

THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

Volume LII, Number 3

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November 1991

Alan T. Nolan on "The Generalship of Robert E. Lee"

by Barbara Hughett

Robert E. Lee emerged from the Civil War as an almost mythical figure. From a family with deep roots in American history, he was the son of "Lighthorse Harry" Lee, a cavalry officer in the American Revolution who later served as governor of Virginia. He married the great-granddaughter of Martha Custis Washington. Lee graduated second in the West Point class of 1829, and served with distinction during the war with Mexico in 1846. As the southern states began to secede in 1861, he was called to Washington where General Winfield Scott offered him the command of the United States Army in the field, but he declined. When Virginia voted to secede, Lee resigned his commission. He could not fight, he said, against his beloved home state. After first serving as personal military adviser to Confederate President Jefferson Davis, he became commander of the Army of Northern Virginia in June 1862.



Alan T. Nolan

Though Lee's performance as a general has been subject to debate over the years, his competency has been generally admired. His sterling personal qualities and his grace in defeat have led to his being revered as a hero in both the South and the North. This conventional wisdom will be questioned on November 8, when Alan T. Nolan scrutinizes "The Generalship of Robert E. Lee" in his address to The Civil War Round Table.

Nolan will present some controversial viewpoints as he reviews Lee's conduct as commander of the Army of Northern Virginia. While conceding that Lee was frequently an effective tactician and that his operational strategy was sometimes successful, Nolan contends the general misperceived the South's grand strategy. His conclusion is that, contrary the traditional view, Lee's generalship was significantly flawed.

Alan Nolan, chairman of the board of trustees of the Indiana Historical Society, is a fellow of the Company of Military Historians and a founder and former president of the Indianapolis Civil War Round Table. A graduate of Indiana University and Harvard Law School, he practices law in Indianapolis with the firm of Ice Miller Donadio & Ryan. Books he has written include *The Iron Brigade* (1961), which *Civil War Times Illustrated* has classified among the best one hundred books ever written on the Civil War.

His latest work, *Lee Considered: General Robert E. Lee*



505th Regular Meeting

Alan T. Nolan

on

"The Generalship of Robert E. Lee."

Friday, November 8, 1991

Holiday Inn Mart Plaza

350 North Orleans Street

Buttons—15th floor

Cocktails at 5:30 p.m. Dinner at 6:30 p.m.

\$17.50 per person

Entree: Chicken Nancy, Orange Roughy,
or Fruit Plate



A Reminder

Please make your reservation by Tuesday, November 5, as the Holiday Inn needs 72 hours advance notice. Mail the enclosed postcard or call the book shop at (312)944-3085. If you make a reservation and must cancel, please call the book shop as soon as possible.

If you are driving and coming from the south, turn left into the Mart Plaza lot just after crossing the river on Orleans. From the north, turn right from Orleans on Hubbard, left on Kingsbury, right on Kinzie, and left into the Mart Plaza lot. Parking is free. Have your ticket validated at The Round Table registration table.

and Civil War History (1991), was a selection of the History Book Club and the Book-of-the-Month Club. Of this book, James M. McPherson wrote: "With a deft pen and a sure grasp of the essential questions, Alan Nolan separates the Lee of reality from the Lee of mythology. No student of the Civil War can ignore the challenging and controversial conclusions of this study."

Nolan has also written many articles for historical publications and a contemporary novel, *As Sounding Brass*. He last addressed The Round Table in December 1986, when his topic was "A Historic View of Robert E. Lee."

THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE



Founded December 3, 1940

357 West Chicago Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60610
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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, 357 W. Chicago Ave., Chicago, IL 60610.



Schimmelfennig Boutique

In addition to The Round Table history, the following items are available at each monthly meeting:

Lapel pins \$ 5.00 each
Mugs 7.00 each
Meeting tapes 7.00 each
Fiftieth Anniversary photos 10.00 each

Proceeds from the sale of these items go to support the programs of The Civil War Round Table.

Battlefield Preservation Report

by Mary Munsell Abroe

Two leading battlefield preservation organizations currently are in need of our help. The Association for the Preservation of Civil War Sites, with our 1991 Nevins-Freeman recipient Gary Gallagher at the helm, and the Civil War Battlefield Campaign of the Conservation Fund are raising monies for the purchase of highly significant battlefield properties *and they must have our support—the support of Civil War students who constitute their natural constituency*. We expend massive amounts of energy arguing about everything from Longstreet and Lee at Gettysburg to Abraham Lincoln and the Constitution to why the South *really* lost the war, and we spend countless dollars accumulating books, papers, and artifacts of every description. Quite frankly, however, we are wasting our breath and our money if the only thing that *really matters*—the land where our ancestors fought and died and in the process defined our nation—continues to slip from our grasp! In assisting these two fine groups, we have an opportunity to support the study of our Civil War in a way that *truly will make a difference*.

