



# ON THE skirmish line

Newsletter of The Central Virginia Battlefields Trust

## Saying Goodbye to Jerry Brent: A Eulogy for a Very Special Guy

REMEMBRANCE SHARED BY  
MIKE STEVENS, CVBT PRESIDENT,  
AT JERRY'S SERVICE ON JUNE 21, 2014.

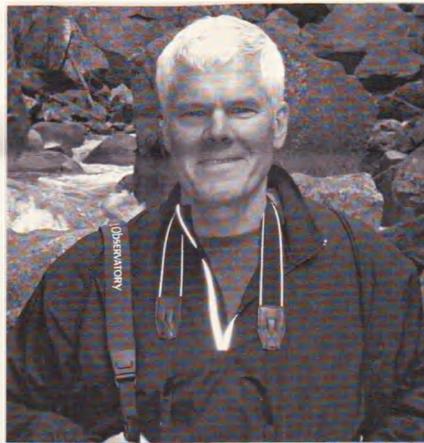
There are things that we don't want to happen but have to accept, things we don't want to know but have to learn, people we can't live without but have to let go.

Many people come into our lives, coming and going, scarcely leaving an impression. But rarely we meet someone, a once-in-a-lifetime kind of person, a person with qualities that touch our hearts in ways that make a profound and lasting difference.

For all of us here today, Jerry Brent was just such a person.

We gather today to remember Jerry, a man who each of us knew, and respected, and loved. We gather together because Jerry, who lived so fully and died too soon, touched each of us with his humanity and with his grace, touched each of us in ways that defined him as a truly good man, touched each of us with his compassion and kindness, with his humor and intelligence and love.

He loved Lou, his wife and companion and soul's counterpart, with a love that was incandescent and without limit. He loved life and his passions, his family and friends, his home and community, his UVA, his collection, the preservation of hallowed ground. He touched each of us, each and every one of us, in ways that enriched our own lives and lightened our paths.



And, in the end, just as he showed us how to live life to the fullest, he also showed us how to meet death with dignity and courage.

Cancer forces one to focus one's energies on pain and dysfunction, on disappointment, on fear and survival. It threatens to rob one of one's humanity and the ability to see the wonders that surround us all, the beauty of nature, the wonder of music, the touch of a loved one. It revels in making it difficult to remain fully human, fully engaged,

fully aware of the grace-filled gifts of life and the awesome blessing of loving and being loved.

It did none of those things with Jerry. He (and Lou) fought this damn cancer with extraordinary strength and courage for over three years. He continued to love life to the fullest, to carry out his responsibilities and promises, to appreciate the indescribable blessings of this world, to hang in there with grace and dignity and humanity no matter what the cancer threw at him.

But in the end, grace and dignity and humanity were not enough and he died, and we all deeply mourn that death and the void that his absence leaves behind. We mourn, and we grieve, and we hurt. And while his memory will live for as long as those of us who loved him live, his body is now to be placed in sacred soil, lost to us forever.

{Continued on page 2}

**{Saying Goodbye to Jerry Brent, continued from page 1}**

But is that really so? If you will allow me a moment of personal reflection, I'd ask you to stand quietly and turn your focus inwardly and listen to that still small voice within. Do you not hear the whisper of grace, of possibilities? Do you not realize that the ultimate, unqualified Mystery is beyond human understanding, beyond human experience? Do you not see that, on the other side of death, Truth might be revealed? Do you not wonder if death might simply be a doorway, and that those who cross its threshold live on in the unknowable territory of eternity, not lost but having arrived Home and ready to greet us when we ourselves arrive at the end of our own life's journey? Do endings make room for new beginnings?

But that hope and that faith mean different things to each of us, so I will close by merely saying that while words are never enough, and can never fully express what we are feeling, I speak for all of us when I say that we are deeply appreciative of the infinite blessing it has been to have known Jerry and to be able to call him our friend.

He lived well, laughed often, loved much. He left the world far better than he found it. He looked for the best in others and gave the best he had. He never missed an opportunity to say a kind word or extend a helping hand. His life was an inspiration, his memory a benediction.

To Lou, and to Jerry's family, please accept our deepest condolences. Jerry was a truly good man, a man appreciated, respected, and loved by all of us, and we will miss him for the rest of our lives.

**A LIFE THAT MATTERS (anonymous):**

Ready or not, some day it will all come to an end.

There will be no more sunrises, no minutes, hours, days.

All the things you collected, whether treasured or forgotten, will pass to someone else.

Your wealth, fame and temporal power will shrivel to irrelevance.

