

THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

Volume XLVII, Number 6

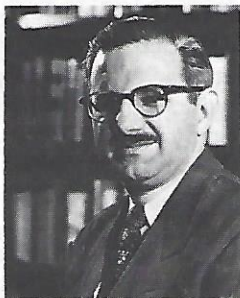
Chicago, Illinois

February, 1987

Ralph G. Newman on Robert Todd Lincoln in the Civil War

by C. Robert Douglas

On January 19, 1865, President Lincoln wrote to General U.S. Grant: "Please read and answer this letter as though I was not President, but only a friend. My son, now in his twenty-second year, having graduated at Harvard, wishes to see something of the war before it ends. I do not wish to put him in the ranks, nor yet to give him a commission, to which those who have already served long, are better entitled and better qualified to hold. Could he, without embarrassment to you, or detriment to the service, go into your military family with some nominal rank, I, not the public, furnishing his necessary means? If no, say so without the least hesitation, because I am as anxious, and as deeply interested, that you shall not be encumbered as you can be yourself."



Ralph G. Newman

The brief term of military service of President Lincoln's eldest son will be the focal point of the address to The Round Table by our founder, Ralph G. Newman, on February 20. In his remarks, Ralph will focus on the necessarily (as he looked in the early brief military career of Robert days of The Round Table) Todd Lincoln, and include excerpts from letters in which he commented on his experiences while serving as an aide to Lt. Gen. Grant.

According to Col. Horace Porter, assistant inspector general on Grant's staff, the President and Grant had already discussed the matter before their exchange of correspondence. Grant would respond in his letter of January 21, 1865: "Your favor of this date in relation to your son serving in some Military capacity is received. I will be most happy to have him in my Military family in the manner you propose. The nominal rank given him is immaterial but I would suggest that of Capt. as I have three Staff officers now, of considerable service, in no higher grade..."

Robert reported on February 22, 1865. His work consisted principally of escorting visitors here and there. Grant had also allowed Robert to secure leave for the inauguration of his father on March 4th. He participated in the engagement that forced the Confederate evacuation of Petersburg on April 2-3. Colonel Porter wrote later: "The new acquisition to the company at headquarters soon became exceedingly popular. He had inherited many of the genial traits of his father and entered heartily into all the social pastimes at headquarters. He was already ready to perform his share of hard work, and never expected to be



458th Regular Meeting

Ralph G. Newman
on
Robert Todd Lincoln
in the Civil War

Friday, February 20, 1987

Note: This is the third Friday of the month.

Quality Inn
Halsted and Madison
Cocktails at 5:30 p.m. Dinner at 6:30 p.m.
\$13.00 per person
Entree: Medallions of Pork, Fish, or Fruit Plate



Meeting date

As noted above, the February meeting will be held on the third Friday of the month, February 20. We will return to our regular meeting night, the second Friday of the month, in March.

treated differently from any other officer on account of his being the son of the Chief Executive of the nation."

When Lee surrendered at Appomattox Court House, Capt. Lincoln was among those who witnessed the event. The young captain was personally presented to the Confederate leader. After the ceremonies of surrender, Grant, with Robert Lincoln in his party, headed for Washington where they arrived early on April 14.

During the period following his father's death, many matters required Robert's presence and attention. On April 21, 1865, he tendered his resignation to the Adjutant General and requested that it be accepted. On the back of the letter, Grant wrote: In approving the resignation of Capt. Lincoln, it affords me pleasure to testify to the uniform

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THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE



Founded December 3, 1940
 18 East Chestnut Street
 Chicago, Illinois 60611
 Phone: (312) 944-3085

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The only requirement for membership in The Round Table is a genuine interest in the Civil War and its era. For information, address Dan Weinberg, 18 E. Chestnut St., Chicago, Illinois 60611.



(continued from page 1)

good conduct of this young officer and to say that by his course in the performance of his duties, and in his social intercourse, he has won the esteem and lasting friendship of all with whom he came in contact."

In the mid 30s, our speaker's book shop, then located at 33 N. LaSalle Street, became an informal gathering place for a number of men interested in Lincoln and the Civil War. As this group became better acquainted, they joined

together for lunch. One of the group recommended the formation of an organization concerned exclusively with the Civil War. It would meet once a month for dinner, listen to a paper by one of its members and then discuss the speaker's presentation. The first meeting took place on December 3, 1940 at the Bismarck Hotel. Of the 15 men who attended that meeting, only Ralph and Elmer Gertz remain.

