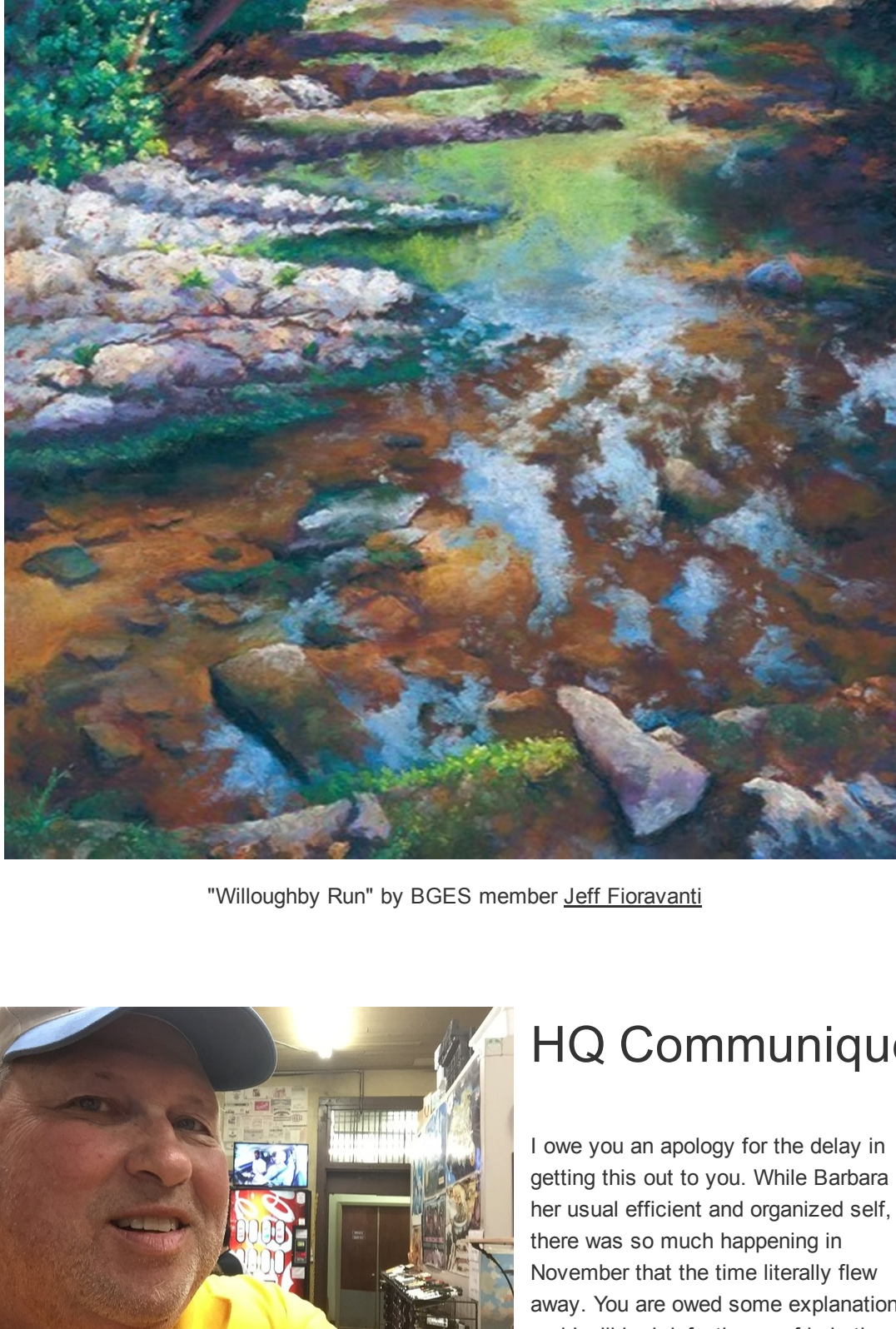
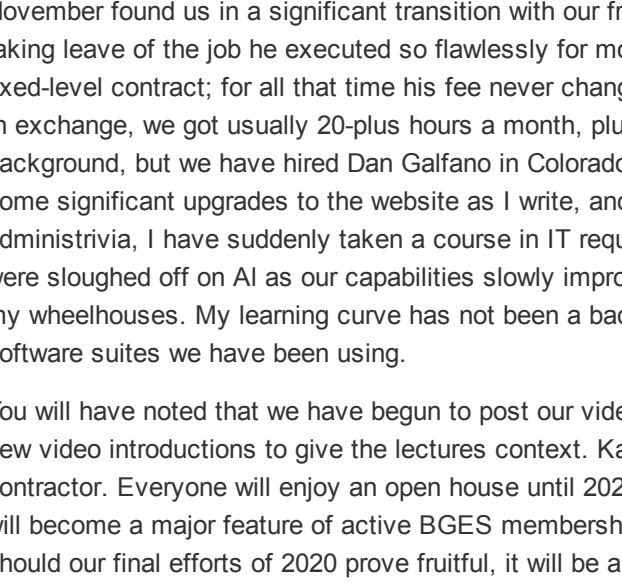




