

December 2022

THE FLAGBEARER

This issue of the Flagbearer

Round Table Member Joe

Michaud essay on

General Ambrose E.

Burnside

...Timeline Dec 1864

...New Bedford Civil War connections

...Membership / dues form 2023

...Holiday Round Table message

...Book recommendation



THE GREATER NEW BEDFORD CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE NEW BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS

December Flagbearer



Happy Holidays to you from the New Bedford Civil War Round Table

We hope that you enjoyed the December Holiday Dinner at the Century House.

We can all take some time off and relax a bit. Our next Round Table meeting will be January 24th, and it will be a Zoom meeting. Out of town members will be able to join in to the Zoom call.



In the future we would like to do an in-person meeting at the Low Tide Yacht Club and concurrently, digitally a Zoom set up. Low Tide Yacht Club, being a part of the City of New Bedford Ft Taber Park, has no high speed internet coverage. We are working on a hot spot solution to this dilemma.

It takes a team. To the left here you see a rundown of the volunteers on the Executive Board and each person contributes their effort to keep our organization running smoothly. We appreciate all that they do. Especially newest Board Member, Will Hunter, Chef extraordinaire. His pies, cookies, and ice cream served during the social hour are wonderful.

Please take a moment to read Round Table member, Joe Michaud's essay on General Burnside; - a man that knew his talents and limits. Joe has really covered Burnside well.

Finally, I will publish a January 2023 Flagbearer. Till then, - editor



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The Annual Holiday Dinner of the New Bedford Civil War Round Table

We thank all that came out to our Annual Holiday dinner, especially those that traveled a distance, Boston and suburbs. We had 49 of you in attendance. Our President Mark Mello did an excellent reading giving us the background on the poem origination , "I heard the Bells on Christmas Day", written by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow on Dec 25, 1863. This was in response to the near fatal wound his son, Charles Appleton Wadsworth , received during Grant's Mine Run campaign in Virginia.



Peter Rioux's annual Civil War Trivia Pursuit was a winner, as always. He asked 25 questions, most were correctly answered , but not all. Peter is really good at this .

Al Smith, President of the Civil War Round Table in Boston delivered an outline of a possible 4 or 5 "Days in June" Battlefield Tour. A flyer will be published in the near future. The first stop for participant pickup is planned for the north end of New Bedford, thus, the drive to the old pickup location in Boston is eliminated for the New Bedford Round Table participants.

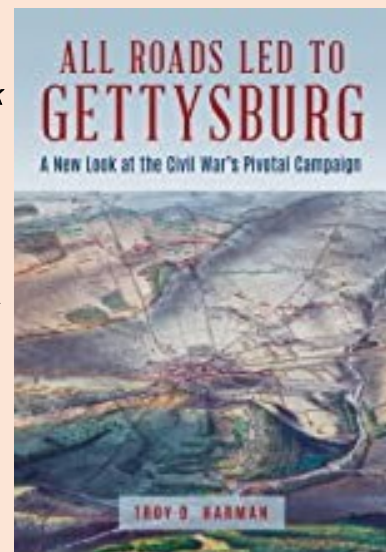
The evening closed with a medley of Civil War songs by Larry Roy and his harmonica. Larry's entertainment has become a tradition we enjoy. Larry told me that his 84th birthday is this week. Happy Birthday Larry !!

Holiday Gift Recommendation

Friend of this Round Table is Troy D. Harman, Historian, Author, and National Park Ranger at the Gettysburg National Park. Troy has published a new book and it looks quite interesting. It has long been a staple that Gettysburg was an accidental battlefield. Lee was blinded by the lack of intel from Jeb Stewart, and Meade was 3 days into his new job. It was all about the high ground.

