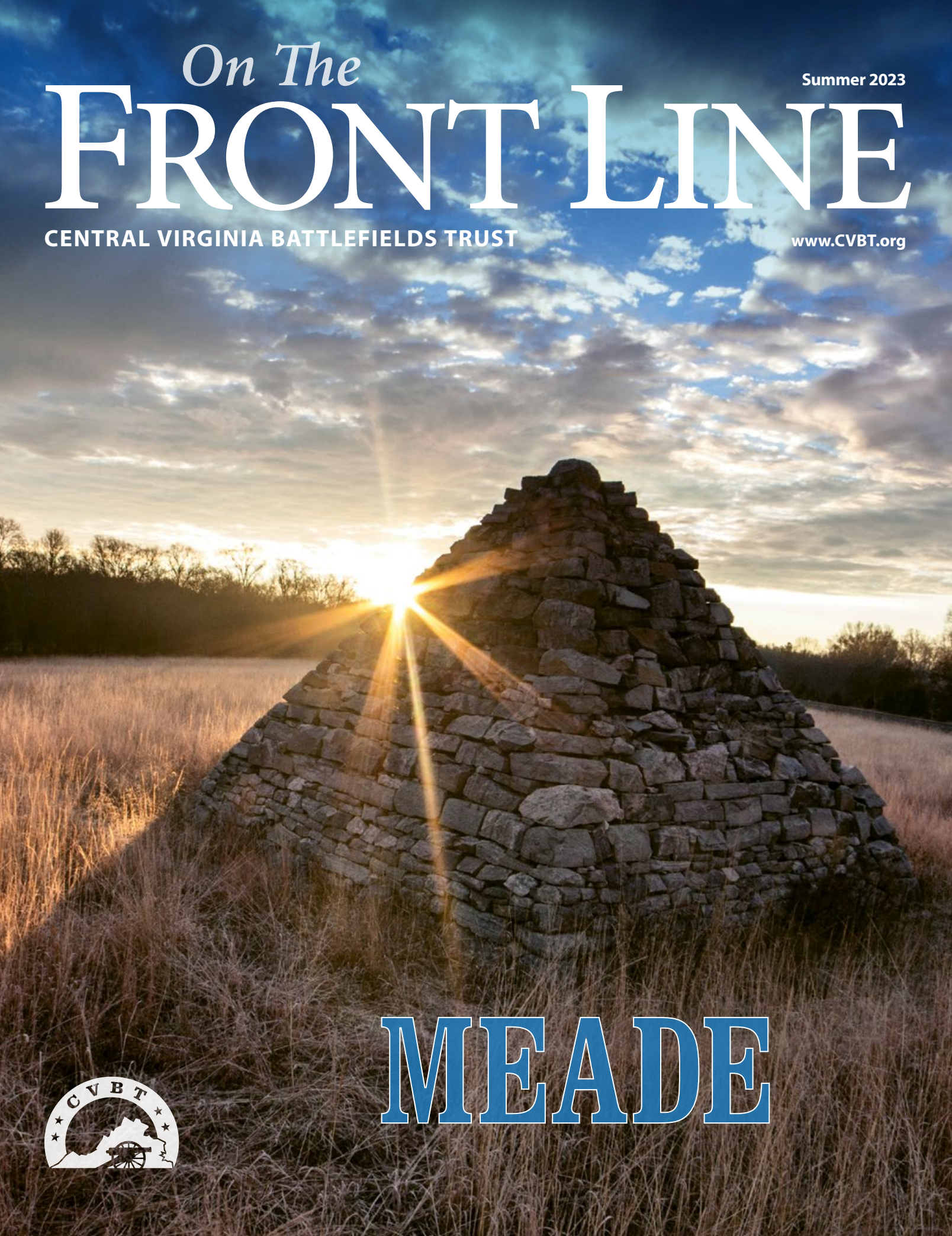

On The FRONT LINE

Summer 2023

CENTRAL VIRGINIA BATTLEFIELDS TRUST

www.CVBT.org

MEADE

A memorial to George Gordon Meade stands along Pennsylvania Avenue NW, in front of the E. Barrett Prettyman United States Court House, in Washington, D.C. Sculpted by Charles Grafly and dedicated in 1927, the monument cost $400,000.
Library of Congress

Central Virginia Battlefields Trust

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The Meade Pyramid, Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park
Buddy Secor

Dispatch from the President

Welcome to another issue of CVBT's *On The Front Line* magazine. We have been receiving rave reviews for this publication—so much so that we have decided to expand the real estate, meaning more pages to include additional content.

This issue's focus is Union commander Gen. George Gordon Meade. Having never sought a military career (ending up at West Point simply to obtain an education in engineering because his family could not afford college), Meade endured the one-year requirement in the military. He began a civilian profession, but when the economy faltered, wound up back in the ranks to pay the bills.

You will learn much about his personality and traits in the pages of this issue. After being ordered to replace "Fighting Joe" Hooker just a few days before the battle at Gettysburg, Meade reluctantly accepted—he had no choice. Meade would prevail over Lee's Army of Northern Virginia at Gettysburg by fighting a predominantly defensive battle. Being quite pleased with himself, Meade congratulated his soldiers for "driving from our soil every vestige of the presence of the invader." Lincoln, of course, was pleased with the initial victory, but, to put it mildly, was not so exuberant about Meade's failure to immediately pursue Lee and felt Meade had wasted an opportunity to close on Lee's army and end the war.

Once we feel a task at hand has been accomplished and fall back on our laurels, we lose any momentum we've gained. Just ask Meade. I always feel this way about the Central Virginia Battlefields Trust. We accomplish remarkable things for a small organization, and it is easy to take a break after a hard-fought campaign preserving another piece of our history. But that is simply not our way.

Interest rate hikes, inflation, and the intense pressure of development in Central Virginia are all combining to make even the hardiest organizations take a step back. The battle is not getting easier. It is intensifying.

Simply paying the daily bills to keep CVBT running has become a challenge. All of us at home are feeling the pain of higher costs, as well—it's no secret.

Still, I will not let CVBT fail to pursue any opportunities, to let one square inch of historical Civil War property get away. We may have larger mortgages, wait twice the time for approved grant money to run its course through today's bureaucracy, and face higher costs in literally every aspect of nonprofit business, but none of this will deter us from our mission!

In March, CVBT met its commitment to the American Battlefield Trust and conveyed a check for $67,500 toward saving Chancellorsville's Dowdell's Tavern site. These 42 acres are a crucial part of our combined effort to stitch Jackson's Flank Attach back together.

We have also completed our submission for grants to help pay for the cost of CVBT's newest piece of the Flank Attack, the Stonewall Brigade III tract. The expected cost outside what we hope to receive from any grants for the Stonewall III tract was part of our latest campaign. CVBT's combined campaign for both Dowdell's Tavern and Stonewall III totaled $100,000. Thanks to all our members and donors, I suspect we will have either come within a few thousand dollars, or complete in full, this task by the writing of this message.

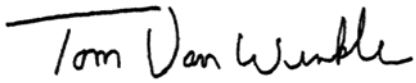
Again, not slowing down, CVBT is now pursuing battlefield property at the Mine Run battlefield—the site of one of George Meade's most important command decisions. More on Mine Run at a later date.

Continuing on the premise of not slowing down, visit our CVBT website and check out the 2023 Annual Conference. Our theme: "1863: Chancellorsville–The Crossroads of Fire." We'll have three days of incredible tours, fun, food, programs, and comradery. We will visit Moss Neck, Jackson's headquarters after the battle of Fredericksburg, on a tour led by renowned historian and CVBT friend Frank O'Reilly. This is a rare opportunity! Our keynote speaker, author and historian Kris White, will ponder the question, "What if Jackson hadn't been shot on the evening of May 2, 1863?" Tours of several key Chancellorsville battlefield stops, led by historians Chris Makowski and Kris White, are also planned.

Friday's complimentary President's Reception will be held at the historic Sentry Box home in Fredericksburg, overlooking the middle pontoon crossing. Sunday's brunch and program at Stevenson Ridge will include a panel discussion entitled "Chancellorsville: A Prelude to Gettysburg," with full audience participation. Historians signed on to the panel as of this writing include John Hennessy, Sarah Kay Bierle, Robert Lee Hodge, and Chris Makowski, with more to come! Hurry and register! There are limited full weekend packages *(including the conference dinner)* available.

Slowing down, missing opportunities—that's not CVBT. We find ways to work smarter and prevail over the challenges. Your continued support is critical to accomplish this. Please: Recruit some members, become a CVBT General, think about monthly giving, and review our Legacy Giving. It all counts!