December 2020



"Willoughby Run" by BGES member [Jeff Fioravanti](#)



Executive Director Len Riedel

HQ Communiqué

I owe you an apology for the delay in getting this out to you. While Barbara is her usual efficient and organized self, there was so much happening in November that the time literally flew away. You are owed some explanation and I will be brief—the proof is in the pudding, and we have been exceptionally productive with many issues finally coming to a head, and we face the end of the year in good order.

November found us in a significant transition with our friend and longtime webmaster, Al Stevens, taking leave of the job he executed so flawlessly for more than 20 years—working with us as a fixed-level contract; for all that time his fee never changed and was perhaps 30% of market value. In exchange, we got usually 20-plus hours a month, plus 911 ITT calls. Al is still in the background, but we have hired Dan Galfano in Colorado to handle our IT matters. We are making some significant upgrades to the website as I write, and with new software and other matters of adminstrivia, I have suddenly taken a course in IT requirements and management. Things that were sloughed off on Al as our capabilities slowly improved are now in Barbara's, Burford's, and my wheelhouses. My learning curve has not been a bad one, and I have found new tools within the software suites we have been using.

You will have noted that we have begun to post our video archives. I have been making dozens of new video introductions to give the lectures context. Karen Needles is doing a great job as our contractor. Everyone will enjoy an open house until 2021, when the expanding inventory of lectures will become a major feature of active BGES membership. Fundraising to support it is on track, and should our final efforts of 2020 prove fruitful, it will be a truly Happy New Year!

We also have undertaken a significant audit of our email list and have segmented our list for membership purposes into current, past due, prospective members, and subscribers. As we analyze the numbers from our various transmissions, we are learning more and more and becoming more effective.

We wrapped several projects and now have three active projects. Current fundraising goals call for \$23,000 to wrap up two and sustain the Medford project for the next year with subsequent fundraising needed to continue supporting that work. As I said, we have really been busy.

The efforts with the vaccine have opened the door to serious talks about returning to the field. I believe our earliest program is most likely Grierson's Raid in late March or our April programs with the remainder of 2021 as announced. Our medical experts are not guaranteeing anything yet, but if the immunization program goes well, then these dates should look good. As confidence returns to the traveling public, our crisis will largely end, depending upon live post-Covid immunities. I know you can hardly wait.

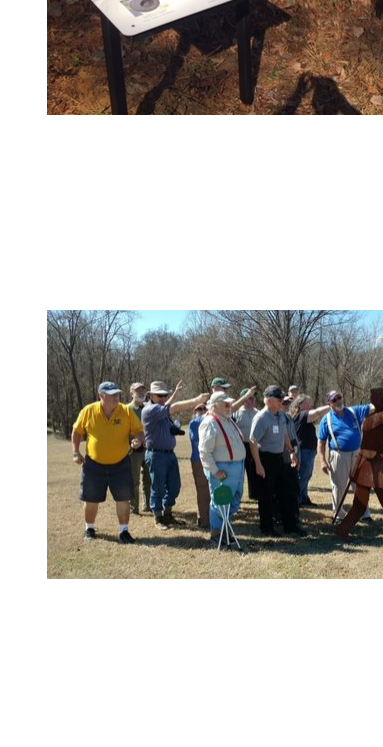
Our final checklists for 2020 are short and they largely depend upon you. Timely renewals and return to the membership fold will help us meet or exceed our revenue projections while reducing the last residual debt. We may even get to replenish the piggy bank. For this I am extremely grateful. BGES could have definitely died in the summer of 2020; but PPP and large numbers of BGES members making special and extra gifts, increasing membership donations, and quiet patience have helped us cross the stormy waters. You are all to be credited—save the suspension of the Field University programs, we didn't lose a step and produced high-level, quality scholarship and educational activities. Had you badgered me or been critical or impatient, we would have gone under, but you inflated the floats and came through each time I asked for your help. What can I say but THANK YOU! See you in the new year!

