



In the spring of 1862, the outlook for the Confederacy appeared bleak, perhaps hopeless. Out in the Western Theater, Ulysses S. Grant had captured Forts Henry and Donelson, and won the Battle of Shiloh, establishing a major foothold for Federal forces in Tennessee. The Eastern Theater proved even worse. Young George McClellan, heading the largest army ever to set foot on the North American Continent, had moved to the outskirts of the Confederate capital at Richmond. Defending the city was an army half as large whose commanding general, Joseph E. Johnston, had suffered an incapacitating wound on May 31. The new commanding general, Robert E. Lee, was untested in field command with the unglamorous nickname, "*King of Spades*," due to his penchant for digging entrenchments. Another 63,000 Federals, in five separate armies, patrolled the Shenandoah Valley and readied to join McClellan's massive army near Richmond. If the capital city fell to the Federals, the Confederacy was doomed. The morale of the Southern people was at its nadir.

In mid-June Confederate General J.E.B. Stuart and 1200 cavalrymen were sent on a secret mission-to find a weakness in McClellan's army for a potential attack by the undermanned Rebels. Setting out on June 12, Stuart's troopers headed directly behind McClellan's hulking army. After fighting one serious skirmish, the desired information that Stuart sought was found-McClellan's right flank was, according to Stuart, "*in the air*." Now the weary horsemen hoped to make their way back to safety. Only two options were open: return the way they had come or continue their route and encircle McClellan's army. The decision lay in Stuart's hands. Undoubtedly, he would continue.

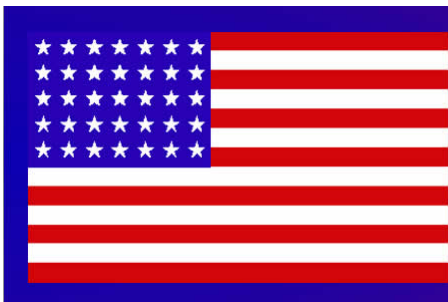
A major barrier lay in Stuart's path-the unpredictable Chickahominy River. Incessant rains and foul weather had destroyed numerous bridges, and with McClellan's cavalry sure to come, Stuart could potentially be trapped. After some harrowing events, Stuart and his cavalry returned to Lee's army. They had covered 150 miles in a little over 72 hours, capturing 165 prisoners, 260 horses and mules, and destroying thousands of dollars of Federal supplies-while losing only one killed and one captured.

Richmond newspapers hailed the exploit as "*A MAGNIFICENT ACHIEVEMENT*," and labeled the ride "*Unparalleled and Brilliant*." The Richmond Enquirer blatantly applauded Stuart by reporting, "*[His] achievement .... stands alone in the history of the war and eclipses the most brilliant achievements of the lamented and glorious [Turner] Ashby, of the invincible [John Hunt] Morgan, and .... of the gallant and dashing [Stonewall] Jackson*." But, was the excessive praise justified, and did the raid have military merit? Or was Stuart merely an unbridled showoff whose only interest in the war was personal glory? Come ride with Stuart and find out the answers to these questions.

Our speaker this month is longtime MRRT member Jerry Maxwell, presenting, "*J.E.B. Earns His Plume: Stuart's First Ride Around McClellan*." Jerry promises this is a brand-new talk and NOT a repeat performance. Our meeting place is back at the downtown Farmington Public Library (Grand River and Farmington Road). Circle your calendar-MONDAY, JUNE 30-and be sure to come to the right place.

#### ODDS & ENDS:

- Nearly 50 people have signed up for this year's trek to the Shenandoah Valley (Saturday/Sunday, October 18-19). Our guide, Dennis Frye, says he is anxious to lead us around again. As usual, two checks will be collected-one in July for Bus fees, guide's remuneration, etc., and one in August for the dinner/breakfasts. These amounts have yet to be determined. More information will be forthcoming at this month's meeting.
- Officer elections were held at last month's meeting: Norm Carver (President), Jeanie Graham/Mark Farrell (Co-Vice Presidents), Mollie Galate (Secretary), and Carroll Tietz (Treasurer). Congratulations to those newly-elected and our thanks to outgoing President Gary Pike and Secretary Bee Friedlander for their excellence over the past few years.



- The July Meeting will mark the return of our world famous **AUCTION**. You are notified in advance so you 'll have plenty of time to determine what items you would like to donate. Books have been our main staple, but we've also auctioned off tokens, coins, bullets, pieces of shell, pamphlets, gunpowder flasks, buttons—and a plethora of other items. Some great bargains will be available. All monies accumulated go into the MRRT Treasury.
- The March 2003 newsletter related the story of a fire that destroyed the Lexington (VA) Presbyterian Church (the one attended by Stonewall Jackson). Recently the rebuilt -church ·was opened for services. MRRT member Philip Crown, now residing in New Market, sent photographs of the interior and exterior of the rebuilt church. These photos will be on display at this month's meeting.

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The Michigan Regimental wishes to thank last month's speaker, **Tilden G. Edelstein**, for his outstanding presentation, "*A White Colonel of a Black Regiment*"—the story of Thomas Wenvsorth Higginson. An excellent program.