Thank You,



Tom Van Winkle
President, Central Virginia Battlefields Trust

Executive Director Letter

We here at CVBT have been very busy since the last issue. The fundraising campaign around our preservation of the Stonewall Brigade III tract was launched—and continues—as well as the process of applying for grants to help fund the project. We also continue working with our colleagues at the Virginia Department of Historic Resources to finish the easement work associated with the Myer's Hill tract, and we're planning for the future public access to and interpretation of the site.

I'm excited about our plans for the 2023 Annual Conference—particularly about being able to go to Moss Neck. Tickets are limited and are going fast.

We've started a new volunteer group to help us with projects, The Friends of CVBT. You can learn how you can become involved later in this magazine. We've also begun exploring preservation projects in the Mine Run battlefield area. This is an oft-overlooked action from the fall of 1863 and offers some interesting opportunities.

Most of us here at CVBT live on battlefields. Recently, I moved from being on the Second Fredericksburg/Salem Church battlefield to being on the south end of the Fredericksburg battlefield in the Hamilton's Crossing area. As I have started digging into what happened in the area around my place, I've learned that Iverson's North Carolinians were in the area. I'm also near the area where Stapleton Crutchfield placed Jackson's artillery reserve. My colleague, Tim Talbott, also shared with me a journal entry in which Rufus Dawes of the 6th Wisconsin writes about taking fire from Confederate artillery posted on a hill that could very well be my yard or that of one of my neighbors.

I wonder what might have happened in the area around my house in December 1862 and the days that followed. I think about the men who were there, and the men they fought against—how what they saw, and did, changed them, and how many never came home from the war. Or, for those who did, how they might not have come home the same.

I am lucky to live among this history as a part of my life, and lucky to work at preserving it, for us today and those who come after us tomorrow.

Be well, thank you for supporting battlefield preservation, and I look forward to seeing you on the battlefield.

Executive director Terry Rensel (foreground) joins CVBT President Tom Van Winkle and Board Member Gordon Rhea (third and forth from right in background) for a tour on Myer's Hill in April. Historian John Cummings III stands at the center of the group (holding binders). *Terry Rensel*

Friends of CVBT

Earlier this year we announced the creation of *The Friends of CVBT*. This is a small group of volunteers who will help with CVBT events and other projects as needed. Active volunteer members will have the unique opportunity to be involved with events hosted by nationally acclaimed historians, assist in tours, and work on preserved battlefields. Participating volunteers will be enrolled in the membership ranks of CVBT every year they contribute.

If interested, email Terry Rensel at **executivedirector@cvbt.org** or call the CVBT office at 540-374-0900.

Support CVBT by Giving through Your IRA

If you are 70-and-a-half or older, you can support CVBT through a qualified charitable distribution (QCD) from your IRA. Simply contact your plan administrator for the details on how to do so. You can find out more at **cvbt.org/iragiving**.

Monthly Giving

Instead of making a single, large membership donation, you can make monthly gifts through a recurring charge to your credit card. This allows you to spread out your gift throughout the year, and for CVBT to have an ongoing stream of funds to continue the work of preserving battlefields in Central Virginia.

Choose the level of giving that works best for you, starting at $5 a month, by visiting **cvbt.networkforgood.com/projects/188112-monthly-giving**.

2023 Annual Conference Registration Now Open

The 2023 CVBT Annual Conference theme is "1863: Chancellorsville–The Crossroads of Fire" and will take place Friday, October 6, through Sunday, October 8.

Featured programs and events this year include historian Frank O'Reilly leading a tour of Moss Neck, Stonewall Jackson's winter headquarters after the battle of Fredericksburg. Privately owned, Moss Neck is rarely open to visitors. And this year's President's Reception will be hosted at the historic Sentry Box in downtown Fredericksburg.

Moss Neck most famously served as Stonewall Jackson's headquarters in the winter of 1863. *Chris Mackowski*

Kristopher D. White is the deputy director of education at the American Battlefield Trust and co-founder of Emerging Civil War. *Chris Heisey*

Saturday's events include a tour of the Chancellorsville battlefield led by historians Chris Mackowski and Kris White. The CVBT Annual Meeting and banquet will once again be held at historic Belmont, and feature Kris White as the keynote speaker. Kris's address that evening will be "What If Stonewall Jackson Had Not Been Shot?" (Expect some fun, some irreverence, and some surprises!)

Sunday morning breakfast at Stevenson Ridge includes a historians' roundtable titled: "Chancellorsville: Prelude to Gettysburg."

The full details, including registration information, can be found at our website, **cvbt.org/cvbt-annual-conference**.

CVBT Board members Paul Scott, Mike Greenfield, and Eric Powell pick up trash on Myer's Hill. The CVBT Board did some cleanup work on the site in late April and walked part of the boundary as part of an effort to better get to know the newest part of the property. Action took place there on May 14, 1864, as part of the battle of Spotsylvania Court House. *Terry Rensel*

Join the CVBT Generals Today — Invest in Preserving Our History and Enjoy Exclusive Rewards as a CVBT General

The Central Virginia Battlefields Trust is blessed with those who have decided to join our ranks and support our mission of saving the Civil War battlefields of Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Mine Run, The Wilderness, and Spotsylvania Court House here in the ever-expanding sprawl of Central Virginia. Whenever we purchase one of these threatened important historic properties, YOU, our partners, always answer our call.

By Joining the Ranks of The Generals Today, You Can Take Your Place as a Prominent Leader in This Mission and Leave a Personal Mark on This Nation's History.

But there is always the need for some liquidity. At times, properties come up without notice, and CVBT needs to work extremely fast, sometimes requiring us to write an immediate check to secure a piece of land. These are instances when we cannot wait on a grant or for an appeal to be answered.

Of course, there are also the daily expenses of running the business. We have the need to cover our modest rent, daily office expenses, and employee salaries. CVBT has always run on a shoestring, and that has not changed. We have two full-time employees, and everyone else works as a volunteer. Yet, our impact on battlefield preservation is considerable and on par with much larger organizations of our type.

We have a special designation for those who go beyond answering land appeals and paying membership dues and choose to invest in the organization further. The **Generals**.

Generals are those who give an additional $1,000 a year over and above membership and land appeal donations. This is an INVESTMENT in our organization. CVBT has proven for more than 26 years that big successes can come from a moderately sized group of resolute individuals and partners such as yourself.

Those choosing to join the ranks of The Generals should garner some special consideration. CVBT will hold at least one annual private invitation-only battlefield tour with a noted historian exclusively for The Generals. There will also be a special event at our Annual Conference offered to this group. In addition, you will receive a special Generals hat designating your further investment in CVBT.

For Generals investing $2,500 and above a year beyond land appeals and membership dues, CVBT will also waive conference fees for yourself and one guest in addition to the benefits listed above.

CVBT is a small organization doing incredible things. We appreciate all donors and welcome you as **Partners**. For those who are encouraged to further invest in our mission, we cannot thank you enough, as you literally keep the lights on and allow the business of saving America's treasured history to continue.

We need at least 150 Generals supporting CVBT on a yearly basis. Won't you consider becoming a General today?

The CVBT Legacy Society

Planned Giving to Ensure the Future of Battlefield Preservation for Central Virginia and the Fredericksburg Region

Planning your estate gives you the opportunity to benefit some of the institutions and organizations you have supported during your life. In fact, many significant gifts that nonprofits receive come from the estates of regular contributors.

We hope that you will consider including a gift to CVBT in your estate plans. Your gift will help ensure a vibrant future for battlefield preservation in Central Virginia. CVBT's long-term stability is based on solid planning, which will ensure that we are here in the future to take the lead in the preservation of these battlefields. Your thoughtful choice to include CVBT in your estate plans would go a long way toward helping make this future a reality.

If you choose to remember CVBT in your plans, we hope you will let us know so we may acknowledge your gift. Of course, if you prefer, we will keep your intention confidential.

Contact CVBT for an Information Kit and FAQ Guide

There are many ways to plan special gifts for CVBT and your other charitable interests—a bequest through your will is just one. Whatever your plans may be, we encourage you to call or write for more information, without obligation. You may reach us at:

Terry Rensel, *CVBT Executive Director*
executivedirector@cvbt.org
540-374-0900

Or visit us at cvbt.org/legacysociety

History Found Rebecca Campbell Light

BY JOHN HENNESSY

Rebecca Campbell Light didn't go looking for history. History found her. In the early 1980s, Michigan-born Rebecca and her husband, Otis Light, responded to a sign, "Land for Sale," on Mine Road in Spotsylvania County, just up the hill from the site of Hamilton's Crossing. They bought the 15-acre property. The land included a collapsing house and a family cemetery.

