



# ON THE skirmish line

Newsletter of The Central Virginia Battlefields Trust

## Vermont Veterans Visit Virginia 25 Years After the War

*CVBT member Jeffrey Stocker has sent us an 1888 article from The Orleans County (VT) Monitor, which he located and transcribed. Members who receive our annual journal of Fredericksburg History and Biography will remember Mr. Stocker's article in the 2015 volume, called "No Men ... Could Have Accomplished More or Behaved Better:" The Battle of Chancellorsville as Reported by Three Soldiers of the 153rd Pennsylvania. Decyphering the small and sometimes obscured print of old newspapers is easily described as scholarly grunt work and we appreciate Mr. Stocker's generosity in sharing his efforts.*

Beyond the line of Willis and Marye's Hills rises another height, even more commanding than the first. And when we reached the fortifications and stood within the old earthworks, which to this day remain higher than a man's head, and from the embrasures looked down upon the first tier of hills and across the river to Stafford's Heights, we were profoundly impressed with the strength of the position where Lee had entrenched his army. The strength of Meade's position at Gettysburg cannot be compared with this of Lee's. It is marvel that the command of Sedgwick in '63 was able to carry this stronghold, even while the main body of Lee's army was fighting Hooker

Mr. Editor, -Behind a spanking pair of bays, with a colored guide for driver, our party of five left the Exchange Hotel of Fredericksburg at 7:30 a.m. for a forty five mile drive along the old battle lines of Salem Heights, Chancellorsville, the Wilderness and Spotsylvania. We took the old plank road leading directly over the Heights. Passing out of the city we had a full view of the ground over which forty brigades had charged again and again in the hopeless effort to pass the stone wall and capture the strongly fortified position on Marye's Hill.

at Chancellorsville. Pickett's charge with 17,000 men upon our center at Gettysburg will ever be heralded to history, and ranked as the great charge of the war. It was out upon an unobstructed field where it could be seen. But to charge repeatedly the heights of Fredericksburg called for more determination, and in heroism equaled anything in the annals of warfare. The charge of our men and the brushwood at the "bloody angle" at Spotsylvania, and the nine times repeated charge of Lee to recapture the position, were more persistent, if not more heroic.

Three miles out on the plank road is Salem Church. Here the battle of Salem Heights

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was fought on the 4th of May, '63, between the Sixth Corps, under Sedgwick, and Lee's whole army. The line of battle of the old Vermont Brigade was along near the plank road and about one-fourth mile from Salem Church on the Fredericksburg side. From this position the brigade made the celebrated charge that saved the Sixth Corps from capture. I well remember an incident of that charge that it will do to relate here: There was a private in Co. "E" of the 6th regiment, by name of Montgomery. He was one of those peculiar fellows that had but little regard for army discipline and less regard for the property of the inhabitants of a rebellious state. "Mont," as he was called, always found the heaviest swarm of bees, knew just what neck of woods to look in for sheep or pigs and where the chickens did roost. For use on this expeditions Montgomery had a large, long-bladed knife, which he also used when frying "hard tack." The knife was well worn at the point, and would almost open of itself when held in a favorable position. During the charge Montgomery got a little in advance of our line and enough to the left to bring him in front of Co. G, when he suddenly came face to face with a rebel lieutenant and a squad of men he was trying to rally. Montgomery up with his musket and fired, but it missed, and the Johnnies seeing their advantage, rushed forward and seized his gun. Just then our line came up and the Johnnies all turned to run except the lieutenant, who with Montgomery, were quickly left in our rear. They were standing in a little skirt of wood, and the gloom of evening was gathering. Montgomery instantly realized his danger. How easily the Lieutenant could run him throw with his sword and the secrete himself until an opportunity came to pass our lines. He therefore got hold of that knife, and opening it in his pocket, sprang upon the lieutenant and caught him by the throat, and with a flourish of his big knife demanded of the "reb" that he "surrender or die." He took his captive back and turned him over to the of-

ficer of the day and came up with our line just as roll call had discovered his absence and we were wondering if Montgomery had been slain.

The little skirt of timber along the depression or valley has been cut away, and the field is in tillage; otherwise the scene of that hot fight with the Louisiana tigers, and where the Vermont brigade repulsed seven lines of battle is familiar to the eye. The old white gate posts occupy the same position and the fences have been rebuilt.

Salem Church is a site to behold. To say that it carries two thousand marks of shot, grape, shell and bullets would hardly exaggerate the truth. Under one of the windows I found an illustrated Sunday School lesson card for July 1st, which I brought home for a trophy. The breastworks along the road past the Church are easily traceable.

