- Lunch at Alum Springs Park (pizza!)
- Battlefield tour at Fredericksburg's Sunken Road with Frank O'Reilly from the National Park Service, including an exclusive peek into the Innis House
- Barbeque dinner at the Stonewall Brigade Tract on Chancellorsville Battlefield in a special event tent with delicious food and cake. At the Annual Meeting, Tom Van Winkle shared new land preservation announcements. Several awards were presented, and special guests made inspiring remarks about the importance of battlefield preservation.
- Sunday brunch at Stevenson Ridge included an informative and motivating presentation by keynote speaker A. Wilson Greene



Battlefield tours are always an event highlight at CVBT's conferences. One of the treks this year explored the history of the Sunken Road and the high ground at Willis Hill (CVBT's first save!) at Fredericksburg. Terry Rensel



President David Duncan of American Battlefield Trust (right) presented Central Virginia Battlefields Trust with a custom-designed map showing the preservation victories at the four battlefields, including the partnerships between the two groups. Lisa Van Winkle



(Above) Donald C. Pfanz received the Ralph Happel Award for starting the modern battlefield preservation movement. (Left) A. Wilson Greene shared some stories of the early trials and successes for the preservation movement at Sunday brunch. Lisa Van Winkle



An autumnal and regimental battle flag welcome at the check-in barn started the evening festivities at the Stonewall Brigade Tract on Saturday night. Sarah Bierle

The South Side of the Orange Plank Road

“We are driving them beautifully!” exclaimed Union Maj. Gen. Winfield Scott Hancock on May 6, 1864, during the Battle of The Wilderness. Farther down the Orange Plank Road from his position, the Confederates might have admitted to being driven, but would have chosen a different adjective. The brigades of Thomas, Scale, Lane, and Walker on the southeast side of the road were in trouble. A domino effect was created when the first brigade — Scale’s — was attacked by surprise in the early morning. Pushed back, that brigade ran into the next Confederate brigade “stacked” behind it, and the effect continued until the four units had tangled and retreated.



Union troops fighting along the Orange Plank Road, sketched at the time of the battle. *Library of Congress*

Lane’s brigade, behind Scale’s men, had enjoyed a relatively easy night and morning. In fact, the men had not entrenched, and when the forward line retreated, they were “borne gradually back by other disorganized troops without firing a gun,” according to a writer from the 37th North Carolina. With the front three brigades in retreat, Walker’s brigade rose to meet the advancing Union troops. Could they prevent a breakthrough and halt their enemy?

Federal troops advanced from three directions on Walker’s brigade, and the Southerners fought until they “nearly exhausted our ammunition when our right flank was nearly all captured and killed and we were ordered to fall back.” To the north of the Orange Plank Road, Confederate lines also fell back, and the soldiers hurried toward Widow Tapp’s Field, where their commander, Gen. Robert E. Lee, waited anxiously. By concentrating their attacks, Hancock’s Union boys had broken and disordered their foes but their moment of success was brief. The Confederate counterattack already hurried forward.

Regiments from Longstreet’s Corps rushed toward the field where — at the opposite side — Union soldiers crept



The donated land includes more woodland acreage of The Wilderness where Union and Confederate troops attacked and counterattacked. *Sarah Bierle*

from the woods and formed to attack the artillery that tried to hold them off. Meanwhile, running eight abreast along the road and deploying into the woods and fields on their side, the Confederate First Corps advanced through their retreating comrades. Evander Law later remembered, “In perfect order, ranks well closed, and no stragglers, those splendid troops came on.” Thousands more troops entered the Battle of The Wilderness, ending Hancock’s “beautiful” advance. The fight turned brutal, as Longstreet’s veterans shoved the Union II Corps back in their own nearly unstoppable advance.

Today, the fighting at Widow Tapp’s Field (including the “Lee to the rear!” incident) is well interpreted on the ground preserved by the National Park Service. On the south side of the Orange Plank Road, the preservation story has been more complicated. The National Park Service owns land that borders the road, but just beyond that strip of historic greenspace, the residential community of Fawn Lake has a large footprint on the battlefield. However, this year Fawn Lake generously donated 30.4 acres for preservation. (Details in the News section, page 3.) Across this land, Confederate brigades retreated in disorder from the Union advance, and then Longstreet’s men advanced as the whirl of battle pushed and pulled more men into deadly combat. It is a preservation victory with a developer, and CVBT is honored to receive the deed to the land and the responsibility to tell the stories of the soldiers who advanced, retreated, survived, or perished on this land.