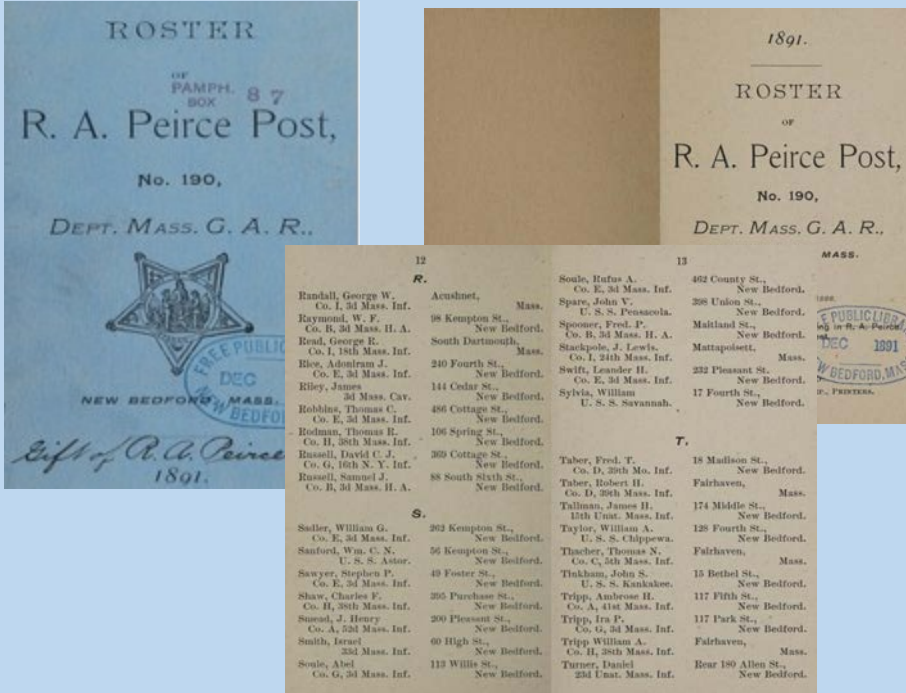
Not so, says Troy Harman. Troy's theory is that a battle at Gettysburg was entirely predictable. Armies follow railroads, rivers, and major roads. They need to move men and equipment. Yet this perspective hasn't been fully explored. Look at an 1863 map and you will see the battlefield was framed on the north by the Susquehanna River, in the south by the Potomac, in the east by the Northern Central Railroad, and in the west by the Cumberland Valley Railroad. This was a high stakes game of chess. All this led to Gettysburg. Lee fought for access to two creeks, the Marsh and the Rock creeks. And for the rail access.

And so, it wasn't all about the Round Tops, Cemetery Hill, and Culps Hill.



...Civil War on the home front—New Bedford, Massachusetts

Lets begin with the ancestor of our member Bob Randall. You all know that his grandfather was George Randall of Rochester. He was a member of R.A. Pierce Post G.A.R. And here is a copy of their roster.



George is listed on page 12, top right.

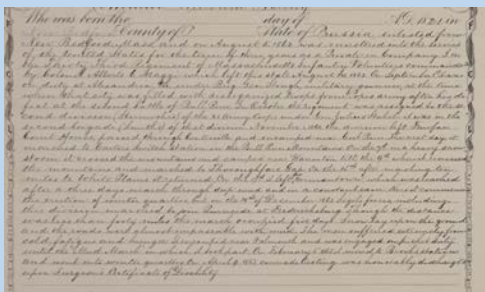
Next is the William Logan Rodman G.A.R. Post 1. Their records are on file and easily accessed. Here are some highlights.

new GAR William Logan Rodman Post No. 1 Records

This collection contains the records of Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) William Logan Rodman Post No. 1 (New Bedford, Mass.) formed on September 27, 1896 shortly after the establishment of GAR Department of Massachusetts, and chartered on October 4, 1896 as the first Post in Massachusetts and the New England states. This Post was named to commemorate the Civil War service of Lieutenant Colonel William Logan Rodman of the 38th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Regiment, who was killed in action at Port Hudson, Louisiana on May 27, 1863.

Contents include: by-laws, rosters, GAR muster roll, membership records, William Logan Rodman Corporation records, minutes of regular and special meetings, Relief Committee records, Monument Fund ledgers, and personal war sketches of 720 comrades of GAR William Logan Rodman Post No. 1 (New Bedford); song souvenir, early history and annual reports of encampment proceedings, 1875-1947 (incomplete) of GAR Department of Massachusetts; Bunker Hill drum historical sketch, and roster of GAR Richard A. Peirce Post No. 190 (New Bedford).

Each of their members wrote out their personal recollection of their service in the Union Army.



Ashley & Peirce,
THE RELIABLE
CLOTHIERS & HATTERS,
72 and 74 William Street,
NEW BEDFORD.

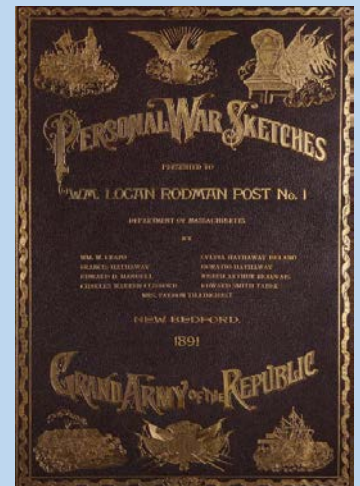
D. J. Sullivan,
Diamonds, Watches,
GOLD AND SILVER,
WATCHES AND JEWELRY.

