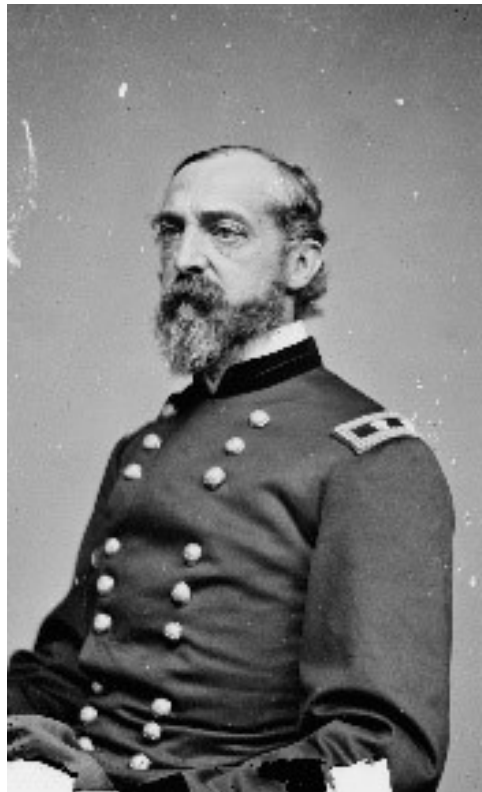


Second Quarter Newsletter April 1 - June 30, 2023



Second Quarter Newsletter
2023
Inquiring Minds Want to Know...



**“So Strong was Their Position”
Mine Run**

By Tom Van Winkle
President, Central Virginia Battlefield Trust

Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, Wilderness and Spotsylvania Courthouse are all battles engrained in the minds of most Civil War aficionados. One of these battles

profoundly changed the course of the war, and one little known campaign, mostly overlooked by history, influenced that battle.

In July of 1863, Union Commander Major General George Gordon Meade boasted that he had repelled General Robert E. Lee from the North by defeating the Confederate forces at Gettysburg. Lincoln, however, was not as enthusiastic learning that General Meade had not pursued and intercepted the rebel army to force a surrender. Lincoln would say, "We had only to stretch forth our hands and they were ours."

After Gettysburg, Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia did not allow Meade many opportunities to press him into battle. The only notable engagements would occur on October 14, and November 7, 1863. The first, on October 14, happened at Bristoe Station, VA, and this only due to Confederate Lieutenant General. A.P. Hill's corps discovering two corps of the retreating Union army at Bristoe Station. The next would be at Rappahannock Station November 7th, after which Lee's army withdrew into Orange County south of the Rapidan River. The Army of the Potomac would then occupy the surrounding area of Brandy Station and Culpeper County.

The next important campaign was the Battle of the Wilderness. Or was it?

Winter was coming and Major General George Gordon Meade was being relentlessly pressed by the War Department to engage General Lee. As was common during the war, Winter signaled the end of hostilities until Spring. Meade needed to engage the Confederates before this break. Meade's plan was to engage Lee's army south of the Rapidan River by marching from Culpeper Court House, maneuver through the Wilderness and strike Lee's right flank. The attack would begin on November 27th with the armies meeting at Payne's Farm. The Confederates, under Jubal A. Early who was in command of Ewell's Corps, met Union Major General William French's Third Corps.

After several attacks and counter attacks, the Confederates withdrew to fortifications Lee had prepared along Mine Run. Union General Warren was tasked with reconnoitering Lee's works and reporting to General Meade the disposition of the Confederate position. Warren would report that the Confederate line was reinforced even further during the night, and it would be ill advised to attack. Union soldiers would hail Warren's decision as visions of Fredericksburg certainly crossed their minds.

Meade, after assuring the high command in Washington there would be a battle, would say he was "put in an embarrassing position." Although a few minor skirmishes would take place, there would be no further engagement with the Union forces retiring December 1st and 2nd.



So, why should we pay attention to such a seemingly minor campaign as Mine Run? Shouldn't we simply focus on the next engagement, the battle that arguably did change the direction of the Civil War?

