

IN CAMP ALONG THE MONOCACY



From Blue And Gray Education Society Field Headquarters in Frederick Maryland

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Editor: Gloria Swift



Gloria Swift with assistant Fred

From the Desk of the Editor In Frederick, Maryland: Changes are a coming! Are you ready?

Hello everyone! Yes, I know it's been a while since our last newsletter! A few things behind the scenes have been taking place, so the newsletter has been held until now.

One of the changes I am sure you have noticed right away is that my picture has taken the place of Len's on the front. Don't worry! Len is still our Executive Director, but I am now the sole producer of our newsletter, ***In Camp Along the Monocacy***, which will be coming to you six times a year instead of four. Issues will be produced in January, March, May, July, September and November. The new newsletter format will contain more historical content rather than official BGES news and announcements. A specific topic or theme of history will be presented in each volume. For example, future issues may discuss coastal fortifications, or maybe the life of Frederick Douglass. The exception to that general rule will be this current newsletter as you see it looks similar to past issues.– however, that will change with the next one. The focus of the new format is to provide a members-only perk for BGES with deep historical content. This newsletter will not be offered to the public.

Len, along with our Board of Directors, has been busy hammering out some details to make BGES a more visible organization to the public and to encourage more membership. To that end, Len will be publishing in April his own new web format newsletter geared to the public as well as to our members. It will contain information about the operational side of BGES, such as who we are and what we do. There will also be business news, project reviews and photographs. In addition there will be information on BGES tours and activities. Most importantly, there will be "hot" buttons available in the contents for those wanting to immediately sign up for membership or to make donations to specific projects.

Two different “newsletters” with two different formats. I hope you like what we will be offering! If you have any particular historical subjects that you would like me to touch on or you’d like to hear more about, certainly let me know!

The second change coming to BGES happens on June 1, 2019. As of that date, Len will be transferring the operation of membership back to the Headquarters in Chatham. For those of you whose memberships are due in June, you will get a letter from me, but your response will be sent to Chatham. Starting July 1st, Len will send out the yearly membership renewal letters. As you all know, he says he enjoys coming for your wallet and I think he missed the aspect of doing just that while I had the reins of membership. I myself will be going from Membership Coordinator to Historical Consultant and Tour Host. In other words, not only will you be hearing from me via the newsletter, but I will be able to get out in the field a bit more with all of you to enjoy our wonderful historical places together!

So, the changes are a coming! Are you ready? I am!

Gloria Swift

Editor, *Along the Monocacy*



Welcome to Our New Members!

Richard Smaligo, Park City, UT

Greg Holdsworth, Scarborough, Ontario Canada

Alexander Welles, Seattle, WA

Michael McConnell, Lookout Mtn, GA

Paul Wilson, Millbrook, NY

Michael Rider, Louisville, CO

John Harmon, Staten Island, NY

David Finn, Springboro OH

Rex Holmlin, Williamsburg VA

A big thank you also to our renewing members! You are much appreciated!

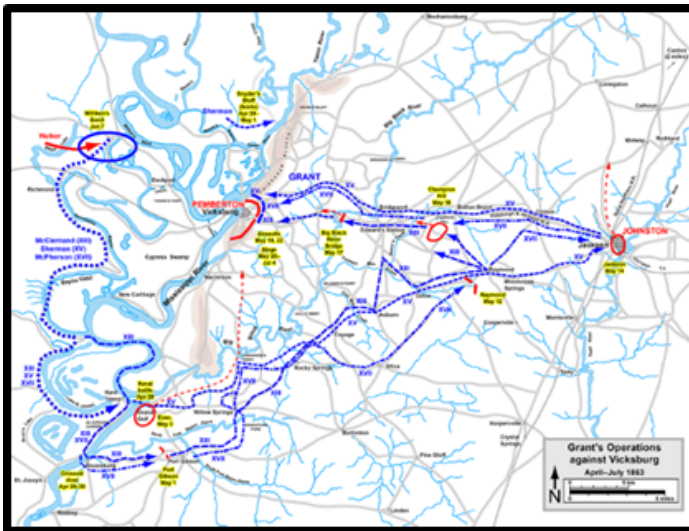
Promises Made, Promises Kept

If you study the Civil War in the western theatre at all, you have no doubt studied the Vicksburg Campaign. Or, if you've been on a BGES trip there, you have been lucky enough to enjoy the company and knowledge of one Parker Hills, our historian/host for the Vicksburg Campaign series.