It will not matter what you owned or what you were owed.

Your grudges, resentments, frustrations, and jealousies will finally disappear.

So, too, your hopes, ambitions, plans, and to-do lists will expire.

The wins and losses that once seemed so important will fade away.

It won't matter where you came from, or on what side of the tracks you lived.

At the end, whether you were beautiful or brilliant, male or female, it won't matter.

So what will matter? How will the value of your days be measured?

What will matter is not what you bought, but what you built; not what you got, but what you gave.

What will matter is not your success, but your significance.

What will matter is not what you learned, but what you taught.

What will matter is every act of integrity, compassion, courage or sacrifice that enriched, empowered or encouraged others.

What will matter is not your competence, but your character.

What will matter is not how many people you knew, but how many will feel a lasting loss when you're gone.

What will matter is not your memories, but the memories that live on in those who loved you.

Living a life that matters doesn't happen by accident.

It's not a matter of circumstance but of choice.

Choose to live a life that matters.

Jerry's life mattered. Remember him, and honor him by following his example.



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# A Tribute to Jerry from the Civil War Trust



BY JIM LIGHTHIZER, PRESIDENT OF THE CWT



Photo courtesy of the Civil War Trust

On June 17, with the passing of Jerry Holland Brent, Fredericksburg lost a native son and one of its greatest champions to the scourge of cancer. Those of us at the Civil War Trust—and in the battlefield preservation business—lost a dear and devoted

friend. Simply stated, no one has faced cancer with more optimism; no one has fought it with more aplomb.

The dictionary defines a cavalier as “one having the spirit or bearing of a knight; a courtly gentleman; gallant.” Jerry, the University of Virginia alum whose allegiance to his alma mater ran ever deep, was all of these things—with a capital “C.” As the long-serving executive director of the Central Virginia Battlefields Trust (CVBT), Jerry was one of the hardest-working leaders of one of the hardest-working preservation groups in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Jerry’s legacy—his role in helping to forever safeguard the history and heritage of the Old Dominion—will be matched only by his humility in the undertaking. Both at CVBT and in his many collaborations with the Civil War Trust, Jerry eschewed the spotlight, working countless hours behind the scenes to make some of the country’s biggest and most exciting preservation successes possible.

In 2006, the Civil War Trust announced what was, and remains, the most ambitious private battlefield acquisition project in American history with the launch of our \$12 million fundraising campaign to save Fredericksburg’s Slaughter Pen Farm. Of these storied 208 acres, historian Frank O’Reilly wrote, “The Slaughter Pen is the very heart and soul of the Fredericksburg Battlefield.... This is the point where the battle was won and lost on December 13, 1862.... [T]his is where preservation ultimately will win or lose the struggle for Fredericksburg’s history.”

Jerry and the men and women of CVBT understood what was at stake, pledging \$1 million in support of the project. It was, for an organization of CVBT’s size, a promise that would have been impossible to keep without leaders whose passion for preservation exceeded the magnitude of

the challenge that lay before them. In a clear sign of Jerry’s overwhelming commitment to his calling—a resolve to which all of those who knew him could readily attest, and by which all of us were routinely inspired—CVBT fulfilled its pledge and presented a final payment to the Trust two years ago.

Slaughter Pen Farm is now preserved for posterity, a living monument not only to the men in blue and in gray who fought there, but to all Americans who have served in uniform. It is an outdoor classroom for people of all ages to learn about our nation’s greatest conflict and the history surrounding it. So, too, are hundreds more battlefield acres in Central Virginia which—without Jerry Brent and those of us who must ensure that his example endures—would today be lost but for Jerry’s brand of hard work and persistence.

Working together with organizations as diverse as the Civil War Trust and the Silver Companies—a major developer in the Fredericksburg region—CVBT during Jerry’s tenure as executive director demonstrated time and again that preservation and progress need not be mutually exclusive. Indeed, the commemorative cannon that sits atop Pelham’s Corner in Spotsylvania County is located on land once owned by the Silver Companies and later secured by CVBT in a land swap, a symbol of what can be achieved through collaboration when and where possible.

Preservation is a partnership; Jerry knew this, and he lived by it, never letting small differences among friends distract from the big picture and preservationists’ shared mission. CVBT and the cause of battlefield preservation writ large could not have asked for a kinder, more collegial, more approachable—and, ultimately, more effective—representative, in Virginia or anywhere in the country. Saving hallowed ground is not always easy, or without controversy, but Jerry’s unflappability and grace under fire were enough to convince most anyone of the contrary.