In essence, by studying how the armies maneuvered at Mine Run, we learn much of why the next campaign, the Wilderness campaign, unfolded as it did. We also need to answer the question of what Lee's Mine Run fortifications looked like in order to deter the overwhelming strength of the Union army and a pressured Union commander. The failure of Union General George Gordon Meade to successfully engage Lee and end the conflict also expedited Lincoln's search for an aggressive commander, and subsequent decision to appoint General Ulysses S. Grant as commander of all Union forces.

There is much to be learned at Mine Run, and much to preserve. The battlefield at Payne's Farm was purchased and saved by the American Battlefield Trust (ABT). Aside from this major accomplishment, there still remains a large amount of, in many cases, pristine

earthworks and historical recourses, all adding to the Mine Run story. Much of these resources reside on private property and others on commercial sites.

The [Central Virginia Battlefields Trust](#), key pointed in Fredericksburg VA, has been preserving local Virginia Civil War battlefields for 27 years and has saved over 1,700 acres to date. For these 27 years, we have focused on the battlefields of Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Wilderness and Spotsylvania Courthouse. This does not mean we have not kept a watchful eye on other sites relating to these core battlefields facing development and the encroachment of industry.

A Mine Run committee was formed at CVBT which includes local Mine Run expert, CVBT Vice President, and historian Chris Mackowski, who penned the book '[The Great Battle Never Fought](#).' The committee recommended CVBT assume this added area of operations as it is under threat and is relevant to the Wilderness battle.

At the Central Virginia Battlefields Trust (CVBT) 2022 Annual Conference, CVBT President Tom Van Winkle announced the Mine Run campaign area would be added to the organizations mission statement. CVBT is now working on identifying and researching properties to acquire.

CVBT and ABT are not the only organizations interested in the interpretation and preservation of Mine Run. While CVBT is a Land Trust and is focused on saving the battlefield ground itself, several other local folks have reached out with interest. John Kanaster is the owner and operator of [Battlefield Tours of Virginia](#) a tour group which employees some of the most well-known historians in the area. John has for years wanted to add tour stop signage to many important areas on the Mine Run battlefield area. John also champions the preservation and interpretation of this overlooked campaign and promotes this during his tours.

The [Friends of Wilderness Battlefield](#) organization has also become an interested party. FoWB President Bob Lookabill, and Vice President Beth Stenstrom, both understand the correlation between Mine Run and the Wilderness campaign along with the importance of telling the complete story. The organization, of which this author is proud to say was a founding member and five term president, has been interpreting, improving, and maintaining the Wilderness battlefield for over 25 years.

Jack Phend of the [Civil War Study Group Lake of the Woods](#), Virginia, has also been interested in furthering the awareness of Mine Run. Jack has been successful in having signage placed in several areas already.

The fact that so many local entities want to work towards the same goal, a meeting of the minds, so to speak, to discuss all our objectives was held on Monday, January 23rd. All the parties met at the CVBT office in Fredericksburg. It was unanimously agreed we need to protect the remaining evidence of this campaign and not let the prominent historical recourses be lost forever. It was also agreed there is a need to improve on interpretation of the sites and better tell the story of what did happen here.

The group decided we need to work together to accomplish these goals and offer each of our strengths to the mission. The group, now known as the "Mine Run Consultants" by name only, will meet periodically and pool our recourses to move along projects. We have already identified tasks and begun working towards them.

If you, like many, do not know the story of the Mine Run campaign, I would recommend you take a look.



Tom Van Winkle is a founding member of the Friends of Wilderness Battlefield and eventual five term President of the organization. Tom has written historical and preservation articles for many publications and has been published and referenced in several books. Tom was Partner and Executive Producer of Heritage Media, LLC, a local film and video company specializing in historical video and documentaries. Tom was Executive Producer of the local TV show, "History Scene" and has also produced several local videos such as "CVBT's 15th Anniversary", "Civil War Fredericksburg Then & Now", "Fire on the Rappahannock" and "Dilemma of Robert E. Lee- Contest for the Constitution". Tom has been involved with CVBT since 2007 serving on the Board of Directors as well as Webmaster, and Communications Director. He was appointed President of the CVBT in 2017 and currently holds this position.

