

**BGES PRESENTS:  
A WEEKEND OF HISTORY  
WITH DENNIS FRYE**

**HARPERS FERRY, SOUTHERN LIGHTNING ROD FOR  
JOHN BROWN AND STONEWALL JACKSON**

Recently historian Dennis Frye retired after a distinguished career in the National Park Service and as a founding member and past President of the Association for the Preservation of Civil War Sites (APCWS). A focused historian and evangelist for the preservation of American history, he lives in a “witness house” on the Antietam Battlefield and is a highly respected and high energy expert on the region where he grew up and has lived all his life.

Bleeding Kansas had energized the country and John Brown, as an evangelist--some might argue a madman believed God had called for him to be an avenging angel against the scourge of slavery. He had answered the call and for more than 3 years he had been “At War” shedding blood along the Kansas-Missouri border. Now he believed that it was time to take his crusade national and no place was more visible than Virginia.

Dennis Frye grew up in the shadow of John Brown’s diabolical plot. Slave uprisings were not uncommon in the South and Brown’s scheme was simple and dramatic—seize the weaponry in the Federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry and then arm an army of rebellious slaves that would sweep the Valley of Virginia and drench the state in blood as other slaves rose up and joined them across the state and the South.

The famous Hymn goes: “John Brown’s body lies a moldering in his grave but his soul goes marching on”...and indeed the Civil War did not end until, as he predicted, “the crimes of this guilty land (would never be) were indeed purged away (sic) with blood.” Abraham Lincoln made sad acknowledgement of that fact in his Second Inaugural Address.

The Civil War is overwhelming and the bloodshed at nearby Antietam Creek has been unmatched in any other American battle. This overshadows the pivotal moment that Brown created. We will spend a day in John Brown’s world visiting the Kennedy Farm and immersing ourselves in the great plot with Dennis’s excellent narrative.

Long before he died General Thomas J. Jackson was known world-wide. The British and French both had observers in America and his austere promptitude and battlefield discipline at Manassas where he stood like a “Stonewall, or in “Stonewall’s Valley” where he befuddled three Union Commanders with his lightning moves and unexpected strikes made him legendary in his own time. With his death in May 1863 and his national funeral in Richmond followed by his quiet return via the James River to his quiet Lexington he was enshrined as one of the nation’s greatest soldiers.

Time and modern social politics has dulled the patina on his monuments and closer examination has dropped his reputation as a tactical commander; however, there is no doubt his campaigns and battles still command much consideration. So for one day, we will take you to where historian Dennis Frye believes he created his greatest victory—one that has been overshadowed by the great battle of Antietam.

What a great way to spend a late Summer weekend—at one of the most beautiful places on earth—I can already taste the ice cream at Nutters in downtown Sharpsburg.

### **Friday, September 15, 2023**

Meet Dennis at 6:00 PM at the headquarters hotel, Fairfield Inn Martinsburg for an opening lecture “*September Suspense, Lincoln’s Union in Peril*” which is based on his book by the same name. Afterwards you will be free to go to dinner on your own.

### **Saturday, September 16, 2023**

8:00 AM Depart the hotel for the short trip over to the Kennedy Farm staging area for the Brown Raid. Once the stage is set we will head for the NPS’s Harper’s Ferry National Historical Park (NHP) Dennis will orient us to the town of Harpers Ferry and the Armory and Arsenal where weapons were made and stored. We will then engage with John Brown, learn his background and plans. We will meet the key members who were with him and talk about those like Harriett Tubman and Frederick Douglass who were not. The viability of the plan will be critiqued and then we will follow the plot, meet the state and Federal response that included US Marines, JEB Stuart and of course Robert E. Lee. We will find out how Lee ended up there and how he handled the crisis.

We will then head to Charles Town where Brown was turned over to the State of Virginia, tried, convicted and executed. While there we will see key sites related to his trial and execution and will meet Major Thomas Jackson and the VMI Corps of Cadets.

### **Sunday, September 17, 2023**

8:00 AM Depart the hotel where we will return to the Harpers Ferry NHP, Dennis will fast forward to September 1862 and stipulate the thrust of his thesis that Stonewall Jackson’s victory at Harpers Ferry was his greatest accomplishment during the Civil War and that it is also the least celebrated.

