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An orb is visible in this photo of Burnside Bridge

Civil War Ghosthunters: Seeking Antietam's Supernatural

By Theodore Carter
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Cecil Marzulli takes her pursuit of the paranormal seriously. You can tell by looking at the equipment packed in the back of her Chevy Trailblazer: an infrared DVD recorder, a laser-sighted thermoscanner, an electromagnetic sensor, an electronic voice phenomena recorder, and a top-of-the-line digital camera purchased a few years ago with her Christmas bonus.

An accountant by day, Ms. Marzulli, of Gaithersburg, is the head of the Civil

War Paranormal Investigation Team and spends weekends traveling to battlefields and historic haunts in the Washington area and beyond. This time she's preparing for a trip to Antietam Battlefield on the date of its 143rd anniversary.

On the drive, her husband John, a former nonbeliever, sits shotgun wearing a Gettysburg T-shirt and a commemorative ball cap.

"We don't really hunt them, they come to us," Ms. Marzulli explains. "We talk to them. We play music for them." Ms. Marzulli says that Civil War ghosts "still feel as if they're protecting their country."

The Marzullis stop to pick up Ms. Marzulli's mother, another team member. Theresa Oden, a spunky octogenarian, is wearing a T-shirt proclaiming "I slept with a ghost in Gettysburg." Her orange Confederate flag earrings and necklace complete the outfit.

Ms. Marzulli's group is not alone in their pursuit of local ghosts. Beverly Litsinger has founded the Maryland Ghost and Spirit Association, a group whose Web site posts pictures and hosts discussion groups about paranormal experiences. The DC Metro Area Ghost Watchers can be hired out to investigate spooky phenomena in the region.

What makes Ms. Marzulli different is her specific focus on the Civil War. Driving toward Antietam, she points out the windshield and describes troop movements as if the brigades were standing in front of her. She's writing a book that's under contract with Sheridan Press, in which she tells the history of the Civil War through her real-life encounters with ghosts. "We're not telling ghost stories. We're telling the truth," she says.

Outside the Antietam Battlefield visitors' center, re-enactors wander through the parking lot in their Union

blues, sipping bottled water. Canvas tents dot the surrounding meadows, and tourists examine placards with wrinkled

brows.

Using the remaining daylight hours to scout out the battlefield, Ms. Marzulli chooses to investigate the Burnside Bridge. Locations that have witnessed a lot of bloodshed are dense with ghosts, according to Ms. Marzulli. In 1862, Confederate sharpshooters, poised on a hill overlooking the bridge, shot and killed Union soldiers for several hours before the North was able to cross.

Ms. Marzulli doesn't have her full team on this hunt, but Betsy Von Drehle and her son, Aaron Pusser, meet up with the group. The five-member squad is enough to operate the ghost-detecting machinery.



Cecil Marzulli, left, uses divining rods and an electromagnetic sensor, and her mother, Theresa Oden, uses a thermoscanner to detect ghostly activity.

Crossing the bridge, Ms. Von Drehle holds an electromagnetic sensor and her son holds two copper divining rods out in front of him that, according to Ms. Marzulli, will cross in the presence of an electromagnetic field. Ms. Oden follows with a thermoscanner as Mr. Marzulli sets up the infrared DVD recorder. Ms. Marzulli begins snapping pictures.

"They're here on this bridge. I can feel them," Ms. Marzulli says.

Aaron's divining rods cross. Ms. Von Drehle's electromagnetic readings are high, and Ms. Oden finds a few cold spots, 20 degrees cooler than the ambient air, with her thermoscanner. Ms. Von Drehle smiles. "Hi guys," she calls across the vacant bridge.

Ms. Marzulli takes a digital picture which shows circular blips. To her, these are orbs -- floating, circular manifestations of ghosts that can appear in photos even when not visible to the naked eye.

Skeptics call these circular marks photographic evidence of dust particles, but Ms. Marzulli asserts, "They have an intelligent flight path. They respond to my voice."

Ms. Marzulli stations herself where the Union soldiers made their frontline. "How are you tonight," she says into the darkness. "I've gotten a picture before of one of you fellows by this cannon. Is this your cannon?"

Mr. Marzulli sets up a portable stereo and switches on drum and fife music. "We brought some entertainment for you. This is so you can hear something you recognize and feel good about," Ms. Marzulli says. She often uses music to lure the supernatural. When she doesn't have her CD player, she sings period songs.

As she walks, she talks to the spirits within the separate brigades. She mentions specific soldiers and generals, hoping to show the spirits her genuine interest and knowledge. "Are you guys from the 21st Massachusetts?" she asks.



Orbs fill the body of this photo taken in Antietam's East Woods.

The photos from Burnside Bridge are full of "orbs." Ms. Marzulli considers it a fair collection of evidence, though not as exhilarating as her photographic evidence of vapor-like ectoplasm or her sightings of full apparitions, ghosts that show themselves in human form. Overall, it's an average hunt.

During a quick survey of the portion of the battlefield known as Bloody Lane, Ms. Marzulli snaps more pictures and again captures a few circular markings. "Not the same level of activity here," she says.

Still, she is always courteous. "We thank you all for your time," she says before leaving. Other team members follow her retreat to the parking lot. As the ghost-catching gadgets are packed into the truck, the group rehashes the locations of recorded cold spots, electro magnetic readings and plain eerie feelings.

On the drive home, the Marzullis are already talking about a Civil War era inn nearby, a possibility for their next hunt.

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