

THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

Volume LIII, Number 6

Chicago, Illinois

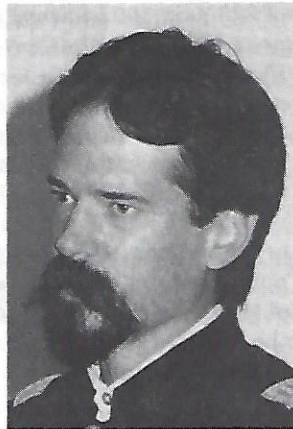
February 1993

Brian C. Pohanka on "Custer's Last Stand: The Battle of Little Big Horn Reexamined"

by Barbara Hughett

One of the legendary figures to emerge from the Civil War, George Armstrong Custer, first came to prominence as a dashing young cavalry officer at the First Battle of Bull Run. He was a member of the West Point class of 1861, and took part in every battle of the Army of the Potomac except one. A dashing and effective cavalry leader, Custer had eleven horses shot out from under him during the course of the war, although he was wounded himself only once.

However, it is for "Custer's Last Stand," the Battle of Little Big Horn, on June 25, 1876, that the general has become famous . . . or infamous. The dramatic demise of the flamboyant and controversial commander of the Seventh U.S. Cavalry has inspired a plethora of books and articles, as well as "Last Stand" paintings and several dozen Hollywood films.



Brian C. Pohanka

One of the fascinations of Little Big Horn rests in the fact that ongoing research is constantly shedding new light on the enigmatic events of that fatal day. In the summer of 1984, following a catastrophic fire that scorched the rolling Montana hills where Sioux and soldier clashed, a team of archaeologists launched their own investigation into Custer's Last Stand. The material record of three archaeological surveys of the Little Big Horn battlefield has provided historians with a new understanding of how Indian warriors vanquished the vaunted Seventh Cavalry.

Utilizing state-of-the-art surveying techniques, the archaeologists pinpointed their finds. Microscopic ballistics analyses identified specific weapons by means of distinctive firing pin marks on the expended shells. It was thus possible to trace the movement of individual soldiers and Indians across the battlefield. Most striking of all were the forensic examinations of some thirty sets of skeletal remains. Included as part of the study were "facial reconstructions" of half a dozen skulls located in the course of the surveys.

Coupling these recent findings with the considerable body of interviews conducted with Sioux and Cheyenne veterans of the battle, a knowledge of the personality strengths and weaknesses of Custer and his subordinates,



518th Regular Meeting

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Brian C. Pohanka on "Custer's Last Stand: The Battle of Little Big Horn Reexamined"

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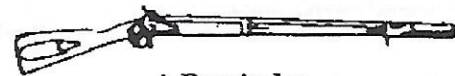
Friday, February 12

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Holiday Inn Mart Plaza
350 North Orleans Street
Buttons—15th floor

Cocktails at 5:30 p.m. Dinner at 6:30 p.m.
\$20.00 per person

Entree: Beef Bourguignon, Orange Roughy, or
Fruit Plate



A Reminder

Please make your reservation by Wednesday, February 10. Mail the enclosed postcard or call the book shop at (312) 944-3085.

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.

and an understanding of period Army tactics, it is possible to construct a theoretical model of Little Big Horn that is far from the heroic "Last Stand" of dime novels and horse operas. "Custer's Last Stand: The Battle of Little Big Horn Reexamined" will be the topic of Brian C. Pohanka—who participated in the archaeological surveys—when he addresses The Civil War Round Table on February 12.

A graduate of Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, Brian Pohanka was a researcher and writer for Time-Life Books for ten years. While at Time-Life, he

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THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE



Founded December 3, 1940

357 West Chicago Avenue

Chicago, Illinois 60610

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, 357 W. Chicago Ave., Chicago, IL 60610.



Founder Ralph G. Newman will address the New Salem Lincoln League on February 13. His topic will be "Sixty Years on the Lincoln Trail."

Former President Brooks Davis delivered his address, given to our Round Table last month, on "Jefferson Davis and Abraham Lincoln as Commanders-in-Chief" to the St. Louis Civil War Round Table on January 26.

BATTLEFIELD PRESERVATION

☆ UPDATE ☆

by David Richert

The Association for the Preservation of Civil War Sites, working with local groups, has helped preserve nearly 238 acres in three locations—Byram's Ford, Missouri; Sharpsburg, Maryland; and Cedar Creek, Virginia.

At Byram's Ford, the APCWS purchased about forty acres along the Big Blue River that played a critical role in the 1864 Battle of Westport. The Monnett Battle of Westport Fund, the nonprofit arm of the Kansas City Civil War Round Table, donated \$21,300 to the Association to assist with the purchase. The land will be donated to the Kansas City Parks Department, which has agreed to manage it as a historical park along with additional tracts to be donated by the Monnett Battle of Westport Fund. If the city fails to live up to the agreement, the property reverts back to the Association. The Byram's Ford purchase represents the Association's first venture west of the Mississippi River.

In October 1992, the APCWS presented the Cedar Creek Battlefield Foundation with a check for \$25,000. The Foundation earned the contribution by attracting ten gifts of \$2500 in 1992 toward the purchase of a 158-acre parcel near historic Belle Grove Plantation in the heart of the Shenandoah Valley's largest battlefield. The gift is the second in a possible series of four donations by the APCWS to the Foundation.