Parker has taken our group into some really remote but significant areas of this campaign as we have followed Union General Ulysses Grant's path to his ultimate goal of capturing Vicksburg, one of the last strongholds and impediments of Union control of the Mississippi River to the Gulf.

One of the important stops along this campaign route where Parker often takes BGES groups is a small tucked away place called Grand Gulf State Park. Grand Gulf was originally a town directly along the Mississippi River just eight miles north west of Port Gibson, the county seat of Claiborne County. Settled in late 1790's, Grand Gulf grew into a significant bustling port town in the first half of the 19th century. Because of cheap bottom land and slave labor, individuals and investors were drawn to the area as it quickly became the center of cotton trade. With that cotton trade came explosive growth. Eventually, Grand Gulf would surpass Port Gibson in wealth, size and population with over 1000 residents, a large hospital, numerous merchant shops, two churches, a cotton press, steam saw, theatre, grist mill and of course excellent docking facilities for steamboats and merchant ships.

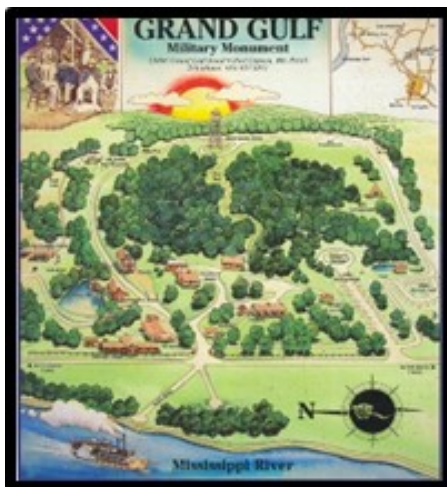
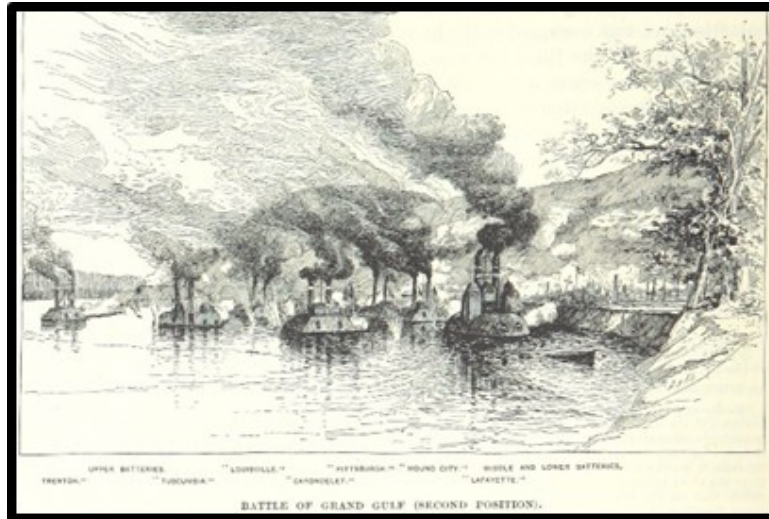
Beginning in the mid-1840's, Grand Gulf's fortunes began to change with a series of unfortunate events. First, yellow fever outbreaks decimated the population as it did elsewhere along the Mississippi. In 1852, a steamboat explosion destroyed the town's docking facilities. In 1853, a tornado hit the town that left much devastation in its wake. In addition, the Mississippi River began to change its course and was starting to carve away at the settlement itself. By 1860, 52 blocks of Grand Gulf had been carried away by the mighty river current. At the time of the Civil War, only about 158 people remained in what was left of the town.



a constant harassment on the Union gunboats plying the river.