In March 1991 the APCWS contracted to buy nearly two hundred acres of Fisher's Hill battlefield in the Shenandoah Valley from a private owner. The field at Fisher's Hill, site of a significant engagement during the 1864 Valley Campaign, retains much of its historic appearance today, yet two interstates intersect just a few miles away and the threat of suburban development creeping into the area from Washington is very real; in addition, the battlefield is not protected from development by state, local, or federal governments. Land purchased by the APCWS encompasses a segment of the defense line held by Confederates under Jubal Early and a portion of the attack route of Philip Sheridan's forces. There is no federal funding available for Fisher's Hill, so the Association must look to businesses, other groups and private citizens to raise the balance (after down payment) of the \$222,000 purchase price.

Time is short, for terms of the contract state that the land must be paid for *in full* by December 31, 1991—or the Association loses its down payment. Donations may be sent to: APCWS—Fisher's Hill Campaign, P.O. Box 1862, Fredricksburg, VA 22402. The APCWS is the nation's only trust dedicated solely to preservation of Civil War fields and related sites and it is the current owner of ten historically significant properties. It is also a *membership* organization to which approximately fifty of our own members belong; those fifty constitute about one-sixth of our total number. There are various categories of membership, starting at \$25; information is available from A. Wilson Greene at the above address. Please consider joining!

The Conservation Fund, a land and water conservancy, headquartered in Arlington, Virginia, launched its Civil War Battlefield Campaign in 1988—in the aftermath of the Manassas controversy. The Civil War Battlefield Campaign, directed by Frances Kennedy, has become an important purchaser and purchase broker of battlefield properties in a very short time. For example, it assisted the Mellon Foundation of Pittsburgh in acquiring land at Antietam, Five Forks, the Wilderness, and Gettysburg's East Cavalry Field (1600 acres in total) last year; the tracts then were given as a gift to our nation. The CWBC also has preserved land on nine battlefields, including Fredricksburg, Chancellorsville, Shiloh, and Glorietta, and is in-

(continued on page 4)

October Meeting

by Barbara Hughett

The eighteenth annual Nevins-Freeman Award of The Civil War Round Table was conferred on Gary W. Gallagher at The Round Table's 504th regular meeting on October 11, before 99 members and guests. The award was established in 1974 to honor individuals for their contributions to the preservation of our nation's heritage and to our understanding of the past, especially of the years 1861-1865. Gary Gallagher, head of the history department at Pennsylvania State University and president of the Association for the Preservation of Civil War Sites, is the author of several books and numerous articles on Civil War subjects. He is currently in the process of writing a biography of Confederate General Jubal A. Early. The topic of his acceptance address was "Jubal Early and the Myth of the Lost Cause."

By the end of the Civil War, one-quarter of the prewar white military-age male population of the South was dead; another quarter had been maimed in some way. Much of the Southern land lay in ruins. "Alone among the sections of the United States," Gallagher emphasized, "the South had suffered a truly shattering military defeat." Only Southerners have known the kind of all-encompassing failure known by many nations on other continents, and by the native peoples of the Americas.

In an effort to come to terms with their defeat, Southerners came up with various explanations of what they had fought for and why they had lost, which became components in what is known as "The Myth of the Lost Cause." Gallagher noted that, although the South went to war to protect a slave-based society, Jefferson Davis and others "responded to the loss of the thing they initially set out to safeguard by arguing that they had gone to war not to protect slavery but to protect and preserve their constitutional rights." This rationalization enabled some Southerners to convince themselves that they had emerged from absolute military defeat with their honor intact.

Jubal Anderson Early was perhaps the most influential of the former Confederate generals in the postwar mythmaking. Born in Virginia in 1816, Early graduated from West Point but left the Army in the 1830s to become a lawyer. Elected to the Virginia legislature for one term as a Whig, he was he was an anti-secession delegate to the 1861 Virginia State Convention. However, once the state voted to leave the Union, he joined the Army and ultimately rose to the rank of lieutenant general. He was dismissed from the army in disgrace after losing the Shenandoah Valley in 1864. Most of his life thereafter was spent in a tireless effort to canonize Robert E. Lee and promote the cult of the Lost Cause.

