

A BGES' Civil War Field University Program:
Before the Little Big Horn,
the Civil War of General George A. Custer
Presented by Neil Mangum
September 28-October 5, 2024; from Sandston, Virginia

Some names and events resonate throughout history—who doesn't have an image in their mind of Patton, Benedict Arnold, Alvin York, or Old Hickory? But one name seems to rise above all of them and that is CUSTER. We know of "Custer's Last Stand" and "The Boy General." His image is emblazoned upon our conscious by great movies and legendary actors like Errol Flynn who played him in *They Died with Their Boots On*. But by age 36 he was dead, a legend of gargantuan dimensions.

This tour looks at the Civil War that George Custer experienced. It is rich and romantic, filled with combat at the highest level and a flair for presence at some of the most memorable events of the Civil War in the East. Elevated to brigadier general at age 23, he was called upon, with other rising stars, to infuse enthusiasm, competence, and aggressiveness into an ineffective cavalry that was constantly being bested by Confederate cavalry general, JEB Stuart. It is an essential study if you are to understand events on the rolling hills of Montana in June 1876.

ITINERARY

Saturday, September 28, 2024

Check in to the Holiday Inn Express at Sandston, Virginia. Neil Magnum, your tour leader, and Len Riedel will meet you in the lobby at 8 p.m. to distribute maps and overview the program.

You should arrange dinner on your own. Your hotel is included.

Sunday, September 29, 2024

Bags out by 8:15 a.m., and mount up at 8:30 a.m. Our goal today is to bundle up Custer service under George McClellan and Alfred Pleasanton before he is promoted to general officer. With the exception of the Peninsula Campaign, which moves in the wrong direction, we will feature Brandy Station, First Manassas, and the cavalry actions at Aldie, Middleburg, and Upperville.

Lunch and dinner are included, along with the hotel in Frederick, Maryland.

Monday September 30, 2024

Leave your bags in your room as we will return this evening. Departure is at 8:15 a.m. We will make a short trip over to the site where George Meade assumes command of the Army of the Potomac with Lee already in Pennsylvania. We will then talk about the decision to elevate some young officers to infuse a new spirit of aggressiveness in the cavalry—one of the beneficiaries, of course, would be George A. Custer, who at 23 becomes a brigadier general in command of a brigade of Michigan cavalry, the 1st, 5th, 6th and 7th regiments. The 7th Cavalry would become immortal 13 years later.

Custer is immediately thrust into action, and our day will examine him in the upcoming Gettysburg campaign, where he will become entangled with Confederate cavalry at Hanover on June 30, in Hunterstown on July 2, and east of Gettysburg on July 3. After lunch, we will strike out as Union horse attempts to hamper Robert E. Lee's withdrawal from Pennsylvania. This afternoon features engagements at Monterey Pass and Smithsburg.

We will return to our hotel in Frederick. Today, lunch and your hotel are included. Dinner, however, is on your own.

Tuesday October 1, 2024

Bags out at 8 and depart at 8:15. Lee is still in Maryland, trapped with his back against the Potomac. We take in several sites related to the pursuit but will focus on the battle at Falling Waters as Custer surprises Confederates trying to cross the river. After lunch, we will then cross into West Virginia (Virginia at this time of the war) and head back to Northern Virginia, discussing the October 1863 battle at Buckland Mill, where Confederate cavalry ambushed General Kilpatrick and routed the Federal horse in what is known to history as the Buckland Races near Haymarket, Virginia.

We will stop at the historic marker for Newby's Crossroads, where an overly aggressive Custer nearly stumbled into a very capable Confederate rear guard around July 24, 1863. We will finish the day viewing the battle of Culpeper Courthouse, where Custer's Michiganders spearheaded an assault on the town railroad station, capturing more than 100 Confederates and 3 pieces of artillery on September 13, 1863. We will also visit Greenwood Hill, where Custer is wounded.

We will overnight in Culpeper. Your lunch, dinner, and hotel are all included.

Wednesday October 2, 2024

Leave your bags in place as we depart at 8:00 a.m. With the arrival of Ulysses S. Grant in the spring of 1864, the Union begins its final drive to win the war. Camped

near Culpeper, the Federal army moves into the Wilderness of Spotsylvania. Led by new cavalry commander, Phil Sheridan, Custer's Wolverines will be in the van of the Army of the Potomac's advance to the outskirts of Richmond. We will open with a sharp engagement at Todd's Tavern, which will produce a decision to cut Sheridan loose from Meade's army and pursue Stuart's cavalry to its death.

We will hit the Confederate supply depot at Beaver Dam Station and Yellow Tavern, where Stuart receives a mortal wound from the revolver of one of Custer's troopers. Following lunch, we will move farther afield as Sheridan seeks succor from Federal forces on the Peninsula. This will take us to Meadow Bridge, Haws Shop, and a place near the 1862 Gaines Mill battlefield known as Cold Harbor.

Once reunited with Grant, Sheridan is sent to support David Hunter's advance up the Shenandoah Valley, where he will run into a well-positioned Confederate force at Trevilian Station. Once again, Custer's ambition and inexperience nearly cause him a catastrophe—some have thought it to be "Custer's First Last Stand." You will see what they mean. We should return to Culpeper by 6 p.m. En route, you will see his headquarters at Clover Hill Farm.