Through Ralph's leadership, The Round Table has awarded graduate fellowships in Civil War history; a Civil War Research Center has been established, and the Nevins-Freeman Award, to recognize those individuals whose scholarship, literary achievements and contributions to the study of Civil War history are outstanding, was created. In recognition of Ralph's accomplishments, he was designated as the second recipient of that prestigious award.

Ralph's civic and public contributions include 13 years as president of the board of directors of the Chicago Public Library, and he led the work to restore the Cultural Center of the Main Library. He has been honored as a laureate of the Lincoln Academy and serves as a member of its board of regents. Currently he serves on the library division of the U.S. Information Agency.

His literary works include *The American Iliad* (1947); *Lincoln For the Ages* (1960); *The Civil War Digest* (1960); and *Abraham Lincoln's Last Full Measure of Devotion* (1981). In a number of his writings, he collaborated with fellow Round Table members Otto Eisenschiml and E. B. 'Pete' Long. His leadership finds expression in service as president of the Stephen A. Douglas and the U.S. Grant Associations, and as a trustee of Lincoln College. For his many works on our mutual behalf, we are in his debt and take pride in welcoming him once again as a speaker at our meeting.

A symposium commemorating the 125th anniversary of the battle between the Merrimac and Monitor will be held in Portsmouth, Virginia March 6-7. The program, sponsored by the Portsmouth Area Civil War Round Table, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the City of Portsmouth, will feature Dr. William Davis, author of *Duel Between the First Ironclads* and Dr. William N. Still, author of *Iron Afloat*. In addition, a reunion of Monitor and Merrimac descendants is planned. For further information, contact Don Finlay, 3015 Reese Dr., Portsmouth, Virginia 23707 (804) 484-8554.

We reported in December the good news from Antietam that the historic Grove Farm would not become a shopping center. However, another threat looms on the horizon (literally). A cable television company wants to erect a 120-160 foot tower on a hilltop about a mile from the center of the battlefield. Preservationists have argued that the tower would be readily visible from virtually every part of the battlefield and would mar its historic integrity. The television company is asking for a special exception to the conservation zoning.

Letters opposing the rezoning should be sent to: Washington Co. Board of Zoning Appeals, County Office Bldg., 33 W. Washington St., Hagerstown, Maryland 21740, and the *Morning Herald*, 100 Summit Ave., Hagerstown, Maryland 21740 (attn. Letters to the Editor).

January meeting

by Wayne Anderson

At the 457th Regular Meeting on January 9, Marshall Krollick, fellow member and noted authority on the Gettysburg Campaign, spoke to 118 members and guests on "Captain to Brigadier: The Promotions of Custer, Farnsworth and Merritt."

To be promoted to brigadier general is the highlight of a military career. During peacetime, the promotion process is very slow. Before the Civil War, the only promotion criteria was an officer's ranking on the seniority list. In wartime, the promotion process is based on an officer's bravery, ability, and surviving the test of combat. However, when two captains and a first lieutenant are promoted to brigadier general (bypassing the ranks of major, lieutenant colonel and colonel), it is unusual, even in wartime.

The individual responsible for the promotions of Custer, Farnsworth and Merritt was Major General Alfred Pleasonton, who was appointed commander of the Cavalry Corps, Army of the Potomac, after the Chancellorsville Campaign. Pleasonton was a West Point graduate and served in several Indian campaigns before the Civil War. Although a combative officer who sought action against the enemy, Pleasonton's personality often ran afoul of his superiors. His redeeming qualities, said Marshall, were that he was a good cavalry commander and possessed a thorough understanding of cavalry units and tactics. Also, Pleasonton had an eye for selecting young cavalry officers who showed ability and potential.

Of the three young officers promoted to brigadier general, George Custer is the most easily recognized. Custer graduated last in his class at West Point in 1861 and was commissioned in the cavalry. He served on the staffs of McClellan and Pleasonton during the first two years of the war. At the Battle of Aldie, June 17, 1863, Custer led a cavalry charge, even though he was a staff officer. This was noted by his commander, General Pleasonton.

Wesley Merritt was another young cavalry officer who was a West Point graduate (class of 1860). He served on the staffs of Generals Stoneman and Pleasonton when they commanded the Cavalry Corps. Merritt was cited for bravery during the Battles of Brandy Station and Middleburg. Although Merritt did not have the outgoing personality of Custer, he was judged by Pleasonton as a young officer with potential.

