

*A 2020 BGES Civil War Field University Program:
Sheridan Recovers the Valley, Fall 1864*

With Scott Patchan and Gary Ecelbarger

July 7-11, 2020, from Winchester, VA

What a summer it was—call it the “Shenandoah Summer.” The valley was alive again with an active rebel army. They had been in Maryland and Pennsylvania. They had fired on the United States President in the fortifications of Washington, D.C., and now they were in control in the lower (northern portion) valley. Union fortunes had sunk so low that Abraham Lincoln had had his cabinet sign a pledge to make every effort to win the war between November 1864 and March 1865 after the upcoming electoral defeat that seemed certain.

U.S. Grant had traveled with the primary eastern army and was now compelled to respond to the threats to the national capital. He might even need to return to D.C. to put things in order, leaving Benjamin Butler as the senior officer outside of Petersburg. It was a dark scenario into which Grant optimistically inserted Maj. Gen. Philip Sheridan. Sheridan was a diminutive character whose arms nearly reached the ground without his stooping. That said, every pound was fight, and Grant knew that if given the task, like a bulldog, Sheridan would not release Early once he got his teeth into him.

This is a program rich with characters and character—big battles and decisive turns of fortune. It is the Shenandoah Valley in 1864.

Tuesday, July 7, 2020

6:00 PM. Meet at the headquarters hotel, where Scott and Gary will introduce you to the program of the next four days, with emphasis on Early’s summer success and the imperative need for an anchor to stop the Union drift. Dinner is on your own.

Wednesday, July 8, 2020

8:15 AM. Today is devoted to the largest battle in the Shenandoah during the entire Civil War. The third battle of Winchester earned its own book, and our day will cover it in great detail, starting with a cavalry engagement at Spout Spring and moving successively to the heavy infantry fighting in the First Woods, Middle Field, and the Second Woods.

It is hard to calculate the impact of a fluid and heavy battle on the morale of the competing forces, but if there was such a moment it was when Sheridan gained the field, taking personal command and inspiring his men to victory. Sheridan would be

forever bonded to his men from this point, and a month later at Cedar Creek it would be dramatically on display. But for now, it suffices to show you how the battle turned for the Union.

We are going to take you to many, many sites that have not been regularly visited by tour groups and will give you a boots-on-the-ground sense of Hackwood Plantation and Red Bud Run—you will meet George Crook and George Patton. At Stephenson's Depot, we will pick up Sheridan's cavalry as they cross the Opequon and slam into Breckinridge's, and then Early's retreating infantry that propelled it through Winchester and southbound. Lunch is included.

Thursday, July 9, 2020

With the southern army fleeing to the high ground south of Winchester, we will follow in their footsteps to Front Royal, where Thomas Mundford was unable to abate the Federal pursuit at the Shenandoah River crossing and fall back to the area around Fishers Hill. The terrain of the battle often has been explained in simplistic terms, but the ground is actually very significant and it needed to be approached in a considered fashion. We will clarify what Sheridan intended to do to continue his attacks and how the Confederates misunderstood that intent and reacted in the wrong way, allowing Crook to unleash a devastating attack on the rebels' flank and rear.

A significant element of today's study will be a unique walk on Little North Mountain in the footsteps of the soldiers who maneuvered there. We will stand in the shadows of Lomax's cavalry and follow Crook's attack to Ramseur's Hill, where the North Carolinians stoutly stood. We then will see how Alabama colonel Cullen Battle tenaciously defended Early's artillery and kept open a retreat route to ensure thousands of Confederates were not encircled. This should take most of our day, but if time permits we will finish up in the Luray Valley at Milford, where Thomas Munford rallies and stops Gen. Alfred Torbert's move toward Early's rear—a move that could have resulted in the capture of Old Jube's entire force. Lunch is provided, but dinner is on your own.

Friday, July 10, 2020

8:00 AM. We will head out today to follow Sheridan's pursuit of Jubal Early to Harrisonburg. There, we will assess Sheridan's decision to cease pursuit of Early's army and allow him to regroup in the Blue Ridge. Instead, Sheridan initiated the "burning" of the Shenandoah Valley and a withdrawal to the valley's northern reaches. Our stops will include the site where Lt. John Meigs, son of Gen. Montgomery Meigs, was gunned down; and village of Dayton, Virginia, which Sheridan ordered burned in retaliation for Meigs' death. We will view the monument to Lt. Col. Thomas F. Wildes of the 116th Ohio, whose intervention spared Dayton from Sheridan's wrath. We will follow Sheridan's fiery path northward up the Shenandoah to the vicinity of Tom's Brook, where Sheridan ordered his cavalry to whip Confederate general Tom Rosser's cavalry or get whipped trying. The Union horse soldiers did let their commander down, and we will visit this battlefield in the afternoon to go over the fields where former classmates at

West Point, Custer and Rosser once again met each other in battle. Lunch is included, and we will have a farewell dinner.

