



# THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE



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798th REGULAR MEETING, Friday, January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021

## Jennifer Murray on: *“General George Meade”*

**Zoom Meeting. Time: Jan. 8, 2021 07:30 PM CST**



Dr. Jennifer M. Murray is a military historian, with a specialization in the American Civil War, in the Department of History at Oklahoma State University. Murray's most recent book publication is "On A Great Battlefield: The Making, Management, and Memory of Gettysburg National Military Park, 1933-2013," published by the University of Tennessee Press in 2014. Murray is also the author of "The Civil War Begins," published by the

U.S. Army's Center of Military History in 2012. She is currently working on a full-length biography of George Gordon Meade, tentatively titled "Meade at War: George Gordon Meade and the Army of the Potomac."

Murray's essay on Meade in "Upon the Fields of Battle: Essays on the Military History of America's Civil War," explores the leadership decisions of Army of the Potomac in the final days of the Gettysburg Campaign. Specifically, Prof. Murray places President Abraham Lincoln's expectations of a decisive victory by Meade over Robert E. Lee's Confederate army within the broader context of military history and argues that battles of annihilation are incredibly rare and thus Lincoln and northern citizens' expectations misplaced.

Consequently, General Meade's leadership during the pursuit from Gettysburg, culminating in the actions at Falling Waters, must be understood within the broader contours of the feasibility of annihilating a citizen-soldier army and the rarity of coupling a battlefield victory with an aggressive pursuit of the enemy forces.

Prof. Murray's previous experiences include working as a historian for the Department of

Defense in the Pentagon for a year before she took a job teaching history at UVa-Wise. Murray worked as a seasonal interpretive park ranger at Gettysburg National Military Park for nine summers (2002-2010). She received her Ph.D. from Auburn University in 2010.

## **Battlefield Preservation**

### **American Battlefield Trust Receives 11<sup>th</sup> Straight 4-Star Rating from Leading Charity Evaluator**

(Washington, D.C., ABT) – In recognition of its diligent efforts to operate as effective and transparent stewards of financial resources, the American Battlefield Trust has once again been given the highest possible assessment — a 4-star rating — from the nation’s largest independent charity evaluator, Charity Navigator. By receiving this recognition for the 11th consecutive year, the Trust is in exceptional company — only 1 percent of the nation’s nonprofits have demonstrated this level of sustained excellence.

This continued commitment to fiscal responsibility and transparency was a key element of the vision articulated by the organization’s new president, David Duncan, as he took over the top role on October 1, 2020. A 20-year veteran of the organization, previously serving as Chief Development Officer, Duncan pledged “I want to give donors my assurance that we are going to continue to be the best possible financial steward of their contributions and generosity to this organization. No matter how much we raise, it’s about how effective and efficient we are with the resources that are entrusted to us. The rating provided by Charity Navigator mirrors the promise that the Trust sends to its donors each time they invest in our indispensable mission.”

“We are proud to announce American Battlefield Trust has earned our 11th consecutive 4-star rating,” said Charity Navigator’s CEO Michael Thatcher, emphasizing the Trust’s continuous record of fiscal responsibility and transparency in a recent letter to the nation’s premier battlefield preservation organization. “This is our highest possible rating and indicates that your organization adheres to sector best practices and executes its mission in a financially efficient way.”

“Only one percent of the charities we evaluate have received at least eleven consecutive 4-star evaluations, indicating that American Battlefield Trust outperforms most other charities in America,” Thatcher said. “This exceptional designation from Charity Navigator sets American Battlefield Trust apart from its peers and demonstrates to the public its trustworthiness.”

## **Virtual Civil War Events**

The Congress of Civil War Round Tables is sponsoring a series of virtual Civil War Lectures by some of the nation’s leading historians.

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Visit <http://www.cwrtcongress.org/lectures.html> to view the complete schedule and register.

## **December Meeting**

**By Mark Matranga**

**David Powell** gave an insightful presentation to The Civil War Round Table at its 797<sup>th</sup> Regular Meeting on December 11, 2020, on “Union Command Failure in the Shenandoah Valley.” Generally identified with works on the Civil War in the West, especially his work on the Chickamauga Campaign, Powell, a 1983 graduate of the Virginia Military Institute, shifts focus eastward to General Grant’s grand plan to defeat General Lee in 1864. There he finds a complex operational plan designed to eliminate the Valley as a source of supply for southern armies and a potential threat to Washington D.C.

Grant’s strategy for 1864 was to keep simultaneous pressure on all Confederate armies so as to prevent any consolidation of forces. He initially proposed moving forces from the Gulf to assist in the campaign for Atlanta and to land a large force on the Virginia coast while Meade and the Army of the Potomac held Lee’s army with a modest force. This plan was rejected by the administration. As a result, Grant opted to land a force below Richmond and chose Franz Sigel along with George Crook to conduct operations in the Shenandoah.

Grant was not enamored with political generals, which prompted him to appoint Crook as Sigel’s second in command. This was somewhat ironic in Sigel’s case in that his military training and experience were at least the equal of Academy graduates. Born in Baden, Germany, he attended military school. He supported the failed revolution of 1848, after which he emigrated to the United States and settled in St. Louis. He rallied his countrymen to the union cause and led them at Wilson’s Creek and Pea Ridge; thereafter, he transferred east under Pope and later, to the Army of the Potomac. Powell related that after Hooker took command Sigel resigned, complaining he had “the smallest corps in the Army of the Potomac.” It was not until later, in March 1864, that he filled the vacancy in the Department of West Virginia where his main assignment was to guard the B&O Railroad.

