

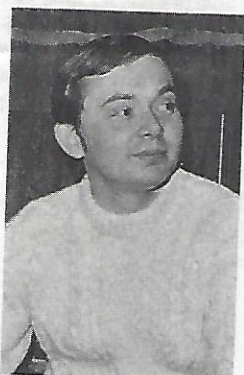
THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

Volume XXXIV, Number 8

Chicago, Illinois

April, 1973

Dana M. Wegner on Commodore "Dirty Bill" Porter



Dana M. Wegner

Back at the old stand, the Chicago Bar Association, on Friday, April 13, 1973, after our March splurge on Ladies Night—or was it The Gentlemen's Night?—one of our members, and a fairly new one at that, comes up with a subject that we would guess to be totally unknown to 93.7% of members of The Civil War Round Table. Dana M. Wegner of Elmhurst will tell us about Commodore William D. "Dirty Bill" Porter. In outlining his subject Dana says:

"William David Porter was the most ruthless officer in the Union Navy.

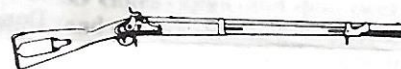
Despite his tumultuous career spanning almost half a century of combat experience, Bill Porter remained as the only major Civil War naval personality never to have had a biography written. The Navy Department tried to court martial him three times and tried to retire him on five different occasions. Only his death in 1864 could remove this vociferous, aristocratic, war-loving, and morally loose sea dog.

"Overweight "Dirty Bill" was a self-taught engineer, an incredibly skilled officer, a hard drinker, a gambler, and the most disliked officer in the Navy. Entering service at age 11, Bill had 25 years of experience at sea while most future Civil War army heroes were getting practice during the Mexican War.

"During the Civil War, Porter designed and built the finest river ironclads in the West while lining his own pockets at considerable cost overruns. During the Battle of Fort Henry his gunboat was perforated and Bill was permanently disfigured by the exploding boiler. His controversial career was ended when Lincoln promoted him to commodore with the stipulation that Porter retire from active service. Despite popular belief, Porter was, indeed, technically responsible for sinking the Confederate ironclad *Arkansas*.

"I have been researching Porter for about three years now and have accumulated an immense amount of information regarding his early, bombastic, career and his Civil War antics. There has never been a biography of Bill Porter written and the Round Table members should enjoy a humorous evening filled with the new, fresh, irreverent, and sometimes controversial tale of "Dirty Bill".

"I am a 1969 graduate of Elmhurst College with majors in history, literature, and art. I am a 1971 and 1972 graduate of the Munson Institute of American Maritime History in Mystic, Connecticut, and the recipient of the Hardin Craig Award for Excellence in Maritime Writing. I have published 15 articles dealing with Federal ironclads and my short article about Bill Porter appeared in the July 1972 issue of *Civil War Times Illustrated*."



320th REGULAR MEETING

Dana M. Wegner

On

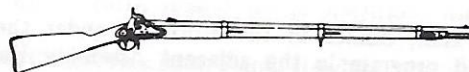
Commodore William D. "Dirty Bill" Porter

Friday, April 13, 1973

Chicago Bar Association
29 South LaSalle Street

Cocktails at 5:30 p.m.

Dinner at 6:30 p.m.



MAIL THE CARD—NOW. Make your dinner reservation. Back at the old stand, pay in advance is not required, but they can't cook it until you order it. The Bar Association management quite reasonably insists upon a firm commitment 48 hours in advance. Order your dinner or you may not eat it. You can always cancel out by calling WH-4-3085.

Dana Wegner is a member of the U.S. Naval Institute and the Nautical Research Guild, and is research associate for the Smithsonian Institution. He gave his talk on "Dirty Bill" Porter (brother of Admiral David D. Porter) at a recent meeting of Salt Creek Civil War Round Table, and members who heard him there insisted that he come down town for a larger audience.

THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE



FOUNDED DECEMBER 3, 1940

18 East Chestnut Street,
Chicago, Illinois 60611
Phone: Whitehall 4-3085

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Founding Newsletter editor: Gil Twiss, 1954-1968



*from the
Editor's pen*



Ladies Night, taken over by the Camp Followers who proclaimed it Gentleman's Night, proved a huge and expected success with reception in the Grand Army of the Republic Memorial Hall, dinner in the Rotunda under the Tiffany Dome, and program in the adjacent Assembly Hall. Champagne flowed, wine was poured, the food was good and plentiful and the service was overwhelming. Betty Walter opened the program session, and Alice Cromie introduced the speaker, but the ladies stopped there and did not freeze out President Charles V. Falkenberg from his accustomed role as arbitrator, moderator, and presiding officer.

Bell Irvin Wiley of Emory University, Atlanta, has written a slew of books on the plain Americans—the common folk—of the Civil War period; the soldiers, the civilians, the women, and the slaves; so drew from a vast background in discussing "Women of the Lost Cause." It was a popular war, and a woman's war. Mothers urged their sons to enlist; belles ridiculed and discarded swains who did not wear the gray. A few women sought to take up arms and there were some who disguised themselves as men and joined the troops. It was recorded on one prison camp that an officer prisoner had given birth to a son! A few gained fame as spies, Rose Greenhow, Emma Sanson, and Belle Boyd.

Also heroic were those who stayed home and remained loyal despite the heavy losses—258,000 Confederates died

during the war. One mother had ten sons and a grandson in service; one lost seven sons killed in action; another had four sons killed at Gettysburg; and another lost three in the Atlanta campaign.

Among the real heroines were the poor women who kept farms and plantations going while the men were away. Only a few had slaves and many women plowed the fields, harvested the crops, cut and hauled the firewood, and ran their households. Because many essentials could not be bought after the war's second year, they had to make at home soap, candles, leather, cloth, and dyes.

Despite a refusal of contemporaries to admit it, morals declined, along with church attendance, during the war, especially in the vicinity of large camps. One observer recorded his opinion that half of the women in the Chattanooga area were "lost to virtue," and an Alabama regiment long stationed near Richmond had a high incidence of gonorrhea and syphilis.

Dr. Wiley paid especial attention to Mary Boykin Chesnut—an interest he shares with Betsy Davis—and her "Diary from Dixie." The diary has been published in several editions, none of which reproduce it exactly as she wrote it, and she herself rewrote much of it, as she admitted in a letter to Mrs. Jefferson Davis. A rift between the Davises and the Chesnuts is completely covered up, and slides were produced showing a dinner she originally called an unpleasant occasion was later changed to a pleasant occasion.



MAJOR GENERAL JOHN REYNOLDS MONUMENT in Gettysburg National Cemetery. General Reynolds, commanding the First Corps, was killed July 1, the first day of the Battle of Gettysburg. This photograph dates from the 1890s.

GENERAL GRANT'S DARKEST DAY

Here is another article that turned up in extracts sent to us by our fellow member Alan C. Aimone, military history librarian at the United States Military Academy, West Point. It was published in *The Bivouac—An Independent Military Magazine*, August, 1883, Vol. I, No. 8, with no indication when or where Grant wrote it originally.

The darkest day of my life was the day I heard of Lincoln's assassination. I did not know what it meant. Here was the rebellion put down in the field, and starting up again in the gutters; we had fought it as war, now we had to fight it as assassination. Lincoln was killed on the evening of the 14th of April. I was busy sending out orders to stop recruiting, the purchase of supplies, and to muster-out the army. Lincoln had promised to go to the theatre, and wanted me to go with him. While I was with him a note came from Mrs. Grant saying that she must leave Washington that night, to go to Burlington to see the children. Some incident of a trifling nature had made her resolve to leave that evening. I was glad to have it so as I did not want to go to the theatre. So I made my excuse to the President, and at the proper hour we started for the train. As we were driving along Pennsylvania avenue, a horseman drove past us on a gallop, and back again around our carriage, looking into it. Mrs. Grant said: "There is the man who sat near us at lunch today, with some other men, and tried to overhear our conversation. He was so rude we left the dining-room. Here he is now riding after us." I thought it was only curiosity, but learned afterwards that the horseman was Booth. It seemed that I was to have been attacked, and Mrs. Grant's sudden resolve to leave changed the plan. A few days after I received an anonymous letter from a man saying that he had been detailed to kill me, that he rode on the train as far as Havre de Grace, and as my car was locked, he failed to get in. He thanked God that he had failed. I remembered that the conductor locked our car, but how true the letter was I cannot say. I learned of the assassination as I was passing through Philadelphia. I turned around, took a special train and came on to Washington. It was the gloomiest day of my life.—*Gen. U. S. Grant.*

