

ON THE skirmish line

Newsletter of The Central Virginia Battlefields Trust

GRANT'S KNOLL TO BE INCORPORATED INTO THE FSNMP

Effective May 23, 2016, the official boundary of the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park has been expanded to encompass four tracts of land that amount to 25.55 acres at what is known as Grant's Knoll, in Orange County. This step paves the way for the Federal government to take custody of the land previously under CVBT and Civil War Trust ownership. This action truly illustrates the CVBT mission. We acquire land, through purchase or donation, and hold it in trust, for however long as necessary, until such time as a resource agency such as the National Park Service can assume ownership. This final step effectively transfers ownership to the public and will open it to visitation.

This sequence of events began in 2001, when the Silver Companies donated an initial six acres. In 2007, a second donation came from the Silver Companies, as mitigation for a commercial development at the nearby modern intersec-



This sketch by Alfred Waud shows Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant and some of his staff on the property being transferred to the National Park.

tion. The Civil War Trust acquired the final 6.5 acre tract, with a house, which it subsequently demolished. The Virginia Department of Transportation has maintained easements along the road frontage, to allow an expansion of the road, but that eventuality may never occur. Rather than widening entire roads, recent efforts in places like Route 3 through the Chancellorsville battlefield are to provide for strategic left turn lanes and other access

management features that provide for safety without aggressively altering the historic landscape.

While the CVBT held this land in trust, the Orange County Board of Supervisors exempted us from paying property taxes. Non-profit status does not automatically do this and the County Board was both generous and helpful. They recognized that the land would eventually become part of the National Park and extended their support. SL

FROM THE PRESIDENT:

The mission of the Central Virginia Battlefields Trust is to preserve land associated with the four major campaigns of Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Wilderness, and Spotsylvania Court House.

This is our brand; this is what we do. In the Fredericksburg area, CVBT is integrated with the local community and becomes aware of opportunities quickly. The results are in our history. We came out swinging in 2016 with several new acquisitions, including the Norfolk Artillery site in Fredericksburg and a tract on the Chancellorsville battlefield. Recent partnerships with the Civil War Trust resulted in additional acquisitions in the Wilderness and at Fredericksburg. At Pelham's Corner, we have protected an historic monument and expanded the overall site. We have more projects in the pipeline.

Because we have a local presence, boots on the ground if

you will, the CVBT has the ability to pursue parcels that might otherwise be missed. By focusing on our own backyard, we close in on the small tracts of land that outside organizations might ignore. There is a method to what we do and we have been able to stitch parts of the battlefield back together. As an example, we have purchased ten small parcels on the south side of the Plank Road on the Chancellorsville battlefield. This area lies outside the National Park boundary and we are reassembling the Jackson flank attack field in that area, even as the Civil War Trust and the National Park Service acquire large tracts north of the road. Each small purchase may not be the most exciting on its own, but the end game certainly is.

In summary, CVBT remains an effective and efficient organization, continuing to build upon the hard work of our previous and current board members. As always, we thank you for your support of our mission. —*Tom Van Winkle*

The CVBT's Annual Journal

The 2016 volume of Fredericksburg History and Biography will be out later this year and we will be sending copies to those of you who are at the Active Member level or above. We will also have plenty of copies for sale.

This year's journal includes research that primarily looks at post-war events (which is the result of the articles we received rather than any deliberate plan). The first article is about the grave of a Massachusetts soldier in the Fredericksburg National Cemetery that is decorated with flowers every Memorial Day. This act of remembrance is not by his descendants, but by a Fredericksburg family that has quietly placed flowers for more than a century.

We also continue with our presentation of the Fredericksburg Town Council minutes, this time for the years 1868-69. That was the period when a strong Republican majority in Congress placed the South under martial law and imposed a stronger Reconstruction regime intended to halt violence against former slaves. Reconstruction is a huge subject to consider, but placing it in a local context makes it more immediate and perhaps understandable. The murder of a Fredericksburg civilian by Union soldiers is also presented. The white soldiers were convicted by a court martial through the testimony of a newly freed slave, which at the time was absolutely unprecedented. We will also have our usual Southern Exposure section.

As always, we have back issues for sale. Some of the earlier volumes are sold out, but most others are available.