Turned out, the land and house had been known as Hamilton's Hill during the Civil War, later renamed "Forest Hill." Rebecca knew nothing of the land's history, but soon, descendants of those buried there started showing up—Hamiltons and Maryes curious about the burial ground, their ancestors, and the decomposing house (they still come). Through one the Hamilton descendants, Rebecca encountered the delightful and important journal of Matilda Hamilton, a wartime resident of Hamilton's Hill. Rebecca and her historical companion Matilda Hamilton have been on a journey through history ever since.

Rebecca Campbell Light loves the "rabbit holes" history offers for exploration and connection.

"I'm saving places for other people to learn what I learned."

Fueled by her new passion, Rebecca and Otis started buying tumbledown historical houses in Fredericksburg, learning their stories, and rehabilitating them, giving them new life as rental properties. She's not sure just how many they rescued—more than a dozen, certainly.

Her immersion in the physical preservation of history paralleled an emerging interest in the written history of the region. In the mid-1990s, she edited and published the diaries and letters of the Bernard sisters, as *War at Our Doors*, which vividly captures the experience of three sisters navigating through war in Caroline, Spotsylvania, and Culpeper counties. The sisters could write, and in Rebecca's hands, their diaries and letters constitute one of the most important and eloquent (and under-used) portraits of civilians at war.

A decade later, Rebecca published the letters, memoirs, and family papers of the Wells family of Fredericksburg. *Between Two Armies* is the documentary story of a Unionist family trapped in a war-torn town—an essential source for anyone researching Civil War Fredericksburg. She has also written for the Historic Fredericksburg Foundation, Inc.'s (HFFI) *Journal of Fredericksburg History*, including an essay on Forest Hill and Hamilton's Crossing in 2014.

These all constitute rabbit holes of a sort for Rebecca, for all along, she and Matilda Hamilton have continued their walk through time. Rebecca continues to work on Matilda's diary and the papers of the Hamilton and Marye families (Matilda's sister Jane married John L. Marye of Brompton). That book is up next, though who can say what rabbit holes may intervene. We invariably benefit from Rebecca's rabbit holes.

By the time Rebecca and Otis acquired Forest Hill, the Hamilton house was beyond retrieval. Still, in recent years, Rebecca has taken bold steps to preserve the vestiges of history that remain: the surviving foundation of an 1816 wing of the original house, the cemetery, and, especially, the ancient "witness trees" that survive on the property. She donated the site of Forest Hill to the HFFI (its sale, with restrictions, generated more than $1.3 million for preservation) and put in place protections for the cemetery, historic witness trees, and original house site. She also collaborated with CVBT to protect witness trees on an adjacent parcel, providing a gift of $500,000 to CVBT to support the maintenance of the trees and the preservation of battlefield lands elsewhere.

Rebecca Campbell Light's efforts place her in the first rank of Fredericksburg's preservationists. Lots of people are interested in history, but only a small percentage care enough to act to preserve it. Rebecca has turned an emerging interest in history into an enduring legacy. She sees her efforts in simple terms: "I'm saving places for other people to learn what I learned."

SHOW SOME RESPECT
George Gordon Meade

BY TOM HUNTINGTON

The subtitle of my 2013 book, *Searching for George Gordon Meade,* was "the forgotten victor of Gettysburg." It seemed that the general who commanded the victorious army at the largest battle of the Civil War should receive more attention than he did. As I wrote, Meade had become the Rodney Dangerfield of Civil War generals. He got no respect.

George Gordon Meade amassed one of the best combat records of any officer in the Army of the Potomac. However, after "fighting his way" to army command and besting Robert E. Lee at Gettysburg, Meade largely vanished into obscurity. *Library of Congress*

Meade was born in Cadiz, Spain, on December 31, 1815. His father, Richard, was a wealthy Philadelphia merchant serving as an agent for the U.S. Navy in Spain, and he loaned the Spanish government large sums of money to help finance its wars with Napoleon. Instead of being repaid, Richard was imprisoned. After his return to the United States, he spent the rest of his short life fruitlessly petitioning the U.S. government for reimbursement. His death left the family in straitened circumstances, so a free education at the military academy at West Point certainly had an appeal to Meade's widowed mother. Although young George had no great love for the military, he ended up graduating from the academy in 1835.

Like many future Civil War generals, Meade fought in the Mexican-American War, serving capably under Gen. (and future president) Zachary Taylor. He later oversaw work constructing lighthouses up and down the East Coast. When the Civil War broke out in 1861, he was living in Detroit and conducting a scientific survey of Lake Superior. "I always thought my services in the construction of lighthouses, and subsequently on the Lake Survey, were of considerable importance," he said later.

But we don't remember Meade the lighthouse builder; we remember Meade the soldier. Commissioned a brigadier general in the volunteer army, he received command of a brigade of the Pennsylvania Reserves in the division commanded by Maj. Gen. George McCall in the Army of the Potomac under Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan. Another brigade commander in the division was a man Meade came to know well, Brig. Gen. John Fulton Reynolds. During the Seven Days' battles outside Richmond, Meade's men were in reserve at the battle of Beaver Dam Creek on June 26, 1862, but were more involved the next day in the battle of Gaines's Mill. After that fight, McClellan ordered a "change of base" from the Chickahominy to the James River, a move that, to many, looked suspiciously like a retreat. Meade himself was shot twice—in the arm and the side—at the fighting at Glendale (aka Fraser's Farm or Charles City Crossroads). He was sent back to Philadelphia to recover.

Back with the army by the time of Second Bull Run, Meade now commanded a brigade in the division of his friend Reynolds. Meade and Reynolds fought in support of Maj. Gen. John Pope and the newly formed Army of Virginia during the disastrous battle, in which Pope remained baffled by the intentions of Army of Northern Virginia commander Gen. Robert E. Lee and his subordinate, Maj. Gen. Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson. Hopelessly outmaneuvered, Pope was defeated, with Reynolds's division providing valuable rearguard action on August 30, 1862.

Lee didn't wait long before returning to the offensive by moving north into Maryland. McClellan and the Army of the Potomac moved north to confront him. Meade now commanded the division, Reynolds having been sent to Pennsylvania to command militia. The division was part of the I Corps under Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker. Meade's Pennsylvania Reserves performed well during the battle of South Mountain on September 14, where they pushed up the rugged terrain to Turner's Gap. Writing about the battle years later, Meade's adversary, Maj. Gen. D. H. Hill, noted, "Meade was one of our most dreaded foes; he was always in deadly earnest, and he eschewed all trifling."

The fighting for South Mountain paled in comparison to the bloody contest at Antietam on September 17. Meade pushed his men forward through the bloody Cornfield in the morning and even received command of the I Corps when Hooker fell wounded. In his official report, Hooker noted

Meade's "great intelligence and gallantry." Those qualities were also on display on December 13 at the battle of Fredericksburg. Maj. Gen. Ambrose Burnside now commanded the army after President Lincoln had tired of McClellan's inactivity following Antietam. At Fredericksburg, Meade, now a major general, was once again under Reynolds, who had received command of the I Corps. Fighting in the "Slaughter Pen" south of town, Meade's men pushed through Stonewall Jackson's lines but had to retreat when they did not receive any support. It was one brief highlight for the Union on an otherwise disastrous day.

Fredericksburg ended Burnside's brief span at the head of the army. Lincoln replaced him with Hooker, and Meade received command of the V Corps. Meade and his corps did not do a great deal during the battle of Chancellorsville in May 1863. At first it appeared that Hooker had performed a brilliant maneuver by moving his army to attack Lee's flank, but then "Fighting Joe" decided to pull his forces back—Meade's corps included—and let Lee bring the fight to him. Lee took up the offer on May 2 by launching a devastating flank attack on Oliver Otis Howard's XI Corps. It proved to be another disaster for the Army of the Potomac. Hooker, concussed after a near miss by a Confederate cannonball, opted to retreat.

That was the beginning of the end of Hooker as commander of the Army of the Potomac. Several generals expressed their opinion that Meade should be the man to replace him.

On June 28, 1863, Col. James Hardie arrived at Meade's tent outside Frederick, Maryland, with orders from Washington for Meade to take command of the Army of the Potomac. "Well, I've been tried and condemned without a hearing, and I suppose I shall have to go to execution," Meade said. The battle of Gettysburg started three days later.

Meade's men advanced through a hail of cannonballs and a shower of lead as they crossed the Slaughter Pen Farm at Fredericksburg.
Chris Mackowski

Relations between Meade and Army of the Potomac commander "Fighting Joe" Hooker deteriorated precipitously after Chancellorsville. When an officer arrived at Meade's headquarters in late June 1863, promoting him to army command, Meade at first worried that Hooker had sent someone to arrest him.
Library of Congress

"Devil Dan" Sickles worked tirelessly to undermine Meade in the months after Gettysburg. Sickles performed questionably at the battle and so tried to deflect blame from himself by casting aspersions on Meade.