Sunset at Chancellorsville Battlefield
Sarah Bierle

Recollections & Reminiscences OF THE STONEWALL BRIGADE

What the Men Who Served with “Old Jack” Saw and Thought about the Civil War

BY CECILY NELSON ZANDER

Nicknames communicate a great deal about the people who participated in the events of the American Civil War. This was not only true in the case of individuals — much better to be known to your men as “Uncle Billy” than “Granny Holmes,” for example — but also in the case of regiments and brigades. The importance of nicknames is why, when asked to name some of the most illustrious units to serve in the war, many would call to mind the Midwesterners of the Iron Brigade or the Virginians who composed the Stonewall Brigade. The latter shared its nickname with its most famous commander, Thomas Jonathan Jackson, who organized the men of the 2nd, 4th, 5th, 27th, and 33rd Virginia infantry regiments for service in 1861.

Some 6,000 Virginians donned Confederate gray as members of the Stonewall Brigade’s various regiments. Only 219 were paroled at Appomattox Court House, none holding a rank above that of major. The men served through some of the most storied campaigns of the Civil War and fought over much of the ground preserved



Gen. Elisha F. Paxton commanded the Stonewall Brigade during the Battle of Chancellorsville. He was mortally wounded on May 3, 1863. *Public Domain*

by the Central Virginia Battlefield Trust today. The brigade served intact from First Manassas until Spotsylvania, when its remaining members were taken prisoner by Union troops under Winfield Scott Hancock. Though officially dissolved after that bloody fight during the Overland Campaign, many of the brigade’s members fought on in reconstituted regiments until Appomattox. Few historians working today would fail to identify the Virginians of the Stonewall Brigade among the elite formations of the Army of Northern Virginia — on par with Maxcy Gregg’s South Carolinians, William Barksdale’s Mississippians, the North Carolinians of Dodson Ramseur, and the Texans of John Bell Hood.



This photo taken in summer 2021 shows the preserved area of the Chancellorsville Flank Attack fields. The National Park Service land is to the front of the photo, and CVBT property is on the opposite side of Route 3 toward the back of the image. Terry Rensel

Because of its association with one of the two most famous officers to lead troops in the Confederacy, the brigade has been extensively chronicled by Civil War historians. The best-known study — James I. Robertson's *The Stonewall Brigade* — has become a veritable classic among histories of the conflict since its 1963 Centennial-era publication. The work remains deserving of a place on the shelf of any Civil War library. The fame of General Jackson also meant that the veterans and members of the Stonewall Brigade published a great many reminiscences of their service — some in the form of regimental histories, others in private memoirs or edited editions of wartime diaries. Collectively, the remembrances and

records of the war compose a picture of a unit that projected a sense of Confederate nationalism, believed in the central importance of Virginia (and Virginians) to sustaining the Confederate war effort, and witnessed the war's transformative impact on the landscape of their native state.

The impressions of the soldiers considered below are exactly that — impressions — but they offer one way of understanding the events of the Civil War beyond a list of battles and maneuvers. They also affirm that even during the worst days of the war, the Stonewall Brigade commanded the respect of peers and even foes. As John Esten Cooke recalled in his memoirs, soldiers across the ranks of the Confederate armies respected the Stonewall Brigade. "At Port Republic," he explained, "a soldier said to his companion: 'I wish

these Yankees were in hell,' whereupon the other replied: 'I don't; for if they were, old Jack would be within half a mile of them, with the Stonewall Brigade in front!'" When Arthur J.L. Freemantle, a British writer who spent three months traveling across the Confederacy in 1863, first encountered the soldiers of the Army of Northern Virginia on the march, he took special notice of the "celebrated" Stonewall Brigade as Lee's troops made their way toward Gettysburg.

The reminiscences of one commander testify to the degree of Confederate nationalism among the members of the Stonewall Brigade. Brig. Gen. Elisha F. Paxton admitted he felt a great weight associated with his new position when he took command of the brigade in late 1862. On December 7 of that year, he wrote that "my highest ambition is to make my brigade the best in the army, to merit and enjoy the affection of my men." Paxton's correspondence from the earliest weeks of his command indicated his belief in the Confederate cause and the degree to which he expected his men to subscribe to the same ideology. After hearing that some soldiers of the Stonewall Brigade fell back without orders during the unit's engagements during the Battle of Fredericksburg, Paxton wrote in a general order to his troops: "He who proves recreant to his country and his cause at such a time merits the just sentence of military law — to die under the colors he disgraced and by the muskets of the gallant comrades he deserted."

