



HFCWRT Monthly Newsletter

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- DATE:** Wednesday, October 10th, 2018
- TIME:** Dinner 6:30 PM; Program 7:30 PM
- PLACE:** Camp Hill Methodist Church, Harpers Ferry, WV
- SPEAKER:** James Rada
- SUBJECT:** Daughters of Charity

The Speaker:

James Rada, Jr. has written many works of historical fiction and non-fiction history. They include the popular books *Saving Shallmar: Christmas Spirit in a Coal Town*, *Canawlers*, and *Battlefield Angels: The Daughters of Charity Work as Civil War Nurses*. He lives in Gettysburg, PA, where he works as a freelance writer. James has received numerous awards from the Maryland-Delaware-DC Press Association, Associated Press, Maryland State Teachers Association, Society of Professional Journalists, and Community Newspapers Holdings, Inc. for his newspaper writing.

The Subject

The Daughters of Charity in Emmitsburg, MD, were the only trained nurses in the country at the start of the Civil War. Their services were so in demand that both the Union and Confederacy allowed them to cross the borders unimpeded at the start of the war. The brutality of the war would test even their abilities as they ran hospitals, served on troop transports and provided care in battlefield hospitals and ambulances. They even had their own Central House occupied by armies from both sides of the war.

The Meal

A family-style meal will be served at 6:30 PM prior to the program. The cost of the meal is \$15.00 per person. Reservations for the meal **must be made no later than Sunday, October 8th**, with Christopher Craig ccraig@laurellodge.com or 000-000-0000. The meal will consist of baked meat loaf, mashed potatoes, gravy, buttered green peas & pearl onions, rolls, Butter, iced tea, coffee, and dessert.

Mounted Confederates on the Prowl

By Robert K. Krick

The Grey-Ghost syndrome exerts pervasive power on Americans who read about the Civil War. John Singleton Mosby resonates most notably and often in the annals of partisan rangers launching moonlit raids. McNeill's Rangers did the same thing and did it well, not from Mosby's zone operations, but with considerably less publicity, then and since.

Frantic deeds of derring-do, executed on sweat-flecked steeds, unquestionably generate drama and adventure. That does not necessarily carry any weight in the immemorial dispute about the broader influence of raiders on national war aims. Enthusiasts for the partisans insist that they levied a major impact on the theater; others are pretty sure they did not.

Part of the McNeill legend grew from tales about his gallantry toward prisoners, despite the savagery that often accompanies irregular combat. An Ohioan, writing in mid-1864, when both sides demonized their foemen, told a glowing story about his treatment. McNeill warned his captives that Confederate guards would rob them blind and urged them to hand over their valuables for safekeeping. The ranger chief looked up the prisoners later and returned all of their "money and trinkets" and added a forty-dollar gift. Out of such tales blossom legends.

Postwar bitterness did not reflect that level of wartime chivalry. Six years after the war, the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals published a twenty-two-page pamphlet indicting raider John S. Arnold as a horse thief. Poor Arnold had captured a Yankee general's charger in a military operation, but now fell prey to vengeful Jacobins in black robes. The American courts only have evolved to an ethical and apolitical posture in recent years.

No one ever has thoroughly investigated and written the story of the raiders led by John Hanson McNeill and his son Jesse. Steve French's work, *Phantoms of the South Fork: Captain McNeill and His Rangers* (Kent State University Press, 2017), surely fills that prescription. His diligent endeavors unearthed sources great and small across a wide spectrum. French did not find everything, but deserves high marks for research—the single most important criterion for a topic with rich sources extant.

The moment at center stage under the brightest lights for McNeill's unit came in February 1865 when a few score rangers rode into Cumberland, Maryland, and captured Federal Generals Crook and Kelley. French quotes Kelley in summary: "It is a disgrace, that two major-generals should be captured by a beardless, broken-legged boy, with a handful of men."

Phantoms includes serviceable maps that cover McNeill's theater amply. Some localized sketches would be useful to illuminate the chapters covering such lesser actions as Johnson's Run (where was the ice house *vis a vis* the run and the hill, etc.?). A good index, nicely articulated with subordinate topics, deserves recognition in an era when shoddy indexes proliferate annoyingly. This is a good book.

Robert K. Krick lives in Fredericksburg, Virginia.

On this Day, October 11th 1862

Jeb Stuart at Chambersburg reported that all officials had fled on the approach of the Confederates. His men cut telegraph wires, seized horses, and destroyed what military equipment they could not bring away. Railroad machine shops, depots, and several trains were also wrecked. In the afternoon Stuart moved eastward and then south through Emmitsburg, MD, in route to the Potomac. The following day, Stuart's Confederate cavalry, after brief skirmishing near the mouth of the Monocacy in Maryland, crossed the Potomac back into Virginia near Poolsville, completing another ride around McCellan. (Excerpted from *The Civil War Day by Day*, E. B. Long, published by Doubleday)