With the eventual decline of the town by the time of the Civil War, why is it so important to see Grand Gulf when studying the Vicksburg Campaign? What could have happened to make this place so important to history? Although no longer the town of its heyday, it proved to be an obstacle to Grant. His plan in the spring of 1863 was to bring his troops across the Mississippi River from Louisiana in order to make a concentrated advance on Vicksburg from the south and east. Grant initially thought he might be able to cross and land at Grand Gulf, but Confederates had arrived previously with artillery and kept up

Beginning at 8:00 am on April 29, Rear Admiral David Dixon Porter brought his seven ironclads to bear against the Confederate artillery that had been arranged in two earthworks. Though successful in silencing some of the guns, others better sheltered on a high bluff continued a constant fire. As a result, Porter drew away his gunboats around 1:30 pm. However, as soon as dark fell, Porter resumed his concentrated attack on the Confederate gunners so that Union transports could pass protected behind him on the river to a point just south in order to pick up Grant's troops and bring them over to Mississippi. It was a turning point in the beginning of the end for Vicksburg.



Grand Gulf State Park was created in 1962 as a monument to both the Battle of Grand Gulf and the history of the enterprising and successful cotton town along the river. Visitors there today will find a museum, hiking trails, observation tower, picnic area and a few restored buildings left from the original town. For the Civil War historian, thirty-four cast aluminum signs were placed in the park to tell the story of the activity there.

In February 2018, BGES had a chance to visit Grand Gulf once again with Parker Hills on a Vicksburg tour. As the group went through the park, they noticed the shape the signs were in. Standing in such a warm humid climate for 56 years along the Mississippi River had taken its toll. They were rusted, hard to read, leaning; five had been removed because they were in such bad shape and were lying in a scrap pile in the woods. Luckily, Executive Director Len Riedel was among the group. A discussion quickly ensued and in talking with the officials at Grand Gulf, a BGES project was born with the assistance of Parker Hills as lead project supervisor "on the ground".

Getting back to HQ in Chatham, Len put out a call to BGES members for donations for the project. The response was overwhelming, and all of the monies needed were raised by BGES members by June – only four months! But we will get to that success in a minute, for I want to tell you of the process in rehabbing the signs.

Paul Gore of A to B signs of Clinton Mississippi was hired to do the actual work. He's worked with Parker before on projects at Raymond battlefield, so Parker knew what he was about. In order to save time, travel and money, Paul was able to park his camper at the Grand Gulf campground and use the park's gazebo as a workshop while he completed the project.

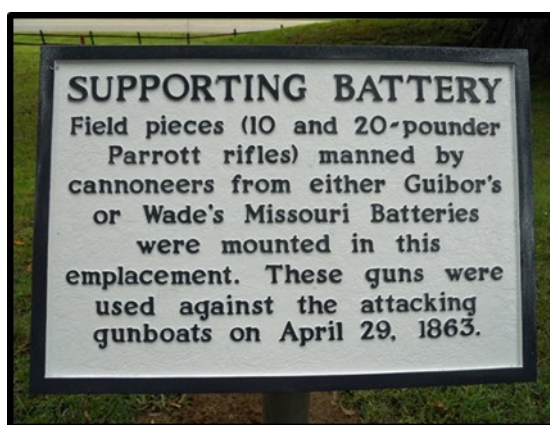


First of course, was taking stock of twenty-nine signs (remember five are in a scrap pile) and remove them from exhibit. Parker retrieved the additional five markers from the scrap pile and added them to the project. The signs were all sandblasted to bare metal (the letters on each sign are raised) and repainted with a base automotive paint. A roller was then used to repaint the raised lettering and the edges of each marker. Once the signs were ready, they could go back on their posts.

