

A BGES Civil War Field University Program:
Great Test in the East:
The Peninsula and Seven Days Campaigns
With Len Riedel and Paul Severance
March 20-26, 2022; from Williamsburg, VA

Abraham Lincoln inherited a broken nation split by secession and ideological differences. With the commencement of hostilities in April 1861, Lincoln had called into service volunteers from across the country in numbers never before seen on the continent. Early confrontations resulted in embarrassing defeats and changes in the war plans. Experience had been replaced with Youth, and Youth determined to know better than Authority, so in January 1862, President Lincoln ordered the armies of the United States to all be in motion against the rebellious forces by George Washington's Birthday (February 22), 1862.

This program is an analysis of the efforts of Gen. George McClellan, Commander of the United States Armies and the Army of the Potomac, to comply with Lincoln's directive. Rather than directly confront Confederate forces encamped near Manassas, Virginia, McClellan opted to move his entire army to the Virginia Peninsula and then move in a massive force to envelop and overwhelm the assembled Confederate forces and capture the Confederate capital at Richmond.

The resulting effort spread over nearly 3.5 months, and it was a failure caused by timidity, bad weather, a willingness to trust bad information, and an enemy that determined to take the initiative from the ponderous Union force. That rebel force did not do well either, but the capital was saved, and Lincoln was forced to attempt a new plan. Confederates shifted the field of conflict, and it was Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia that declared "Game On!"

This field study is the story of two different plans—the Northern Peninsula Campaign from March until the first part of June 1862; and the Seven Days Campaign, which started with the commencement of the command of Robert E. Lee and ended with the Lincoln administration's decision not to send reinforcements to McClellan's retreated army.

This tour brings the expertise of BGES Executive Director, Len Riedel, making a rare field appearance to guide the Peninsula Campaign (theme of his Master's degree); and Paul Severance (retired guru for senior American civilian and military leadership at the senior joint service school at Fort McNair, Washington, D.C., and now instructor for the College of William and Mary and Christopher Newport University, heading the Seven Days portion).

On February 9, 2022, Paul and Len had a spirited and informative discussion about this program. Click [here](#) to watch that hour-long show.

Sunday, March 20, 2022

Have an early dinner and at 7 PM meet at the Hampton Inn, Williamsburg Historic District. You will meet your cohort and pick up your nametags and reading books.

Paul and Len will speak and set the framework for this great campaign—Paul focusing on the ramifications of Lincoln’s General War Order #1 and Len on Virginia’s preparations for war.

Dinner is on your own.

Monday, March 21, 2022

8:15 AM: Our field is the Virginia Peninsula. It looks a great deal different than it did in March 1862; however, there are timeless markers, and we will depart en route to Fort Monroe, where we will stand on the ramparts and discuss the real estate and the Chesapeake Bay, Hampton Roads, and the antecedents of the 1862 test. There is a touch of everything, and this opening field chat will last the better part of an hour, perhaps a little more (please note we will not be visiting the Casemate Museum—it isn’t part of the story we need to tell here).

After Monroe, we will head to Camp Butler to discuss the lines of communications along the Peninsula, the control of the rivers, the *Monitor* and *Virginia*, and the activities at Gosport Naval Shipyard. We will punctuate this with a trip to the Monitor Conservation Center, where you can see some excellent displays and the refurbishment of the *Monitor*’s turret and guns.

Following lunch, we will look at the Department of the Peninsula commanded by Gen. John B. Magruder: What was his mission? How did he propose to accomplish it? And what actions did he take in support? Starting at Young’s Mill, we will discuss the first line of defense, how Magruder used it, how Lee affected those plans, and Magruder’s response to a detachment of a significant percentage of his assigned forces. We will then travel to the left anchor of this line at Harwood Mill.

When Magruder’s force was reduced, he had to consider a new plan that he could support with a smaller number of troops. We will pick up a remaining track of the old Hampton-York Road into Yorktown, in which we can highlight some additional challenges and opportunities for the engineers of Magruder’s force. We will finish today looking at the reinforced British earthworks near and around the town and visit the waterfront, considering its importance to the support of Magruder’s force.

Lunch is included, but dinner is on your own.

