

IN CAMP ALONG THE MONOCACY



From Blue And Gray Education Society Field Headquarters in Frederick Maryland

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From the Desk of the Executive Director at HQ In Chatham Virginia:

The Future is Now



In 1993, I sat down to work on a business plan for a nonprofit educational organization that would compliment the newly formed Association for the Preservation of Civil War Sites (APCWS). As my military career, wound down and I was transferred to Washington, DC we settled in Fredericksburg and the organization was born--indeed our first tour in 1994 took place in conjunction with the APCWS's Annual Battlefield tour to the Richmond area battlefields, while I was still on active duty, we did a symposium featuring Terry Jones, Archer Jones, Joe Glaathaar, Louis Manarin, Mike Litterest and Mike Andrus. We had perhaps 35 attendees who tagged on from the APCWS conference and then we went on tour with Ed Bearss, Dan Beattie and Will Greene. A BBQ at Glendale Community Center ended our first foray.

A lot of water has passed under the bridge in the intervening 24 years. I quickly discovered that just as in war no plan survives its first clash with reality. We have never reached the lofty projections I wrote in the plan; but, we did the important things right and our single minded focus to get things done no matter who got the credit has served us well. Today we can look over a proud and substantial list of accomplishments that stand us proudly with any who have ever undertaken to tell the story or preserve important sites through education. Indeed we have quietly become one of the very senior nonprofit Civil War groups in the country. That is what I want to briefly address.

BGES is a small organization, perhaps the size of a large Civil War Round Table, contributing members total about 300 give or take a score or two in any given year. Yet as the Civil War Sesquicentennial fades in our rear view mirror, we are the only national non profit Civil War education organization in the country--the only one (Civil War Trust is a land preservation organization). With that comes some significant moral obligations--we are indeed charged with "Preserving our Past for Our Future."

I have been at this for 25 years now and at 64 with health issues, I have challenged senior members of this organization to determine if we are to go ahead after I step down from daily operations. Their answer was an unqualified yes. So, planning has begun.

This is a personality driven business and it cannot be. Organizations rarely work together and personal animus often prevents complimentary organizations from sharing common interests or working to grown the movement as a whole--sad. History IS and the preservation of it is an essential element of our national identity. When wholesale assaults began on the symbols of the past we are challenged to speak to their social, cultural and educational value. This is not an easy task nor would it be because of the legacies the war has left. The path less traveled is the route to success. When John Kennedy soared in his rhetoric about the space program he said that we did not do these things because they were easy but rather because they were hard. Ronald Reagan in a call to greatness said it was a new day in America and admonished us to accept the challenge by saying why not? We are Americans. There is an inherent greatness to America despite its many flaws and missteps towards today. I would suggest that regardless of your regional or ethnic identity, the legacy of the war is in the hearts and souls of her descendants whether your name is Spratt, Lee, Grant or Christian (Stonewall Jackson's progeny).

Today as educational emphasis has shifted from liberal arts and hard critical reasoning skills to computer science and sound byte clichés that distort complex issues. With the instant gratification and misinformation of social media, the burden is on us to avoid the emotional pitfalls of latent prejudice and ignorance to clearly articulate and present the reasons why the study of the people, places and events surrounding and including the Civil War matter today. In certain circles it is distinctly politically incorrect and you can expect significant blow back.

Recently I was at a Civil War Round Table in Scottsdale. There were very few youth or young and middle aged adults in attendance--even the speaker, the venerable Ed Bearss was nearly 95. What happens when those voices are silenced? Who will tell the story? Will the legacy of those great but flawed Americans of 1860 be relegated to the dust bin of our collective memory?

Twenty five years of integrity and service--that is what BGES represents. The answers to the questions I have posed will, in large measure, determine where we are 25 years from now--will the Civil War be the next War of 1812, World War I or Korean War, faded into the background of history? Will it become a footnote like Lewis and Clark? Great events that have not captured or retained the imagination of the public...is our time past or is it just beginning? Folks I suggest to you that the great work of your membership in BGES is yet in front of you. Accept the baton and work to ensure the questions posed do not become the reality of the future.

Regards,

Len

Len Riedel

Executive Director

It's the Little Things....

