



# The Signal Flag



## BRANDYWINE VALLEY CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

**Campaign # 27**

**Skirmish # 4**

**December 2012**

### From the Rear Ranks:

Greetings Members!

I hope you are all well and from what I have heard our musical presentation by Mike was well received last month. This month we are lucky to have Don Ernsberger, one of our repeat speakers discussing one of the Union's many lost opportunities at the Battle of Fredericksburg. As many of you know Fredericksburg was one of the costliest and perhaps without the perceived victory at Murfreesboro would have much greater political consequences for the North. Regardless, the debacle at Fredericksburg led to Congress calling for the resignation of several high ranking members of President Lincoln's cabinet. In addition Fredericksburg would lead to another re-shuffle in the command of the Army of the Potomac. Below I have included a couple of great articles by Don Pfanzer which are excerpts from a series of articles he wrote for Fredericksburg.com exploring some little known facts about the battle as well as debunking some myths. I hope to see you all on December 5<sup>th</sup>!

Respectively,  
Chip Crowe  
President,  
Brandywine Valley Civil War Round Table



#### ~ Officers ~

**President:** Chip Crowe  
**Vice President:** Hank Fisher  
**Secretary:** Ted Pawlik  
**Treasurer:** Dave Walter

#### ~ Committee Members ~

**Preservation:** Bob Sprague, John Walls  
**Nominating Committee:** Vince Carosella  
**Speakers:** Vacant (currently by committee)  
**Trips:** Greg Buss  
**Credentials/Greeter:** Ted and Marilyn Pawlik  
**Round Table Telegram:** Robert Sprague  
**Publicity:** Jim Lawler  
**Historians:** Bob Sprague  
**Social Dir:** Flo Williams  
**Banquet:** Jim Lawler  
**Photographs** – Hank Fisher

#### ~Members at Large ~

David Hoffritz, Dave Kohler, John Whiteside

#### ~ Official Sutler ~

Harriett Mueller: Books / Periodicals  
302-429-6201

#### ~ Annual Membership ~

Individual \$25.00; Family \$40.00; Student \$15.00  
(Full time student up to age 23)

#### ? Questions? Contact:

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President, Brandywine Valley Civil War Round Table  
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Downingtown, PA 10335  
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#### BVCWRT Web Site:

<http://bvcwrt.home.comcast.net>

#### BVCWRT Blog:

<http://bvcwrt.blogspot.com/>

**BVCWRT Facebook Page:**

<https://www.facebook.com/#!/BrandywineValleyCivilWarRoundTable>

**Webmaster:** Jim Lawler  
[dtownjim@comcast.net](mailto:dtownjim@comcast.net)



**What is the BVCWRT all about???**

We were founded in 1987. According to our by-laws, "the purpose of the Brandywine Valley Civil War Round Table shall be to provide a congenial medium through which persons having a common interest in the events of the American Civil War - its causes and effects, engagements, personages, units, armaments and other things pertaining thereto - may satisfy their interest and broaden individual knowledge through discussion, lectures, field trips and the exchange of books, paper and other data. The purposed is also to consider the preservation and protection of the battlefields, sites, landmarks, relics and collection of the period."

***\*We are wheelchair assessable***

Unsolicited articles from our members are welcome.  
Please contact Chip!



*Brandywine Valley Civil War Round Table  
Come to our next meeting  
December 5, 2012*

**Speaker: Don Ernsberger**  
**Topic: "Meade's Breakthrough with the PA Reserves at Fredericksburg"**  
**Time: 7:00 PM**  
**Place: West Chester Borough Hall, Gay Street**

This month speaker will be Don Ernsberger. Don has spoken to our Round Table several times before, one being the "Great Charge at Gettysburg." For our December meeting Don will be speaking on Meade's Breakthrough with the PA Reserves at Fredericksburg, in what many consider a lost opportunity for Union forces at Fredericksburg.

**Signal Flag December 2012**

In plain English, we are an organization of diverse people brought together by our common interest in the American Civil War. This interest can range from the casual to the obsessive. We intend to tailor our activities and presentations to appeal to all our members, novice or expert.

