

A 2021 BGES Civil War Field University Program: Sheridan Recovers the Valley, Fall 1864

With Scott Patchan and Gary Ecelbarger
September 7–11, 2021; from Winchester, Virginia

What a summer it was—call it the “Shenandoah Summer.” The valley was alive again with an active rebel army. They had been in Maryland and Pennsylvania. They had fired on the United States President in the fortifications of Washington, D.C., and now they were in control in the lower (northern portion) valley. Union fortunes had sunk so low that Abraham Lincoln had had his cabinet sign a pledge to make every effort to win the war between November 1864 and March 1865 after the upcoming electoral defeat, which seemed certain.

U.S. Grant had traveled with the primary eastern army and was now compelled to respond to the threats to the national capital. He might even need to return to D.C. to put things in order, leaving Benjamin Butler as the senior officer outside of Petersburg. It was a dark scenario into which Grant optimistically inserted Maj. Gen. Philip Sheridan. Sheridan was a diminutive character whose arms nearly reached the ground without his stooping. But, every pound was a fight, and Grant knew that if given the task, like a bulldog, Sheridan would not release Early once he got his teeth into him.

This is a program rich with characters and character—big battles and decisive turns of fortune. It is the Shenandoah Valley in 1864.

Tuesday, September 7, 2021

6:00 p.m. Meet at the Holiday Inn Express meeting room (on Foxridge Lane), where Scott and Gary will introduce you to the program of the next four days with emphasis on Early’s summer success and the imperative need for an anchor to stop the Union drift.

Dinner is on your own.

Wednesday, September 8, 2021

8:15 a.m. Departing at 8:15 a.m., we are down the valley to Harpers Ferry, where Union operations and regeneration seemed to flourish in the waters where the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers come together. We will visit the old city and Sheridan’s headquarters to discuss his arrival and upcoming plans. The vulnerability of the national capital meant that Sheridan would serve two masters—Grant, but more importantly, the War Department. Sheridan had been sent to mix it up, and he immediately energizes his cavalry to seek and attack Confederates where they may be found. We will close the day discussing the ramification of two sorties against rebel infantry on August 11 and 16. It was a different Federal army than the valley had previously seen.

We will return to the hotel and give you the night to reflect on it. Lunch is included but dinner is on your own.

Thursday, September 9, 2021

8:15 a.m. Load up at 8:15 as we head up the valley toward Kernstown. This small town had been fought over earlier in the war, and its position astride the Valley Turnpike would make it a key location. Lee had sent Early reinforcements—nearly 6,000 men—and Sheridan wanted to make sure they knew he was there. From Kernstown he departed on his own form of urban terrorism. “The Burning” would take the fertile valley at harvest time and ensure that anything that would help feed the Confederates or assist in their war effort was destroyed. Rarely has any action been so reviled.

Reinforced, Early was ready to push his 21,000 men forward, and those operations will take us back toward Harpers Ferry through Halltown, Kearneysville, Leetown, and Shepherdstown. The two weeks of operations spill over to Middleway and Smithville before petering out near Berryville. Like the Confederate offensive, it is a fast-moving day, and we will return to the hotel from Berryville.

Lunch is provided, and dinner is on your own.

Friday, September 10, 2021

8:15 a.m. Starting again at 8:15 a.m, today is devoted to the largest battle in the Shenandoah during the entire Civil War. The third battle of Winchester earned its own book, and our day will cover it in great detail starting with a cavalry engagement at Spout Spring and moving successively to the heavy infantry fighting in the First Woods, Middle Field, and the Second Woods.

It is hard to calculate the impact of a fluid and heavy battle on the morale of the competing forces, but if there was such a moment it was when Sheridan gained the field, taking personal command and inspiring his men to victory. Sheridan would be forever bonded to his men from this point, and a month later at Cedar Creek, it would be dramatically on display. But for now, it suffices to show you how the battle turned for the Union.

We are going to take you to many, many sites that have not been regularly visited by tour groups and will give you a boots-on-the-ground sense of Hackwood Plantation and Red Bud Run. You will meet George Crook and George Patton. At Stephenson’s Depot, we will pick up Sheridan’s cavalry as they cross the Opequon and slam into Breckinridge’s and then Early’s retreating infantry that propelled it through Winchester and southbound.

Lunch is included.

Saturday, September 11, 2021

With the southern army fleeing to the high ground south of Winchester, we will follow in their footsteps to Front Royal, where Thomas Mundford was unable to abate the Federal pursuit at the Shenandoah River crossing and fall back to the area around Fishers Hill. Because of the terrain, the battle has often been explained in simplistic terms, but the ground is significant, and it needed to be approached in a considered fashion. We will clarify what Sheridan intended to do to continue his attacks and how the Confederates misunderstood that intent and reacted in the wrong way, allowing Crook to unleash a devastating attack on the rebels' flank and rear.