Thank You, Det Wilkens

by Kevin Hunt, Battlefield Resource Chair



After many years of unequalled dedication, Det Wilkins has retired as the Ground Force (GF) lead volunteer and coordinator. His responsibilities included identifying and planning the tasks to be completed each week, providing guidance to the GF volunteers in the completion of those tasks, collecting and reporting the GF hours, getting gas and other supplies for the equipment, coordinating maintenance of the equipment, and ensuring the GF volunteers follow NPS safety practices. He successfully accomplished all this, in addition to participating in the mowing and grounds maintenance side by side with the GF volunteers. His dedication and leadership resulted in a beautiful setting around Ellwood and surrounding areas, and we received frequent compliments from visitors, telling us how the setting ultimately enhanced their experience.

Det's dedication went far beyond what would be expected as GF lead. In addition to the group's Thursday workdays, one could find him at Ellwood just about any day, whether it be mowing the Wilderness Crossing trail or Wilderness Tavern site or just wandering the grounds with his dogs for quiet relaxation.

Not only did Det oversee the GF operations, but he also graciously assisted with requests from FoWB volunteers who needed materials for crafts for various programs (ie Victorian Christmas), or help setting up for Living History events and the Volunteer Appreciation Picnic. When we were interpreting on the landscape, and the NPS purchased a wagon for us to use to keep our supplies in, Det is the one who assembled it for us. There were so many ways that Det contributed to FoWB and to the park, we could never name them all.

Although Det may no longer be leading the GF, we will be sure to see him from time to time, walking his sweet dog, Ollie, and hopefully taking pride in what Ellwood and the battlefield has become with his support over the years.

FoWB owes a heartfelt thanks to all of the members of our amazing Ground Force, and in particular, to their dedicated leader, Det Wilkens.

Volunteer Open House Saturday, February 25, 2023

by Don Shockey, Ellwood Chair

From 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM, on Saturday, February 25, 2023, the National Park Service and the Friends of Wilderness Battlefield (FoWB) hosted an Open House for prospective volunteers at Ellwood Manor, located at 36380 Constitution Highway (Rt. 20), Locust Grove, VA 22508. The Open House introduced potential volunteers to opportunities for the 2023 season at the historic structure and grounds of Ellwood on the Wilderness Battlefield.

Ellwood is a historic slave plantation and farm that played a part in the battles of Chancellorsville and the Wilderness. Ellwood volunteers can become a part of the interpretive team that shares the story of this special place, or work with maintenance helping preserve the landscape for future generations.

Ellwood interpreters give formal and informal programs and provide orientation to park visitors. Individuals who are excited about learning history, discussing slavery and the Civil War, and telling historically underrepresented stories are encouraged to apply. Interpreters at Ellwood will need to attend an all-day training session. Lunch and snacks will be provided.

Volunteers with the Grounds Force help maintain the grounds and historic landscape surrounding the manor. Grounds Force volunteers will need to attend training to safely operate groundskeeping equipment. Additional volunteer opportunities may be available through both the National Park Service and FoWB.

This open house was a chance for prospective volunteers to explore Ellwood and meet Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania NMP personnel and FoWB members. It's not too late to sign up! Potential volunteers with questions or looking for more information may reach out to FoWB members Don Shockey (540-729-2885, shockeydl@comcast.net), Bob Lookabill (540-972-5668, ellwood@fowb.org), or National Park Service Volunteer Coordinator Becca Toy (540-693-3200 x4100, rebecca_toy@nps.gov).

Sign Up for Park Day! Saturday, April 15, 2023

After several years of not being able to have Park Day, it is back by popular demand! FoWB is coordinating with the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park to co-host this event and you can sign up here!

[Volunteer Opportunity](#)

People can also access it by going to <https://www.volunteer.gov> and searching "Fredericksburg." It's titled, "Park Day - Day of Service."

We hope to see you there!

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