**Welcome New Members & Reenlistments**

The Round Table welcomes our new members since our last meeting. Please welcome them and share your Civil War enthusiasm.

**New Members: Welcome**



A High School and College instructor for 30 years in history and philosophy, Don Ernsberger, worked on Capitol Hill for seven years as a Deputy Chief of Staff. While in Washington DC he had access to the National Archives and the Library of Congress resources to research for his books. Some of Don's books are, "At the Wall; The 69th Pennsylvania at Gettysburg", "Paddy Owen's Regulars" and "Also For Glory: The Pettigrew – Trimble charge at Gettysburg July 3, 1863." Don has been a lifelong Civil War buff. He conducts battlefield tours and lecture on many civil war topics. He and his family are re-enactors with the 69th Pennsylvania "Irish Volunteers", where Don is the group's historian.

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## ***Drummer Boy of the Rappahannock***

*Part 10 of a series on the 1862 Battle of Fredericksburg*

ROBERT HENRY HENDERSHOT was a rambunctious boy. No, he was more than rambunctious, he was downright rebellious.

Hendershot had grown up in Michigan at a time when that state was still something of a frontier. His father died when he was just a few years old, leaving him to be raised by his mother. He was the sort of child every parent dreads.

"Robert had always been of a high-strung temperament," his biographer, H. E. Gerry, explained, "with a force of willpower and temper hard to govern. He did not like attending school, absenting himself without leave or ceremony, and in preference hunted watermelon patches, fished, skated, blacked boots, sold papers, in fact anything suited to his fancy which was directly in opposition to the wishes of his mother and the family at home."

The Civil War gave Robert an outlet for his adventuresome spirit. In the fall of 1861, a company from Hendershot's town left the state and headed to the front. Although he was under age, the boy tagged along. Time and again, the officers sent him home, but each time he came back. As Gerry noted, "The officers were destined to find the little warrior a persistent fellow, and decidedly hard to get rid of."

Hendershot eventually joined Company B, 9th Michigan Infantry. In a skirmish at Murfreesboro, Tenn., he was captured and sent to Camp Chase, Ohio, to await exchange. The impetuous youth had no intention of wasting time in an exchange camp, however, and he slipped away and re-enlisted in the 8th Michigan Infantry on Aug. 19, 1862, under an assumed name, Robert Henry Henderson.

The 8th Michigan belonged to the Army of the Potomac, and Hendershot soon found himself on his way to Virginia. He joined his new regiment on Nov. 28, just in time for the Battle of Fredericksburg. In an effort to seize the town, Union commander Ambrose E. Burnside ordered the 7th Michigan

### **'Behind the Lines'**



A new weekly series, 'Behind the Lines,' debuts today in Town & County. An anecdotal narrative will tell the in-depth story of the 1862 Battle of Fredericksburg—the action, the major players, the behind-the-scenes intrigue and the effect on the town. Writing the series is Donald C. Pfanz, staff historian at Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park. A native of Gettysburg, Pa., Pfanz graduated from the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg in 1980, and then joined the National Park Service. He served at Petersburg National Battlefield and Fort Sumter National Monument before joining the Park Service here. He has written two books: 'Abraham Lincoln at City Point' and 'Richard S. Ewell: A Soldier's Life.'

Infantry Regiment to cross the river in pontoon boats under fire and drive Confederate riflemen from the Fredericksburg waterfront.

Although Hendershot was in the 8th Michigan rather than the 7th, he tried to climb into one of the first boats as it pushing off from shore. Instead, he slipped and fell into the icy water. Rather than give up, he grabbed on to the boat and was dragged across.

When the boats touched shore, the 7th Michigan dashed into town and engaged the Confederates in house-to-house combat. Robert had a different agenda. Following in the wake of his adopted regiment, he “went into a house and set it on fire, stole a clock, two blankets, and some other small articles.” Somehow he managed to get the purloined items back to his camp in Stafford County.

Grabbing a discarded rifle, he then returned to Fredericksburg for additional booty. “He went into a different house,” wrote Gerry, “and assisted in destroying mirrors, pianos, and other valuable property.” He had just applied a match to another residence and was heading out the back door when he encountered a Rebel with a shotgun. Hendershot had the drop on him and demanded the man’s surrender. At the prompting of some other soldiers, he then personally escorted his prisoner to the rear, presenting him to Gen. Burnside in person at the Lacy House (Chatham).