#### **QUIZ: All questions pertain to the month of June .....**

1. What battle was fought in Western Virginia on June 3, 1861, leading to a "disgraceful" rout of the Confederates? And, which Union general, not involved in the battle, took full credit for the victory?
2. Which governor of Virginia turned command of all Virginia forces over to the Confederacy on June 8, 1861? And, which pro-Southern governor of Missouri called for 50,000 volunteers to help fight the Federals on June 12, 1861?
3. Which Union general, born in Charleston, South Carolina and the son of a Unitarian Minister, was appointed to the rank of Brigadier General on June 14, 1861? [He was later charged with both "drunkenness and corruption" and forced into early retirement.] And, to which illustrious group was he elected the first commander-in-chief in 1866?
4. What battle did Stonewall Jackson's army in the Shenandoah Valley win on June 8, 1862? And, whose army did he defeat?
5. Which battle did Jackson win the following day, June 9, 1862? And, which Federal general did he defeat?
6. Which vessel became the U.S. Navy's first hospital ship, deployed on the Mississippi River on June 10, 1862? And, which group of women served as volunteer nurses aboard the vessel?
7. Which famous home and surrounding area on the Pamunkey River, serving as a supply and ammunition depot, did McClellan's forces abandon and burn on June 27, 1862? And, which Confederate officer, later a general, owned this home and property?
8. Which Federal general ordered the office of the Chicago Times closed on June 2, 1863? And, why did he do this?
9. Which Union general, nicknamed "Black Dave" by his own men, pulled his troops out of Lexington, Virginia on June 13, 1864? And, which famous college did he burn on his way out?
10. Which famous Union colonel was seriously wounded near Petersburg, Virginia on June 18, 1864, prompting a promotion to the rank of general by U.S. Grant who thought the colonel fatally wounded? And, what was unusual about this particular promotion?

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Few generals on either side could match the handsome figure of Confederate Robert Emmett Rodes. Historian Douglass Southall Freeman stated that Rodes looked as though "*he stepped out of the pages of Beowulf*" and described him as a



*"Norse God in Confederate gray."* Standing taller than six-feet, the blonde-haired, blue-eyed Rodes' most distinguishing feature was a drooping sandy mustache that hung below his chin. More importantly, he was a warrior. In nearly every battle until his death in 1864, Rodes' demonstrated great leadership and spectacular fighting ability. Praised equally by his peers and commanders, he also appealed to the common fighting men under his command. An artillerist who observed Rodes in battle marveled at his poise: *"Rodes' eyes were everywhere, and every now and then he would stop to attend to some detail of the arrangement of his line or his troops, and then ride in again, humming to himself and catching the ends of his long, tawny mustache between his lips."* One staff officer gushed in a letter to his sister, *"I like him so much. He is very admired by all and very popular."* D.H. Hill called him a *"capital brigadier,"* while E.P. Alexander said Rodes' *"whole career .... was brilliant."* Both Longstreet and Jackson praised his talent as a general. Arguably, he was Robert E. Lee's finest divisional commander.

Born on March 29, 1829, at Lynchburg, Virginia, Robert Rodes graduated from Virginia Military Institute in 1848 (number 10 in his class). He taught at VMI until 1851 when he began a career as a civil engineer. In 1856 he went to work for an Alabama railroad and eventually became its chief engineer. While in Alabama he married Virginia H. Woodruff in Tuscaloosa. He joined the Confederate army as a colonel of the 5th Alabama and was promoted to brigadier general in October of 1861. The following spring he suffered a gunshot wound in the arm at Seven Pines on May 31 and did not return to his unit until September 6. Eleven days later at Antietam, Rodes was again wounded in the arm by a piece of shell fragment shortly after he had helped a wounded aide to a nearby barn before returning to his position in Bloody Lane. The following May he was promoted to major general.

In the summer of 1864 he accompanied Jubal Early into the Shenandoah Valley. On September 19 the 35-year-old Rodes rallied his troops just east of Winchester against a large Federal assault. Astride his horse and next to John Brown Gordon, Rodes jerked when a shell burst overhead. A fragment of shell had struck him behind the ear, and he toppled at the foot of Gordon's horse. Carried to the rear, Rodes died within hours. (Interestingly, some eyewitnesses claim a bullet hit him in the head, killing him instantly.) *"General Rodes was not only a comrade whom I greatly admired,"* wrote Gordon, *"but a friend whom I loved."* A North Carolina colonel lamented that Rodes' death *"cast a gloom over the whole of the army."* Staff officer Jedediah Hotchkiss stated: *"We have never suffered a greater loss save in the Great Jackson. Rodes was the best Division Commander in the Army of Northern Virginia and was worthy of and capable of any position in it."* Rodes is buried in the Presbyterian Cemetery in Lynchburg.

## QUIZ ANSWERS:

1. Philippi and George McClellan
2. John Letcher and Claiborne Jackson
3. Stephen A. Hurlbut and Grand Army of the Republic
4. Cross Keys and John Fremont
5. Port Republic and James Shields
6. USS Red Rover and nuns from local convents
7. White House and William Henry Fitzhugh "Rooney" Lee
8. Ambrose Burnside and for publishing articles criticizing the Emancipation Proclamation
9. David Hunter and Virginia Military Institute
10. Joshua L. Chamberlain and it was the only battlefield promotion Grant made during the war

A double reminder: be in attendance this month on **MONDAY, JUNE 30** for *"J.E.B. Earns His Plume: Stuart's First Ride Around McClellan,"* presented by **Jerry Maxwell**, at the Grand River/Farmington Road Public Library. The meeting starts at 6:30 P.M. See you there! Don't forget our website: <http://www.farmlib.org/mrrt/>.