HERE AND THERE

Edwin C. Bearss, research historian, National Park Service, several times speaker to CWRT, spoke on "The First Missouri Confederate Brigade from Springfield to Mobile" at CWRT of the Ozarks, Springfield, Missouri, February 26, and at the CWRT of St. Louis, February 29.

Will Plank, CWRT member of Marlboro, N.Y., our companion on 20 Battlefield tours, has recently been returned to the Castle Point VA Hospital, after some time in a Kingston nursing home, recovering from a severe stroke he suffered in September, 1971. He is paralyzed on the right side, but uses his left hand, and although his speech is still impaired, he reads and understands everything. Mrs. Plank reports he welcomes visitors and mail—but no get-well cards.

Bell I. Wiley was scheduled as Ladies Night speaker at the Civil War Round Table of Baton Rouge on March 15. And he is author of an article, "A Time of Greatness" in *The Museum of the Confederacy Newsletter*, February, 1973.

The Decatur-Springfield Civil War Round Tables Ball is scheduled for April 20, "full dress uniform or period clothes, or come as you are." Honorary memberships are offered for

TO THE CAMP FOLLOWERS (LADIES)

Time: 5:30 P.M., Friday, April 13, 1973

Place: Stouffer's Restaurant, 35 East Randolph at Wabash (\$5)

Program: Don't walk under a ladder on your way to Superstition Night; and what else did you expect when we meet on Friday the 13th. In Civil War times, superstition ruled many events of daily life, and we'll dig up a few for your edification and avoidance. But leave your black cat at home.

Reservations: Write or phone before April 5, (because it is a restaurant, we must know early) Betty Walter (Mrs. Robert), 1511 East Miner Street, Arlington Heights, Ill. 60004, 312-253-7053.

Last Meeting: Read all about it in the rest of this issue, and you will see that the Camp Followers came through when called upon and put over the most successful (and only) Gentleman's Night in our history.

To all CWRT Members: your women folk always qualify as a camp follower and are cordially invited to attend the meetings. Perhaps some of the newer members don't know this. We meet when they do, drink, eat and have a program—then break camp simultaneously with the gentlemen.

double membership, and there will be a drawing for top honorary member, who will receive a Colt revolver, Civil War type cap and ball with case, powder flask, nipple wrench, mold cap, and balls. Tickets are \$6 a person from John L. Satterlee, president, 6 Lambert Lane, Springfield, Ill. 62704.

Marshall D. Krolick, former CWRT president, was scheduled speaker March 8 at the Civil War Round Table of Milwaukee on "Lee vs. Longstreet at Gettysburg."

PARTICIPANTS IN 7 OR MORE BATTLEFIELD TOURS

- 20: Henry Bass, Newman, Plank, Reeder
- 18: Douglas, J. Ambler Johnston
- 17: Meyer
- 16: Worthington
- 15: Donovan, Waterbury,
- 14: Margaret April, Clausius, Hunter, Hohlweck, Lloyd Miller, Mathis, Slechta
- 13: Brooks Davis, Janousek, Lebold, Alexander, Underwood
- 12: Long, Schick, Kearney, Behanna, Burhans, Wilhelm
- 11: Pfeil
- 10: Tierney, Capel, Falkenberg, Walton, Welcher, C. Johnson
- 9: Ames, Gummerman, Joseph, Warsaw, Jernigan, M. Fischer, Henry, Kennedy, Mulroomey
- 8: McNeal

The following deceased members hold their records as follows:

- 20: Hixson
- 15: Twiss
- 12: Curtis, Farr
- 11: Wilson Smith
- 9: Bertquist



THE NEW BOOKS

(Compiled by Dick Clark)