The Union commander praised the boy for his gallantry. “Well, boy,” he was quoted as saying, “if you keep on in this way ... you will soon be in my place.”

Hendershot was then just 12 years old.

Burnside advised the youngster to return to camp, but Hendershot replied that he “preferred to go and capture another Johnny Reb.” Inspired by his spunk, the general and his staff raised “three cheers for Robert Henry Hendershot, ... the Drummer Boy of the Rappahannock.” The nickname stuck.

Hendershot remained at the front and was slightly wounded two days later in the Union attacks on Marye’s Heights. As a result of the wound, and possibly his age, he was discharged on Dec. 27. By then, Hendershot’s fame had spread across the country. When he reached Washington, Northern citizens hailed him as a hero. He dined with President Lincoln at the White House and appeared as a guest at both houses of Congress.

Later, when he visited New York City, the New York Tribune's editor, Horace Greeley, presented the lad with a fancy new drum. Capitalizing on the boy’s popularity, showman Phineas T. Barnham engaged Hendershot to play his drum at Barnham’s museum. In the years following the Civil War, a poem and a play were written about Hendershot, extolling his courage.

Hendershot enjoyed his celebrity status and milked it for all it was worth. In the decades following the war, he performed on his “Greeley Drum” at meeting halls throughout the nation. At Wa-Keeney, Kan., more than 200 people turned out to hear the now-middle-aged drummer play. (Wa-Keeney apparently was hurting for entertainment.)

Miss Ruth Welch, a local dignitary, brought the house to its feet with a stirring recital of the poem “The Drummer Boy of the Rappahannock,” after which the curtain opened and Hendershot appeared, beating his drum to the tune, “Marching Through Georgia.” His young son played the fife at his side.

The crowd went wild, wrote a Western Kansas World reporter, calling for encore after encore until Hendershot “had far more than exhausted the pieces which had been so industriously published as constituting his part of the program.”

The only ones not enamored with Hendershot were the soldiers of the 7th Michigan Infantry, the regiment that had stormed Fredericksburg. No one in that regiment remembered seeing Hendershot on Dec. 11, 1862. In their estimation, the real hero of the fight was their own drummer boy, John S. Spillane.

In 1891, the Grand Army of the Republic (an association of Union veterans) held its national meeting in Detroit and invited Hendershot to take part in its parade. The 7th Michigan was outraged by the invitation and publicly challenged Hendershot to produce even one witness who had seen him at Fredericksburg. “Failing this, we feel ourselves justified in declaring in a public manner our belief that this claim is a fraud.”

Hendershot answered his critics the following night at a reunion of the 7th Michigan. Taking the stage, he produced letters from President Lincoln, Gen. Ulysses Grant, and Horace Greeley attesting to his bravery. But none of those men had been at Fredericksburg, his critics countered; they had. Did any of the 200 veterans in the room know Hendershot? When no one rose to Hendershot’s defense, pandemonium broke out.

“Throw him out of the window,” cried one man. The crowd seemed at the point of doing just that, when the 7th’s own drummer boy, John S. Spillane (now a captain on the Detroit police force), entered the room. “There,” shouted a veteran, “there is the drummer boy of the Rappahannock!” The veterans hurried Spillane to the platform and unceremoniously booted Hendershot down the stairs.

After the meeting, the citizens of Detroit presented Spillane with a medal proclaiming him, not Hendershot, to be the real “Drummer Boy of the Rappahannock.”

Was Hendershot a hero or a fraud? As is so often the case with history, we shall probably never know. The witnesses, like the tap of Robert Henry Hendershot’s drum, have fallen silent.

**Next week:** Civilians in the Crossfire

DONALD C. PFANZ is staff historian with Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park. He is author of “Abraham Lincoln at City Point” and “Richard S. Ewell: A Soldier’s Life.”

Source: <http://www.fredericksburg.com/CivilWar/Battle/0331cw.htm/>

## ***The Angel of Marye's Heights***

[See previous stories.](#)

Part 33 on a series of the Battle of Fredericksburg.