Tuesday, March 22, 2022

8:15 AM: After your breakfast, we will depart and travel via the Colonial Parkway to Yorktown and over to Gloucester Point—as in 1781, the defending forces viewed the point as integral to their security, and we will see how they accounted for it. We will then return to the Yorktown area and the grounds of the Moore House to discuss McClellan's assessment of the challenge presented by Magruder's preparations and his decision to move to siege operations.

Gen. Joseph E. Johnston's advance force arrives in early April, and we will see what preparations Magruder's Plan B entailed. We will travel to the headwaters of the Warwick River, where you will see the Red and White Redoubts, the connecting rifle pits, and follow Johnston's withdrawal from Yorktown and his abandonment of Magruder's second line.

Following lunch, we will go to Magruder's field headquarters at Lee Hall, continuing on to the right of Magruder's line at Lee's Mill (the right flank is located on Fort Eustis and Mulberry Island). It's at this point that McClellan's advance is checked on April 5, resulting in the Union commander's decision to besiege the Confederates—a decision that will delay the Federal operations by a month. This is best appreciated from the Union IV Corps headquarters at Warwick Court House. We will discuss how the Federals seek intelligence and how the Confederates deceive them as to the actual strength present on the line.

Our last stop of the day will be the center of the Confederate second line at Dam #1. This is really a superb stop with substantial Confederate earthworks, the flooded Warwick River, and the aggressive repulse of the Federals attack on April 16. This position is also abandoned by Johnston. We will leave it and, like Johnston, retreat to our hotel in Williamsburg.

Lunch is included, but dinner is on your own.

Wednesday, March 23, 2022

8:15 AM: We make the short drive over to the fragmentary remains of Fort Magruder, the centerpiece of Magruder's last stand line of defense. Constructed along a tight front where the tributaries of the James and York Rivers pinched in on the Peninsula, Magruder has crafted a line of some 14 redoubts, all within supporting distance to block a military ascent up the rivers or the Peninsula itself. We will open with a discussion of Joseph E. Johnston's assumption of command, his preparations, and his instructions from Richmond. Johnston has brought his own team with him that includes his deputy Gustavus Smith and James Longstreet, among others. Magruder is physically ill and is now relegated to the role of division commander. Johnston has withdrawn from Magruder's second line, and he doesn't intend to stop short of Richmond.

Leaving Fort Magruder, we will drive the last portion of the Federal's line from Yorktown and Newport News, and General Hooker's Federals' glancing attack against Fort Magruder's southern side. We will move to the center of the Federal attack and the Confederates counterattack while visiting Redoubts 1 and 2 and "the Bloody ravine." We will also point out the importance of the extant Quarterpath Road. Our final stops in the Battle of Williamsburg will be along the Colonial Parkway, where we will travel to Redoubts 14 and 11, where George A. Custer and Winfield Scott Hancock turn the Confederate line and miss a chance to destroy Longstreet's rear guard.

Following lunch, we will walk across the street to the Wren Building at the College of William and Mary to discuss the Confederate withdrawal toward Richmond and along the Richmond Road. Following in those footsteps, we next stop near the Richmond International Airport to see the incomplete earthworks that had been built over the previous year. We will finish the day with the two-day battle of Seven Pines and the wounding of Joseph E. Johnston.

Lunch is on your own, as is dinner.

Thursday, March 24, 2022

7:45 AM depart: Lee is the new commander of the Army of Northern Virginia, and he is different from Johnston. As he transitions from the desk next to President Davis, he crafts a plan to destroy the stationary Union Army. Indeed, McClellan will do nothing over the next three weeks other than extend his right to hold hands with an addition: Federal Corps under the command of Irvin McDowell, which he expects to come down from Fredericksburg. That unit has been released and then recalled when the Confederate Army, under the command of Stonewall Jackson, has disquieted the Lincoln administration, causing them to fear for the security of their capital.