Saturday July 11, 2020

We will wrap up this study with the famed battle of Cedar Creek, fought on October 19, 1864, in which Jubal Early launched a desperate, predawn attack on the rear of Sheridan's sleeping army on the fog-covered morning. Early's army routed two-thirds of the Federal force. We will follow the footsteps of Early's attack and go over the ground where he routed the little Army of West Virginia and the Nineteenth Army Corps. We will review the terrain where Horatio Wright's Sixth Corps slowed Early's progress after several hours of early morning fighting. We then will head to Winchester to follow in the path of Sheridan and his famed black horse Rienzi as they dashed back to the battlefield, where Sheridan inspired the men whom Wright had already begun to reassemble for a counterattack. We will close out the day interpreting the counterattack and Custer's charge that shattered Jubal Early's hopes to obtain the one victory that Robert E. Lee assured him would "set things right." Our discussions this day also will address the controversy surrounding the "Fatal Halt" by Jubal Early that Gen. John B. Gordon claimed cost the South a victory at Cedar Creek.

Sheridan's Valley Campaign still had Waynesboro in the new year, but he had taken the starch out of the Confederates' 1864 offensive—exactly what Grant promised Lincoln he would do. The valley would suffer a "Blue" winter as the Confederacy sputtered to its death. Lunch is included. We will return to the hotel by 5 PM.

About the Faculty

Gary Ecelbarger has developed a reputation for enthusiastic presentations and excellent history. Although he refers to himself as an "amateur historian," Gary's books are well researched, well written, and extremely well received. Constantly pushing the envelope by asking new questions and finding new answers, he has tackled a wide variety of America's wars and is highly sought in the touring community. Gary's fascination with the Civil War is primary and matches his Revolutionary War focus—a voracious student of history. We could not bring you a better scholar or educator.

Scott Patchan is at the top of a very short list of historians of any type who understand and can present northern Virginia and the Shenandoah Valley. He has begun to develop the same reputation in the Revolutionary War. He and Gary have worked together for a number of years now, and they present a very cogent story that is firmly based on extensive research and a "boots-on-the-ground" prep style. Neither Scott nor Gary are so-called "academic" historians, but you ignore them at risk of missing a very well-done program.

Hotel Information

This program will be based in Winchester, Virginia. The hotel will be posted on this site. The headquarters hotel room block will likely be in the \$125 a night range plus tax. We will notify you of the hotel selected and the date open for reservations.

Transportation

The servicing airports are Washington Dulles (IAD) and Washington Reagan (DCA). If you fly you surely will need to rent a car or arrange a limo.

Recommended Reading

You will be provided with a reading book and maps upon arrival. The following books are suggested to enhance your readiness for the program. Amazon.com has a program to support non-profits IF YOU SIGN UP to support Blue and Gray Education Society (EIN 54-1720582) at [AmazonSmile](#). When you sign up there rather than the normal Amazon site, one-half of one percent of your purchase price will be provided to BGES as a donation from Amazon. This will apply not only on this purchase but others you may make at other times.

Tom Lewis: [*The Guns of Cedar Creek*](#)

Scott Patchan: [*Shenandoah Summer: The 1864 Campaign*](#)

Scott Patchan: [*The Last Battle of Winchester: Phil Sheridan, Jubal Early, and the Shenandoah Valley Campaign, August 7–September 19, 1864*](#)

Jeffrey Wert: [*From Winchester to Cedar Creek: The Shenandoah Campaign of 1864*](#)

Registration Form

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Presented by Scott Patchan and Gary Ecelbarger

July 7-11, 2020, from Winchester, VA

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Registration includes four lunches, a farewell dinner, a reading book with maps, the academic program, all admissions, support of two professional historians, tour director, and transportation appropriate to the registration. We also will provide snacks, bottled water and a limited selection of sodas.

_____ Registration \$875

_____ Current BGES member \$800

_____ I am not a member but would like to join so that I can get the member's rate or I am a member who is past due to renew. Please accept my donation of \$_____ (must be \$75 or more, which is tax deductible).

_____ I am sending a deposit of \$300 plus full payment for any memberships. Total enclosed is \$_____.

_____ I will pay the balance due before the event.

_____ Check enclosed

Charge my (circle one) MC VISA AMEXP Discover \$_____

Exp: _____ CVV: _____

Signature: _____

Mail to BGES Seminars, P.O. Box 1176, Chatham, VA 24531; or fax credit card registrations to 434-432-0596. You may also register online at *blueandgrayeducation.org*.