Wright Drug Co.,
Wholesale and Retail Druggists
and Dispensing Pharmacians,
87 PINECHURCH ST., COR. WILKINSON
ST., NEW BEDFORD, MASS.

Gen Benjamin F. Cutler, of Massachusetts,
The Post Office, No. 100, Bedford Street, New Bedford, Mass.

THE HARMONIZED BATTERY, (No. 143)
NEW BEDFORD.

EQUIVALENT CIGAR,
Smoker F. W. F. 18th. Cigar.



...Timeline highlights of December 1864

You would think that the Union effort would slow down in the winter months, but the war has dragged on , Grant is in charge, Sherman is on the move, military operations are active, and so here is what's happening in December 1864.

Sherman's invaders are halfway between Atlanta and Savannah, living off the land. Most people in Washington did not know for sure where he was.

General Thomas forms a semicircle around Nashville , and Hood approaches with e Army of the Tennessee.

Maj. Gen. Grenville Dodge replaces Rosecrans as commander of the Department of the Missouri. Rosecrans had his difficulty bringing stability to that region.

Lincoln works on his annual message to Congress. He will appoint Salmon P. Chase Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.

Wheeler's Confederate cavalry attacks Kilpatrick at Waynesborough, GA. Kilpatrick eventually wins the day.

Lincoln's message to Congress is read to them.

Frustration abounds concerning the delay of Thomas initiating an attack on Hood at Nashville. Weather not favorable.

Sherman arrives at Savannah but cannot connect with the supply ships. The men are living off the land but the horses need forage. Three days later, he does connect with the supply fleet, after Fort Mcallister falls.

Gen. Thomas comes out of his lines in the fog at Nashville and attacks Hood, thus saving his job from the enroute Gen. Logan who was being sent to replace him. Hood's Army of the Tennessee is devastated but not destroyed. Union casualties are light compared to Hood's.

Sherman sends his famous message to Lincoln, " I beg to present you, as a Christmas gift, the city of Savannah, with 150 guns, and plenty of ammunition, and also about 25,000 bales of cotton".

Federal landings took place at Fort Fisher at the entrance to the Cape Fear River. It fails. Violent charges and countercharges were levied by Butler against Adm Porter, Butler against army officers, and Butler vs. everyone else. Butler loses command of the Army of the James.

THE NEW BEDFORD CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

2022-2023 MEMBERSHIP FORM

Program Year is July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023

Please fill out this form and make check payable to "New Bedford CWRT"

Mail to: New Bedford Civil War Round Table, C/O Martin Flinn, Treas 39 Little Oak Road, New Bedford MA 02745

Name _____

Type of Membership _____ Individual (\$25.00) _____ Family (\$30.00)

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

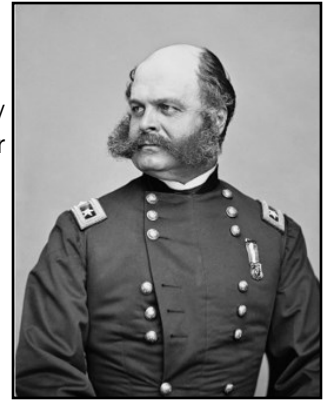
Cell or Home phone: _____

Email Address: _____

Date: _____

Burnside Reconsidered?, by Joe Michaud, Round Table Member and Historian

It would seem that concerning Ambrose Burnside we know all we need to know. The common perception of Burnside is that of a stumbling, bumbling leader who was known more for his lustrous “burnsides” (later modified to “sideburns”) than any particular military skill or prowess. This argument has been traditionally supported by the fact that as a leader he was involved in multiple military defeats. From the repeated unsuccessful assaults over the Rohrbach Bridge at Antietam to the infamous mud march and disastrous Fredericksburg campaign, to the calamitous uncoordinated attack at the Crater it seems that Burnside was at the head of one military disaster after another.