Though historians have justly criticized Paxton as a military commander, there is little doubt that he was an ardent Confederate despite his shortcomings on the field of battle. Paxton, in fact, adopted an almost zealous faith in the Confederate cause. In a New Year's Day missive to his troops in 1863, he commended the brigade for participating in nine major engagements and winning eight over the course of the previous year. He noted marching over nearly 1,500 miles of Virginia and Maryland and the hardships of life in the army. All of this was critical to the progress of Confederate arms, he told the men of the Stonewall Brigade. "You have the proud satisfaction of knowing that you have participated in the campaign which has given your country a brilliant name in history," he wrote of the Confederacy, and reminded the men "that you have contributed



Philip Frazer was an officer in the 27th Virginia Infantry. He was killed on May 5, 1864, during the Battle of The Wilderness. Virginia Military Institute Archives

with your blood to its success. To-day you begin another year in the service of your country, and in the achievement of its independence."

In his famous (if fawning) history, *Stonewall Jackson and the Old Stonewall Brigade*, John Esten Cooke took care to emphasize the centrality of Virginia to the Civil War. Cooke, a staff officer who served under James E. B. Stuart, wrote multiple biographies of Civil War officers after the war. Most of these reflect their author's trenchant belief in the Lost Cause ideology of the conflict, which included, as a central tenet, a focus on the contributions of Virginians to the Confederate war effort. More than its importance in being the site of dozens of major engagements, it was Virginia that produced leaders such as Stonewall Jackson, and Cooke wrote that the men of the regiment were "worthy children of Virginia, and sons of the great South." It is, on one hand, unsurprising that Cooke — a Virginian — would give so much credit to his natal state for its part in sustaining the Confederate cause. On the other hand, Cooke's deliberate choice to identify the men of the Stonewall Brigade as Virginians first and Southerners second reveals how important association with the Old Dominion could be during the Civil War.

Another Virginian in the brigade, John Samuel Apperson, possessed a keen eye for scenery and kept a voluminous diary throughout his attachment to the Stonewall Brigade. Published as *Repairing the "March of Mars,"* the diary is an essential source for depicting day-to-day life in the Stonewall Brigade. Apperson, a hospital steward, grew up in Virginia in a family that owned no slaves. Despite this, he apparently had no reservations about casting his lot with the Confederacy — because of his loyalty to his home state. In late November 1861, however, Apperson's comments about Virginia focused on the destructive power that war had on the landscapes he cherished. After being ordered to march to Winchester to occupy his winter quarters, Apperson noted the desolation that surrounded an abandoned army camp. "The man that passes there will see our mark for years to come," he recorded in his diary, wondering "will not such marks be visible



Pvt. Samuel T. Cowley enlisted in Company A of the 2nd Virginia Regiment. In the case with his photograph, he enclosed a note that read, "Keep this to remember old S.T. Cowley in the Southern Army, June 9, 1861. God bless you all, now and forever."

Library of Congress



On May 3, 1863, the Stonewall Brigade came under heavy artillery fire that stalled their advance for a short time.
Sarah Bierle



Pvt. Samuel H. Wilhelm fought in Company I of the 4th Virginia Regiment until his capture. He died of illness at Fort Delaware in September 1863.
Library of Congress

throughout Virginia?" Still, the toll on the landscape did not seem to dim Apperson's ardor for his brigade or its leader. "I have no doubt," he wrote of the brigade's men, "they will follow him wherever he might see fit to lead them."

Perhaps no other account of the Stonewall Brigade's activities has been cited more by historians than that of John Overton Casler of the 33rd Virginia Infantry. Casler's colorful reminiscences remain among the best and most important accounts of the war written by Confederate common soldiers. With the help of Jedidiah Hotchkiss, the noted topographer whose recollections of life in Jackson's army are a classic in their own right, Casler aggressively marketed *Four Years in the Stonewall Brigade* to a wide and appreciative audience.

As a common soldier, Casler lacked access to the larger-picture perspective that many of the other authors mentioned above gained from their

positions. At the outset of Jackson's famous Flank Attack at the Battle of Chancellorsville, for example, Casler recalled, "[W]e could not imagine where we were going." When Jackson's corps successfully arrived in the rear of the Union army's XI Corps and launched into one of its most famous assaults of the entire war, Casler remembered running hard and fast after the Federals, but also recollected "a big newfoundland dog lying in one tent as quietly as if nothing had happened." The smaller details that escaped the reports of officers fill the pages of Casler's reminiscences. And to his credit, Casler frequently admitted the limitations of his knowledge. "I am not writing a history of the war," he explained, "only of my experiences in the army."