Nothing in Jackson’s tactical career compares to his conquest of Harpers Ferry. In this his last independent command of the war, Stonewall faces his most difficult natural obstacle, defended by an obstinate enemy, under the pressures of an impossible timeline. Indeed the miracle of General Lee’s Special Orders #191 were not that they were lost or found but that they worked. Why? Search Jackson’s actions and his tactical brilliance.

You will spend the morning investigating Bolivar Heights and School House Ridge—both critical to Jackson’s decisions concerning the fate of the forces in the town below. Dennis’ 20 years as the Chief Historian at Harpers Ferry well prepared him to study, consider and synthesize Harpers Ferry like no one else—we guarantee he will bring you new perspectives about Stonewall and this September 1862 operation.

After lunch, we will move on to Sharpsburg, on the 161st Anniversary of the battle, following Jackson’s route as he moves rapidly to Lee who is consolidating his command in front of the crossings of the Potomac River. After arriving, Jackson is assigned to command and secure Lee’s left where the bulk of the epic fighting on September 17<sup>th</sup> took place—names like the Cornfield, the East Woods and the West Woods near the Dunker Church are some of the bloodiest ground in America’s bloodiest single day ever. Stonewall’s well-earned sobriquet would be carved in stone and highlighted in blood as his divisions suffered more casualties than any other Confederate unit as they repulsed three Federal Corps, the I, XII and the II.

This is a day of Stonewall and the exchanges back and forth will leave you with a new appreciation for the impact of this complicated man. We will finish by 5 PM.

#### **About the Faculty:**

**Dennis Frye** retired after 32 years in the NPS at Harpers Ferry. He is also native to the area and has walked the grounds since his youth. He is a recipient of the Department of Interior’s Distinguished Service Award” the highest in the Department. He holds the American Battlefield Trust’s “Shelby Foote Award” and the Nevin-Freeman Award for his leadership in Battlefield Preservation—many may recall he was a founding member of the Association for the Preservation of Civil War Sites and was the second Executive Director of that group.

Today he owns and restored Ambrose Burnside’s post Antietam Headquarters which hosted Abraham Lincoln after the famous 1862 battle.

#### **Hotel Information:**

This program is based out of the Fairfield Inn, 451 Foxcroft Ave, Martinsburg, WV (304) 901-3003. The Blue and Gray group rate of \$119 per night plus tax expires August 15<sup>th</sup>.

#### **Transportation:**

The servicing airport is Baltimore Washington International (BWI) more than an hour east of Martinsburg and Dulles (IAD) is an hour southeast of Martinsburg. Trains do service the area—mostly the Maryland Area Regional Commuter (MARC) however, Amtrak also comes through. I do not know if MARC is servicing on the weekend. Martinsburg is right off I-81.

### **Recommended Reading:**

You will be provided with maps upon arrival. The following books are suggested to enhance your readiness for the program.

Dennis Frye will have copies of his books available for purchase or you can likely purchase them from any of the Eastern National Book stores we visit.

Dennis E. Frye: **Antietam Shadows: Mystery, Myth & Machination**

Dennis E. Frye: **Confluence: Harpers Ferry as Destiny**

Dennis Frye, **September Suspense: Lincoln's Union in Peril**

Dennis Frye: **History and Tour Guide of Stonewall Jackson's Battle of Harpers Ferry**

Dennis Frye: **Harpers Ferry Under Fire: A Border Town During the Civil War**

Stephen Sears, **Landscape Turned Red**

Edwin C. Bearss, **Fields of Honor**

**REGISTRATION FORM FOR  
A WEEKEND OF HISTORY  
HARPERS FERRY, SOUTHERN LIGHTING ROD FOR  
JOHN BROWN AND STONEWALL JACKSON  
September 15-17, 2023 from Martinsburg, WV**

Name (s): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Emails: \_\_\_\_\_

Registration includes opening lecture, two lunches, battlefield maps, the academic program, support of a professional historian, tour director and transportation appropriate to the registration. We will also provide snacks and bottled water.

\_\_\_\_\_ Registration \$595

\_\_\_\_\_ Current BGES member \$550

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