

THE STONE WALL

May 1995

BEARSS examines Nathan Bedford Forrest

Forrest was the only Confederate cavalryman of whom Grant stood in much dread. His methods were unorthodox. He "was amenable to no known rules of procedure, was a law unto himself for all military acts."

This wily, ambitious man became an effective lieutenant general without the aid of a military education. He hadn't studied the rules of war, so his enemies could never anticipate his movements. But he and his troops were determined to rid their home states of Tennessee, Mississippi and Alabama of those detestable Yankees.

So who was he? Where did he come from? What exactly was so unusual about his military tactics?

EDWIN C. BEARSS returns to our round table to describe this man who came to be known as the Wizard of the Saddle.

Come early to the meeting if you want a seat. Bearss speaks vividly, and with gusto. He is, with good reason, one of the most popular speakers about the Civil War.

EDWIN C. BEARSS

Thursday, May 11, 1995, 7:30 p.m.

Manassas National Battlefield Park

Visitor Center

**BULL RUN CIVIL WAR
ROUND TABLE**
P. O. Box 196
Centreville, VA 22020

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1888.

CIVIL WAR BOOK SIGNING

May 13, 4-7 p.m.

JOHN DIVINE
*8th Virginia Infantry
35th Battalion Virginia Cavalry*

THOMAS EVANS & JAMES MOYER
*Mosby's Confederacy
Mosby Vignettes*

BYRON FARWELL
Ball's Bluff

VIRGIL CARRINGTON JONES
*Ranger Mosby
Gray Ghosts & Rebel Raiders*

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*43rd Battalion Virginia Cavalry
Mosby's Command*

AND OUR OWN

BILL MILLER
Mapping for Stonewall

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.....

Loudoun Museum
celebrates
THE ROAD TO ANTIETAM
May 13 - 14

.....

MARCHING ORDERS

Forward to CHANCELLORSVILLE

Saturday, May 13

The Bull Run Civil War Round Table tours one of the most fascinating battlefields in the National Park System by embarking on the Chancellorsville Campaign.

Highlights

ELY'S FORD: Hooker steals a march on Robert E. Lee

CHANCELLOR HOUSE: Description of the crossroads and the Wilderness

McGEE HOUSE: First day's action, May 1, 1863

LEE-JACKSON BIVOUAC SITE: An audacious plan is formulated

CATHARINE FURNACE SITE: Sickles attacks Jackson's tail; implications

JACKSON'S FLANK MARCH: Stonewall leads the way

BROCK ROAD/ORANGE TURNPIKE: Jackson rolls up the 11th Union Corps

VISITOR CENTER: Jackson is wounded

HAZEL GROVE: Confederate artillery dominance

FAIRVIEW AREA/BERRY-PAXTON DRIVE: The advent of trench warfare, third day's fight

BULLOCH/ELY'S FORD ROAD INTERSECTION: Hooker's final line; Lee's victory

Time of departure: **8 a.m.** at the Dogan's Ridge parking lot at Manassas Battlefield Park (Rt. 234, one half mile north of the Stone House intersection).

Cost: Free. Members are encouraged to reimburse the driver of carpools for the gasoline.

Rations: Bring a picnic. We'll break for lunch at the visitor center.

Sign up: Two sheets will be available at the meeting. One is for volunteer tour guides; the other for members who wish to attend.

Rain date: A driving rainstorm will postpone the tour until the following Saturday, May 20.

MARCHING ORDERS

Forward to FISHER'S HILL

Saturday, June 17

Members of the Bull Run Civil War Round Table will march to the Shenandoah Valley.

Highlights

OVERVIEW at Fisher's Hill
FUNKERHOUSE FARM Earthworks and artillery exchange
UNION FLANK MARCH, CSA POSITION, LOOKOUT TREE, etc.
BATTLE'S BRIGADE vs. CROOK
SPANGLER'S BRIDGE, JACKSON'S HEADQUARTERS
HUPP'S HILL for lunch
LITTLE NORTH MOUNTAIN
BOWMAN'S CROSSING
CONFEDERATES ATTACK, BATTLE OF CEDAR CREEK
CEDAR CREEK BRIDGE, and others, if time permits

Time of departure: 8 a.m. at the Dogan's Ridge parking lot at Manassas Battlefield Park (Rt. 234, one half mile north of the Stone House intersection).

Cost: Free. Members are encouraged to reimburse the driver of carpools for the gasoline.

Rations: Bring a picnic. We'll break for lunch at Hupp's Hill.

Sign up: Two sheets will be available at the May and June meetings. One is for volunteer tour guides; the other for members who wish to attend.