But Casler's work also featured many of the hallmarks of many of the works on life in the Stonewall Brigade mentioned above. Casler lamented the "ruin, desolation, death and suffering" Philip Sheridan brought to the Shenandoah Valley in 1864 and told his readers "those who never saw war have no idea" of the destruction that armies could do. Casler speculated that Sheridan's actions likely motivated "hundreds

to take up arms for the South" who would never have become ardent Confederates like himself without provocation. With more than a tinge of Lost Cause sentiment, Casler celebrated his service in the Stonewall Brigade. He said the men who served with Jackson did so with "love of country and patriotism in view." Compared to Union soldiers, whose families lived far from the seat of war and who were "well fed and clothed" and "paid with good money" and "given large bounties and had the prospect of a life pension," Confederate soldiers in the Stonewall Brigade were, to Casler's mind, paragons of a fight they were always bound to lose, but who fought for their cause despite that fact.

Because the recollections, diaries, and letters of the men of the Stonewall Brigade are so diverse, they can be read and re-read in pursuit of understanding many important themes in the history of the Civil War. Not mentioned here, but amply evident in any of the volumes listed above, for example, is the importance of Stonewall Jackson to the Confederate cause and the creation of Confederate ideology. Because the brigade that wore his name outlived its commander, its men helped to keep alive a spirit of adulation for Jackson that defined Confederate literature for decades after the conflict. There are also innumerable details to be gleaned about leadership lessons, tactics and strategy, and the wide variety of experiences an individual could have in Confederate service.



Cpt. William H. Powell led Company A of the 33rd Virginia Regiment. He was wounded at the Battle of Gettysburg but survived the war.
Library of Congress



Pvt. John J. Rhodes served in Company K of the 5th Virginia Regiment. He survived the war.
Library of Congress