So, given the disasters noted above, the question remains how could this man have risen to senior military leadership and ultimately command of the Union Army of the Potomac? The answer lies in an examination of his life and military career. Thus, rather than dwell upon his much better known failures, the focus of this essay will be upon his reputation, integrity, modesty, and the innovative military operations he developed that achieved success under his command. Given his obvious military failures, what was it about Burnside that drove his ascension to the highest ranks in the Union Army? Eminent Civil War historian Bruce Catton perhaps put it best in a brief sketch of Burnside in “Glory Road”

“ He (Burnside) was a simple, honest, loyal soldier, doing his best even if that best was not very good, never scheming or conniving or backbiting. Also, he was modest; in an army many of whose generals were insufferable prima donnas, Burnside never mistook himself for Napoleon. Physically he was impressive: tall, just a little stout, wearing what was probably the most artistic and awe-inspiring set of whiskers in all that bewhiskered Army. He customarily wore a high, bell-crowned felt hat with the brim turned down and a double-breasted, knee-length frock coat, belted at the waist—a costume which, unfortunately, is apt to strike the modern eye as being very much like that of a beefy city cop of the 1880s.”

Ambrose Everett Burnside was born in Liberty, Indiana on May 23, 1824, the son of a South Carolina slaveowner who had freed his slaves prior to moving his family to Indiana. At the age of 19, Burnside, used his father’s political connections to secure an appointment to West Point. He graduated in 1847, ranked 18 out of 38 in his class, and was commissioned a second lieutenant in the 2nd U.S. Artillery. After commissioning he served in an artillery unit in the Mexican-American War but arrived too late to see any action so performed mostly garrison duty around Mexico City.

Following the war, he continued to serve with the artillery in the newly acquired territories in the Southwestern United States. Burnside’s courage was tested when he was wounded by an arrow in his neck during a skirmish against Apache. It was during his time spent on the Western frontier that he became very disappointed with the quality of weaponry available to the Cavalry.

In 1851, Burnside was assigned to Fort Adams in Newport, Rhode Island. It was here that he met a local woman, Mary Richmond Bishop the daughter of a prominent Providence family. Burnside however became not only enamored by Mary but also of the southcoast area in general eventually living most of his life in Bristol, Rhode Island. The couple married on April 27, 1852 and although they both loved children, Ambrose and Mary had none of their own.

In October 1853, Burnside resigned his commission in the regular Army, borrowed some money and returned to Bristol, Rhode Island where he founded the Bristol Rifle Works. It was there that he developed, patented and began manufacturing the breechloading Burnside carbine. Based upon successful testing, Burnside initially secured an agreement with the Buchanan Administration for 5000 rifles. A well placed bribe however resulted in the termination of the contract and then his factory in Bristol burned down. These events left him with huge debts and teetering on the edge of bankruptcy. As a result, he sold most of his personal property and his patents for very little money and used those funds to pay down his debts. He also went to work for the railroad where he built a fortuitous friendship with George B. McClellan.

At the start of the Civil War Burnside was appointed a Colonel in command of the 1st Rhode Island Brigade. At Bull Run, he distinguished himself by taking charge of a full division in the midst of heated combat thus preventing a total rout of that unit. This initiative was rewarded with his promotion to Brigadier General. At that point, he relayed to McClellan his innovative idea of an amphibious division made up of combined naval and army assets that could jointly operate against the coastal forces of the Confederacy. This novel use of joint assets would serve as the model for future joint operations utilizing navy and army assets that Grant and others would master and for which McClellan would take credit.

North Carolina

Burnside was given command of an amphibious task force charged with closing the ports of North Carolina to shipping. Burnside, aware of the need for skilled seamen in navigating and landing in shallow water, recruited heavily from the New England coastal areas. Prior to leaving port, rumors of storms and unseaworthiness of the ships in the flotilla concerned the enlisted greatly. In response, Burnside and his staff moved to the smallest and most vulnerable craft in the flotilla to encourage confidence in the ships and bolster the courage of the troops. This also strengthened the confidence of the men in their leader who was willing to share their risks and hardships which at the time was a rarity.

Burnside's joint forces launched a coordinated attack on Roanoke shortly after arriving and eventually took over 2500 prisoners and destroyed the ships remaining in that port with the Navy wiping out the few that had escaped to sea. For several days Burnside's success was the toast of the Union which had undergone ten demoralizing months of losses. It also shattered the confidence of southerners that the Richmond government would protect them from Union military incursions.

After his return to Washington in July, Lincoln, admiring Burnside's innovative and aggressive use of force along with his unpretentious nature, offered Burnside command of the Army of the Potomac. Due to his loyalty to McClellan who had saved him from bankruptcy (and perhaps knowing his limitations as a leader) he politely refused and recommended that McClellan was the best man for the job.