The Civil War Trust has had a long and rewarding relationship with CVBT, one that we look forward to continuing for many years to come. Our work is not yet finished, and there is still much to accomplish. With his departure, Jerry Brent now joins those heroes of preservation upon whose shoulders we stand—but whose shoes will never be filled.

# William C. “Jack” Davis at the CVBT annual meeting, about his important new book, due out this winter.

**By Robert K. Krick**

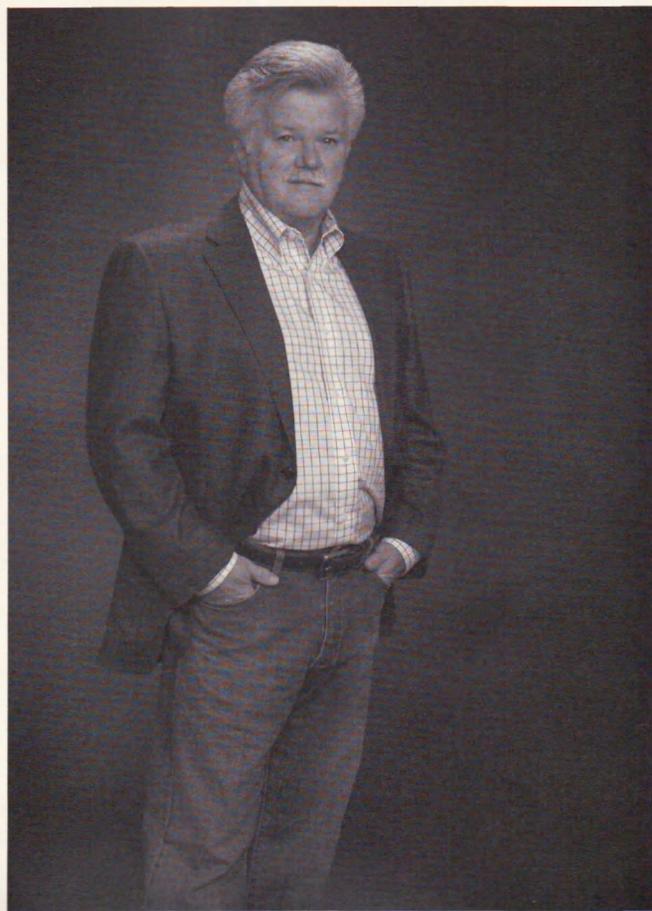
WILLIAM C. DAVIS ATTENDED COLLEGE AND GRADUATE school at Sonoma State University in northern California, at the same time I was enrolled at nearby institutions. If anyone should ever unearth the antique traces of that epoch, I will be the one without flashy cars or flashy girlfriends. The timbre of our joint, but divergent, roots in northern California might be epitomized by the fact that I have a dog named for the secular cathedral of my youth, the '49ers stadium of that era, *Kezar*; Jack remembers Kezar Stadium, he says, only because of the toothsome hot dogs vended there. Jack's dog, for the record, is a frolicsome beast named *Crusher*, although Mrs. Davis insists on the infinitely coyer nom-de-canine, *Cuddles*.

Although Davis always has been known as “Jack,” instead of Bill or William or Willie or some other fond diminutive, not even he knows the etymology of the nickname.

By whatever name, Jack surely is the most widely published Civil War historian of this era. For two decades he worked in editorial management in the magazine world (*Civil War Times* and others), and in the book-publishing industry. In 1990 he left that corporate world and spent a decade working as an independent writer and consultant, including some time abroad. From 2000 until his retirement in 2013, Jack was Professor of History and Executive Director of the Virginia Center for Civil War Studies at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg.

For forty years, Davis has produced approximately a major book each year—an absolutely astonishing output. His first book was a huge, magnificent biography of John C. Breckinridge (1974). *Breckinridge* seems to me to be a veritable prototype for a work of the sort, and perhaps the best thing he has done (that judgment emanates, obviously, from my admittedly parochial perch in the biblioworld). He followed Breckinridge with battle books about New Market (1975) and First Manassas (1977).

Jack's literary output exceeds fifty titles written or edited, in the fields of Civil War and Southern history, as well as



numerous documentary screenplays. Numbers of them received national awards. He was the on-camera senior consultant for 52 episodes of the “Civil War Journal” series, on the Arts & Entertainment Network/History Channel, and several other series on Public Television and BBC.

The 1975 New Market book is the basis for the motion picture *Field of Lost Shoes*, released in May 2014, starring Lauren Holly, familiar as a stylish redhead on television's NCIS.