ON CHRISTMAS DAY, 1862, with the memories of Fredericksburg still fresh in his mind, Gen. Robert E. Lee wrote his wife lamenting the hardships of war: "What a cruel thing is war: to separate and destroy families and friends, and mar the purest joys and happiness God has granted us in this world; to fill our hearts with hatred instead of love for our neighbors, and to devastate the fair face of this beautiful world."

And yet, amid the killing, there were individuals whose kindness and compassion lifted the spirit and reminded soldiers of their common humanity. Richard Rowland Kirkland was one such individual. On Dec. 14, 1862, Kirkland risked his life to comfort soldiers who lay wounded in front of Marye's Heights. It is not uncommon for a soldier to risk his life for a friend. What makes Kirkland's story so compelling is that he risked his life to help his enemies.

Kirkland was born in 1843 on his father's farm near Flat Rock, S.C. Like many boys in the rural South, Kirkland grew up learning to shoot rifles and ride horses. An even-tempered, religious lad, he attended Flat Rock Baptist Church and obtained a rudimentary education. Kirkland's mother died when he was just 2 years old, leaving his father to raise five sons and a daughter by himself. Richard was the youngest boy, but he grew up fast. By 1861 he was 5 feet, 8 inches tall and weighed a lithe 150 pounds. A photograph taken of him at this time shows him as having a thin face, brown eyes, dark hair, and a neatly trimmed moustache.

As a young man growing up in the South, Kirkland followed the events leading to the Civil War with interest. On April 9, 1861, he enlisted in Company E of the 2nd South Carolina Volunteers. Three days later, South Carolina forces opened fire on a small United States garrison that had taken refuge inside Fort Sumter, in Charleston harbor, and forced it to surrender. In response, President Abraham Lincoln called upon states loyal to the Union to suppress the rebellion. The war was on.

Kirkland and his comrades initially joined other state troops gathering at Charleston, but when Virginia later joined the Southern Confederacy, the 2nd South Carolina was sent north to protect the Old Dominion from Northern invasion. The war was still in its infancy then, and anyone in uniform was seen as a patriot and a hero.

As Kirkland's regiment moved north, it received an enthusiastic welcome wherever it went. "We was received with [a] warm reception," the eager young soldier wrote his brother from Petersburg, "& glee every where through the state." Everywhere they stopped, citizens welcomed them with food, hugs and flowers. It was heady stuff for a man not yet 19 years of age.

### **Behind the Lines**

A weekly series, Behind the Lines. An anecdotal narrative tells the in-depth story of the 1862 Battle of



Fredericksburg—the action, the major players, the behind-the-scenes intrigue and the effect on the town. Writing the series is Donald C. Pfanz, staff historian at Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park. A native of Gettysburg, Pa., Pfanz graduated from the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg in 1980, then joined the National Park Service. He served at Petersburg National Battlefield and Fort Sumter National Monument before joining the Park Service here. He has written two books: 'Abraham Lincoln at City Point' and 'Richard S. Ewell: A Soldier's Life.'

All too soon, however, war's reality set in. In July, Kirkland got his first taste of combat at Bull Run, outside Manassas. Other battles followed: Savage's Station, Malvern Hill, Antietam. Suddenly war did not seem like such a glorious endeavor. Kirkland, however, did his duty and did not miss a battle. By December 1862, he was a seasoned veteran.

The 2nd South Carolina Regiment was in the thick of the fighting at Fredericksburg. When Union troops launched their attacks against Marye's Heights on Dec. 13, Gen. Robert E. Lee ordered Gen. Joseph B. Kershaw to reinforce Confederate troops fighting there. Kershaw led the 2nd South Carolina and the other units of his brigade across the plateau and into the Sunken Road below to join regiments from North Carolina and Georgia in repulsing the Union attacks.

The Confederates did their work well: By day's end 1,000 Union soldiers lay dead in front of the Heights. Seven thousand more had been wounded. Unable to move, most of the injured soldiers still lay between the lines when the sun rose the next day. No one could rescue them: to expose oneself on the plain even for an instant meant certain death. "The Yankees were literally piled in our front," remembered one South Carolinian, "dead and dying together, the living crying, water, water!"