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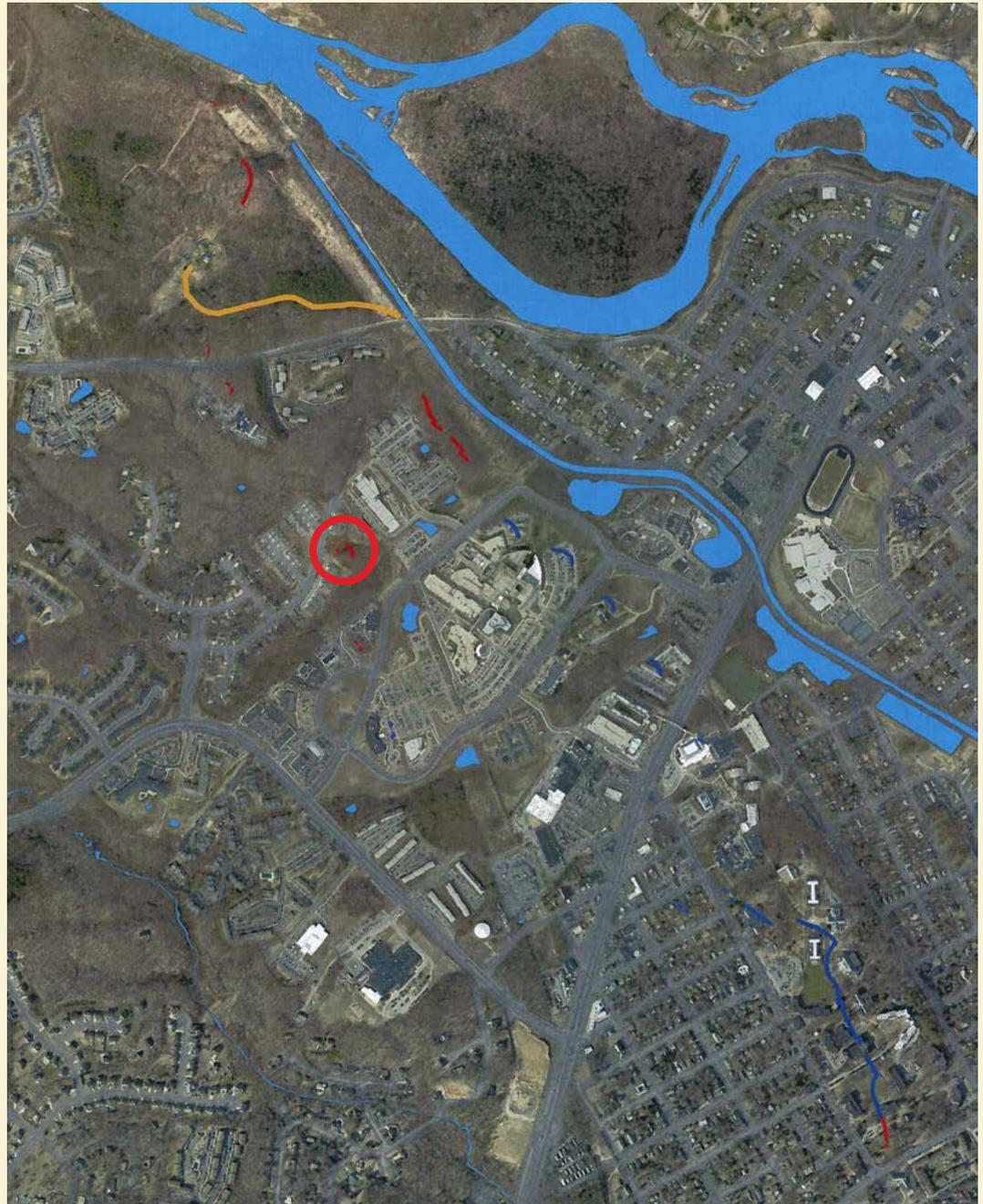
Erik Nelson
Newsletter Editor

Confederate Earthworks Come Under CVBT Protection

The Janney family of Fredericksburg has donated a 4.7 acre tract on a ridge behind Fredericksburg that includes a surviving set of earthworks, occupied by Confederate forces during the December 13, 1862 battle of Fredericksburg. A portion of this overall property was developed several years ago, but a steep knoll with a gun pit and nearby supporting infantry trench was worthy of preservation and is now under CVBT ownership.

The extent of the fighting on this part of the Fredericksburg battlefield was dictated by the topography. A canal across the northern edge of town made it very difficult for Federal infantry to close on the Confederate line in that sector, but Federal artillery had no such constraints and Union batteries on the north side of the Rappahannock River subjected the Southern troops there to a punishing fire.

From this gun pit, the powerful Confederate line extended southward along the crest of Stansbury Hill (crowned today by the University of Mary Washington) to Marye's Heights and Willis Hill. In December 1862, Federal infantry famously launched futile assaults at Marye's Heights, but never crossed bayonets with the defending Confederate infantry. The Federals also probed toward Stansbury Hill, but did not advance in



This modern map of Fredericksburg shows the Norfolk Artillery site circled in red. Additional surviving earthworks are also in red. Earthworks lost to the modern world are in blue.

any strength beyond a ridge where the Mary Washington monument stands. The canal slicing across the land made it impossible for any further infantry movement.