The third member of this trio was Elon Farnsworth, who was neither a West Point graduate nor a professional soldier. Farnsworth served in Albert Sidney Johnston's expedition against the Mormons as a forage master. Pleasonton was also a member of this expedition. When the Civil War began, Farnsworth was appointed adjutant of the 8th Illinois Cavalry, which was commanded by his uncle, John Farnsworth. Elon Farnsworth subsequently commanded a troop and served on Pleasonton's staff, whose command included the 8th Illinois.

In 1862 John Farnsworth was elected to Congress and resigned his commission. After the Chancellorsville Campaign, Pleasonton replaced George Stoneman as Cavalry Corps commander, Army of the Potomac. He wrote to Congressman Farnsworth about his need to appoint his own officers to command positions. Young Elon Farnsworth added a postscript to Pleasonton's letter. Clearly, this was not an example of two officers following army procedures. However, Pleasonton made his request to Hooker

and later Meade to promote Custer, Merritt and Farnsworth to the rank of brigadier general. On June 28, 1863 they were promoted and each assumed command of a cavalry brigade on the eve of the Battle of Gettysburg. General Pleasonton and Congressman Farnsworth had each exerted influence to obtain the promotions.

Custer took command of a unit that would be called the Michigan Brigade. He fought at Gettysburg, Yellow Tavern and in the Shenandoah Valley Campaign. Custer's cavalry cut off Lee's route of escape at Appomattox and forced Lee to ask for surrender terms. Custer remained in the army after the war, and is best remembered for leading a detachment of the 7th Cavalry to annihilation at the Little Big Horn River in 1876.

Merritt commanded a reserve cavalry brigade at Gettysburg. Later he fought at Todd's Tavern and commanded a cavalry division in the Shenandoah Valley. Merritt also stayed in the army after the war. He served in several Indian campaigns, was Superintendent of West Point, and retired as a major general.

Farnsworth's career as a general was tragic and short; he was killed on July 3, 1863 leading a doomed cavalry attack at Gettysburg. Pleasonton's career after Gettysburg was downward. He was relieved as commander of the Cavalry Corps and transferred west. He fought at Mine Run in 1864, defeating Sterling Price's cavalry. After the war he held a number of low level government positions.

In November we reported on a rezoning requested by the Hazel-Peterson Company of Fairfax, Virginia that would pave the way for a gigantic commercial and residential development on about 500 acres adjacent to the Manassas National Battlefield Park. That rezoning has now been approved by the Prince William County Board of Supervisors. Although the project is bound to have adverse impacts on the Park, Manassas Park Superintendent Roland Swain was instrumental in obtaining some concessions by the developer which may ameliorate the effects of the development.

Hazel-Peterson pledged over \$2 million toward construction of an interchange with I-66 which will help divert traffic from the battlefield. They also agreed to establish a buffer zone next to the Park to create a visual screen for the development, to eliminate the US 29 access to the shopping center (US 29 runs through the Park) and to construct storm water retention systems. In addition, they state they have no plans to seek special use permits for buildings over 45 feet high.

Superintendent Swain has been unjustly criticized for acquiescing to the rezoning. However, the problem of encroaching development at Manassas is longstanding, and the Prince William County Board of Supervisors is pro-development. Some type of development near the Park was inevitable; in fact, approval of the rezoning was a foregone conclusion. Swain, realizing that the County would be unwilling to impose limits on the developer, took his concerns directly to Hazel-Peterson. In return for their concessions, and in the face of certain development of some type, Swain agreed to the rezoning. While it is certainly not a clear-cut victory for battlefield preservation, Swain should be given credit for obtaining a result that is not as bad as it could have been.



The New Books

compiled by Dick Clark

Bearss, Edwin Cole. *The Campaign for Vicksburg. Volume II. Grant Strikes a Fatal Blow.* Dayton, Ohio: Morningside Bookshop, 1986. xxi, 19-689 p., maps, photos. \$37.50.

Bearss, Edwin Cole. *The Campaign for Vicksburg. Volume III. Unvexed to the Sea.* Dayton, Ohio: Morningside Bookshop, 1986. xxi, 691-1432 p., maps, photos, bibliog., index. \$37.50.

Eckert, Edward K. *Fiction Distorting Fact: The Prison Life, Annotated by Jefferson Davis.* Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1986. \$39.95. Reputedly the work of Davis' physician, actually done by Halpine and full of distortions that Davis corrected in his own copy.

Bryan, William Cullen. *The Letters of William Cullen Bryant. Vol. IV, 1858-1864.* Bronx, NY: Fordham University Press, 1984. \$45.00. 35 letters to Lincoln and like number to other public figures such as Welles, Chase, Stanton.