The cries of one Union soldier were particularly piteous. After calling in vain for his friends to succor him, he cried out: "If my friends cannot give me water, will my enemies give me some?"

Richard Kirkland could not ignore such pleas. As a Christian, he may have remembered the Apostle Paul's injunction: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink." Bounding up the stairs of the nearby Stephens house, Kirkland asked Gen. Kershaw for permission to take water to his wounded enemies. Kershaw tried to talk him out of it. "Kirkland, don't you know that you would get a bullet through your head the moment you stepped over the wall?"

"Yes, sir," the young man replied, "I know that; but if you will let me, I am willing to try it." Kershaw could not refuse the noble request. Reluctantly, he gave Kirkland permission to go, trusting that God would protect him.

Kirkland hurried back down the stairs, but a moment later he returned. Kershaw assumed the well-intentioned sergeant had had second thoughts, but he was wrong: Kirkland simply wanted to perform his deed under a flag of truce. "General, can I show a white flag?" he inquired. Unfortunately, the general could not grant the request. The two sides were locked in combat; only the commanding general could negotiate a truce. Kirkland was undeterred. "All right," he replied, "I'll take the chances."

Borrowing canteens from several friends, Kirkland took a deep breath, jumped over the protective wall bordering the Sunken Road and dashed out onto the deadly plain. Bullets struck the mud around him, but he was not hit. Reaching the nearest soldier, Kirkland knelt down and, placing the man's head on his chest, poured the cooling liquid down the man's throat. He then took the soldier's knapsack and placed it under his head for a pillow, at the same time laying the man's overcoat across him for a blanket.

By now, the Union riflemen understood Kirkland's mission and had ceased firing at him. Some even cheered his bravery. For the next 90 minutes, Kirkland moved slowly about the field, giving aid to all he could reach. Who knows how many men benefited from his mercy?

As a result of his actions, Kirkland became known as "The Angel of Marye's Heights." He died just nine months later at the Battle of Chickamauga, but his deed at Fredericksburg was not forgotten. In

1965, local citizens led by Dr. Richard Nunn Lanier petitioned the state legislatures of Virginia and South Carolina to construct a monument to Kirkland's memory. Today it stands at the northeast corner of Mercer Street and Sunken Road, a rare testimony to man's humanity to man.

Next week: The Union army retreats

DONALD C. PFANZ is the staff historian at Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park. He is author of "Abraham Lincoln at City Point" and "Richard S. Ewell: A Soldier's Life."

Source: <http://www.fredericksburg.com/CivilWar/Battle/0908CW>



# 2012-2013 Scheduled Speakers

- **Sep 5, 2012:** Sid Copel - "Notable Civil War Personalities"
- **Oct 3, 2012:** Roger Arthur - "1862"
- **Nov 7, 2012:** Mike Plunkett - Musical Presentation: "Paddy Has Gone For A Soldier"
- **Dec 5, 2012:** Don Ernsberger - "Meade's Breakthrough with the PA Reserves at Fredericksburg"
- **Jan 2, 2013:** Traditional Round Table Discussion
- **Feb 6, 2013:** Christopher Densmore - "Emancipation and the Pennsylvania Quakers"
- **Mar 6, 2013:** Charlie Zahm - "Civil War Music"
- **Apr 3, 2013:** John Michael Priest - "Into the Fight: Pickett's Charge at Gettysburg"
- **May 1, 2013:** Melissa Yiaski Rabinsky - "Mary Todd Lincoln : Before, During and After Mr. Lincoln"
- **May 14, 2013:** (Annual Banquet): Robert L. Hodge - "Confederates in the Attic"

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## Brandywine Valley Civil War Round Table Membership Application

Application Type: New  Renewal

Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_ First Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Note: Monthly newsletters are distributed by E-mail only.

Membership Type: Individual (\$25)  Family (\$40):  Student (\$15):

If family membership, please list other names:

\_\_\_\_\_

Bring the completed form and a check payable to BVCWRT to a meeting or mail it to:  
**Dave Walter, Treasurer, 937 Thorne Drive, West Chester, PA 19382**

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