One anti-Meade interpretation of the battle of Gettysburg is that Meade and the Army of the Potomac did not win it; Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia lost it. This view sees Meade as a largely passive figure who merely stood by and watched as Lee blundered his way into defeat. Nothing could be further from the truth. Meade was actively involved, especially on July 2 when he had to rush his forces to the left of his line to fill gaps created when Maj. Gen. Daniel Sickles moved his III Corps forward without authorization. Critics often point to Meade's "council of war" that night as the act of an indecisive, weak commander afraid to make his own decisions. In fact, it was a wise move from a general still getting to know his army.

Meade receives criticism for his pursuit of Lee. In reality, he conducted an energetic pursuit once he determined Lee was retreating. Rather than attempt to chase Lee through the mountain passes west of Gettysburg, Meade moved his army south through Frederick and over South Mountain from there, obeying orders from General in Chief Henry Halleck to keep the army between Lee and Washington and Baltimore. When he did move forward to attack on July 14, Lee had crossed the Potomac. Meade's inability to "bag" Lee's army has haunted his reputation to this day. President Lincoln was one who bemoaned what he saw as a lost opportunity. In a letter to Meade that he never sent, Lincoln wrote, "[Lee] was within your easy grasp, and to have closed upon him would, in connection with the our other late successes, have ended the war."

In any event, Meade followed Lee into Virginia. He oversaw minor victories at Bristoe Station on October 14 and Rappahannock Station in November, but he called off a planned offensive at the end of November when it became apparent that Lee had strengthened his defenses on Mine Run to the point that an attack would be a futile repeat of Burnside's at Fredericksburg.

After a winter defending himself against the politically oriented attacks by Congress's Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, Meade entered the spring of 1864 with a reorganized Army of the Potomac and a new boss, Ulysses S. Grant. Lincoln had promoted Grant to lieutenant general and made him commander in chief of the Union armies. Grant opted to command from the field as he accompanied Meade and his army on what became known as the Overland Campaign. At the start of the campaign, Grant warned Meade that he did not intend to fight by "maneuvering for position." Meade must have seen that as a critique of the army's campaigns from the previous fall. He replied, "General Grant, you are opposed by a general of consummate ability, and you will find that you will have to maneuver for position." Meade was right. Throughout the Overland Campaign, Grant attempted to overwhelm the Confederates with direct assaults—in The Wilderness, outside Spotsylvania, at Cold Harbor—and then ordered Meade's army on wide, sweeping maneuvers in attempts to outflank Lee. Grant did not bag Lee's army any more than Meade had before him, and by the end of June, the two armies had settled into a stalemate in a growing system of trenches outside the vital railroad junction of Petersburg.

Frustrated by his treatment by political foes after the battle of Gettysburg, the once-lauded Meade complained to his wife, "I suppose after a while it will be discovered I was not at Gettysburg at all!" *Library of Congress*

For those who believe Grant was dissatisfied with Meade's leadership of the army, it's worth noting that during the fighting at Spotsylvania, Grant wrote Secretary of War Edwin Stanton and said, "General Meade has more than met my most sanguine expectations. He and Sherman are the fittest officers for large commands I have come in contact with." It's also true that as the war continued, Meade grew restive under Grant's command, feeling that the army's reins were sometimes taken from his hands and that his own role was being eclipsed. "[Y]ou may look now for the Army of the Potomac putting laurels on the brows of another rather than your husband," he wrote his wife.

The armies remained outside Petersburg until April 1865, when Grant and Meade finally penetrated Lee's lines and set the Army of Northern Virginia on a retreat that ended with Lee's surrender at Appomattox Court House. Soon the Army of the Potomac, too, became a part of history. On June 28, 1865, George Gordon Meade issued a farewell address to the army he had taken over exactly two years earlier.

Meade was not a perfect general, but who was? He was not helped by a ferocious temper that emerged under pressure. "Meade does not intend to be ugly," noted one Union officer, "but he cannot control his infernal temper." He also suffered from a contentious relationship with the press, and his reputation received hits from Daniel Sickles—desperate to justify his controversial actions at Gettysburg on the second day of the battle—and members of "Devil Dan's" circle. Meade also died in 1872 at the young age of 56, before he had retired and gotten a chance to tell his side of the story.

Meade's eclipse happened rapidly. When his grandson finally published the general's letters in 1913, 50 years after the battle of Gettysburg, a Philadelphia reviewer noted, "There is probably no other battle of which men are so prone to think and speak without a conscious reference to the commanding general of the victorious party, as they are regarding Gettysburg."

Even Meade could sense what was happening. Less than a year after his great victory in Pennsylvania, he wrote to his wife, "I suppose after a while it will be discovered I was not at Gettysburg at all!"

However, in recent years, the pendulum has begun swinging the other way. In 2018, John G. Selby published *Meade: The Price of Command 1863–1865*, a largely favorable look at the general's time in command of the Army of the Potomac. And last year Kent Masterson Brown published *Meade at Gettysburg: A Study in Command*, a sterling analysis of Meade's actions in July 1863.

Also last year, actor Tom Hanks made a cameo appearance as Meade in an episode of *1883,* a prequel to the popular series *Yellowstone*. Perhaps it says something that one of the most popular actors in the world portrayed a general who often gets overlooked in the history books. Maybe the "Old Goggle-eyed Snapping Turtle" is finally getting a little respect.

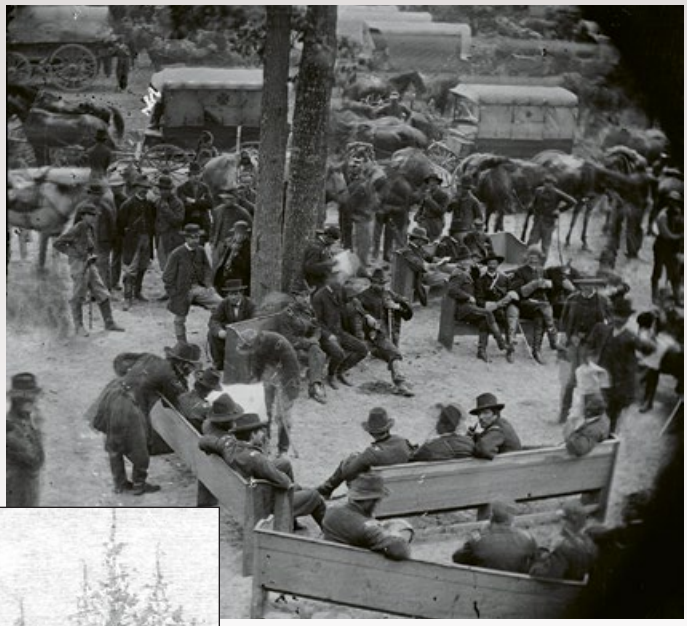
Tom Huntington is the author of *Searching for George Gordon Meade: The Forgotten Victor of Gettysburg*; *Maine Roads to Gettysburg*; and other books. He is the editor of *Aviation History* and *World War II* magazines for HistoryNet.

A Long, Slow Slide

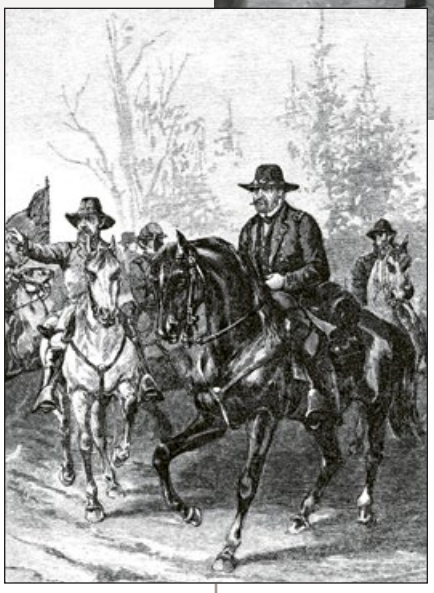
Meade and Grant in the Overland Campaign

BY GORDON C. RHEA

Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant's and Maj. Gen. George G. Meade's increasingly strained relationship significantly hindered the Union Army of the Potomac's campaign to defeat Gen. Robert E. Lee's Confederate Army of Northern Virginia in the spring of 1864. While Grant and Meade strove to present a harmonious façade to the public, the 42 days of sustained combat and maneuvering that brought the opposing armies from the Rapidan River to Petersburg—popularly called the Overland Campaign—witnessed a deterioration of their relationship that severely impacted the Union war effort. The generals' private correspondence and that of their aides poignantly document the erosion of their mutual trust and respect.