Davis is a member of the Advisory Board of the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission and serves on several other consultative bodies, as well as being an occasional consultant to the Virginia State Police on cold case homicides.

A major new book from Jack's pen will reach print in January 2015, just in time for the annual meeting, from Da Capo Press in New York: *Crucible of Command: Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee, the War they Fought, the Peace they Forged*. The CVBT will have available copies of the book for sale, and for author signing, inside the banquet hall at the annual meeting.

*Crucible of Command* exhibits once again Davis's admirable strength in definitive research. His works include major books on such powerful American legends as the Alamo, and Jean Laffite and his Baratarians, which shed

significant new light based on exhaustive digging. That signature diligence, applied to the familiar, oft-told stories of Lee and Grant excavated new material in considerable volume—by sharp, admirable contrast to the steady stream of biographies that complacently plow the same old furrows. Jack’s fresh discoveries on Lee’s youthful education would be alone worth the price of the book.

Davis’s talk for the CVBT annual meeting, Friday evening, May 22, 2015, will be “Grant and Lee, The Generals Nobody Knows,” based of course on the recently published book. The speech title sounds not unlike Gordon Rhea’s address in the same venue in 2014, but Rhea focused exclusively on May 1864. Davis will cover both men’s full lives, introducing a gratifying budget of new information into their stories.

## Save the Date for Our Next Annual Meeting

May 2015						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

### CVBT Youth Community Service Day: Clean-Up at Chancellorsville

**November 8, 2014**

**9:00am–3:00pm**

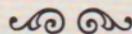
**Ages 10-18**

**Lunch and a FREE T-Shirt**

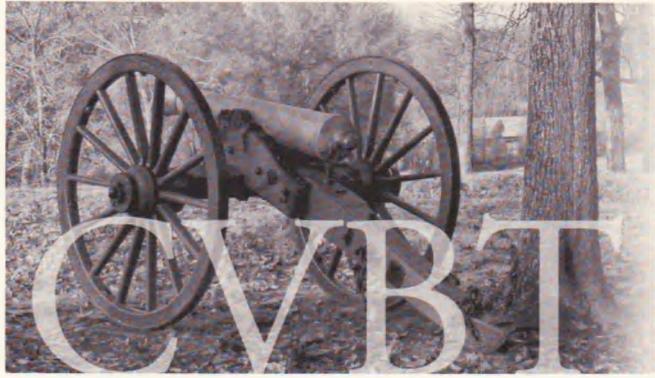
**REGISTER AT**

<http://tinyurl.com/CVBTYouthDay>

**Contact Eric Powell  
for More Information  
majorpowellaag@gmail.com**



**W**e are pleased to announce that the Central Virginia Battlefield Trust's 2015 annual meeting will be held on Memorial Day Weekend, from Friday, May 22 through Sunday, May 24. As in recent years, our meeting will be based at the Fredericksburg Hospital-ity House Hotel, 2801 Plank Road in Central Park. We will again hold a block of guest rooms at the hotel for our members and guests. Please note that our annual business meeting and dinner in 2015 will be held on Friday, May 22, rather than on Saturday evening, as has been our practice in recent years. It will include a delicious buffet dinner and premium cash bar. Civil War historian and widely published author William C. “Jack” Davis will be our guest and keynote speaker on Friday night, and he will enlighten us on the topic of “Grant and Lee, the Generals Nobody Knows.” Much more information on Mr. Davis’s background and his publications is contained in Bob Krick’s previous article in this newsletter. Now that the 150th anniversaries of the four Fredericksburg area battles (and the National Park Service’s related tours) have concluded, CVBT will again sponsor our own battlefield-related tours on both Saturday, May 23 and Sunday, May 24. These daytime tours will not conflict with the very evocative luminary tributes that are always held in Fredericksburg on the Saturday night of Memorial Day weekend—at both the Fredericksburg National Cemetery and the nearby Confederate Cemetery. We will provide further details regarding our annual meeting and the tours we are planning in our next newsletter. We will also post additional details on our website as they become available. We look forward to seeing you for a very special weekend next May! **SL**



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The Trust's mission is to purchase Civil War battlefield terrain and to advocate for battlefield protection at the local, state, and federal levels of government.

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

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Annual Member	\$ 35	Patron	\$ 500	Life Patron	\$10,000
Active Member	\$ 135	Benefactor	\$ 1,000	Corporate Member	\$ 500
Sustaining Member	\$ 250	Life Member	\$ 5,000	Corporate Patron	\$ 1,000

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