Following the disaster of General John Pope at Second Manassas in August of 1862 in which Burnside had sent two divisions in support and McClellan none, Lincoln believed that part of the fault for the defeat lay with McClellan and his less than enthusiastic support for Pope. As a result he again offered Burnside command of the Army of the Potomac. Burnside once again refused citing his inability to effectively command an army of that size and loyally stating that McClellan was still the man for the job.

Antietam

While Burnside's actions at Antietam are generally regarded as a failure it is what he accomplished *before* the battle that merit discussion here. Had Burnside not achieved that success at South Mountain it is unlikely that Lee would have been able to mass his forces at Antietam. Burnside had been appointed to command the right wing of the Union army made up of I Corps under Hooker and the IX Corps under Reno. Upon the approach to Turners and Crampton's gaps Burnside learned that Lee had left a small but sufficient force to defend these critical avenues of approach to Antietam. While the Confederate forces were limited they were experienced soldiers under the command of D.H. Hill and the gaps they were tasked in defending were narrow, strewn with boulders and treacherous for attacking forces.

¹ It should be noted that the successor patent holder later ended up selling over 55,000 of the Burnside Carbines to the War Department reaping a fortune.

² William Marvel, *Burnside*, (The University of North Carolina Press, 1991) P. 43

³ Marvel at P. 60

High casualties and a large expenditure of time and resources were expected in the frontal assault that was anticipated. Burnside initiated a double envelopment attack around the gaps terrain at South Mountain. Despite Hookers insubordinate behavior a portion of I Corps fixed Confederates in position while the balance of his Corps moved north around the enemy position setting up a flank on enemy forces guarding Turners Gap. Reno followed suit fixing Confederate forces at Fox's Gap and flanking from the south. The result being that the Confederate positions became untenable and were thus withdrawn. This robbed Lee of vital time necessary to appropriately mass his forces and left him in a very precarious position at Antietam. This "bloodless" victory also delivered a needed boost for the Union Army and bolstered confidence among the ranks heading into combat at Antietam against the "invincible" Lee. The *New York World* wrote that the battle "turn[ed] back the tide of rebel successes" and "the strength of the rebels is hopelessly broken." Lee at that point considered aborting his invasion but McClellan's failure to rapidly advance on Lee's divided army provided Lee with just enough time to secure reinforcements from A.P. Hill's Division at Harpers Ferry. Unfortunately, the credit for the victory at South Mountain was grabbed by McClellan but it was Burnside's plan that brought the win and almost delivered ultimate victory.



Later at Antietam, McClellan's confusing plan dissolved the "Wings" and separated Burnside's command with I Corps located at the right flank of the Union Army and IX Corps being located at the left flank. This caused great confusion and adversely impacted Burnside's ability to effectively exercise command and coordinated control of his forces.

Burnside was charged with crossing Antietam Creek which was a swift flowing 3-4 feet deep creek and which was under direct fire by Confederates perched on high steep bluffs across the creek. This was not a simple fording operation despite Henry Kyd Douglas' later statement that it was a simple "hop, skip and a jump." Burnside ordered a crossing further down the creek to Snavelly's Ford to attempt flank the Confederates opposing the bridge crossing. His engineers however failed to reconnoiter the creek so Burnside was forced to make three attempts to cross and finally carried the bridge but with heavy casualties and a significant delay. This delay allowed A.P. Hill to arrive from Harpers Ferry and support Lee's army avoiding a collapse and disaster. Burnside's "failure" to promptly carry the bridge despite the terrain and opposing forces however was used by others (to include his "friend" McClellan) to explain the failure to destroy Lee's army. Nonetheless, following McClellan's removal from command, Burnside was once again offered command of the Army of the Potomac. This time he agreed to take command of the Army of the Potomac when he learned his arch nemesis Joseph Hooker was next in line.

Following the Fredericksburg debacle, Burnside immediately offered his resignation but Lincoln had faith that his skills would be useful in another theater. Burnside was sent west to head the Department of the Ohio, which was comprised of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Kentucky. While in command of this theater he ended Confederate raids into Indiana and Ohio. His forces captured the Confederate raider John Hunt Morgan as well. This boosted the morale of his troops and civilians and freed up 55,000



militia who were then able to assist the war effort in other areas. Burnside was also not afraid to exercise his authority in civilian arena as well. He issued General Order 38 which made treasonous statements concerning the war or administration illegal. He ordered the seizure and eventual expulsion of the famed Copperhead Congressman Clement Vallandigham. This action (while legally questionable) significantly diminished the volume of the Copperhead message and impacted their ability to undermine the war effort.