We will start at Lee's headquarters at the Dabbs House, where Lee is visited by Gen. JEB Stuart, who has proposed a recon mission. Lee rejects it but substitutes a wide-ranging mission to fill in missing pieces of his assumptions about the Federal force deployments. We will then ride approximately half of Stuart's Ride, ironically doing what Lee preferred he do and return after reaching Tunstall Station—in doing so, you will learn a great deal about how really important this operation was. At Old Tavern, we will discuss McClellan's intent and operational plan. In this, you will see a genuine disconnect between McClellan and his boss, Abraham Lincoln.

After lunch, we will look at the key component of his plan to destroy first Fitz John Porter and then the remainder of the Union Army—it is really breathtaking. As we ride to Louisa and then follow Jackson from the Valley to his supporting position on Lee's left, the Stuart Ride becomes even more significant. The day will finish with a discussion of McClellan's only offensive action in the campaign—the fight at Oak Grove. We will then return to the Hampton Inn in Williamsburg.

Lunch is included, but dinner is on your own.

Friday, March 25, 2022

8 AM: Lee has brought Jackson to him, but he is not quite ready, and Lee is ready to pull the trigger. Gen. AP Hill, anticipating his commander's order, attacks at Mechanicsville. The turning movement pushes the Federals back upon themselves and, despite holding imposing positions along Ellerson's Mill and Beaver Dam Creek, the Federals are pushed away from their initial points of contact toward a very substantial position at Gaines Mill.

Gaines Mill is the largest of the engagements of the Seven Days and is the only clear Confederate victory. We will spend the entire rest of the morning, and perhaps a bit of the afternoon, walking many of the battlefield maneuvers and parsing and analyzing the multiple lessons in war-fighting that this field reveals—friction, fog of war, and risk analysis. Another excellent field forum will be the group discussion on the contrast between the commander's intent and the related thoughts of conceptual unity. On the Federal side, this is a splendid micro-study of responsiveness, initiative, and adaptation to events as they unfold.

Following lunch on the field at Gaines Mill, we will head to Garnett's and Golding Farms, where we will examine a key element of the Lee plan and how Robert Toombs nearly blew Lee's cover. McClellan has determined to abandon his York River supply line and reestablish it on the James River. At Savage Station, General Magruder is facing Gen. Edwin Vose Sumner. Here, we will delve into a wonderful hodgepodge of controversy that animates students to this day. Magruder is told to be aggressive with the Federals, but he seeks support, and with the Grapevine and New Bridges close by, he expects Stonewall Jackson to engage—he doesn't, because he has another important duty he must attend too. Simpletons, including some historians, have attributed it to being a Sunday and Jackson's religious beliefs about not fighting on Sunday. Let us just say that as we chat about the use of a rail-mounted artillery piece, there are some excellent clues about Lee's master plan to destroy the enemy army. On the way back to our hotel, we will show you some geographic field data that will animate your thinking this night.

Lunch is included.

Saturday, March 26, 2022

8 AM, depart: As we start our sixth field day, Len says, "I cannot say in my 30 years of doing tours that I have seen a longer study of the Peninsula and Seven Days—and if you reflect on this offering, you will see that we are taking you through a year of preparation and then a military operation that spans three months and three weeks (mid-March 1862 through early July 1862). For understanding this early war operation and all it represents—it couldn't be shorter, nor would I remove anything."

Today, we pick up a Union Army in full retreat and a Confederate commander with a number of arrows in his quiver, looking for various intercept points that would allow him to destroy his foe between the rivers. Lee has created a killing field and has defined the parameters of it. Our first stop today is White Oak Swamp and the engagement there and the troubled crossing. Again, traditionally Jackson has been criticized for not coming to the aid of a fellow commander. We will offer you a possible solution that history has never seriously considered and yet should. You will get the chance—do we make sense? You decide.

Across White Oak Swamp, another large engagement is joined at Frazier's Farm, which is also known to history as the Battle of Glendale. Because of the heavy timber that was not there at the time of the engagement, a tactical understanding is going to be overshadowed by a return to the two commanders' intents. Some controversy takes place outside the boundaries of the field that over the years has worked against men such as Magruder and Theophilus Holmes, and yet if we put those mini-dramas aside, you will see the very cogent plans of Robert E Lee and will understand his frustrated summary that opens his official report.