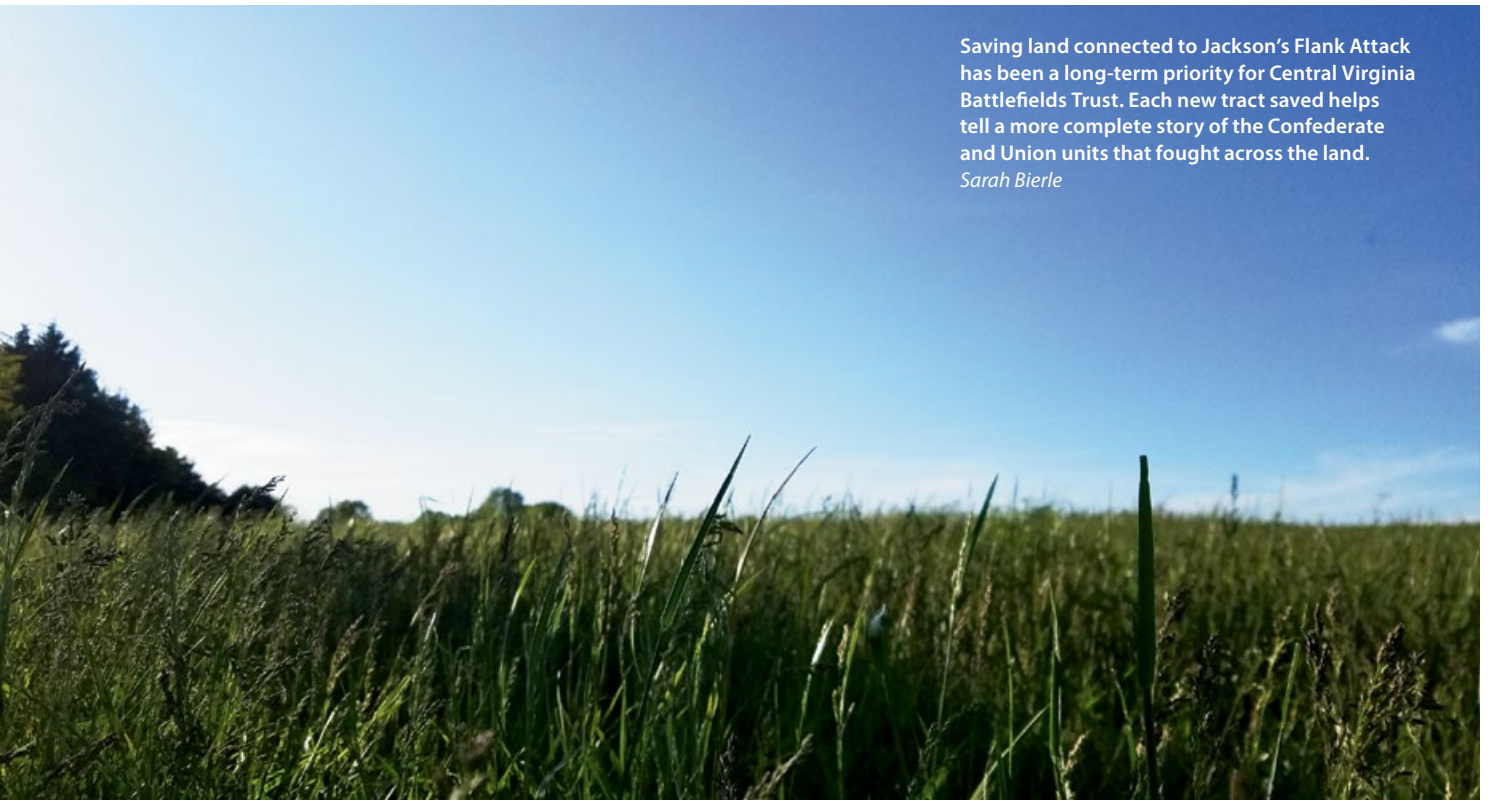


Called the “Stonewall Brigade Tract,” this 9.2-acre parcel sits on the south side of Route 3 and is part of the land in the famed brigade’s attack route on May 2, 1863, during the Battle of Chancellorsville.

Tom Van Winkle

It would be impossible to pick one theme, or one person, or one story that defined the Civil War for the men of the Stonewall Brigade. Collectively, the works reviewed, briefly, in this article underscore important themes such as Confederate nationalism, the importance of Virginia as a Confederate state, and the destructive power of war on people and places. Although much of the story of the Stonewall Brigade can be found in books and articles such as those mentioned above, essential pieces of it also exist in the landscapes and places where its soldiers marched, camped, and fought. Walking the route of the Flank Attack as John Casler did on the morning of May 2, 1863, brings life to his recollections of confusion, excitement, and anxiety for battle just as driving through the battlefields of the Shenandoah Valley gives context John Apperson’s lamentations for the destruction of a beautiful landscape. The history of the Stonewall Brigade, like the history of the conflict in which it fought, lives on in these places and stories.

Cecily N. Zander earned her PhD from Pennsylvania State University in 2021, focusing on 19th-century U.S. history, 20th-century U.S. history, and medieval history. A longtime student of the American Civil War, she is often found walking its battlefields and delving into the deeper questions of military organization and military politics connected to the 1860s.



Saving land connected to Jackson’s Flank Attack has been a long-term priority for Central Virginia Battlefields Trust. Each new tract saved helps tell a more complete story of the Confederate and Union units that fought across the land.

Sarah Bierle



“We have



Prospect Hill on an autumn day with cannons pointing toward the historical, and still-used railroad tracks. *Terry Rensel*

done our duty”

THE PENNSYLVANIA RESERVES AT FREDERICKSBURG

BY KRISTOPHER D. WHITE

“**T**he line began to move forward. I had heard no order,” recalled Sgt. Bates Alexander of the 7th Pennsylvania Reserves. Moments later, Sgt. James McCauley leapt upon the Richmond, Fredericksburg & Potomac Railroad embankment and bellowed, “Wide awake, fellows! Let’s give em hell!” A tidal wave of blue surged to life and engulfed the northeastern face of Prospect Hill. “We pressed ourselves close up to their lines, which soon broke through the intensity of our fire,” recounted another member of the 7th.

December 13, 1862, was proving to be a long and trying day for the men of Maj. Gen. George G. Meade’s Pennsylvania Reserves. Meade, the junior ranking major general in the Army of the Potomac, commanded a division of seasoned veterans. Stalwarts on the defense, and the spearhead of many an offensive action, the Pennsylvania Reserves earned battle honors on such fields as Gaines’ Mill, Glendale, Second Manassas, Antietam, and more. These battle honors came at an extreme cost, and at the outset of the Fredericksburg Campaign, the 13 infantry regiments comprising the core of the division had been reduced to less than 4,000 men. The addition of two new non-Reserve units increased their numbers to perhaps 4,500 effectives.