Angle, Paul. *A Shelf of Lincoln Books: A Critical, Selective Bibliography of Lincolniana*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1972. Reprint of 1946 ed. \$8.50

Basler, Roy P. *A Touchstone for Greatness: Essays, Addresses, and Occasional Pieces about Abraham Lincoln*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1973. \$9.50

Boyer, Richard O. *The Legend of John Brown: A Biography and a History*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973. \$12.50

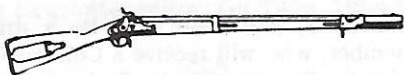
Dornbusch, C.E. *Military Bibliography of the Civil War*. Volume Three. General References; Armed Forces; and Campaigns and Battles. New York: The New York Public Library, 1972. \$20.00

McGuire, Judith White (Brockenbrough). *Diary of a Southern Refugee, During the War*. New York: Arno Press, 1972. Reprint of 1867 ed. \$16.00

Whitman, Walt. *Memoranda during the War & Death of Abraham Lincoln*. Edited with an introduction by Roy P. Basler. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press [1972, c1962]. \$9.00

Thomas, Emory M. *The American War and Peace, 1860-1877*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall [1973]. \$8.95. Paper \$3.95

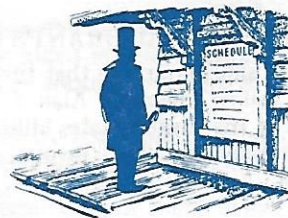
Whiting, William. *War Powers under the Constitution of the United States*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1972. Reprint of the 1871 ed. \$27.50



CWRT of New York schedules a battlefield tour of the Shenandoah Valley for May 17 to 20, 1973. Dr. Ralph Brandon spoke on "The Stonewall Brigade," January 10.

The Tennessee Valley Civil War Round Table is a new organization, reported organized late in 1972 at Huntsville, Alabama.

Robert H. Fowler, general manager of "Civil War Times Illustrated," who addressed Chicago CWRT June 9, 1972, was scheduled for Atlanta CWRT on January 6 and for Cincinnati CWRT, January 18.



BULLETIN BOARD

FUTURE MEETINGS

Regular meetings are held at the Chicago Bar Association, 29 South LaSalle, second Friday in each month except as noted.

Friday, April 13: Dana Wegner on Commodore William D. (Dirty Bill) Porter.

Sunday, April 22: 160th birthday of Stephen A. Douglas at Douglas tomb and Chicago Historical Society, details to be arranged: ladies invited.

May 10-13: Annual Battlefield Tour, Gettysburg and the Army War College, Carlisle, Pa.

Friday, May 18: Edward C. Johnson on Embalming Surgeons of the Civil War.

June 8: George B. Hartzog, Jr., Director, National Parks Service.

Every Monday: Informal noon luncheon meetings at LaSalle Hotel coffee shop; all members invited.

NEW MEMBERS

Duff J. McGovern
Prudential Insurance Co.
105 W. Adams Street
Suite 1330
Chicago, Illinois 60603



THE PRESIDENT'S OWN

A good part of the song and band music Lincoln heard throughout his four years in Washington was provided by the United States Marine Band, which became "increasingly active and important," and the President was their best audience. When the weather grew warm, the mall became "a bright place for promenaders, made doubly so by the fine music furnished by the Marine band," and all White House receptions concluded with "Yankee Doodle."

By 1862 the number of players in the Band had been increased to thirty-two, and the Band had received full status by Act of Congress. It had become almost indispensable for social functions, particularly those held at the Executive Mansion, and the President himself became their best audience.

From The Dispatch of New York CWRT

Dr. Ben H. Proctor, professor of history at Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, is author of a biography of John H. Reagan, Confederate Postmaster General, and addressed the recently organized Civil War Round Table of Texas on that subject at Fort Worth January 9—and among those present was a grandson of his subject, Ernest Reagan of Texarkana. Purchasers of the book got a double autograph. (A special price of \$6.60 is available by sending check made out to the Civil War Round Table of Texas to Hill Junior College Press, c/o Col. H. B. Simpson, P.O. Box 619, Hillsboro, Texas 76645.)