But there was a problem that had not been anticipated. Almost all of the thirty-four marker posts were found to be rusted out or damaged by mowers or other vehicles. The posts had to be replaced too! Originally set in concrete marker pads, it was quite a task to dig them out, but soon the new posts were in their place and the signs could go up at last.



Total cost of the project was \$7500.00 or \$220.00 per sign. This final total is inclusive of labor, posts, concrete, sandblasting, painting and repair. Thanks to the very generous members of BGES, the entire project, from inception to start to finish, was completed in just eight months! The project was conceptualized in February, approved in April, funded by June, and work completed by October! Wow! That's how BGES gets things done! A big thank you to all! We made a promise to Grand Gulf and it was a promise we gladly kept. Now Grand Gulf can continue to share the story of the Civil War now and well into the future.



Before and After! Thank you and congratulations BGES members!!

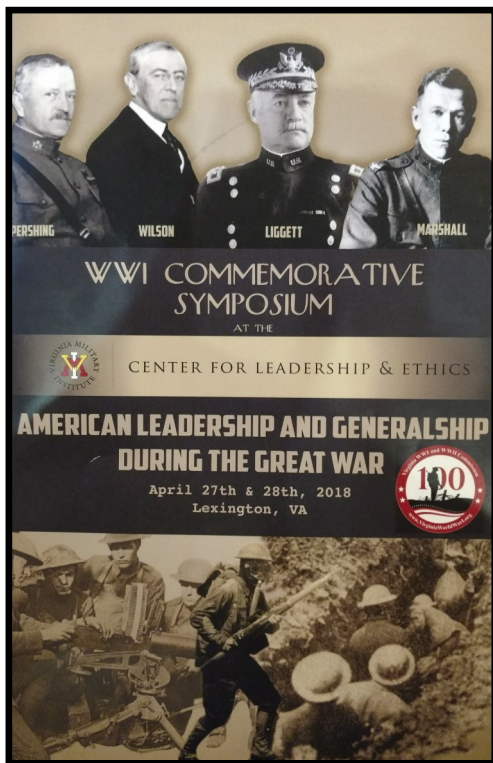
Another project well done!

If you'd like to know more detail about Grand Gulf/Raymond, Parker Hills has just completed a monograph for BGES that will be available in May. You can purchase it either at Grand Gulf State Park, or through BGES Headquarters in Chatham, Virginia. Price as yet to be determined.

The Centennial of World War I

I want to jump ahead an era and talk about a second passion of mine behind the Civil War. That's World War I. As most of us know, the past four years, 2014 to 2018, marked the centennial of this world changing event. When the Civil War centennial started, I was 5 years old and I don't remember much (except the cavalry horses at Manassas!!) although my father made sure we attended some of the special living history events.

With that in mind, when the World War I commemorative events began I was bound and determined to take part! Most of the time however, I was pea green, because most of the special events and exhibits were taking place in Europe. Unfortunately, I was not able to get "Over There" to attend and participate. But, as the fall of 2017 rolled around, and of course the entire year of 2018, more and more programs and events were being offered in the United States to observe our entry into the war. And fortunately, I got to attend and participate in many of them as well as reading various new articles and books that came out for the 100th commemoration.



Last spring, executive director Len Riedel and I attended an excellent and very comprehensive two-day symposium about American Leadership and Generalship in World War I sponsored by the Center for Leadership and Ethics at Virginia Military Institute (VMI). VMI is Len's alma mater by the way, and I received an "insider's tour" of the school including seeing where Stonewall Jackson's classroom was located, but that's a story for another time! For the symposium, numerous historians were brought in from around the country to discuss the character and importance of leadership, both military and political, as the US stepped out onto the world stage for the first time.