Fortunately, the battlefield of Malvern Hill is cleared to look very much as it did on July 1, 1862, and we will enjoy a solid interpretation of the tragic but understandable action. We will see again the fog of war as orders get misplayed and local guides have different names for the same road that puts Lee's maneuvering units out of place and late to execute his plans. It may not have made a difference on July 1, but it was certainly contributory to the overall failure of Lee to achieve his objective.

In the wake of this titanic and continuous struggle, we will return to Williamsburg along the River Road and consider the final missed opportunity to severely bloody McClellan's army along Evelington Heights near Berkley Plantation.

Lunch is included, and we will return to the hotel about 5 PM. You will have learned and been given a great deal to chew on. Len says, "I am sure you will be happy!"

About the Faculty:

Len Riedel is the Executive Director of the Blue and Gray Education Society. Since 1994, Len has been crafting tours on fields all over the world that are reputed for their scholarly content, behind the scene's access, and comprehensive range. A graduate of the Virginia Military Institute and Old Dominion University, where he received his MA degree, he is a retired USAF officer, and he has produced four books with the National Geographic. He was the editor of the latest, *The Civil War: A Traveler's Guide* (2016). He is engineering a new guidebook on the Revolutionary War, which is scheduled for release in October 2022.

Paul Severance received his Ph.D. from Virginia Polytechnical and State University and is a retired senior instructor for the National Defense University at Fort McNair

in Washington, D.C. Responsible for the construction of staff rides that challenged and instructed cabinet level and other senior civilian and military leadership, Paul is well grounded in the theoretical constructs of war and various intellectual lines of inquiry that led to national strategic decisions. His strength is in drawing out the intellectual framework of national strategy and the military linchpins to implement the same. He is now instructing on leadership for both the College of William and Mary and Christopher Newport University.

Hotel Information:

This program will be based at the Hampton Inn, Williamsburg Historical District, 911 Capitol Landing Road, Williamsburg 23105 (757-941-1777). The room rate for our group is \$105 per night, plus tax. Reservations must be made by March 13. The room block goes away after that date. Ask for the Blue and Gray Education rate. Follow [this link](#) to book your room directly within the block.

Your hotel is not included with the registration fee.

Transportation:

The servicing airport is Richmond (RIC), which is served by every major airline. Newport News (PHF) is a closer alternative but has limited service. Norfolk (ORF) requires you to negotiate the tunnel system, which is reputed for its frequent backups of up to 6 miles in both directions. There are rental car companies at the airport. Uber and Lyft offer taxi-type services. Check limo services as well, since rental cars are fairly expensive since the pandemic.

Recommended Reading:

You will be provided with 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.

Brian Burton: [*Extraordinary Circumstances: The Seven Days Battles*](#)

Joel Cook: [*The Siege of Richmond: A Narrative of the Military Operations of Major General George B. McClellan During May and June 1862*](#)

Joseph P. Cullen: [*Peninsula Campaign 1862: McClellan and Lee Struggle for Richmond*](#)

Douglas S. Freeman: [*Lee's Lieutenants, Volume 1*](#)

Joseph E. Johnston: [*Narrative of Military Operations during the Civil War*](#)

James Longstreet: [*From Manassas to Appomattox: Memoirs of the Civil War in America*](#)

John Bankhead Magruder: [*Major-General Magruder's Report of His Operations on the Peninsula and of the Battles of Savage Station and Malvern Hill, Near Richmond, 1862*](#)

Stephen W. Sears: [*To the Gates of Richmond: The Peninsula Campaign*](#)

Thomas M. Settles: [*John Bankhead Magruder: A Military Reappraisal*](#)

Alexander Webb: [*Peninsula*](#)

Registration Form
Great Test in the East?
The 1862 Peninsula and Seven Days
Campaigns
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Presented by Len Riedel and Paul Severance
March 20-26, 2022; from Williamsburg, VA

Name (s): _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Registration includes six lunches and two dinners, maps, the academic program, support of two professional historians, a tour director, and transportation. We will also provide snacks and cold drinks.

_____ Registration \$1350

_____ Current BGES member \$1250

_____ 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 per person plus full payment for any memberships. Total enclosed is \$_____.

And (if applicable)

_____ I will pay the balance due before the event.

_____ Check enclosed.

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

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