Ironically, it wasn't until Lee's death in 1870 that such efforts could be very successful. Lee had consistently counseled acceptance of defeat and urged Southerners to get on with the process of reuniting with the North. Beginning with eulogies to Lee, Early and what Gallagher described as a small group of Virginians launched a campaign which extolled the virtues of their prewar civilization and refought the battles of the war.

Gallagher explained that the campaign these Southerners orchestrated to create a satisfactory history reached a consensus on three major points that became central to the Lost Cause myth. The first two points emphasized that the South had not gone to war to protect slavery and had not lost because of a waning of the will to resist. The third point provided alternative explanations for Lee's defeat and

spawned an immense literature, in which former Confederate General James Longstreet was unjustly accused of responsibility for the Southern defeat at Gettysburg.

Early became what Gallagher called a "one man clearinghouse for much of the Southern writing about the war." Aware of what had happened to Longstreet, former Confederates worried that what they wrote might incur the wrath of Early. Thus, it was commonly believed in the South that Longstreet and Yankee numbers had brought down the flawless Lee, who became an almost Christlike figure. "Jubal Early," Gallagher said, "had great success in helping to plant firmly in the postwar Southern mind a godlike perception of Lee and an explanation for secession removed from the blight of slavery."

Early was not successful, though, in his effort to prevent reconciliation between the sections. Another strain of Lost Cause mythmaking, which still adhered to some of the old explanations and rationalizations, prevailed in the end. This strain, represented by the thinking of former Confederate General John B. Gordon, looked to the future instead of staying entrenched in the past, and embraced a New South that sought to emulate the industrial North.

Jubal Early, Gallagher concluded, "never became reconciled to this new order... He resisted until his death [in 1894], railing at every evidence of Yankee influence in the South." He had been successful, however, in helping establish a tradition that brought a postwar consensus in the South that had never been present in the days of the Confederacy.



Reservations for The Round Table's 80th Birthday Party for founder Ralph Newman, to be held on Tuesday, November 5, must be made by Friday, November 1. Invitations were sent to all Round Table members. The cocktail hour will begin at 6 p.m., with dinner at 7 p.m. The site is Berghoff Brewery & Restaurant, 436 West Ontario Street, Chicago. The cost per person is \$30. To reserve a space, either call Barbara Hughett at (312)973-5822, or send a check to Margaret April, 1304 West Lunt Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60626. Checks should be made out to The Civil War Round Table.



Monocacy National Battlefield in Frederick, Maryland, the country's newest Civil War park, was formally opened on July 13. Speakers at the opening ceremonies included Secretary of Interior Manuel Lujan and United States Senator Paul Sarbanes.

Congress authorized a park boundary of 1670 acres for Monocacy in 1934. The National Park Service began acquiring land in the 1970s, following the Interior Department's designation of the battlefield as a national historic landmark. The National Park Service has acquired over 1000 acres of Monocacy over the past seven years and is in the process of negotiating to purchase an additional 600 acres.

According to Superintendent Richard Rambur of Antietam National Battlefield, of which Monocacy is an adjunct, Monocacy's operating budget has risen from "next to nothing" to \$200,000, which will provide for three park rangers and maintenance. At present, the battle is being personally interpreted by rangers and volunteers from the Frederick, Maryland Civil War Round Table.

The New Books compiled by C. Robert Douglas



Fowler, William M., Jr. *Under Two Flags: The American Navy in the Civil War*. 1990. Norton. \$22.50.

Hendrickson, Robert. *Sumter: The First Day of the Civil War*. 1990. Scarborough House, Chelsea, MI 48118. \$22.95.

Hoehling, A.A. *After the Guns Fell Silent: A Post-Appomattox Narrative—April 1865-March 1866*. 1990. University Press of America. \$24.95.

Humphreys, A.A. *The Virginia Campaign of 1864 and 1865*. New introduction by Chris Calkins. 6th Volume—Campaigns of the Civil War. Broadfoot Publ. Co. 1990. \$25.00. Original of 1883.

Jones, Terry L., ed. *The Civil War Memoirs of Captain William J. Seymour: Reminiscences of a Louisiana Tiger*. 1991. LSU Press. \$19.95.

Kelly, Dennis. *The Kennesaw Mountain and the Atlanta Campaign—A Tour Guide*. Kennesaw Mtn. Hist. Soc. 1990. Pbk. \$9.95.

Lash, Jeffrey N. *Destroyer of the Iron Horse: General Joseph E. Johnston and Confederate Rail Transport, 1861-1865*. 1991. Kent State University Press. \$28.00.