—Len Riedel

Executive Director, BGES

December Happenings: The Winter Campaign

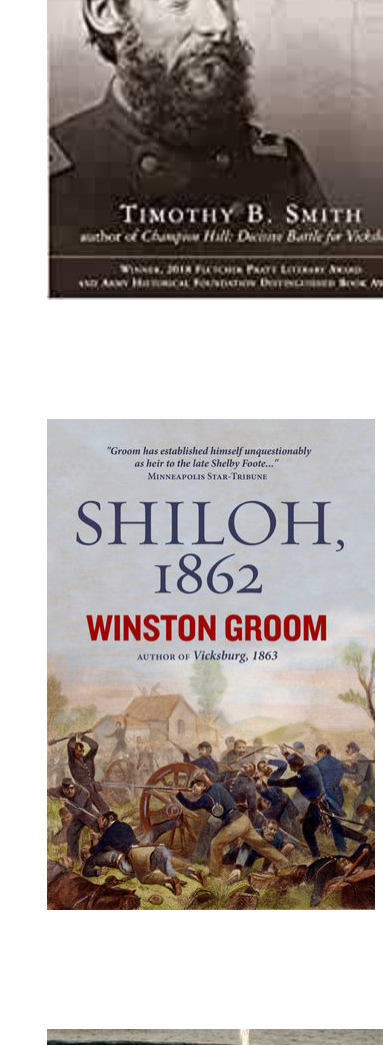
Welcome to the December 2020 issue of *Holding the Line*! This month we continue to anticipate the time when we'll be traveling again with a conversation with Greg Mertz about his April 2021 tour focusing on Shiloh. In addition, we catch up with one of our authors, Brian Steel Wills, who has delved deeply into the enigmatic personality of Gen. George Thomas in his new book. We have some BGES news to share, including the completion of a long-term project, a Covid update on returning to the field, some special offers to satisfy the history lover on your holiday gift list, and BGES's annual Bucket Appeal. BGES Executive Director Len Riedel reviews Tim Smith's *The Real Horse Soldiers*. Does he recommend it? Read on and find out! We also take a look at Christmas during the Civil War through the eyes of a famous political cartoonist. And last but not least, we profile a BGES member who has made a mark for himself in the realm of Civil War preservation and education. Enjoy!



Tour Talk: Greg Mertz and Shiloh

Mocked as a child for his lack of Civil War knowledge, Greg Mertz was spurred into an extraordinary career with Civil War parks. He'll be leading BGES's April 2021 tour of Shiloh. We caught up with him to see what he has in store for participants—including his take on the drummer boy controversy.

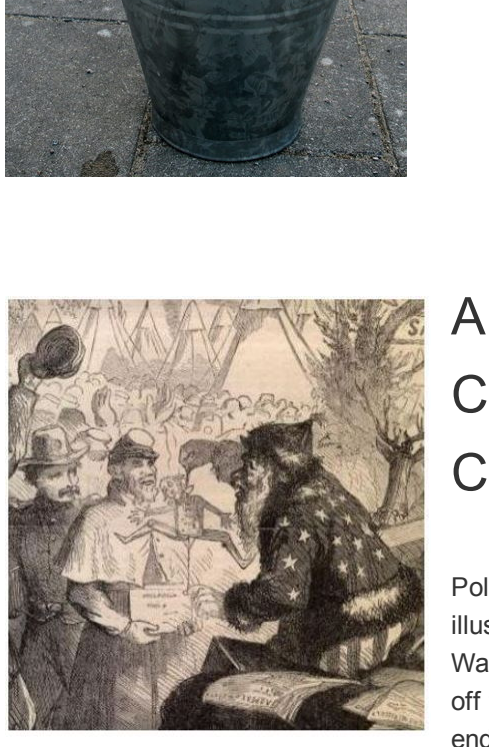
[Read More](#)



Ode to an Enigmatic General

There may be no Civil War soldier more cryptic than Gen. George Thomas, a southerner who fought for the North, a man who never courted accolades despite his triumphs. In his book, *As True as Steel*, Dr. Brian Steel Wills takes on the challenge to get to know this elusive warrior. We caught up with Wills to gain some insight.