The Southern line also extended northward to

the Rappahannock River, anchored at Fall Hill, which is the name of the geographic feature as well as the Taylor house. General Richard H. Anderson's division covered the heights along Stansbury Hill to Fall Hill with five

brigades of infantry (from Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, and Virginia). Anderson also had four batteries attached. Captain Victor Maurin's Louisiana battery occupied an entrenched

(Continued on page 5)

A CONVERSATION WITH ED BEARSS

AT OUR ANNUAL MEETING ON APRIL 29TH, ROB HODGE AND ED Bearss engaged in a freewheeling conversation that was both entertaining and enlightening. The following is a review of the highlights.



Ed Bearss and Rob Hodge in the field. This is what leadership looks like at the sharp end of the stick.

Rob opened their conversation by asking Ed about his war experience. As a bit of background, Ed enlisted in the Marine Corps in April 1942 and before too many months had passed, found himself in the Third Marine Raider Battalion on Guadalcanal. Following that harrowing campaign, Ed became part

of the force that landed on New Britain in December 1943. Jungle warfare is a brutal endeavor and the Marines called New Britain “worse than the worst of Guadalcanal.” Just over a week into that invasion, on January 2, 1944, Ed was part of an advance element probing a Japanese position when he was hit by enemy machine gun fire that killed several Marines and left Ed with grievous wounds.

Ed briefly recounted the above, adding that Lieutenant Colonel Lewis B. “Chesty” Puller ended up having to relieve their battalion commander because he proved unable to deal with the situation. In typical combat Marine understatement, Ed said that Puller “resolved the problem” and the advance resumed the next day. The “problem” at what was being called Suicide Creek had left Ed with wounds that kept him in hospitals for the next 26 months.

That time in medical facilities gave him plenty of opportunity to read the Civil War literature of the day and much else. Ed subsequently used the G.I Bill to get through college and in 1955 he graduated from Indiana University with a Master’s in History. He joined the National Park Service soon thereafter and his first duty in that capacity was at the National Military Park at Vicksburg. He said he realized that his combat experience gave him a certain insight into military history. While studying the terrain at Shiloh, for instance, Ed observed that it is often the lay of the land that randomly determines whether an individual will live or die.

Rob broke up the conversation at times with a series of word associations:

- Rob:** Douglas MacArthur **Ed:** Responding as a Marine, he was OK for Inchon, but not for World War Two
- Rob:** George Patton **Ed:** High opinion

Rob: Braxton Bragg

Rob: Joe Wheeler

Rob: Joe Hooker

Rob: Ben Butler

Rob: Dick Ewell

Rob: Hiram G. Berdan

Rob: Cadmus Wilcox

Rob: Earl Van Dorn

Rob: Winfield Scott Hancock

Rob: John B. Gordon

Rob: Nathan Bedford Forrest

Rob: John Sedgwick

Rob: Shelby Foote

Rob: Jim Lighthizer

Rob: D.P. Newton

Rob: Mike Stevens

Ed: Not a fan

Ed: Overrated

Ed: A favorite; colorful, but lost his nerve at a bad time

Ed: Good lawyer; not a good general

Ed: Interesting general; victim of the keepers of the Lost Cause

Ed: Good shot, but needed to lead his elite unit from the front

Ed: Very good; underappreciated

Ed: A ladies man

Ed: Excellent combat commander, like Patton and Puller

Ed: Overrated. He illustrates how if you live long enough and write books, you can make yourself better than you are

Ed: He embodied the quote attributed to him that war means fighting and fighting means killing

Ed: Nice fellow; last of the McClellan men

Ed: Good writer; not a great researcher

Ed: No better leader for the Civil WarTrust

Ed: Outstanding. Created a museum in White Oak and keeps better records than many archaeologists

Ed: A crusader for preservation, second to none

National Park historian Beth Parnicza asked Ed what advice he had for young historians. He said to get to know your subject well and be outgoing. By that he meant do not turn down groups who are looking for a speaker. On the subject of public speaking, Ed said that early in his Park Service career he was asked to deliver a talk to a local civic group. He carefully prepared and wrote down a speech and at the appointed time and place he began to deliver it to the group. As he did so, he noticed that some folks were getting up and leaving. People often have to leave an event for one reason or another, but Ed vowed that he would never read a speech again. He said you cannot be exciting and engaging when reading.

Ed continued to press the point about being prepared and thus being able to influence decisions and events. In the 1990s,

(A Conversation with Ed Bearss, continued on page 5)

during what many remember as the Third Battle of Manassas, then Secretary of the Interior Manuel Luhan asked Ed why the Stuart Hill tract was important. Ed went to the Secretary's office to brief him (which we can surely picture). He made an impression and was invited back the next week for another briefing. That second session included members of Secretary Luhan's family, and there were several more visits after that, with a smattering of bureau chiefs finding their

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way to the Secretary's office for what Ed called Civil War 101.