Imagine having your boss standing over your shoulder every day. Such was the case for Maj. Gen. George Gordon Meade (seated) when Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant (standing, leaning over) chose to travel with the Army of the Potomac in the spring of 1864. This photo was taken in front of Massaponnax Church as the army marched from Spotsylvania Court House to the North Anna River. *Library of Congress*



Grant and Meade gave each other the benefit of the doubt when the spring campaign opened, and Meade impressed Grant favorably. The stress caused by Grant's unrealistic command structure soon eroded their relationship , however. *Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park*

Meade's lackluster pursuit of Lee after Gettysburg and the subsequent military gridlock in Virginia had discouraged Meade and emboldened his opponents. Lee, Meade wrote home to his wife, was playing a "deep game" and "has got the advantage of me." The Pennsylvanian's subsequent failure to route the Confederates in November 1863 at Mine Run led Secretary of War Edward Stanton to complain that "Meade is on the back track again, without a fight" and prompted serious scrutiny by the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War. Anxious for victories and increasingly doubtful of Meade's ability to deliver them, President Abraham Lincoln cast about for new leadership. His choice was Grant, who boasted a string of successes in the Western Theater. Promoted to lieutenant general, Grant assumed command of the national war effort.

On March 10, 1864, Grant visited Meade's headquarters in Brandy Station, Virginia. Meade had a dim view of his prospects and expressed concern that Grant considered "the failure of the Army of the Potomac to do anything is due to their commander." He offered to step down, promising to serve whatever role Grant thought appropriate. This humble speech, Grant later wrote, "gave me a more favorable opinion of Meade than did his great victory at Gettysburg," and he decided to keep Meade on. Grant determined, however, to accompany the Army of the Potomac during the upcoming campaign, a move that Meade fretted might lead the "ignorant public" to credit Grant for any military successes. Grant somewhat allayed Meade's concern by agreeing that he would set broad strategic policy and coordinate the nation's far-flung armies, leaving Meade to command the Potomac Army. "My instructions for the army were all through him," Grant later explained, "and were all general in their nature, leaving all the details and the execution to him."

Meade confirmed this division of labor, writing home that Grant "appears very friendly, and at once adopts all my suggestions."

The command arrangement was doomed from the start, however, as the two men differed fundamentally in personality and in their approach to combat. Grant, a midwesterner of relatively humble origin, eschewed pomp and struck one of Meade's generals as "stumpy, slouchy, and Western-looking; very ordinary in fact." Conversely, the trappings of aristocracy came naturally to Meade, who moved effortlessly in Philadelphia high society and whose temper tantrums had earned him the sobriquet "snapping turtle." Meade struck one observer as "irritable, petulant and dyspeptic" and was viewed by Assistant War Secretary Charles A. Dana as "totally lacking in cordiality toward those with whom he had business [and] generally disliked by his subordinates." Importantly, Grant and Meade possessed starkly different military temperaments. Grant contemplated a blistering campaign of maneuvers and attacks. "[H]e has the grit of a bulldog," Lincoln said of Grant, "let him get his teeth in, and nothing can shake him off." Meade, on the other hand, preferred a more deliberate pace of combat and epitomized the Potomac Army's cautious bent. He "understood the art of war as taught by logarithms and abstruse engineering," an observer concluded, which "may have answered the purpose some centuries ago, but a new era had dawned in the art of war."

Meade's and Grant's incompatible military styles drove a wedge between the two generals that deepened as the campaign unfolded. For example, on the evening of May 3, the Army of the Potomac boldly swung around Lee's flank, crossed the Rapidan River at Germanna and Ely's Fords, then turned to confront Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. But instead of pressing toward the Confederates, Meade waited for his supply wagons to arrive, ceding the initiative to Lee. Rebels materialized across Meade's front during the morning of May 5, but Meade, much to Grant's aggravation, failed to attack. Finally, as afternoon advanced and still Meade procrastinated, Grant lost his patience and ordered an assault. He had kept his promise not to interfere in Meade's management of the army for only a few hours once the hostile armies came into contact.

That evening, Grant directed Meade to concentrate toward the battle's southern sector and to attack there the next morning. This gambit failed, and the evening of May 6 witnessed the two armies deadlocked in The Wilderness. To break the impasse, Grant ordered Meade to take the army south some 10 miles to Spotsylvania Court House, interposing between Lee and Richmond and inducing Lee to abandon his strong position in The Wilderness. After dark on May 7, the Army of the Potomac started south.

Once again, however, the Army of the Potomac failed to deliver. Lee's cavalry under Maj. Gen. James E. Brown "Jeb" Stuart delayed the Federal advance, which encountered an impenetrable Rebel defense at Laurel Hill, barring the way to Spotsylvania Court House. Meade and Maj. Gen. Philip H. Sheridan, whom Grant had brought east to head the Union army's cavalry, argued over who was responsible for the fiasco. Meade complained that Sheridan's riders had blocked the infantry's advance, while Sheridan blamed Meade for interfering in his management of the cavalry. The screaming match ended with Sheridan stomping from Meade's tent, exclaiming that he could beat Jeb Stuart if Meade would only leave him alone to do it. Meade angrily informed Grant of Sheridan's insubordination, but when he recounted Sheridan's remarks about whipping Stuart if Meade would only let him, Grant responded, "Did Sheridan say that? Well, he generally knows what he is talking about. Let him start right out and do it." Meade felt deeply humiliated, as the commanding general had now overruled him in favor of a subordinate.

Ulysses S. Grant initially intended to leave the day-to-day operations of the Army of the Potomac to George Meade while Grant supervised grand strategy across the map. The arrangement lasted only days before Grant started taking a more hands-on approach. *Library of Congress*

Relations between the two generals continued on a downward trajectory during the battles around Spotsylvania Court House. Meade's penchant for painstaking preparation poorly suited Grant's agenda of bold maneuvers and assaults, and as the campaign advanced, Meade became little more than a staff officer responsible for executing Grant's orders. Near the end of the Spotsylvania operations, he complained in a letter to his wife that Grant had "taken control," adding that "if there was any honorable way of retiring from my present false position I should undoubtedly adopt it, but there is none and all I can do is patiently submit and bear with resignation the humiliation."

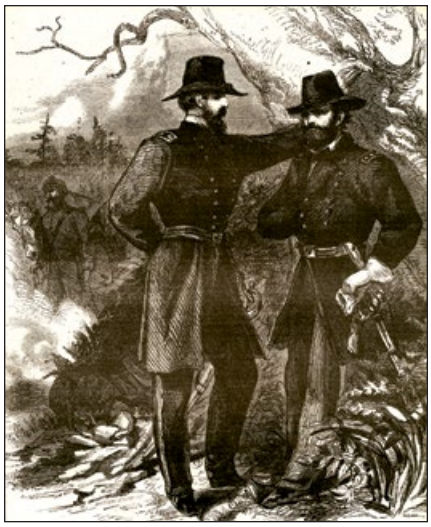
The generals' aides understood the situation's gravity. One of Meade's staff officers wrote that he was "sickened" over Grant's treatment of Meade, and Meade's chief of staff, Maj. Gen. Andrew A. Humphreys, worried that the divided command "was not calculated to produce the best result that either [general] singly was capable of bringing about." Another of Meade's staffers derided Grant as a "rough, unpolished man" of only "average ability," and described Grant's chief aide, Brig. Gen. John A. Rawlins, as knowing "no more of military affairs than

an old cat." Grant's staffers were equally critical of Meade. Lt. Col. Adam Badeau was especially concerned that "the result of [Grant's] having a middleman was to make the whole organization wooden," adding that "Meade severed the nerve between the general-in-chief and the army. He was a non-conductor."

As Lee shifted south and deployed below the North Anna River, Grant and Meade again differed over the appropriate response. Meade believed that the North Anna afforded Lee a strong defensive position and urged Grant to maneuver around the Confederate's right flank. Grant flatly rejected Meade's recommendation and went straight for Lee. The army's provost marshal, Brig. Gen. Marsena R. Patrick, noted, "Meade was opposed to our crossing the North Anna, but Grant ordered it, over his head."

When Lee unwittingly vindicated Meade's advice to Grant by stalemating the Federals at the North Anna, relations between Grant and his subordinate reached a low point. Maj. James C. Biddle of Meade's staff alluded to the bitterness in a letter home. It was "perfectly disgusting," he wrote, to see "Grant lauded to the skies as being the greatest military man of the age," when, in fact, Meade's generalship was as "far superior to [Grant's] as day is to night." Meade later summarized his situation to a group of visiting senators: "At first I had maneuvered the army, but gradually, from the very nature of things, Grant had taken control."