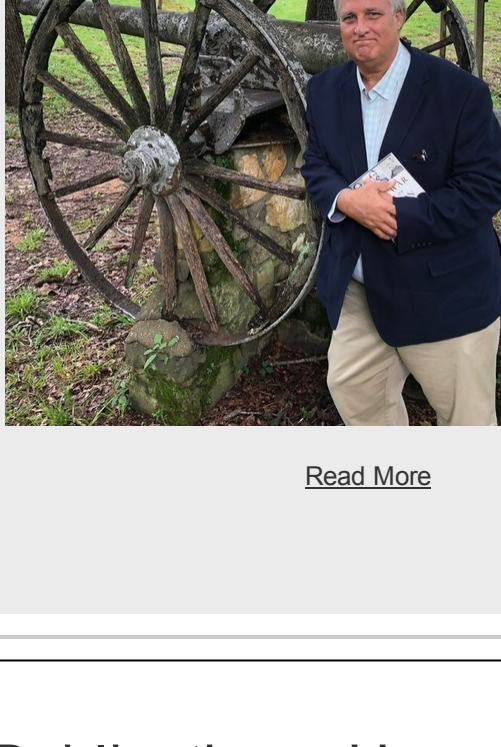
[Read More](#)



The Fort Branch Signs are Complete!

Fort Branch, a lesser known Confederate fort in North Carolina, has some beautiful new interpretive signs, thanks to some dedicated BGES members. See the fruits of their hard work.

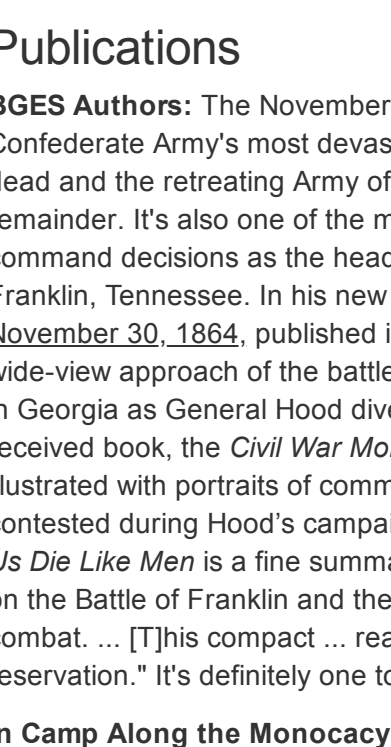
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A Return to Tours?

After nearly a year out of the field, can we finally be returning to tours? Find out what BGES's plan is as news of a Covid vaccine becomes more and more a reality.

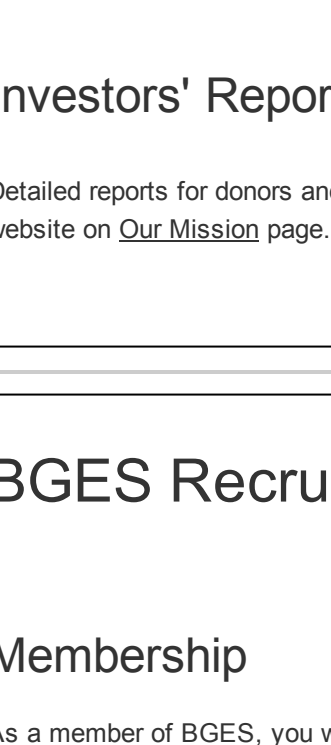
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Book Review: The Real Horse Soldiers

Short of John Wayne's not-necessarily-factual depiction in a Hollywood film, little was known about Grierson's dramatic raid of 1863 until recently. But now, Civil War author Tim Smith has written an extremely well-researched account, reviewed by BGES Executive Director Len Riedel. Does Len recommend it?

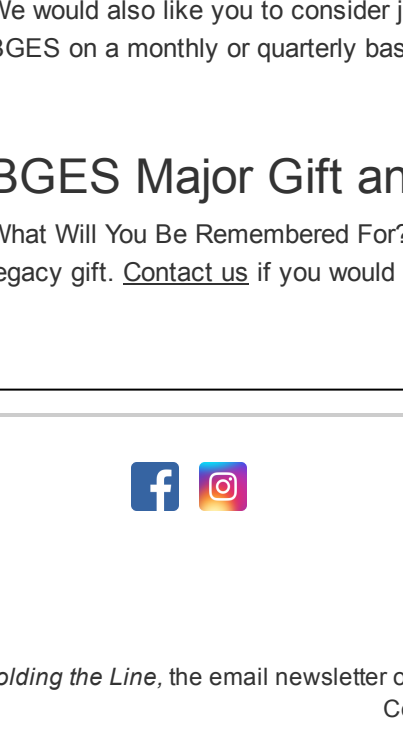
[Read More](#)



Special Books Make Special Gifts

As we head into the holiday season, BGES is offering some exclusive gifts for the history lover on your list—for a short time only.