Ed continued to emphasize that whenever he testified before Congress, he never read to them. People are more influenced by confident speaking, which is critical when looking to preserve threatened battlefields.

Rob asked Ed to share his thoughts on the National Park Service. Ed noted that it had begun as an organization to protect certain natural resources, but Horace Albright, who had helped establish the NPS in 1916, advocated for also bringing the military parks into the National Park system. In the 1920s and 30s, the veterans of the Civil War were dying off and the War Department's interpretation efforts were becoming insufficient. In 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt transferred the military parks to the National Park Service and the battlefields are better off as a consequence.

Rob began to get brazenly intimate and asked Ed how he had courted his wife. "I brought her a cannonball," he boomed. Boldly pushing into this private realm even further, he asked how many pictures of Rob did Mrs. Bearss have in their house. "Three," he responded with a smile. How would he like to be remembered? For having worked for two agencies. He said he liked to think he had served with the two best things in America—the United States Marine Corps and the National Park Service. SL

E-Newsletters available

Some folks prefer to receive certain types of mail in electronic format and that option is available for CVBT newsletters. If you would like to change your current newsletter mailing to an electronic distribution, please contact us at comdir@cvbt.org and we will make that change for you.

position where a large gun pit still stands today, just above William Street. A faint trace of the connecting trench line also survives, but anything else has disappeared under academic buildings.

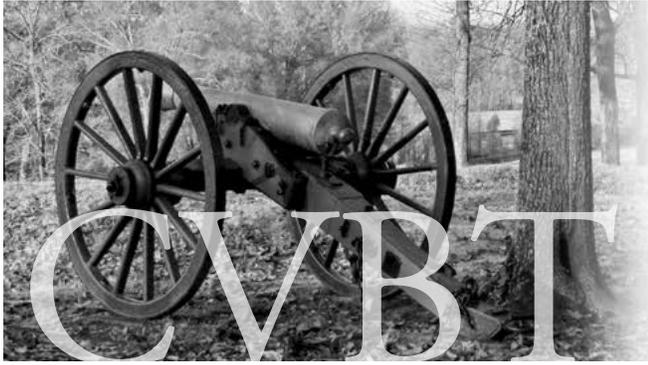
Three Virginia batteries occupied the rest of the line north to the river, including this gun pit recently gifted to the CVBT. These units included Captain John W. Lewis's Battery, the Norfolk Light Artillery (Captain Frank Huger), and the Norfolk Light Artillery Blues (Captain Charles R. Grandy's battery, but commanded at the time by Lt. William T. Peet). One of the Norfolk guns belonging to either Huger or Peet occupied the gun pit on the former Janney property.

These three batteries remained in place for several days before and after the December battle, but documentary evidence of their activities is limited. Frank Huger's letters include only one written from Fredericksburg, on November 23rd, but nothing that describes the battle three weeks later. Captain Lewis was the only one of the three battery commanders to file a report and it contains some details. He said they: "commenced throwing up earthworks to protect the guns and cannoners" on November 23. He also reported firing "about 400 rounds" during the battle.

The ammunition expended by the Confederate guns was not fired at Federal artillery. Instead, as General Anderson wrote: "their shot ... were reserved for those opportunities which the advancing and retiring columns of the enemy gave them." General Cadmus M. Wilcox, commanding the nearby Alabama brigade, reported that he gave specific orders that the guns should "waste no ammunition," and fire only on infantry targets.

The Federals had no such limitations. One of the Norfolk artillerists described their ordeal on December 13th: "One of our rifled pieces bursted and was ordered to the rear... Shells from the enemy killed three of our horses, wounded five others, and dismounted one of our howitzers... One of our young fellows had a most narrow escape, for the shell...passed between his legs, tearing away a portion of the bottom of his coat."

The Confederate position at Fredericksburg continued to evolve after Lee's December victory there. The Southerners extended their earthworks to upstream crossings as well as for miles downstream, where Federal gunboats could ply the Rappahannock River. Many of these works saw action in May 1863, during the Chancellorsville campaign. After that battle, the men of the Norfolk Artillery raised \$858 as a contribution toward a statue to commemorate the dead Stonewall Jackson—an average of about three-weeks' pay per man. They would make good members of the CVBT, were they still alive. SL



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For information on membership, please write to the Trust at P.O. Box 3417, Fredericksburg, VA 22402; call our office at (540) 374-0900; or visit our website at www.cvbt.org. Contributions to the CVBT are tax-deductible.

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Active Member	\$ 135
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