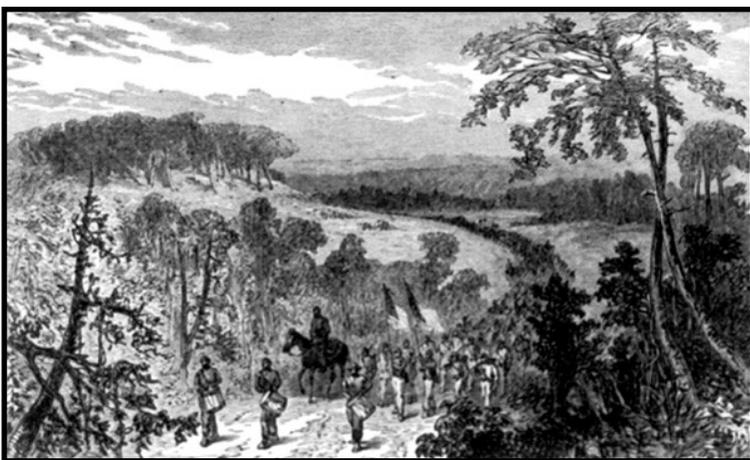
By Gloria Swift

Traveling with BGES is an extraordinary opportunity for someone like me. As a military historian specializing in the 19th century and the American Civil War, getting out on battlefields is truly a treat. Now don't get me wrong, I had a fantastic career with the National Park Service as a park ranger at a few of our nation's historic sites and battlefields. I was lucky to share the stories of those sites with the visiting public, hopefully making history come alive for them.

The same "coming to life" thing happens for me now in traveling with BGES. The caliber of the historians who do some of our tours are fantastic and I enjoy every trip that I am fortunate enough to go on. These historians are so good at their tours that I can forget that I was once in "the biz" (conducting tours and programs) and can relax and truly enjoy the information and wonderful places they are sharing with us.

Given all this opportunity, I do find sometimes that it's the little things, when brought to light, that make the biggest impression and memory of the trip. Parker Hills of Battle Focus, our historian for the Vicksburg series, has managed to surprise me twice with some really cool tidbits.

In 2016, Parker took us to the landing on the Mississippi River where Grant finally managed to get his army across to approach Vicksburg from the south. This landing is on private property, and only with Parker can you access it. It was exciting to see this important crossing despite the flooding of the Mississippi at the time. The dirt roadway leading in to landing was significant also as it was the exact same road the Union troops used to march their way inland and the terrain has not changed in over 150 years!



Grant's army moving inland on the Bruinsburg Road after crossing the Mississippi River



The Bruinsburg Road today, going inland from the landing. Can you see the troops moving ahead?

While standing at the landing, Parker was giving us a good review of Grant and the activities that took place there when he mentioned that Grant had a bit more to worry about at the time than just getting his army to the Mississippi side of the river. He then gave us the tale of Grant aboard the steamer Magnolia and about his servant going into Grant's stateroom early one morning and throwing out the old water in the wash basin into the river. As it turned out, there wasn't just water in the basin – Grant's false teeth were thrown out too. **WAIT!! WHAT?? Grant wore false teeth????** As I looked around, I could tell that a couple of others were surprised by that revelation also – we all know about George Washington and his famous teeth, but Grant had them too?? I told Parker later that of all the things he shared with us, the story of Grant and his false teeth would be the one thing I would remember from the trip - and it has been! Parker mentioned Grant's letter to his wife about this incident and I thought I would share that part of the letter with you now:

February 11, 1863

“This morning I met with a great loss. Last night, contrary to my usual habit, I took out my teeth and put them in the wash and covered them with water. This morning, the servant who attends my stateroom, blacks my boots, etc., came into my room about daylight and finding water in the basin, threw it out into the river, teeth and all.”

Julia Grant was in Memphis at the time and later in the letter Grant asked her to find his dentist, Dr. Hamline, who was also in Memphis, to “*tell him of my predicament.*” To complete the story, it seems that Dr. Hamline came down the Mississippi immediately to find Grant and make a new pair of dentures for him in the field. WOW!! I don't know about you, but that is a story definitely worth remembering!

The next time Parker surprised me was last year in October. He was conducting a tour for us of the Corinth and Iuka campaign including Davis Bridge. We were following the routes of both Union and Confederate troops on this campaign when we came to a small Mississippi town named Rienzi and stopped the van. Knowing I have a soft spot for critters big and small, Parker turned to me and said, “Gloria, I think you're going to like this story”.



In 1862, Union cavalry encamped around the area of Rienzi Mississippi. While there, some officers from the Second Michigan cavalry spied a horse in a field hooked to a plow – I might add here that this was the very same area that Parker was currently pointing out to us right in front of the van.

The horse the officers saw was a very large (nearly 17 hands) black horse, three years old, with three white socks. The officers liked the look of the horse and thought that the animal would be a perfect mount for their commander. A purchase was negotiated, and the horse was presented as a gift to General Philip Sheridan who named him Rienzi after the small Mississippi town. Now I have to say that although Parker knows I like animals, he didn't know that I have a special affinity for the cavalry and for famous horses of the Civil War - Cincinnati, Old Baldy, Traveler, Little Sorrell, etc., so for me to see the field where Rienzi came from, well, it was like the icing on the cake! I was so excited that Parker chuckled and said, "guess this is what you'll remember from this trip!" I totally agreed!