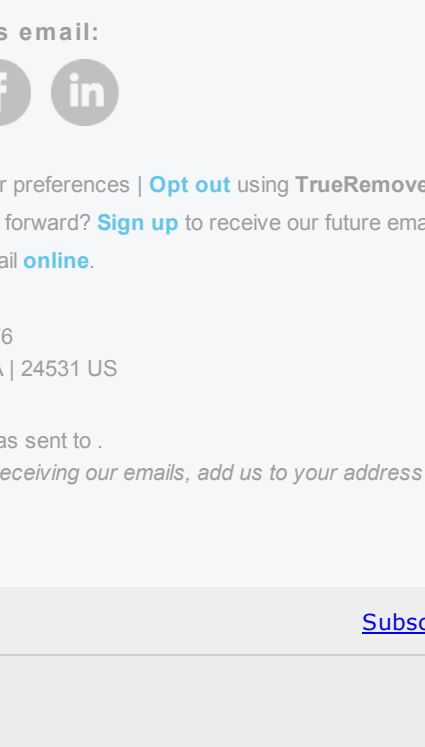
[Read More](#)



BGES Bucket Appeal

It's that time of year—as we close out on 2020, consider tossing some \$\$\$ in the proverbial Bucket and help out BGES!

[Read More](#)



A Cartoonist's Take on Christmas During the Civil War

Political cartoonist Thomas Nast provided illustrations for *Harper's Weekly* during the Civil War, offering insight into the holiday both on and off the battlefield. He also created one of our most enduring images of Christmas.

[Read More](#)

BGES Members Making a Difference

In high school he was the only person in his class who knew the dying words of Robert E. Lee. His fate was sealed—this man embarked on a lifetime of Civil War activities, including contributing to Civil War education and preservation groups and portraying the common soldier as a Civil War reenactor.

[Read More](#)

Publications, Upcoming Tours, & News

Publications

BGES Authors: The November 30, 1864, Battle of Franklin is viewed as one of the Confederate Army's most devastating defeats, leaving six Confederate generals dead and the retreating Army of Tennessee being effectively sidelined for the war's remainder. It's also one of the most controversial, given General John Bell Hood's command decisions as the head of the Confederate Army of Tennessee to attack Franklin, Tennessee. In his new book, [Let Us Die Like Men: The Battle of Franklin, November 30, 1864](#), published in January 2019, author William Lee White takes a wide-view approach of the battle, beginning in early autumn after the fall of Atlanta in Georgia as General Hood diverts General Sherman's armies. Of this well-received book, the *Civil War Monitor* states: "*Let Us Die Like Men* is prolifically illustrated with portraits of commanders and modern-day pictures of areas contested during Hood's campaign." And Civil War Books and Authors writes: "*Let Us Die Like Men* is a fine summary representation and synthesis of current thinking on the Battle of Franklin and the events leading up to those few hours of desperate combat.... [T]his compact ... reading option can be recommended without reservation." It's definitely one to add to your collection.

In Camp Along the Monocacy: There will be no members' newsletter in mid-December. Look for the next one in mid-February! If you are a BGES member and you are not getting this bi-monthly electronic newsletter, email BGES Communications at communications@blueandgrayeducation.org and ask to be added to the list. You can review archived copies about six months after they are released to the membership.

Upcoming Tours

Suspended through early 2021. See latest schedule [here](#).

Investors' Reports

Detailed reports for donors and prospective donors are available for download from our website on [Our Mission](#) page.

BGES Recruiting Station

Membership

As a member of BGES, you will be part of a community devoted to saving our Civil War. You will receive our e-newsletter, updated info on upcoming tours, and access to some of our greatest historians. [Join here.](#)

Already a member? Don't let your membership slip. [Renew here.](#)

Quarter Guard Program

We would also like you to consider joining the [Quarter Guard Program](#), which supports BGES on a monthly or quarterly basis.

BGES Major Gift and Legacy Program

What Will You Be Remembered For? Be part of BGES's future by making an endowment or legacy gift. [Contact us](#) if you would like to make an endowment or legacy gift.