Lunch and your hotel are included, but dinner is on your own.

Thursday October 3, 2024

Bags out by 7:45 a.m. as we depart again at 8 a.m. With Lee's army pinned to Petersburg and siege lines, Lee sends Jubal Early to chase David Hunter away from the Southside Railroad at Lynchburg. With Hunter's departure into the mountains, Early was free to maraud in the lower Shenandoah Valley—a battle at Monocacy Junction brings Federal troops rapidly back to DC and Phil Sheridan is given command of the Valley. This day examines Custer's deployment and operations in the Valley of Virginia.

Our stops today include Front Royal, where the war turns ugly with executions of Mosby's guerillas being answered by retaliatory executions of some of Custer's men. We will then see the very important third battle of Winchester on September 19, 1864. As the fighting rages on, we will finish the day with tours of Cedar Creek, Tom's Brook, and Lacey Spring. We will also see Custer's winter quarters at Long Meadows, where a warm fire and comforting woman (his wife Libbie) welcomes him.

We will head to our hotel near Richmond, where dinner will be on your own. We will have included lunch and your hotel.

Friday October 4, 2024

Custer has built a very impressive combat résumé. But no operation is more important than the final acts in the spring of 1865. We are positioned to examine

them by touring the Petersburg battlefield and then moving to Grant's western boundaries. We will examine Custer's role at Dinwiddie Courthouse and the decisive battle at Five Forks.

With Lee's lines broken, we pick up the pursuit of this wounded panther along what today is known as "Lee's Retreat." Commencing from a point abeam the Southside Railroad at Sutherland Station, we will go to Namozine Church, where Custer will engage on April 3, 1865. Our next stop will be the penultimate blow against Lee's fading hopes at Saylor's Creek. Here Lee's speaks incredulously asking, "Is this army dissolved?"

We will, like Lee, pull into Farmville, where we will spend the night. Lunch, dinner, and the hotel are included.

Saturday, October 5, 2024

Bags out at 8 a.m. with a departure at 8:15 a.m. After Appomattox, the armies rapidly dispersed, as will we. Horses move faster than infantry, and we will move ahead of Lee's legions to a blocking position and the capture of supply wagons at Appomattox Station. First, we will discuss the engagement at Cumberland Church before discussing, on site, the Saturday, April 8 cavalry skirmish involving Custer near Appomattox Station, concluding with a review of the position Custer's Division occupied at the end game.

The active tour ends with a visit and interpretation of Appomattox Courthouse and the final acts in the surrender of Lee's army.

After lunch we will return to Richmond, which is approximately two hours east, where we will return you to the Holiday Inn Express around 4 p.m. If flying out, you could make flights after 6 p.m.

Lunch is included.

About the Faculty

Neil Mangum, one of the nation's foremost historians, is an expert on frontier life and has had a passion for General Custer during most of that time. A retired National Park Service official from Virginia, he served as superintendent at the Little Big Horn National Battlefield as it transitioned from Custer National Battlefield. Neil is author of [*Battle of the Rosebud: Prelude to the Little Big Horn*](#). He has a following, and most people on this trip will have traveled with him before, which makes this event even nicer.

Hotel Information

The headquarters hotel is the Holiday Inn Express, 491 International Drive, Sandston, VA 23150; 804-222-1499. Your hotel for seven nights is included in your registration fee. We will spend the nights of September 29 and 30 in Frederick, October 1 and 2 in Culpeper, October 3 in the vicinity of Richmond, and October 4 in Farmville. If you would like to stay at the Holiday Inn Express upon our return, on October 5, the rate is \$129 plus tax. You must make your own reservation for that night no later than September 9 to secure our group rate.

Transportation

The arrival airport is Richmond International (RIC). Amtrak services Richmond. If driving, you will have to make arrangements with the headquarters hotel to leave your car while we are traveling.

Recommended Reading

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

Asa B. Isham: [*Seventh Michigan Cavalry of Custer's Wolverine Brigade*](#)

Ralph Kirshner: [*The Class of 1861: Custer, Ames, and Their Classmates after West Point*](#)

Stephen Starr: *The Union Cavalry in the Civil War*. [Vols. 1 & 2](#) deal with war in the East.

Jeffrey D. Wert: [*Custer: The Controversial Life of George Armstrong Custer*](#)

Frederick Whittaker and Whitelaw Reid: [*Custer, The Civil War Years*](#)

Eric Wittenberg ed.: [*One of Custer's Wolverines: The Civil War Letters of General James Kidd, 6th Michigan Cavalry*](#)

Registration Form
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Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Registration includes seven nights' lodging, seven lunches, and three dinners; a map package; the academic program; support of a professional historian and a tour director; and all admissions and ground transportation. We will also provide snacks, bottled water, and a limited selection of sodas.

_____ Current BGES member \$2,500 single

_____ Current BGES member \$2,000 per person double occupancy

_____ Non-BGES member \$2,600 single

_____ Non-BGES member \$2,100 double occupancy per person

_____ 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 membership donation of \$_____ (must be \$75 or more, which is tax-deductible; see blueandgrayeducation.org for levels).

_____ I am sending a deposit of \$500 per person and/or 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 cards to 434-432-0596. You may also register online at www.blueandgrayeducation.org.