Rienzi would serve Sheridan well over the next three years participating in at least 45 engagements; 19 of which were pitched battles, and he was wounded four times. The pair became nationally famous with the battle of Cedar Creek in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. When the battle started, Sheridan was twelve miles away in Winchester. Ordering Rienzi to be readied, Sheridan traveled the intervening miles and arrived on the battlefield in time to personally take command of his army which was retreating in panic from a surprise Confederate attack. Seeing Sheridan suddenly on the field riding his big black horse was enough to stem the tide of the Union retreat. With Sheridan's urging, both the army and fortunes were reversed, and the Federals won the day.

Sheridan and Rienzi won more than that, however, they gained immediate fame. Because of his ride and the ultimate victory, a poem was written in their honor called "Sheridan's Ride" by Thomas Buchanan Read, a painter and writer. Published far and wide, and recited over and over, the poem was an instant success with the war weary North. The image of a large gallant steed carrying a determined soldier to battle in order to turn the tide could easily be envisioned. The poem was also shamelessly used for electioneering appeal in the upcoming presidential election. All seven stanzas of the poem was published on the front page of the New York Tribune on election day:

"Sheridan's Ride"

*Up from the South, at break of day,
Bringing to Winchester fresh dismay,
The affrighted air with a shudder bore,
Like a herald in haste to the chieftain's door,
The terrible grumble, and rumble, and roar,
Telling the battle was on once more,
And Sheridan twenty miles away.*

*And wider still those billows of war
Thundered along the horizon's bar;
And louder yet into Winchester rolled
The roar of that red sea uncontrolled,
Making the blood of the listener cold,
As he thought of the stake in that fiery fray,
With Sheridan twenty miles away.*

*But there is a road from Winchester town,
A good, broad highway leading down:
And there, through the flush of the morning light,
A steed as black as the steeds of night
Was seen to pass, as with eagle flight;
As if he knew the terrible need,*

*Still sprang from those swift hoofs, thundering south,
The dust like smoke from the cannon's mouth,
Or the trail of a comet, sweeping faster and faster,
Foreboding to traitors the doom of disaster.
The heart of the steed and the heart of the master
Were beating like prisoners assaulting their walls,
Impatient to be where the battle-field calls;
Every nerve of the charger was strained to full play,
With Sheridan only ten miles away.*

*Under his spurning feet, the road
Like an arrowy Alpine river flowed,
And the landscape sped away behind
Like an ocean flying before the wind;
And the steed, like a barque fed with furnace ire,
Swept on, with his wild eye full of fire;
But, lo! he is nearing his heart's desire;
He is snuffing the smoke of the roaring fray,
With Sheridan only five miles away.*



*Thomas Buchanan Read
also painted an image of the
event to go with his poem.*

*The first that the general saw were the groups
Of stragglers, and then the retreating troops;
What was to be done? what to do?-a glance told him both.
Then striking his spurs with a terrible oath,
He dashed down the line, 'mid a storm of huzzas,
And the wave of retreat checked its course there, because
The sight of the master compelled it to pause.
With foam and with dust the black charger was gray;
By the flash of his eye, and his red nostril's play,
He seemed to the whole great army to say:
'I have brought you Sheridan all the way
From Winchester down to save the day.'*

*Hurrah! hurrah for Sheridan!
Hurrah! hurrah for horse and man!
And when their statues are placed on high
Under the dome of the Union sky,
The American soldier's Temple of Fame,
There, with the glorious general's name,
Be it said, in letters both bold and bright:
'Here is the steed that saved the day
By carrying Sheridan into the fight,
From Winchester-twenty miles away!'*

After the war Rienzi, now named Winchester by Sheridan in honor of the famous ride, enjoyed a well-deserved retirement. When he died in 1878, Sheridan had the old war horse mounted by taxidermists and presented him to the military museum on Governor's Island in the New York City harbor.

In 1922, a fire damaged the museum, but luckily, Rienzi/Winchester remained unharmed. It was decided at that point to send him to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C. He received a military escort the entire way from New York to the Smithsonian.

Before the transfer to Washington, a farewell ceremony for the old horse was held in New York with many veterans in attendance. A band played a selection of military airs and "Sheridan's Ride" was read to the crowd. At the end of the ceremony, the veterans stood up and gave the horse a rousing cheer, "Hurrah for Sheridan! Hurrah! Hurrah for horse and man!"

Like I said, it's sometimes the little things that make a lasting memory!