The rift between the two generals soon came to a disastrous head. On June 1, two Union corps almost succeeded in overrunning the Rebel defenses near Cold Harbor. Grant hoped to renew the assault on June 2, but the failure of reinforcements to reach the front in a timely manner forced him to delay the attack until the morning of June 3. Although the Confederates had now strengthened their position, Grant ordered the offensive to proceed, leaving Meade responsible for managing the attack, including deploying his corps, coordinating their movements, and posting reserves to exploit any gains. "I had immediate and entire command of the field all day," Meade later boasted to his wife. However, he so thoroughly disagreed with Grant's penchant for hard-hitting, army-wide assaults that he expressed his dissatisfaction by doing virtually nothing to prepare. The record reveals no steps to reconnoiter the Rebel position, coordinate the army's elements, or tend to things that diligent generals customarily do before sending soldiers against fortified enemy lines. Meade simply announced the time for the attack and left his corps commanders to cooperate, which none of them did. The Army of the Potomac resembled a dysfunctional family, and Meade, who disagreed with Grant's overall strategy, responded like a petulant child by refusing to take the steps necessary for Grant's plan to succeed. The victims of this dysfunction were the soldiers who charged the Confederate earthworks.



George F. Williams of the 146th New York infantry, marching into The Wilderness, shared a description of Meade and Grant together: "The tall, courtly figure of Meade, his trim gray hair, and neat regulation cap, gave him a martial look, as he leaned on his saber; while the heavy frame of Grant, who wore no sword, seemed the very opposite of my preconceived ideas of our new commander. The wide-brimmed hat, pulled down over his eyes, and the closely clipped beard, made the renowned chieftain appear so unlike a soldier that it needed the uniform and the broad shoulder-strap, with its row of triple stars, to remind one that here was a warrior already famous." *Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park*

Meade festered over his subordinate position. A few days after the aborted assault, he wrote his wife: "Do not be deceived about the situation of affairs by the foolish dispatches in the papers. I fully enter into all your feelings of annoyance at the manner in which I have been treated, but I do not see that I can do anything but bear patiently until it pleases good to let the truth be known and set matters right." He closed by assuring her that "[Grant] has greatly disappointed me, and since this campaign I really begin to think I am something of a general."

Following the Cold Harbor debacle, Grant neglected to keep Meade fully informed of his intentions. His failure to communicate his overall plan during the ensuing movement from Cold Harbor toward Petersburg doomed the operation. Grant intended for Maj. Gen. William F. "Baldy" Smith's reinforced corps to spearhead the attack, supported by elements from the Potomac Army. Not only did Grant fail to ensure that Smith knew that support would be available, he also neglected to direct Meade to send a force to support Smith. Major General Winfield S. Hancock's corps was in a position to assist Smith, but neither Hancock nor Meade were privy to Grant's overall plan. "Had Major General Hancock and myself been apprised in time of the contemplated move against Petersburg, and the necessity of his cooperation, he could have been pushed much earlier to the scene of operations," Meade wrote. Unsupported, Smith's offensive failed, and the war would continue for 10 more months.

Gordon C. Rhea, a member of the Central Virginia Battlefield Trust's Board of Directors, is the author of the definitive five-part history of the Overland Campaign, available from Louisiana State University Press.

Thoughts on Meade

We hope this issue's variety of opinions and insights about George Gordon Meade give you something new to think about. We also encourage you to read the collected *Life and Letters of General George Gordon Meade* so you can get to know the man for yourself.

— Chris Mackowski, editor

John Hennessy

Former Chief Historian and Chief of Interpretation, Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park

George Gordon Meade was largely devoid of performative flourishes. He was more the bespectacled intellectual than swashbuckler, looking, wrote Henry Abbott of the 20th Massachusetts, like "a good sort of a family doctor." Though unquestionably ambitious, Meade camouflaged his aspirations and politics in ways McClellan, Pope, and Hooker could never manage. The very reason Meade thought he would never be appointed to army command was, in fact, one reason he was: he was unentangled by sponsors and politicians. After heavy doses of McClellan, Pope, and Hooker, many soldiers in the Army of the Potomac found this reassuring.

The arrival of Grant in Virginia in the spring of 1864 challenged Meade in ways no previous commander of the Army of the Potomac had been challenged. Most importantly, Grant prodded Meade to greater aggression. He put Meade under immense pressure. Meade recognized that Grant intended to bring to Virginia forces and ideas that Meade had not thus far mustered. He knew Grant would receive the credit for any success—that the public, as he wrote, "will lose sight of me in him" (they did, and do). Still, Meade made no public display of any discontent with Grant.

Meade endured oversight in a way that none of his predecessors, save Burnside, would have suffered without resigning. The exceptional circumstances that confronted Meade in 1864 and 1865—Grant's constant presence, Lee's army fighting for the life of the Confederacy—rendered his performance over those 11 months in many ways remarkable. But Meade and Grant were not antipodes. They saw the war similarly in one essential way: as a grinding, cumulative process rather than an unreachable quest for a single existential moment, that ultimate battlefield victory worthy of storybooks. They shared a vision that bound them in important ways: "a vigorous prosecution of the war with all the means in our power." The result was one of the most successful and important partnerships of the Civil War.

Eric Wittenberg

Award-winning Author and Historian

I have always been a great admirer of George Gordon Meade, in large part because of what he accomplished at Gettysburg under the most adverse circumstances imaginable. He was ordered to take command of an army three days before a major battle, all the while being forced to work with a chief of staff who hated him. Then, he lost three of his seven infantry corps commanders, including the two he relied upon most heavily— John F. Reynolds and Winfield Scott Hancock—and ends up being stuck with extremely inexperienced temporary replacement corps commanders who were not at all aggressive.

Then, Meade found himself in a nearly untenable position when Ulysses S. Grant came east. Having Grant right there all the time, peering over his shoulder, was an arrangement that not many would have made work, but Meade found a way to do so.

The man had his flaws, but in the end, he could say something that none of his predecessors had been able to say: He defeated Robert E. Lee fair and square on the field of battle, and for that, he deserves our respect.

Meade's favorite horse, Old Baldy, outlived Meade by 10 years. Old Baldy was euthanized on December 16, 1882, at age 30.
Library of Congress

Born on the last day of 1815, George Meade died on November 6, 1872.
Library of Congress

Henry Kirke Bush-Brown sculpted the statue of Meade at Gettysburg. Dedicated in 1896, it was the first equestrian statue erected on the battlefield. *Chris Mackowski*

Jennifer M. Murray

Department of History, Oklahoma State University; Author of *The Victor of Gettysburg: George Gordon Meade and the Civil War*

Too often, Meade's personality and career have been distilled to oversimplifications, misunderstandings, and canards—Meade didn't pursue after Gettysburg or that he was irascible (the "damned old goggle-eyed snapping turtle" moniker) or that Gen. Ulysses S. Grant relegated Meade to a secondary role beginning in the Overland Campaign. Unpacking these tropes has revealed an even more fascinating story and added nuance to one of the Civil War's overshadowed generals. This is the portrait of General Meade I aim to bring to readers in my forthcoming biography, tentatively titled *Meade at War.*

Since biographers spend an extraordinary amount of time with their subject, it is tempting to either adore or detest the person you are writing about. No doubt I have fallen victim at times to this inevitability, but I am consciously aiming less to idolize or demonize Meade, but rather to better understand the general and the complex, tumultuous world in which he operated. Yet, I have empathized with Meade many times, particularly in the spring and summer of 1864 as Meade struggled to navigate an unprecedented command dynamic that resulted from Grant's arrival.

I have been touched by Meade's genuine affection for his trusted steed, Old Baldy. I have laughed at Meade's sardonic sense of humor, and I have admired his unwavering adoration of his wife and children. I have ruminated on his peevish behavior and tendency, when frustrated with decisions in Washington, to offer his resignation. Rather than passing judgment from a 21st–century perspective on Meade's military decisions, I seek to understand his actions and decisions within the context of evolving operations. Perhaps most poignantly, Meade's lamentation that he had a "great contempt for History" echoes loudly in my ears. Through the efforts of modern scholars and historians, myself included, we are witnessing a Meade Renaissance. The fruits of this work will afford us a more detailed, accurate, and engaging depiction of one of the Civil War's most distinguished officers.

Jeffrey Wm Hunt

Author of *Meade and Lee After Gettysburg; Meade and Lee at Bristoe Station;* and *Meade and Lee at Rappahannock Station*

A devoted husband and father, as well as an excellent mathematician, engineer, and linguist, George Meade was a consummate gentleman and solid professional soldier. Much admired by peers for his character, bravery, and military talent, Meade worked his way up the ranks via merit, rather than through political influence.