Busey, John W. and David G. Martin. *Regimental Strengths and Losses at Gettysburg.* Hightstown, NJ: Longstreet House, 1986. 351 p. \$19.95.

Hoobler, James A. *Cities under the Gun: Images of Occupied Nashville and Chattanooga.* Nashville, TN: Rutledge Hill Press, 1986. 223 p., maps, illus. \$39.95.

Judson, Amos M. *History of the Eighty-third Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteers.* Notes by John J. Pullen. Dayton, Ohio: Morningside Bookshop, 1986. 333 p., illus., index. \$20.00. Original of 1866.

Menendez, Albert J. *Civil War Novels: An Annotated Bibliography.* New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1986. 192 p. \$26.00.

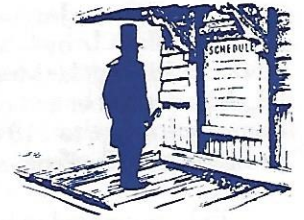
Fellow member Stephen Ziegler was the speaker at the December meeting of the Northern Illinois Round Table. His topic was "Ewell at Gettysburg." On February 6 our president, Pat Sumner, will speak to them on "Fighting Lady—The Women in Uniform."

The Midwest Civil War Round Table Conference will be held April 24-26 in Ft. Wayne, Indiana. The speakers, and their topics, are: Dr. James I. Robertson on "A.P. Hill," Jerry Russell on "The Death of Stonewall Jackson," Dennis Frye on "Command Decision: Leadership in the 1862 Maryland Campaign," Ed Bearss on "Shiloh—Missed Confederate Victory," Dr. Mark Neely on "Lincoln and the Constitution: The Fate of Civil Liberties in Times of Total War," and Chris Calkins on "Civilian Life in Petersburg, Virginia During the War." There will also be a tour on Sunday to the Lincoln Museum and Old Fort Wayne.

The cost of the Conference is \$50 per person, which includes the Friday night reception, breakfast, lunch, dinner and coffee breaks. The Sunday tour is an additional \$10. The Conference will be based at the Ft. Wayne Marriott where rooms will cost \$57.20 single, double, triple or quad.

For further information, or to register, write Midwest CWRT Conference, 3907 Hartzell Rd., Ft. Wayne, Indiana 46806. They can provide hotel reservation information.

BULLETIN BOARD



Future meetings

Regular meetings are held at the Quality Inn, Halsted and Madison, the second Friday in each month, except as noted.

February 20: Ralph G. Newman on "Robert Todd Lincoln in the Civil War." **Note:** This is the third Friday of the month.

March 13: Howard McManus on "The Battle of Cloyd's Mountain."

April 10: Mike Chesson on "The Bread Riots in Richmond."

April 30-May 3: Annual Battlefield Tour—The Trans-Mississippi.

May 8: Betty Otto on "Maryland Campaign, September 1862."

June 5: Mark Boatner on "How the Civil War Dictionary Came Into Being." **Note:** This is the first Friday of the month.

New members

Robert Bundy, P.O. Box 121, Redondo Beach, California 90277 (213) 376-2472.

Barbara Hughett, 1135 W. Lunt Avenue, #312, Chicago, Illinois 60626 (312) 973-5822.

Frederick B. Paton, 1516 N. State Parkway, Chicago, Illinois 60610 (312) 337-2119.

Change of address

David J. Smith, 211 Exmoor Avenue, Glen Ellyn, Illinois 60137.

The Ninth Annual Meeting of the Confederate Historical Institute will be held in Chattanooga, Tennessee April 9-11. It will focus on the 1863 Chickamauga campaign and will feature talks and panel discussions by several historians, and a day-long tour of the Chickamauga battlefield led by Ed Bearss. The \$175 registration fee (\$10 discount if paid by March 20) includes meals, sessions, and the tour, but not lodging at the Ramada Inn South (rooms there are \$40 single or double). For further information, contact Civil War Round Table Associates, P.O. Box 7388, Little Rock, Arkansas 72217.

A three-day seminar on Antietam will be held April 16-19 in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. The lecturers will include Kent Brown, William Frassanito, Dennis Frye, Gary Gallagher, Warren Hassler, William Hassler, and Alan Nolan. In addition to covering the Antietam battlefield, there will be a trip to Harpers Ferry.

The seminar fee of \$310 per person includes all seminar materials, lectures, social functions, transportation, and several meals. Discounted rooms (\$42 single/\$48 double) will be available in the Harpers Ferry Cliffside Inn. For further information, contact The Country Publishers, Educational Seminar Division, P.O. Box 432, Middleburg, Virginia 22117 (703) 687-6306.