Seven miles out on the same road beyond the Church brings us to Chancellorsville. The old house stands yet, having been repaired, although the north wing has not been rebuilt. Solid shot and shell may be seen firmly imbedded in the brick walls. The lady of the house brought forth from her relics a button which I at once identified as the Vermont officers' button. She found it last spring in the field in front of the house on the north side of the plank road. Of course I secured it as a memento. Afterwards I met in Washington Gen. L. A. Grant, and he said it truly belonged to some officer of the old brigade. the lady of the Chancellorsville house is the wife of a Pennsylvania Yankee. She said she was a little girl at the time of the battle, and cried all day for fear of the Yankees, whom she thought were some sort of beasts, having no idea that they were human; but when she came to see them, liked them so well that she married one. No doubt she is thoroughly "reconstructed."

One mile further down the road, beyond Chancellorsville, and we come to the place where Gen. Stonewall Jackson was killed, and where a simple monument stands to mark the spot.

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## Battlefield Photographer Highlights Chancellorsville Scenes

A magazine called *Battlefield Photographer* has given the CVBT a nice plug in their April 2017 issue (Volume XV, Issue 1). They present a historic and companion modern photo of the Wilderness Church area, where the Civil War Trust has been acquiring land on the north side of State Route 3 (the old Orange Plank Road) and the CVBT has been acquiring acreage on the south side. Our respective preservation efforts have been in bits and pieces over the years, but when a historic vista can be photographed in all its preserved glory, the scope of that effort hits home. CVBT and CWT members should be quite proud of what they have accomplished over the years. Also of interest in that issue is a fabulous collection of photos of the site where Jackson was wounded. The earliest image dates to 1866 and others range from the 1880s to the early 1900s. The selection is stunning.

Check out their website at [www.civilwarphotography.org](http://www.civilwarphotography.org). You will be glad you did.



Wilderness Church , circa 1860s



The terrain preserved in the western reaches of the Chancellorsville battlefield are extensive and dramatic. Wilderness Church is in the center right of this photo, behind the hill and within the trees.



Our guide pointed out the place where “Stonewall” and Gen. Lee held their last interview, and the forks of the road where they parted for the last time. All through this region the lines of battle are easily traced by the remaining breastworks, which were thrown up for every new position.

We go on four miles further, or fifteen miles from Fredericksburg, and reach the old “Brock Road,” which crosses the Wilderness on the plank road at right angles. Up this Brock Road marched the hosts of Stonewall Jackson when they came round on our flank and drove from its position the eleventh corps. And here too, our troops stood in the Wilderness fight. The breastworks across the road and along behind the Brock road, remain as the troops left them, subject only to the falling leaves and brushwood of twenty-five years. The timber growth remains the same, so thick and entangled that passage seems almost impossible.

Here we turned down the Brock road and traveled where Stonewall’s men had marched, and where Grant had moved his men “by the left flank” toward Spotsylvania. Traces of the battle are everywhere. Shattered and bullet-scarred trees, old, half-burnt pines where the fire raged, and where our wounded boys were burnt in the relentless flames.

At Todd’s tavern we stopped for dinner. Well for us that we took along our own supplies. Under the broad branches

of a friendly apple-tree we ate our lunch and talked of bygone days. A regular “secesh” came out of the house and visited with us. He was a boy then-I saw but one who was of adult years in war time in all that trip-was very friendly and social. From one of his little girls I procured a Sixth Corps badge which she had picked up in the cornfield.

Our next stop was at the house where the body of our noble Sedgwick was laid. The lady of the house told the story of those times-a pitiful tale-how the blood was so thick on the floor of her house that it took three weeks to soak it all up even by daily application of water; how for two weeks the only food for herself and children was the pork and hardtack secured from the haversacks of the Union dead.

A little further on and we halt on the ground where Sedgwick fell. A monument erected by his comrades of the Sixth Corps marks the spot. The old White Cross cut in the solid stone indicates that heroic body of battle veterans which he so long and ably led to victory.

From here we went to the “burnt woods” about a mile distant, being guided by a native. Mr. James Lewis of our party thought he could identify the spot where he laid in the woods under the mouth of ten guns that played upon the rebel position some twenty or thirty rods away. And when we reached the line there were the places where the guns had stood-ten in number-easily counted, and the old breastworks just as the troops left them, except that

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## Congressman Rob Wittman Visits the CVBT's Offices

Earlier this year, CVBT President Tom Van Winkle sent a letter of thanks to Congressman Rob Wittman, expressing the Trust’s appreciation of his support for the American Battlefield Protection Program. The next time the Congressman was in Fredericksburg, he took the opportunity to visit the CVBT office, where he met with Tom, as well CVBT Board member and longtime friend Charlie McDaniel and CVBT Executive Director Ben Brockenbrough. They agreed that CVBT will keep the Congressman’s office apprised of CVBT projects, through his assistant Karen Klotz (Outreach Coordinator), who also joined the meeting. The Congressman thanked the CVBT for its efforts and hard earned accomplishments and we look forward to a continuing relationship.



the logs over which the earth had been thrown had rotted down. Between the two lines, where the trees were burnt away, a field of oats. In crossing that field, every one in our party found one or more bullets, and some as many as eight or ten. I picked up some pieces of bullets that had been melted by the burning timber, probably shot into the trees, and melted as they were consumed. A well preserved soldier's tin plate was picked up by one of our number with a bullet hole through one edge. The bullets secured from this field were all "yankee" bullets. Our men were on the low ground and many of their shots fell short while it is possible the rebels fired over. Our native guide to this interesting part of the field took us back to his little store and showed us a fine collection of relics gathered from the vicinity. Before we left he presented each one of us with a "rebel" bullet. I thanked him, and told him I thought they had wonderfully improved in their method of presentation of bullets in twenty-five years.