His tenure at the Army of the Potomac's helm was perhaps the most challenging of any man who held that station. Tied by administration dictate, and against his wishes, to the Orange & Alexandria Railroad as an axis of advance, he was denied even a modicum of strategic flexibility, and forced to campaign in circumstances that offered no real advantage to Federal forces. Forgiving Meade for not destroying Lee north of the Potomac, but never quite forgetting his perceived failure, Lincoln and Gen. Henry Halleck alternated between telling Meade what to do, and telling him to act on his own judgment, all the while never explicitly sanctioning his proposals. Believing that he was being treated unfairly, and set up as a scapegoat should things go wrong in the field, Meade, nonetheless, conscientiously gave his best even when the administration forced him into campaigns of dubious viability.

Though his troops never loved him, they respected his ability to avoid the mistakes of his predecessors, and applauded his tidy though strategically fruitless triumphs at Bristoe Station, Kelly's Ford, and Rappahannock Station. Even more impressive to his men, if not the Washington authorities, was his refusal at Mine Run to hurl Federal soldiers against impregnable Rebel defenses. This was an act of moral courage without parallel in the war, especially since Meade felt certain a failure to fight would lead to his dismissal.

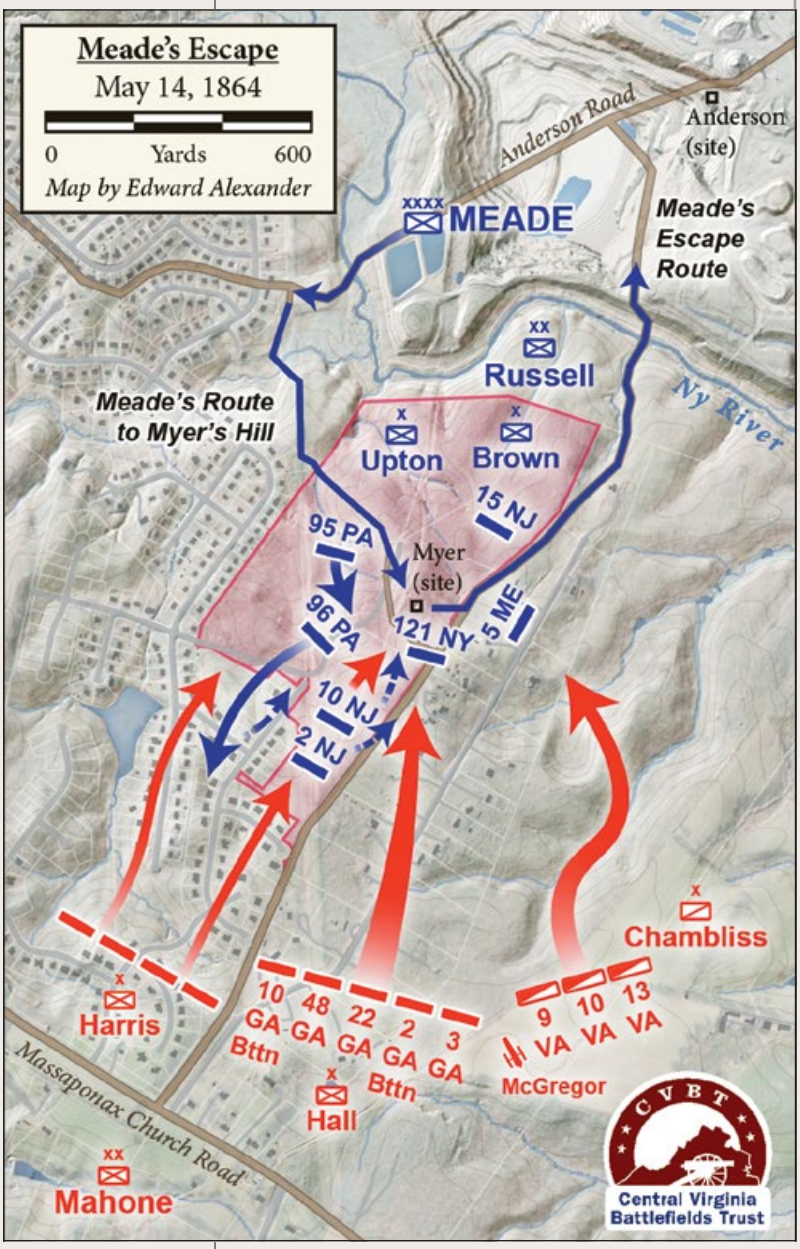
For good reason, Grant judged Meade the equal of William T. Sherman as an army commander, though bemoaning, as did everyone, the general's hair-trigger temper, that often erupted suddenly and left resentment and bitterness in its wake. Though Meade was a good army administrator and an able operational chieftain, he often failed to display the killer instinct Lincoln and Grant coveted.

One of history's great unknowns is how Meade might have done if he had assumed army command earlier in the war, or been left alone to run the 1864 Virginia campaign on his own. My suspicion is that he would not have suffered the fate of McClellan, Pope, Burnside, or Hooker. Whether, given his relationship with his superiors, he could have accomplished what Grant accomplished is highly doubtful, however.

The Near Capture of George Gordon Meade

BY JOHN F. CUMMINGS III

By the afternoon of May 14, 1864, Army of the Potomac commander Maj. Gen. George Gordon Meade had ventured to the Anderson Farm, north of a prominent bend in the Ni River, roughly a mile and a third to the northeast of Confederate-held Spotsylvania Court House. Union VI Corps headquarters had been established at Anderson's, and it provided an excellent view of the recently captured Myer Farm to the south.



The Myer Farm was tentatively held by Col. Emory Upton's brigade of less than a thousand men plus a small supplement of two New Jersey regiments. Upton had been confident he could take the hill but had become apprehensive of his abilities to retain it.

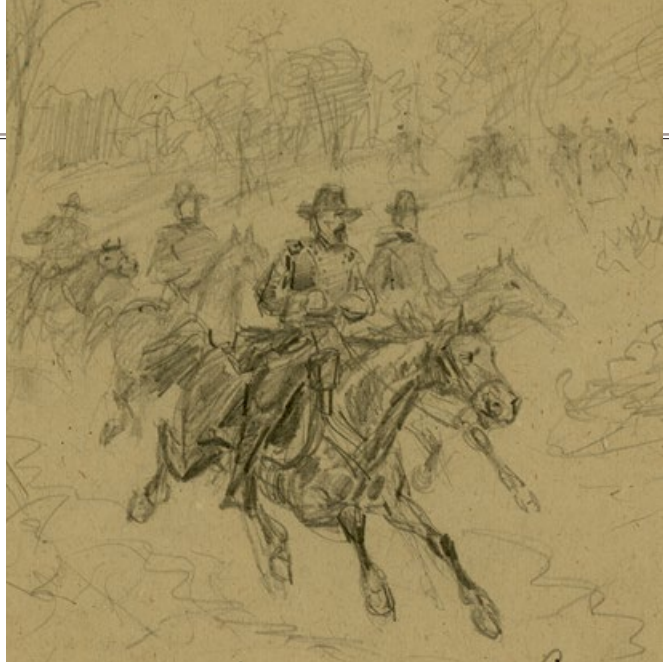
This was the extreme left of the entire Union position at Spotsylvania Court House, so Meade and VI Corps commander Horatio Wright rode to Myer Farm to examine the situation on the hilltop for themselves.

If needed, assistance could be brought up from Gouverneur K. Warren's V Corps, the same command that had handily taken the ground earlier that morning, only to be relieved by Upton's slightly late arrival (difficult terrain, steep bluffs, and a swollen river had delayed him). Warren's men were now back near V Corps headquarters, a mile to the northwest, with thick woods and a swamp between—but still altogether more accessible than other units of the VI Corps in reserve at the Anderson Farm.

Meade and his entourage smoothly crossed the Ni by way of a farm lane known in county deeds as the Anderson Road. This route worked its way gradually down a soft incline from the Anderson Farm to a fording spot, and then rose again into the woods on the south end of Francis Beverley's Whig Hill Farm. Once across the river, Meade's party took a hard left, reaching the cleared base of Myer's Hill, and then made their way to the summit—the same path taken by Warren's men that morning. The pace made for a smoother ride for the general than Upton's perilous descent and ascent directly south from Anderson to Myer.