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FROM THE RANKS

A Sharpshooter's Day

William Kent was a member of Company F of Hiram Berdan's Sharpshooters. Thirty years later, he wrote to his brother how the sharpshooters marched and skirmished on May 4, 1864, the day before the great clash in the Wilderness. The following are excerpts of this letter, which was published in Civil War Times Illustrated, March 1989.

May 4, 1864

Dear Evarts,

It is 5:30 a.m. 30 years ago just about this time the 2nd Corps were hustling back to take their part in the game of battle...

Just now the spirit moves me mightily. I go back, as though it were late Thursday morning that I came into full consciousness from the broken sleep of a tired man, whose feet ached, whose back ached, whose face burned from the heat of the sun the day before, whose throat and mouth was still choked with yesterday's dust — and while longing to lie still, could not, for flies and hunger and thirst and aches & above all for excitement at the thought of "what is for today." I roll over, & sit up and see my comrades some still sleeping some cooking, some coming with canteens, some going with them ...

...By the time our load of canteens were filled and we were back among the boys, the last sleepers were awake all either making or drinking their coffee & eating hard tack or the precious remnants of our softbread both from camp the day before. By this time about 4 or 4:30 signs of moving were numerous...Made it inspiring for the most tired and we forgot the fearful strain of yesterday's march and any forebodings we might have for the future though forebodings were very few. Most of us took things as they came.

Our battalion was the first to move, at least first after the cavalry and we started off in fair spirits & strength about 5 a.m. Our road for some time lay through the woods — apparently a road made for the movements of a year before...

We finally came out on the turnpike and followed it passing without halt the intersection of the plank road which bore off at nearly right angles to our right...

Shortly after this we began to march at a faster gait the staff officers constantly urging the men to keep up and shortly after that our Co. was put in on the left of the road as flankers.

Then came our hardships — to march through the dense brush out of sight of the main line to keep our distance from the main line and from each other and keep up with the procession to make no stop for coffee, but at every little halt we ate a cracker and sipped a little of the precious water still left in the canteens. And so we pressed on and on and the only break in the monotony of tearing through the brush was when we came to an unfinished railroad grade a little stream and a few buildings & gristmill or iron furnace or both at the interesection of two roads. Just about this time we heard the report of heavy guns in our rear — the first I thought was thunder but was not left long in doubt for it grew louder and more continuous. It was the unmistakable sound of battle. After some

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little time, the rattle of muskets told the story of infantry fighting and not so very far away either though much farther than it seemed.

For all this we pressed on as though we were running away from a fight instead of looking for one until an orderly at full speed overtook us and gave the order to Genl Hays who immediately halted us and then we rested for a half hour or so, the firing still keeping up sometimes in fury & sometimes all but dying out. I finally concluded the wind had something to do with it as at times it seemed directly behind us & then far away. A staff officer now came up and we got orders in quick succession Attention Right about face March and then double quick and Genl Hays staff galloped past us spurring us up with word and gesture finally leaving us behind to our company officers who kept up the spur and the pace. The next hour — it must have been about 4:30 — was a hard one. No one spoke even to swear everyone spared their wind to breathe with and the heavy firing growing heavier coming now in great crashes was plenty of incentive without the exhausted sigh of the Captain who always in front fat though he was would occasionally ejaculate Come — on — boys —

We now began to pass masses of 2nd Corps men at rest along side the road and other masses throwing up breastworks at the other side and along the road for a half mile or more. Our pace slackened though we did not stop and at least the men in front of us filed to one side and our battalion alone kept in motion till we neared the intersection of the plank & pike which we had passed that morning. The firing had now died away. Far as the eye could reach up the pike men were massed lying down, standing & sitting here and there an artillery wagon or an ammunition wagon dealing out cartridges and at the intersection a 4 gun

battery of Napoleons in position with the men laying around at ease.

Staff officers and orderlies were the only ones in active motion. Just then from the plank road between the guns came four men and an officer carrying a man in a blanket. As they came nearer us our Capt. saw it was Major Darling of Genl Hays staff and he said who is it Major and he replied Its the General. A shudder went through us all for we were all greatly attached to him who used to boast that Berdans Sharpshooters were the damdest thieves and the damdest fighters in the old 3rd Corps. As the men carried him past our lines and we looked into the blanket & saw him with blood streaming from a hole in his right temple with only an occasional long drawn sob to show there was any life, we thought of him as we had seen him an hour ago and gave him a remembrance of regret but it was no time for more. We were called to attention, marched over the breastworks and ordered to deploy as skirmishers. Our company with its right on the plank road, and to our left there were some other men making a long line under the command of Major Howard of the 17th Maine. Having taken our distances and got a fairly straight line the order was given to advance and we went forward through the heavy underbrush about breast high just lining out with a thin growth of saplings large enough to blur the sight not enough to cover. The firing had ceased the noise & movement of the army died away as we advanced, and we could see no one but the man on our right & left and hear no noise except what we made ourselves wading through the brush. Next to me on my right was Dick Cross my bunk mate...Next on my left was Locke, a recruit who never had been in a fight, and next to him his brother in law, Wright.