Wallace, Lee A., Jr. *17th Virginia Infantry*. H.E. Howard, Inc. 1991. \$16.95.

The history of The Round Table, *The Civil War Round Table: Fifty Years of Scholarship and Fellowship*, by Barbara Hughett, is available for \$30 per copy. You may purchase the book at the November meeting or order it from Morningside Bookshop, 260 Oak Street, Dayton, Ohio 45401 (1-800-648-9710). Add \$2.50 for postage and handling.

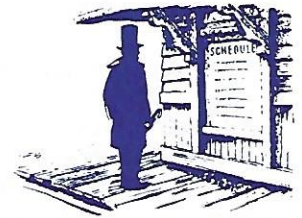
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involved currently in efforts to preserve areas at Port Hudson and Harpers Ferry. At Port Hudson, site of the first major assault of black soldiers (the Louisiana Native Guard) during the war, the CWBC has a chance to acquire 256 acres at a cost of \$150,000; it intends to donate the land to the state battlefield park, the Port Hudson State Commemorative Area. In addition, the Campaign has an option to buy a twenty-three acre parcel, the Spur Battery, on Maryland Heights at Harpers Ferry. The land is edged on three sides by Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, and the CWBC is working with the Friends of Harpers Ferry Park to raise the \$25,000 purchase price prior to a July 4, 1992 deadline. Gifts to assist these worthwhile efforts may be directed to: Civil War Battlefield Campaign, Conservation Fund, 1800 N. Kent St., Suite 1120, Arlington, VA 22209.

Both organizations are non-profit, and both are in the forefront of a struggle that benefits those of us whose passion is on-site study of the Civil War. It is time to ante up. Our ancestors gave their lives. The question to ask ourselves the next time we walk a battlefield is: what difference do we really make in preserving that heritage?

Former Round Table President Brooks Davis spoke at the October meeting of the Cincinnati Civil War Round Table on "The Grand Army of the Republic."

BULLETIN BOARD



Future Meetings

Regular meetings are held at the Holiday Inn Mart Plaza, 350 N. Orleans (Buttons, 15th Floor), the second Friday in each month, except as noted.

November 5: Birthday Party for Ralph Newman, Berghoff Brewery & Restaurant.

November 8: Alan T. Nolan on "The Generalship of Robert E. Lee."

December 13: Mary Munsell Abroe on "Battlefield Commemoration and Preservation: The Reason Why, 1863-1890."

January 10: Karen K. Osborne and Virginia Crane on "A Woman's War: Two Perspectives—North and South."

February 14: W. Glenn Robertson on "General Thomas J. Wood at Chickamauga: The Fatal Order Revisited."

March 13: Herman Hattaway on "How They Teach Civil War History at West Point."

April 10: Dennis Frye on "Mosby vs. Sheridan in the Shenandoah."

April 30-May 3: Annual battlefield tour—Gettysburg.

May 8: Lawrence Hewitt on "Port Hudson: The Most Photographed Battlefield of the Civil War."

June 12: Steven Newton on "Joseph E. Johnston: Rationalizations, Ego, and Politics After the Battle of Seven Pines."

New Members

James W. Barnard, 2359 E. Crestmont Lane, Littleton, CO 80126

Daniel R. Cherry, 24 Columbine, Clarendon Hills, IL 60514, (708)654-1971

Stewart McCarrell, 2144 W. Concord, Chicago, IL 60647, (312)35-4911

Jeff Sandlin, 70 Lincolnway, Valparaiso, IN 46383-5522, (219)462-9922

Walter Sugar, 837 Winchester Lane, Northbrook, IL 60062, (708)272-0450

Changes of Address

William Alban, 675 W. Lake, Oak Park, IL 60301

Timothy A. Nosal, 622 Ogden Court, #162, Oxford, OH 45056

Round Table Treasurer Robert Girardi reminds members that their 1991-1992 dues must be paid by November 1. Persons who have not paid by that date will be dropped from the membership rolls.

Researchers are looking for descendants of Sam Postlethwaite, a Confederate soldier who is buried in an unmarked grave in Greenwood Cemetery in Coventry, Rhode Island. Direct any information you may have to Round Table member Alice Cromie, 23849 West Erhart, Grayslake, Illinois 60030.

A headstone dedication ceremony will be held this month at the grave of longtime Round Table member Lester Joseph, who died last July. The ceremony will take place at 11 a.m. on Sunday, November 10, in the Maple Section of Westlawn Cemetery, 7801 West Montrose.