At Fredericksburg, the Reserves were called upon to be the spearhead of the Federal offensive. Their mission was to strike the left end of Gen. Robert E. Lee’s extensive seven-mile defensive line that ran west and south of the city. The specific target was the 130-foot-high Prospect Hill and a military road that ran along it and behind the Rebel lines. Arraying for battle in the open plantation fields south of the city, the Keystone State men composed “a grand sight,” as one Confederate described “seeing them come in position this morning,” and “it seemed that that host would eat us up.”

Delays in issuing and receiving orders, enemy artillery fire, and gelatinous mud plagued Meade’s men throughout the morning. The line initially lurched forward, only to be recalled by Meade. A second forward movement was stopped by Confederate artillery rounds enfilading their flank. A third offensive went to ground when some 56 Confederate guns roared to life, making the forward advance nearly impossible. Near 1:00 p.m., the weight of Federal iron won the day and silenced many of the Confederate guns on and near Prospect Hill. “Boys, we have done our duty,” declared one Union gunner, “Now go and do yours.”

Finally, on the fourth attempt, the Pennsylvania Reserves sprang to their feet and advanced across 800 yards of open ground toward the railroad embankment that ran roughly north to south across the eastern base of Prospect Hill. They slipped in mud, crossed three Virginia ditch fences filled with water, and struggled to maintain



George Gordon Meade’s division broke through the Confederate lines during the Battle of Fredericksburg on December 13, 1862. *Library of Congress, illustration c. 1900*



Soldiers from the 1st Pennsylvania Reserves were photographed by Mathew Brady. *Public Domain*

their battle formations. The three brigades of the division started to lose cohesion, as some of the units naturally gravitated to the right and others pulled to the left toward a point of woods that offered protection from enemy fire. The point of woods gave the men a sense of false hope as it led directly into a swamp, but by chance, that swamp was not covered by Confederate infantry, and these men by accident and self-preservation found the weak point in Lee's lines. A 600-yard gap between the men on the north end of Prospect Hill and a brigade of South Carolinians to their left offered an opportunity for the Federals to exploit. Other Yankees shifted farther to the left and dove in behind a stone fence for cover. The remainder arrived at the railroad embankment 200 yards from the crest of Prospect Hill. "[O]ur division was ordered to advance on a woods about half a mile in front, which the rebels held with artillery and infantry, the latter being fortified behind a mud fence or ditch, the kind usually put up here."

The railroad embankment had acted as a nearly impenetrable barrier for the Pennsylvania Reserves. As the Federals climbed the obstacle, Confederates atop Prospect Hill unleashed volley after volley. "[O]ur men, who steadily advanced, under a murderous fire that mowed them down like grass." All three of

Meade's brigade commanders went down. Col. William Sinclair was wounded. Col. Albert L. Magilton's horse was killed, and the brigade commander trapped beneath the animal. Brig. Gen. Conrad F. Jackson was unhorsed near the embankment. Undaunted, Jackson sprang to his feet and "then advanced on foot, still in front of his men encouraging them on till, reaching the track of the road, the fatal ball pierced him, entering above the right eye and coming out behind the left ear. Death of course was instant."

Command devolved to the regimental and company level. Grouped behind the embankment, carrying forward across the bald-faced slope of Prospect Hill seemed hopeless and daunting. Finally, though, luck momentarily graced the Federal ranks. The 2nd Pennsylvania Reserves, who managed to work their way through the swampy gap in the Rebel lines, wrapped around the north face of Prospect Hill and the Confederate left flank gap. Amazingly, the Federals cut the military road and created a nearly 700-yard gap in the Rebel lines.

Brig. Gen. James J. Archer's mixed Tennessee, Georgia, and Alabama brigade clung to trenches atop Prospect Hill as they attempted to meet the 2nd Pennsylvania Reserves. This gave the Yankees along the embankment the opportunity to drive forward the last 200 yards up Prospect Hill. Lt. Col. Samuel McCartney Jackson's 11th Pennsylvania Reserves bolstered the 2nd. Jackson was perhaps the highest-ranking Union officer to crest Prospect Hill and was the maternal grandfather of future general and actor Jimmy Stewart.



Color Sgt. William Hardy displayed the regimental flag of the 121st Pennsylvania Regiment, which was in the First Brigade of Meade's division at Fredericksburg. *Public Domain*

More Federals poured up the hill. Engulfing Archer's flank, the Federals began accidentally firing on one another. To prevent further carnage, quick-thinking Lt. Evan Woodward of the 2nd Pennsylvania Reserves "cased my sword took off my hat and advanced and asked if they [the Confederates] wished to surrender or fight." Self-preservation was the name of the game at this point, and the Confederates surrendered. The flag of the 19th Georgia was among the prizes taken from the field.