We advanced about half a mile or less and Lock closed up a little on me and began to ask a lot of questions. Where are the Rebs how far do we go when should

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we run back "I don't know" answered every one of them but it was a comfort for him to talk and I allow it was for me. At last we came to a gentle slope, more open than we had been passing through, with a large tree now & then scattered through it. At the base was a dense fringe of willows indicating a stream which was very welcome in anticipation. As we emerged from the brush we could see our line stretching out right & left and the Major commanding took advantage of it to lop from right to left to correct the alignment broken by our march through the brush and we advanced slowly in good order down the slope. Then came from far away on the right the fire of a skirmish line followed by the heavy fire of a line of battle. It rattled down to us and as the crack crack came on my right though I could see nothing, I fired into the fringe then about four rods in front. Lock says what is it what are you firing at — I replied fire and you'll see. By that time our side was firing as fast as we could load. Just as Lock fired the first time, my words being hardly out of my mouth, a Reb line of battle rose up out of the fringe and let us have it full in the face. Talk about astonishment or surprise, or dismay — I fired once more because I was almost ready and I could not think quick enough to do anything else but by the time the bullet was out of the gun I was in full retreat. As I turned I caught sight of the rebs taking in the Major who was caught between the two fires, he was so near them they could almost have reached out and caught his bridle rein.

...Wright and I both turned and fired reloading as we ran. Lock was too much demoralized to do aught but run but we kept together. All this time the rebs were hard after us keeping up a smart fire though there were none of the crashes like the first one.

Just as we fired the second time in retreat as we turned, Wright was hit in the arm above the elbow. He called out "I'm hit, don't leave me boys" & that seemed to settle Locks mind. Though we were running as fast as the nature of the way permitted, Lock promptly supported Wright on one side and I on the other till we found out he was all right for a run though his arm dangling by his side at every step must have given him intense pain.

Just at this time a bullet hit me square in the back with such force I thought it had gone through, as I heard the spat and felt the shock.

We by this time were nearly back to the reserves and a heavy fire from both infantry and the battery at the plank road crossing showed the rebs they had run against something stronger than a skirmish line and they fell back leaving our part of the line in peace, while we scrambled over the breast works and began to look ourselves and each other over and see how we fared. Our Company came out badly. I think about 8 or ten men killed or wounded...I bethought myself of my hit and put my hand up my back to see if the blood was running and found a bullet between my knapsack and blouse. It had gone through blanket & rubber blanket folded, paper, tobacco, letters, & sundries, it did not break the skin but made an egg shaped swelling between my shoulders.

It was now quite dark. We were not allowed to make coffee so we ate our bread & sugar and wished for some water...and thinking of you I grabbed a canteen and with that as an excuse started to find you - you know how I did, and how we crowded questions and answers into those few short moments.

It has always seemed to me one of the sweetest memories of those years, our meeting as if by chance on the night of such a day of battles both unhurt.

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I got back to the company just in time as I found them in line waiting orders to go on picket. I got into my harness which Casper Kent had picked up & was holding for me & not half an hour after I saw you, with the others I filed between the guns out on the plank past your bivouac calling out to you Goodbye Kent & receiving your greeting in return, and we were out in the debatable ground between the two armies alone save for the killed & wounded of both sides who were so thickly strewn along the road that we sometimes stumbled over them in the dark.

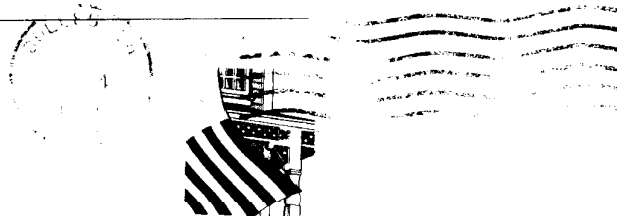
...The staff officer at our head led us out for about two hundred rods on the plank and then turning to the right took us through the woods which were comparatively free of underbrush and the trees were large.

We finally seemed to come in touch with another line & halted told off in squads of five and distributed from the point where we were back toward the plank. We were told we could sleep except one guard in each group who was stationed a few paces in advance that we were to be perfectly still, no smoking, & were to attack at 4 a.m. and were then left.

After we were alone the stillness seemed like that of death...

How I wanted to smoke...but as we all know a lighted match would draw a shot — we did not try it. Some of the boys took a chew. I tried it but on a stomach empty of all but hard tack I could not do it and finally fell asleep, forgetting all my woes aching bones, & empty stomach. I had three hours of the sweetest sleep that ever came to me and the sweetest dreams and with that ended the 4th day of May 1864.

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