This changed in May 1864, when Sigel was tasked with a three-pronged advance into the Valley. Sigel was to move up the Valley while Ord attacked from Beverly, West Virginia and Crook moved from Southwest Virginia up to take Staunton. This complex pincer movement would neutralize the Shenandoah and put Union forces on Richmond’s flank. However, things unraveled before the operation could begin. Ord resigned as he was dissatisfied with the troops assigned him; nativism and prejudice against non-West Pointers was also a factor. Ord was gone in April and David Hunter replaced him.

Sigel’s difficulties were compounded by ill-trained troops and ineffective subordinates. Many of his troops had been recently exchanged after being captured during the 1863 Valley Campaign. Ord had refused to take responsibility for soldiers deficient in drill. Powell finds Ord’s negative

behavior a contributing factor to the disaster the campaign became. Also contributing was Crook's failure to burn the New River Railroad Bridge and to take Staunton after misconstruing reports from the Battle of the Wilderness. Powell asserts that destroying the bridge was Crook's main objective, and in failing to do so and retreating into West Virginia took himself out of the campaign. Sigel, whose role was primarily that of a decoy to hold the Confederates in place in the lower Valley while Crook took Staunton and sealed the Valley, now faced the Confederates alone.

Meanwhile, Confederate forces under John Breckenridge moved down the Valley in early May and Sigel, instead of drawing him further north, responded by moving up the Valley. The two forces met at New Market on May 15, 1864, where Sigel's subordinates again failed him. Powell argues that while Sigel had ordered Augustus Moor to New Market, he did not want to attack and had given orders to Julius Stahel to order Moor to retreat. Moor instead engaged Breckenridge in battle, leading to a Union defeat and rout. Hunter eventually took Staunton in June, but Sigel's days as commander in the Valley were numbered. He remained nominally in department command but Hunter had field command. He was eventually relieved after the election in November.

Sigel was no military genius but was as well trained an officer as any West Point graduate. He had five years military training in Germany, studied military theory under Von Clausewitz, and had led civilian soldiers in battle. He had skill in training troops. But he was ill-served by Ord who Powell termed a 'moral coward,' by Crook, who could have learned that Lee was not victorious at the Wilderness, and by his chief subordinates in the Valley who failed to follow orders. Having led civilians in war in Europe, Sigel was ideally suited to lead volunteer forces. Powell believes he should at least be given credit for this.



## **BULLETIN BOARD**

The **Kenosha Civil War Museum** is putting on programs which can be watched on facebook:

Friday, Jan. 8 at noon: James Pula on "Wisconsin's Sigel Regiment in the Civil War"

Friday, Jan. 15, 2 p.m. Virtual program on "Immigrants in the Civil War," based on the museum's new exhibit.

For more on programs at the museum, visit <https://museums.kenosha.org/civilwar/events/>

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**Rob Girardi** will present “Chicago Fights the Civil War” Jan. 5<sup>th</sup> to the Barrington Questors.

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### **More Upcoming Local Civil War Events**

Due to government-ordered shutdowns, CWRT events are being cancelled or going online on an ad hoc basis. Contact the sponsoring organization for up to date details. Check the **Announcements** section of the CWRT’s website for additional coming events.

Jan. 6th, Northern Illinois CWRT: Doug Dammann on "The 1st Wisconsin"

Jan. 6th, Kankakee Valley CWRT: Steve DePasquale, on "The Confederate Prison Uprising at Camp Douglas"

Jan. 7th, Milwaukee CWRT: Chris Kolakowski on "The Battle of Stones River"

Jan. 15<sup>th</sup>, Salt Creek CWRT: Art Foley on “The Battle of Honey Springs”

Jan. 19th, Lincoln-Davis CWRT: Dave Powell on "Union Command Failure in the Shenandoah"

Jan. 28th, South Suburban CWRT: Lester Lindley on "Civil War Amendments"

Feb. 3rd, Kankakee Valley CWRT: **Bruce Allardice** on "Infernal Machines"

### **Future Chicago CWRT Meetings**

Feb. 12th: Leslie Goddard presents *Clara Barton*

Mar. 12th: Greg Biggs, *The Nevin-Freeman Address*

Apr. 9th: Ron Kirkwood on *Too Much for Human Endurance: The Spangler Farm Hospitals*

May 14th: Michael Hardy on *General Lee's Immortals*

June 11<sup>th</sup>: Wil Greene on *Petersburg*

### **From the Past Meetings of the CWRT of Chicago:**

**15 years ago, January 2006:** Panel Discussion on “The Most Significant What-Ifs of Civil War History,” featuring Rob Girardi, Mary Abroe, Larry Gibbs and Bruce Allardice

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**10 years ago, January 2011:** Larry Hewitt presented “Slandered Heroes: Deserters Who Didn’t”

**5 years ago, January 2016:** David Moore presented “General Williams S. Rosecrans”

Have a great 2021!