Last fall as the 100th anniversary of the armistice approached (November 11th), I found some great local programs to attend. Mount Olivet Cemetery (where the author of the Star-Spangled Banner is buried) offered candlelight tours to visit and "meet" some of the young men who had gone "over there" from Frederick County Maryland and who had been returned to eternal rest at Mount Olivet. During the tour, I got a surprise when one of the WWI doughboy "statues" came to life and began to talk to us! As someone who used to organize programs like this, if I can be surprised, it's the sign of a good program!



1918-2018

BELLS OF PEACE

A World War I Remembrance

The morning of November 11, 2018 found me on top of one of the parking decks in Frederick waiting to participate in the Bells of Peace Remembrance Program. This was a nation-wide program where by churches that were participating would ring their bells 21 times in observance of the 100th anniversary of the 11th hour of the 11th day. I also had a very cool app on my phone that allowed me to participate. I chose the sound of a cathedral bell and set it to ring 21 times automatically in conjunction with those bells of local churches. Being on top of the parking deck gave me a clear view of the city of Frederick and allowed me to hear the bells clearly. It was a chilling moment to hear all of those bells (including my phone app!) knowing that exactly 100 years ago, the guns fell silent after four long years of world war – many of whom said it was the war to end all wars.



Downtown Frederick Maryland as seen
from a parking deck rooftop



So why am I so excited about telling you about these anniversary adventures? It's because I want you to consider attending another very special WWI program with me. Len knows I am keen on the Great War and he's got some great connections in Europe. As a result, he introduced me (by email) to some very special historians and we worked on developing a World War I symposium and tour like no other only available through BGES! It is truly a one-time unique opportunity that you will want to take full advantage of! The dates for the program/tour is September 12-24, 2019, so mark it on your calendars now and join me! What follows is a quick glance at the highlights. Make sure you go to blueandgrayeducation.org for full details and registration.

We will start off on our adventure by flying into London. Our first evening will find us at the Royal Airforce Club enjoying a welcome dinner by our host for the evening and RAF club member, BGES Executive Director Len Riedel. After dinner, we will participate in an “Overview of the Great War” with noted historians from the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst (comparable to our West Point).



Imperial War Museum

The following day we visit the Imperial War Museum and its new exhibits created just for the WWI centenary and in the afternoon, we are whisked off to RMA Sandhurst to enjoy a tour of the campus from the Head of the Department of War Studies. But here is the best part! We will be STAYING at RMA Sandhurst the next two evenings while we attend a symposium about WWI to get us started for our tour. By the way, have I told you that the historians on our tour will be the very same historians you will meet at RMA Sandhurst? Yes! We have been able to secure two of these very fine historians for our adventure across the Western Front.



Royal Military Academy Sandhurst

Once we leave RMA Sandhurst, it is off to Dunkirk France. Yes, I know. When one thinks of Dunkirk, one thinks of World War II. But why not get to see the best of both? There will be time to explore the coastal defenses here of both wars.

From Dunkirk, it's off to travel east along the Western Front. Ypres, the Somme, Cambrai, Meuse-Argonne, Verdun and culminating at the site of the armistice at Compiegne where we will see a replica of the train car where the armistice was signed (Hitler burned the original one). At our farewell dinner, we will have the opportunity to discuss the Treaty of Versailles and learn about its far-reaching impact on the world today. Each day of this WWI tour will unfold the depths of the campaigns and battles and stories of soldiers that we can only truly experience with the RMA Sandhurst historians! WOW! I can hardly wait!

I hope I've been able to pique your interest and that you'd like to join us. We need at least 15 people to ensure that the trip is a go. If you want to join us, here is what I need you to do. We need a solid commitment with a deposit no later than June 1st. Hotels in Europe require a 20% deposit in order to make a reservation. We need to have your firm commitment in order to make those reservations in a timely manner.

I do so hope you will consider joining us! I can absolutely promise you it's a trip that you will never forget! If you've ever wanted to see WWI battlefields with engaging historians, now is the time to do it. See you soon.... "Over There!"

Gloria