Meade's time on Myer's Hill has been presented in sources with slight variation. Most agree that he arrived near 4:00 p.m. in time to witness the 96th Pennsylvania Infantry being sent to investigate a

Meade and Wright left the Anderson Farm—an area now obliterated by a quarry—crossed the Ni River, and ascended Myer's Hill (map shows approximate route). During a short conference in the Myer house, a Confederate counterattack forced the generals to flee. Their haste required a different path across the river, which nearly led to their capture by Confederate cavalry. *Map by Edward Alexander based on input from John Cummings III.*



Alfred Waud sketched the "narrow escape of General Meade," with some Confederate "cavalry dashing out of the woods suddenly." *Library of Congress*

A section of the Anderson Road, looking westerly, as it rises from fording the Ni River and enters the former Beverley Farm woods. Photographed by the author in December 2000. This road trace has been severely damaged in the more than two decades since. *John Cummings III*

possible Confederate advance in the woods a third of a mile south of the Myer yard. In the May 18, 1864, edition of the Albany *Atlas & Argus*, an unsigned article—and most detailed account of the event—describes how "when a shower was at its height," the generals entered the house and "sat down for a light conference. … The two generals had been conversing but a few minutes when the rattle of musketry from above started them. The next instant another volley nearer, accompanied with yells, was heard, a number of bullets penetrated the house."

Meade and Wright had "just time to rush out the rear doors and mount their horses when the enemy came down upon the house and the troops around it like wolves; at the same time they brought out a battery from behind a wood above, unlimbered it and poured in a co-operative storm of grapeshot upon our men."

Looking northward, this March 2002 photograph by the author shows the bottom of the Meade escape road as it levels out along the Ni River's south bank. Meade's would-be captors would have been coming down upon the general from the left, behind the camera's position. *John Cummings III*

Major James C. Biddle of Meade's staff described Meade's harrowing experience in a letter home to his wife on May 16: "Genl. Meade came very near being captured the day before yesterday, he went out to the extreme left of our line to reconnoiter, and whilst there the rebel lines advanced, driving in our pickets & was in the woods, and they were not seen till they were close on Genl. M's heels, they cut him off, and he was obliged to cross the Ny for safety, fortunately Capt Michler was with him who knew of a ford."

Indeed, it was topographical engineer Nathanial Michler who can be credited with Meade's safe exit. Michler had earlier performed a rapid survey of the surrounding countryside and so was able to guide Meade's safe exit toward a crossing spot half a mile downstream from the Anderson Road ford, just under a half mile to the slight northeast of the Myer house.

The harrowing dash nearly ended in disaster, though, when a body of Confederate cavalry came down upon Meade's group from a wooded knoll above the river. However, the tide turned for the Confederate horsemen, and they ended the day as captives rather than as the possessors of an eminent war trophy.

Enraged by the episode, Meade ordered a counterattack to retake the hill from the Confederates who had just driven him from the hilltop. Confederates began a withdrawal even as Federals swept up, leaving the Myers Farm in Federal hands for good. Meade's ego, bruised from his near-capture, took a little longer to recover.

John Cummings has been researching and writing about John Henry Myer and his property since 1998 and spent 20 years as the principal advocate for that land's preservation until the Central Virginia Battlefield Trust's acquisition of the ground in 2018. His work continues.

Originally constructed so train travelers would know they were passing through the Fredericksburg battlefield, the Meade Pyramid continues to serve as a landmark along the railroad. *Jennifer Michael*

Fredericksburg's Meade Pyramid

BY TIM TALBOTT

During the early afternoon of December 13, 1862, Gen. George Gordon Meade, then commanding a division of fellow Pennsylvanians, was not in his normal tempestuous mood. Leading his men into battle at the south end of the Fredericksburg battlefield, Meade's unusually cheery disposition inspired his men and officers who endured heavy Confederate artillery fire while preparing to attack.

After the Federal artillery quieted their counterparts, Meade's three brigades moved forward toward the Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Potomac Railroad tracks. His Pennsylvanians lost alignment after crossing a ditch fence, but finally straightening back up, they moved on toward the railroad. In doing so, they again came under severe Confederate artillery fire, and once again the Union artillery responded with a terribly deafening barrage that hushed the Rebel guns.

Finally at the railroad, Meade's men let loose several volleys that stunned the Confederate infantry, who had waited for the bluecoats to get a little closer. Led by brigade commanders Col. William Sinclair, Gen. Conrad F. Jackson, and Col. Albert Magilton, some of the Federals continued to move forward, utilizing an outcropping of woods for cover, while others fought from the railroad embankment. Sinclair's soldiers quickly found that the woods contained a swamp, and few Confederate defenders. Across the tracks, through the marsh, and up the ridge they went, finding a gap in the Rebel line left largely unguarded due to a belief that no enemy troops would attack through such terrain.

Successfully surprising Gen. Maxcy Gregg's brigade (and mortally wounding Gregg), Sinclair's two regiments could not hold the hard-earned ground without significant reinforcements. Forced to withdraw due to fire from regiments in Gen. Jubal Early's reserve division, the Pennsylvanians fell back to the railroad.

Since that December 1862 day, historians have wondered what might have happened if support troops had arrived to widen and solidify Meade's temporary breakthrough. Was Meade actually that close to victory on that portion of the battlefield? It remains an often-argued "what if."

Meade's division pierced the Confederate line at Prospect Hill in the general area where the Meade Pyramid now stands. *Battles and Leaders*

Meade's career skyrocketed in the six months following Fredericksburg, advancing from divisional command to a corps leader and then to commander of the Army of the Potomac on the eve of the battle of Gettysburg. Even so, Fredericksburg was not without losses for Meade. During the fighting, he narrowly avoided a possible death-dealing head wound when a Confederate bullet perforated his hat. In addition, Meade lost Brig. Gen. Conrad F. Jackson, who fell in action at the railroad; Col. William Sinclair, who received a serious wound to his left foot; and Col. Albert Magilton, whose wounded horse fell and injured him. Magilton resigned about two weeks later. Finally, one of Meade's favorite staff officers, Lt. Arthur Dehon, was also killed at the railroad near General Jackson.

Meanwhile, for the city of Fredericksburg, it took decades to recover. During the last decade of the 19th century, a group of women in Richmond, Virginia, formed the Confederate Literary Memorial Society (CLMS). This organization, which descended from the Hollywood Memorial Association, reached out to various railroad companies in the state and encouraged them to construct markers along their tracks across the Old Dominion to mark where the war's significant historical events occurred.

The Meade Pyramid measures 24 feet tall and weighs 400 tons. *Jennifer Michael*

However, Edmund T.D. Myers, president of the Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Potomac Railroad, had a different idea for the Fredericksburg battlefield. Starting in 1897, with a half-acre donation of land by Eliza Pratt, which came from her remaining acreage on the adjacent Smithfield plantation, Myers proposed erecting a 24-foot-high stone pyramid. The pyramid's builders (incorrectly) believed the chosen location was the approximate site of Gen. Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson's headquarters, and thus was worthy of marking.

The model for the pyramid came from the 90-foot-high stone memorial at Hollywood Cemetery in Richmond, dedicated in 1869 to the memory of the cemetery's Confederate war dead. To get the proportions of the scaled-down Fredericksburg monument correct, Myers had John Rice, one of his railroad staff, visit Hollywood Cemetery to take measurements.

Constructed during the first three months of 1898, the Fredericksburg battlefield pyramid was intended by the CLMS to be a highly recognizable landmark for railroad travelers, heralding that they were traveling through the famous battleground. The stacked stones greeted railroad passengers for decades before the creation of the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park (FSNMP) and its tour road in the late 1920s.

Concern arose over potential development invading the south end of the Fredericksburg battlefield not long after the National Park Service (NPS) created FSNMP. In 1946, NPS Chief Historian Ronald Lee recommended that the park acquire a large tract that included the pyramid to mitigate development threats. Six years later, after a surprising amount of controversy, the park accepted the pyramid land, and in 1978, it acquired 65 more acres.

Today, passenger service via Amtrack and the Virginia Railway Express still passes the pyramid. But more people probably see the stone monument by automobile from its Lee Drive access point. Yet, over the years since its construction, the pyramid's location—more properly associated with Meade's temporary breakthrough than the area near Stonewall Jackson's headquarters—has helped it become popularly known as the Meade Pyramid.

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Urgent Preservation Threat!

As this issue of *On the Front Line* went to press, word has come out of the Wilderness about a proposed new massive development in eastern Orange County that would seriously impact both the Wilderness and Chancellorsville battlefields.

Thousands of homes and hundreds of acres of data centers would spring up on the edge of historically significant land, and tens of thousands of cars would be added to the heavy traffic already clogging battlefield roads.

CVBT has joined the American Battlefield Trust, the Friends of Wilderness Battlefield, and several other groups and individuals in litigation against this threat.

Find out more at www.cvbt.org.