The Pennsylvania Reserves carried forward their assault as far as they could—their luck had run out. Anxiously looking back across the attack plain for reinforcements, none had materialized. "The consequence was that the Reserves ... were unable to hold it and were forced to fall back to their original position, leaving their dead and wounded in the hands of the enemy." A riled up Stonewall Jackson then unleashed a counterattack that swept the Federals back from whence they came.

The attack of the Pennsylvania Reserves was the lone bright spot among the darkness that was the Battle of Fredericksburg. The veteran force of Keystone State men cracked the Confederate lines and severed the Confederate military road. They captured the only stand of Rebel colors at Fredericksburg. They offered, even for a fleeting moment, the chance of victory. "All that we gained at so fearful a cost is lost," lamented one Federal. The bloodletting that was Fredericksburg and the trying year that was 1862 had taken its toll on the Pennsylvania Reserves. The unit was rotated out of front-line service and back to Washington but would rejoin the Potomac army in time for Gettysburg.

Division commander Meade perhaps summed up best the sentiments of his men. "One thing I do know, I have been long enough in the war to want to give them one thorough good licking before any peace is made." To accomplish this feat, Meade, and the men of the Pennsylvania Reserves were willing to "go through a great deal."

A haunting fog lies across Slaughter Pen Farm, land where Meade's men advanced as they attacked the Confederate lines during the Battle of Fredericksburg. Central Virginia Battlefields Trust's Preservation Partners raised \$1,000,000 to assist the American Battlefield Trust with the preservation of this property. Terry Rensel



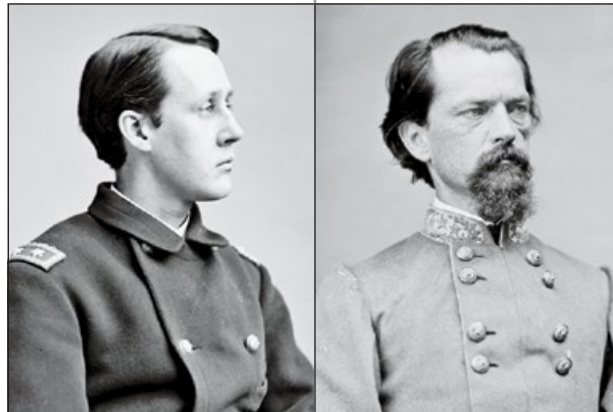
Forward: Attack & Counterattack at Spotsylvania's Mule Shoe Salient

BY SARAH KAY BIERLE

The fighting around Spotsylvania Court House during the 1864 Overland Campaign entailed some of the bloodiest attacks and counterattacks in Civil War history. Soldiers at the Mule Shoe and its Bloody Angle went to battle against enemy units they had fought on previous battlefields. On May 12, 1864, two division commanders who had fought each other before unknowingly met again in battle in the major Union attack and desperate Confederate counterattack that started the day-long fight.

Maj. Gen. Francis C. Barlow, commanding the First Division of Hancock's II Corps in the Federal Army of the Potomac, had spent grueling hours moving his troops along muddy paths and getting lost in the darkness before finally reaching the war council to plan the assault on the Confederate lines. His exasperation increased at the lack of information about the enemy's fortifications and even the distance the Union troops would have to go to reach the salient. Finally, he declared: "Then I assume the authority to form my division as I please, and that I will do it in two lines of masses. If I am to lead this assault I propose to have men enough, when I reach the objective point, to charge through Hell itself and capture all the artillery they can mass in my front."

The next morning, Barlow's division crashed into the east side of the Confederates' salient while on the other side of the protruding fortifications. Gen. David Birney's men also sent the Southerners scurrying. In those early moments, the Union assault looked like a complete success, capturing approximately 3,000 prisoners, 30 battle flags, and 18 cannon. However, in the rear of the salient, Confederate general John B. Gordon rallied his men for a counterattack. He sent a brigade of North Carolinians charging into the fight, buying time to form a more organized counterattack.



Union General Barlow (left) and Confederate General Gordon had fought at Gettysburg and by 1864 — if Gordon's hyperbolic account is true — each believed the other officer had died. However, they met in battle again at Spotsylvania Court House as their troops attacked and counterattacked. *Public Domain*

Gordon found the commander of the Army of Northern Virginia, Gen. Robert E. Lee, prepared to personally lead the forward movement, but he intervened, and for the third time that month, Lee was ordered to the rear by his enthused troops. After Lee had been pushed toward safety, Gordon roared his own orders to advance, later recalling, "With the fury of a cyclone, and almost with its resistless power, they rushed upon

Hancock's advancing column. With their first terrific onset, the impetuosity of which was indescribable, his leading lines were shivered and hurled back upon their stalwart supports. In the inextricable confusion that followed, and before Hancock's lines could be reformed, every officer on horseback in my division, the brigade and regimental commanders, and my own superb staff, were riding among the troops, shouting in unison: 'Forward, men, forward!'"