We next drove to the "bloody angle." This was the key to the Spotsylvania battlefield. One of our party had charged over the breastworks at the point where a large tree had been completely cut off by minie bullets. That same stump is now in the national museum at Washington. The comrade said he counted the rebels seven deep behind the breastworks at this bloody angle, some of the under ones not being yet dead. In the capture of that angle we took from five to seven thousand prisoners. All through the woods breastworks had been thrown up at right angles so as to protect the front line from which ever side it should be taken. It was here that Lee's men recharged nine times to recover the position. On our left, front of the "bloody angle," is now a cornfield. There are old pieces of canteens, knapsacks, etc., etc., in abundance; and on every furrow could be seen small pieces of bone. I saw one lower jawbone intact, except that part of the teeth had fallen out and were scattered along near by. The dweller of that little house that stands almost in front of the angle came out to talk to us. He said that he plowed up three bodies this spring when putting in that field-and thro' all these years the government has been moving every body it could trace to the national cemeteries. He also brought out to us a silver badge which he plowed up this spring. It bore the name, company and regi-

ment of a soldier who enlisted from Albany, New York, in the month of March, 1864; he, therefore, had been in the service scarcely two months when he fell among the thousands who died at this bloody place. We took a copy of the inscription to forward to the Adj. Gen. of N. Y., hoping that after these long years this badge might find its way to those who had mourned for a loved one slain.

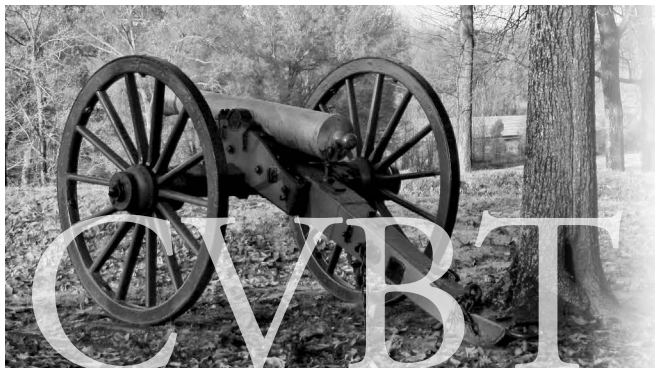
From this place, where Vermont made an imperishable name, we drove by way of Spotsylvania Court House directly to Fredericksburg. Along the way we passed many farms owned by negroes, well fenced and well tilled, seeded with clover, and with every evidence of thrift and prosperity, being in marked contrast with the shiftless farming of the native whites. Many farms that we passed during the day are now cultivated by Yankees and plainly tell what the soil will do when properly worked.

Just as the shades of night were falling we passed down the hillside by Hazel Run between Lee's and Willis Hills, along by the old mill along the line of the charge by the old brigade, along the sunken road held by Cobb's rebel brigade in Dec. '62, past the house where Cobb died, along that fateful stone wall at the foot of Marye's Hill, down over the ground where Hancock and Hooker led on their men into the streets of the city, passing the Methodist Church through the open doors of which we could see the people and their minister in their regular Wednesday evening prayer meeting, and halted at the door of the Exchange Hotel. And [illegible word] the last scene of the day was one of peace and worship. We had traversed hallowed ground, consecrated by the lifeblood of heroic souls. There is no place on this continent of an equal area, where so much patriotic blood has been shed as within the sweep of a radius extending out for twenty miles from Fredericksburg on the south side of the Rappahannock. And for what did these men die? Why those twelve hundred graves of the "unknown" on Willis Hill? They died for the American Union; for civil rights and freedom of speech in the American Union; and above all for the American HOME; and for the protection of that home against all latter day foes. Every man who loves the old flag, or wife, or child, should "rally once again."

W. H. Holmes

### **E-Newsletter available**

The CVBT believes it is important to maintain close contact with those who generously support its mission. We do this through a quarterly newsletter that is a tangible reminder in your mailbox of our regard and appreciation. Some organizations think they can save money by converting to an electronic format, but we have found that people like to be able to hold something in their hand. We do, however, give members the option of receiving their newsletters via e-mail. There is a certain cost savings to us, albeit minor. If you would like to change your current newsletter mailing to an electronic distribution, please contact us at [comdir@cvbt.org](mailto:comdir@cvbt.org) and we will make that change for you.



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

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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