East Tennessee

Grant assigned Burnside to command the long delayed Knoxville campaign to free east Tennessee. Burnside first advanced to Knoxville skillfully bypassing the Confederate stronghold at Cumberland Gap and ultimately occupying Knoxville unopposed. After consolidating his command he then sent a 3 brigade force back to the Cumberland Gap where they forced the surrender 2,000 Confederate troops and restored Union command of this vital piece of geography.

After the Union defeat at Chickamauga, Burnside was pursued by Lt. Gen. James Longstreet in eastern Tennessee near Knoxville. Burnside proved more than a match against Longstreet by out maneuvering him at the battle of Campbells' Station. Burnside was then able to reach his entrenchments around Knoxville, where he was unsuccessfully besieged. During the brief siege Burnside came under hostile fire from a Confederate battery that seen him in the breastworks. After three missed shots Burnside, being an old artillery officer, quickly triangulated the Confederate position and ordered the Union piece to fire back. This shot rang true as the rebel gunners quickly withdrew their now mangled parrot gun. Grant truly appreciated Burnside's service in tying down Longstreet's corps at Knoxville. This act contributed greatly to Grants victory at Chattanooga. Soon the siege was lifted and Longstreet withdrew returning to Virginia.

In short order, Grant recalled him to command the IX Corps in the 1864 Overland Campaign. Evidently, Grant valued Burnside's skills as a General Officer and wanted him involved in the upcoming campaign. He was also assigned command of a new division of black soldiers recruited primarily from the south.

The Crater

At the Battle of the Crater, Burnside developed and presented an innovative plan for Union sappers to tunnel under the Confederate lines at Petersburg and place 8000 pounds of gunpowder in a T shaped bunker approximately 20 feet below the rebel positions. After careful planning and training Burnside was informed by Meade (who was on record opposing the plan) on the day before the attack that his choice of a new and fresh black division to lead the assault had been rejected by Grant. Burnside then made arguably his worst decision of the war by allowing his remaining divisional commanders to draw straws as to who would lead the initial assault after the explosion.

This mistake resulted in the worst divisional commander in the army, Brigadier General James Ledlie being tasked with the assault. Ledlie failed to brief his troops on their objectives, provide them with necessary equipment and was reportedly in the rear drunk and disengaged from the assault. The result was that while the explosion caused a massive breach in Confederate lines the corresponding assault through that breach was a miserable failure with the Union taking massive casualties and being forced back from the breach.

This disaster became Burnside's last battle. He was relieved of command by Grant afterwards it was the end of his active military career. While an official inquiry cleared him of any wrongdoing he was never re-assigned to an active command. Shortly thereafter Burnside resigned his commission on April 15, 1865. Prior to leaving Washington he attended the play "My American Cousin" at Ford's Theater and was present when Lincoln was assassinated.



⁴ MacPherson, James M. *Crossroads of Freedom: Antietam, The Battle That Changed the Course of the Civil War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002. P. 112

⁵ The extended battle in taking the Rohrbach bridge resulted in it being renamed "Burnside's Bridge."

⁶ The Battle of ~~Frederickburg~~ needs its own examination which is beyond the scope of this essay. Suffice to say that while Burnside owns a large part of this disaster he was aided and abetted by many factors to include logistical failures, obstinate ~~subordinates~~ and morale issues.

In post-war civilian life Burnside was elected governor of Rhode Island three times and to the US Senate twice as a Republican (despite his prewar Democratic leanings). During his tenure in the Senate, Burnside supported legislation that afforded black applicants to West Point special status, served as the Chair of Foreign Relations Committee and during a visit to Europe in 1870 attempted to mediate peace between the combatants in the Franco-Prussian War. He was the third Commander in Chief of the Grand Army of the Republic and was elected as the first President of the National Rifle Association. While serving his second term in the Senate, he was stricken with a heart attack and died at Edghill, his home, in Bristol Rhode Island on September 13, 1881. Following a state funeral he was interned next to his wife at Swan Point cemetery in Providence where his remains rest today.

So in the end when Burnside's failures are weighed against his successes and innovations a different picture and better understanding emerges. Despite his failures he was still regarded highly by most of his contemporaries as an innovative and energetic General. He never hesitated to answer the call of his country. He was honest, humble and exceedingly loyal to his friends. He was an adopted south coaster so I consider him as "one our own" and had he been more active in promoting his success and less willing to take all the blame for his (and others) failures perhaps today we would have a more balanced view of his military career