The Confederate counterattack halted the Union advance and started driving the blue-clad troops out of the Mule Shoe. However, much to Barlow's distress, throughout the day, more and more Union troops were sent into the fight, and the land's topography filtered the new troops toward a particular point that became known as "The Bloody Angle." By the end, thousands of soldiers lay dead or wounded. The attack and counterattack devolved from divisional level to an intense personal battle at The Angle. Whether in sweeping lines under the command of generals or in confused hand-to-hand fighting, attack and counterattack produced deadly results and little ultimate gain on May 12, 1864, at Spotsylvania Court House.



A winter's scene of the topography where Barlow attack at Spotsylvania
Sarah Bierle



Toward the top of the high ground in this photo (near the modern power line) the 96th Pennsylvania Regiment encountered attacking Georgians on May 14, 1864.

Sarah Bierle

Officers of the 96th Pennsylvania Infantry, likely photographed early in the war. *Library of Congress*



Myer's Hill – Woodbury Manor

BY TERRY RENSEL

On the morning of May 14, 1864, Union officers spied Confederate cavalry atop a significant piece of high ground southeast of Spotsylvania Court House. They worried that from the vantage point, the gray-clad horsemen might be able to observe the military movements as the Federal Army of the Potomac tried to disengage from the blood-bath battle at Spotsylvania Court House and move around the Confederate right flank. Generals Grant and Meade decided that the hill must be occupied to screen their maneuvers. The high ground — now called Myer's Hill after the civilian family who owned the land in 1864 — became the scene of a lesser-known battle in the two weeks of fighting in the region.

Early in the day, Union regiments occupied Myer's Hill. As the day progressed, newly promoted Union general Emory Upton took his brigade and positioned his troops around the Myer's house. One of the regiments in Upton's brigade, the 96th Pennsylvania Volunteers, was sent forward from the house to take possession of a clump of woods about 250 yards ahead and to the right. Shortly after entering the wood, the Keystone State soldiers discovered two brigades of Confederate infantry forming to attack.

Sgt. Henry Keiser, of the 96th Pennsylvania, captured a Confederate officer and wrote in his diary: "The Rebel Major, in answer to a question put by the Lieutenant, said there were

no other Rebels near, but not one minute after he was taken to the rear we ran into two full lines of Rebs, and I tell you we were not slow in getting back." In the confusion, the Confederate major escaped.

Meanwhile, seeing the Confederates readying for an attack and realizing they were badly outnumbered, the Pennsylvanians prudently began to withdraw. The Confederates took advantage of the situation and launched an assault, driving the advance units and then all of Upton's command off the hill and temporarily back across the Ni River. However, after sunset, Upton's men reoccupied Myer's Hill when they discovered the Confederates had retreated.

Sergeant Keiser wrote in his diary on May 15: "At 8 o'clock this morning we again crossed the river and formed our troops fortifying the position from which we were driven last evening." Keiser and the rest of Upton's Brigade remained there through May 16 and also returned to the position on the 18th and 21st.

In 2021, Rappahannock Plantation, LLC generously donated approximately 17.75 additional acres of the Myer's Hill Battlefield, along and within the Woodbury Manor subdivision. Part of this property donation includes the land where the 96th Pennsylvania battled the Georgians. The new donation brings to 91 the total acres of preserved land atop Myer's Hill.



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Central Virginia Battlefields Trust Has Announced its 2022 Annual Conference Weekend

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Join us for a full weekend exploring the Civil War experience and the Battle of Fredericksburg. 2022 marks the 160th anniversary of these major historic happenings along the Rappahannock River, through the streets of Fredericksburg, and across the open fields toward the high ground of Marye's Heights and Prospect Hill. Learn about the stories of the soldiers, the civilians, and the enslaved whose lives would never be the same because of what happened at Fredericksburg, explore the streets and ground where they marched or fled, and be inspired to continue telling the stories of our nation's past through preservation and interpretation.

**Watch the CVBT website (www.cvbt.org/cvbt-annual-conference)
and other announcements for more details about this future event!**