A significant element of today will be a unique walk on Little North Mountain in the footsteps of the soldiers who maneuvered there. We will stand in the shadows of Lomax's cavalry and follow Crook's attack to Ramseur's Hill where the North Carolinians stoutly stood. We will then see how Alabama Col. Cullen Battle tenaciously defended Early's artillery and kept open a retreat route to ensure thousands of Confederates were not encircled. This should take most of our day, but if time permits, we will finish up in the Luray Valley to Milford, where Thomas Munford rallies and stops Gen. Alfred Torbert's move toward Early's rear, a move that could have resulted in the capture of Old Jube's entire force.

The 1864 Valley Campaign still had Cedar Creek and Waynesboro in the coming six months, but Sheridan had taken the starch out of the Confederates 1864 offensive—exactly what Grant promised Lincoln he would do. The Valley would enjoy a “Blue” winter as the Confederacy sputtered to its death.

Lunch is included, and you can depart around 5 p.m. if you so wish.

Read more about the tour at the BGES Blog's “Tour Talk”: [Sheridan Recovers the Valley with Gary Ecelbarger and Scott Patchan.](#)

About the Faculty:

Gary Ecelbarger has developed a reputation for enthusiastic presentations and excellent history. Although he refers to himself as an “amateur historian,” Gary's books are well researched, well written, and extremely well received. Constantly pushing the envelope by asking new questions and finding new answers, he has tackled a wide variety of America's wars and is highly sought in the touring community. Gary's fascination with the Civil War is primary and matches his Revolutionary War focus—a voracious student of history. BGES could not bring you a better scholar or educator.

Scott Patchan is at the top of a very short list of historians of any type who understand and can present northern Virginia and the Shenandoah Valley. He has begun to develop the same reputation in the Revolutionary War. He and Gary have worked together for many years now, and they present a very cogent story that is firmly based on extensive research and a “boots-on-the-ground” prep style. Neither

Scott nor Gary are so-called “academic” historians, but you ignore them at the risk of missing a very well-done program.

Hotel Information:

This program will be based at the Holiday Inn Express, 142 Foxgarden Lane in Winchester, VA 22603. There is a block of rooms for \$85 per night, plus 8.8% tax. For reservations, call 540-667-7050 and ask for the Blue and Gray Education Society rate code *BGE*. PLEASE NOTE THIS GROUP RATE GOES AWAY ON AUGUST 24, so make your reservations before then. You are not required to stay at the Headquarters hotel.

Transportation:

Winchester is located 75 miles west of Washington, D.C. via I-66 and I-81. The servicing airports are Washington Dulles (IAD) and Washington Reagan (DCA). If you fly, you will surely need to rent a car or arrange a limo.

Recommended Reading:

You will be provided maps upon arrival. The following books are suggested to enhance your readiness for the program. *Amazon.com* has a program to support non-profits IF YOU SIGN UP to support Blue and Gray Education Society (EIN 54-1720582) at [AmazonSmile](#). When you sign up there rather than the normal Amazon site, one-half of one percent of your purchase price will be provided to BGES as a donation from Amazon. This will apply not only to this purchase but others you may make at other times. Thank you.

Scott Patchan: [*The Last Battle of Winchester: Phil Sheridan, Jubal Early, and the Shenandoah Valley Campaign, August 7–September 19, 1864*](#)

Scott Patchan: [*Shenandoah Summer: The 1864 Valley Campaign*](#)

Jeffrey Wert: [*From Winchester to Cedar Creek: The Shenandoah Campaign of 1864*](#)

Registration Form

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Presented by Scott Patchan & Gary Ecelbarger
September 7–11, 2021; from Winchester, Virginia

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Registration includes four lunches, maps, the academic program, all admissions, support of two professional historians, tour director, and transportation appropriate to the registration. We will also provide snacks, bottled water, and a limited selection of sodas.

_____ Registration \$875

_____ Current BGES member \$800

_____ I am not a member but would like to join so that I can get the member's rate; or I am a member who is past-due to renew. Please accept my donation of \$_____ (must be \$75 or more, which is tax-deductible).

_____ I am sending a deposit of \$300 plus full payment for any memberships. Total enclosed is \$_____.

_____ I will pay the balance due before the event.

_____ Check enclosed.

Charge my (circle one) MC VISA AMEXP Discover \$_____

Exp: _____ CVV: _____

Signature: _____

Mail to BGES Seminars, P.O. Box 1176, Chatham, VA 24531; or fax credit card registrations to 434-432-0596. You may also register online at *blueandgrayeducation.org*.