Renzi (or if you prefer, Winchester), can still be seen today at the Hall of Armed Forces in the American History Museum of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. The saddle blanket, saddle, bridle and other accoutrements all belonged to Phil Sheridan and used on Rienzi during the war. It will surprise you when you see him how tall this horse really is. Many soldiers remarked that Sheridan, at five feet five inches tall, had to "shinny" his way up into the saddle!



Our 25th Anniversary!

**It's Celebration Time -
Come on!**



It is time to celebrate! BGES is starting its 25th year of operations in April. We have planned an event centrally located to commemorate years of achievement and to call for a firm foot forward into the future. Mark your calendars, April 6-8, 2018 is designated to celebrate what we have done as an organization. Rallying in Chester, Virginia this is a weekend celebration that is worth a day or three days of your time. All will be welcomed.

The BGES at 25 will start on Friday April 6th with early arrivals welcomed to tour Pamplin Historical Park in the morning. We will host a symposium starting at 1 PM with speakers talking about BGES projects they worked and which many of you helped to accomplish. Two lectures will precede a commemorative ceremony featuring one of BGES' completed projects and then followed by another lecturer speaking to another BGES project. These are not intended as dry recitations of who, what and where but rather as real life stories of what an educational organization does interfacing with the artifacts and challenges of historical items and happenings. Specifics will be on our website. We will finish the day with a dinner at Pamplin Park and remarks on the past 25 years and the challenges of the future from Executive Director, Len Riedel.

Saturday we will gather at the headquarters hotel to load a bus for a day long examination of the Bermuda Hundred Campaign. Here we placed over 40 interpretation signs back in 2014. Led by George Fickett and Scott Williams our day will celebrate preservation as a feature of government service—both tour leaders blended a passion for preservation with their professional obligations to preserve and present the surviving sites of a key point in American history. Lunch will be provided and an optional dinner, will feature National Geographic Publisher and Editor in Chief, Lisa Thomas who will speak about the four BGES books and the growing partnership between Nat Geo and the BGES.

Sunday we will meet at North Anna Battlefield Park to tour our first substantial project from the 1990s the interpretation of the Ox Ford Battlefield and Lee's Inverted V—it subsequently expanded to include the Union staging position, the Federal charge and the Union encampment areas. Led by Hanover County Historical Society President Art Taylor, this will show you the enduring quality of the work we have done—signs there have been in place nearly 20 years. After a luncheon in the North Anna Park, we will caravan to Fredericksburg and the Slaughter Pen to meet BGES member and NPS historian, Greg Mertz and representatives of our partners, Central Virginia Battlefields Trust (CVBT), to review the fighting on Jackson's front and to tell the story of another completed BGES project—the cannon at Pelham's Corner.

Registration for the anniversary party is just \$250—a clear play to our 25th celebration. The registration includes admission to Pamplin Park for the entire day, admission to the lecture series, and attendance at the special tribute ceremony, It also includes dinner on Friday night, the bus tour and lunch on Saturday, as well as the caravan tour and lunch on Sunday. Dinner on Saturday requires an extra fee of \$35 (thus the whole package will be \$285).

I think you will find much to enjoy, learn and celebrate. It is certainly because of you our members, that we have been successful for 25 years and we want you to be with us at this very special event.

As a special enticement, you may bring your spouse or significant other for just \$135 (the registration fee for our first tour in 1994) that includes all the social events. We also encourage you to sponsor a friend who is not a BGES member and bring them along with you to enjoy the festivities. The two of you can register for just \$450, that includes the Saturday night dinner—a savings of \$60 each. Additional non-members can be registered through your sponsorship for \$225 each. And if you know a student under the age of 18, they can register for just \$75 per person and enjoy all meals and activities.

This is a celebration - a worthy tribute to 25 years of service. I hope you will be able to join us. You can register at www.blueandgrayeducation.org. Please call me if you have any questions; I can be reached at **434-250-9921**.

Len



Welcome to Our New Members!

Robert McCluan — Beaverdam, VA
James McVicker—Alexandria, VA
Robert McKinnon—Atlanta, GA
Doug Hays—Reston, VA
John Sinclair—Baltimore, MD
Gail Long—Los Gatos, CA
Warren Breisblatt—Scottsdale, AZ
Peggy Yurczak—Beavercreek, OH

John Greene—Frederick, MD
Alexander Taylor—Landing, NJ
John Curran—Phoenix, AZ
Burford Smith—Douglasville, GA
Gary Ecelbarger—Annendale, VA
Gary Brand—Wallingford, CT
Bill Terpeluk—Chalfont, PA

Thank you to all of our renewing members this quarter and a big welcome back to those past members who responded to Len’s December appeal and brought their memberships up to date!

Thank You!!!