At Antietam, the Save Historic Antietam Foundation earned an APCWS matching gift of \$15,000 by persuading eighteen Civil War Round Tables and other historical organizations to contribute a minimum of \$500 each to purchase forty acres of the historic Grove Farm. Protection of the Grove Farm tract prohibits potential development of the site that would have compromised the scenic approach to Lee's Headquarters at Sharpsburg.

In other APCWS news, development of Pamplin Park Civil War Site near Petersburg, Virginia, is proceeding rapidly. The entrance road, parking lot, and interpretive trail will be completed by April 2 when a dedication ceremony will be held. In addition, APCWS is already collecting museum objects for display, including a pristine South Carolina officer's uniform with Petersburg connections. As reported in the November "Battlefield Preservation Update," the Pamplin family purchased the land, which contains fine earthen entrenchments, and requested that the APCWS develop and manage, at Foundation expense, a first-class historic site.

With grants from the Shenandoah County Economic Development Commission and the American Battlefield Protection Program, the APCWS is working on a master plan for Fisher's Hill Battlefield Civil War Site. A parking area and interpretive trail to the top of Ramseur's Hill, complete with historical signs and a brochure, are anticipated. The Strasburg Guards Camp of the Sons of Confederate Veterans is working with the APCWS at Fisher's Hill. Also in the Shenandoah Valley, the Association is working with local officials, landowners, historical groups, and others to develop a blueprint for preservation of twelve major Civil War battlefields in Western Virginia. The goal is to create a Shenandoah Valley National Battlefield Park. Copies of the plan are available from APCWS, PO Box 1862, Fredericksburg, Virginia 22402.

❧ JANUARY MEETING ❧

by Barbara Hughett

Only about one hundred miles separate the Kentucky birthplaces of Jefferson Davis and Abraham Lincoln, and the two men were born less than a year apart. However, their paths to the presidencies of their respective countries were very different. Davis was born into an affluent and educated family, Lincoln into an illiterate family of very modest means. Davis studied at Transylvania University and graduated from West Point; Lincoln was self-educated. Davis's prior political career was certainly more illustrious than was his counterpart's.

How did these two men compare as commanders-in-chief of their opposing nations during the American Civil War? "Jefferson Davis and Abraham Lincoln as Commanders-in-Chief" was the topic of Brooks Davis on January 8, when he addressed 140 members and guests at the 517th regular meeting of The Civil War Round Table.

"Webster's dictionary," Davis stated, "defines commander-in-chief as the officer or official holding supreme command of the military or naval forces of a nation. Practical application of that definition of the term goes well beyond that, as political leadership must be factored in." While Jefferson Davis, former secretary of war and hero of the Mexican War, had military expertise superior to that of Lincoln, Lincoln was, by far, the more skilled politician.

It has been said that the South and its leader had no strategy for winning the war. "Actually," Davis remarked, President Davis "did develop a doomed strategy of defending all of his territory at its borders and to avoid the offensive.... It can certainly be shown that he changed the border-defensive view, realizing that it was not feasible. Professor Emory Thomas has stated that Jefferson Davis drew heavily on General George Washington's strategy of winning by not losing!"

The main objectives of war, according to General Carl von Clausewitz, are: (1) conquer and destroy the enemy's armed forces; (2) get possession of the material elements of aggression and other sources of existence of the enemy; and (3) gain public opinion by winning victories that depress the enemy's morale. "These objectives," Davis emphasized, "were ultimately understood and executed by the North, while the South never really perfected an overall strategy and a unified command system to accomplish it."

Working well with people is vital to skilled leadership. While both men made some mistakes in their cabinet appointments, Abraham Lincoln was better able to work with his difficult cabinet members. Both presidents needed the cooperation of the governors of the states at all times. "Lincoln worked actively to aid friendly governors with reelection problems while his opposite number, unfortunately, felt that this activity was to be carefully avoided."

Jefferson Davis had to cope with problems that his Northern counterpart did not face—such as severe shortages of food and other supplies, and sky-high inflation. The loyalty of the people was mandatory to both presidents. "[Jefferson Davis's] speeches did exhort the people, but not in the almost magic way Abraham Lincoln's did."

In closing, Brooks Davis made the the following observation: "It is difficult not to compare Jefferson Davis with Abraham Lincoln, even while discussing their relative ratings as commander-in-chief, for Mr. Davis is usually depicted as a foil. He should be judged by what he did with

the potential of the Southern cause. Returning to Montgomery, Alabama, and the heady days of early 1861, and considering the available manpower pool, neither R.E. Lee nor Bruce Catton could imagine that any of the other candidates—such as Robert Toombs, Howell Cobb, Alexander Stephens, Robert Rhett, or William Yancey—would ever approach Jefferson Davis in stature.

"He was probably elected because of a widespread desire for unanimity, respectability, strong leadership, and—above all—moderation. There is no doubt that his administration and personality did not turn out that way until the rising of the 'Lost Cause' movement. The question remains: did he get more out of his nation in manpower and economic resources than did his counterpart? The South, after all, lost the war; thus the North and its leaders won the world's glory."

The one hundred eighty-fourth anniversary of the birth of Abraham Lincoln will be commemorated in Springfield on February 12.

The Twentieth Annual Abraham Lincoln Symposium will begin at 1:30 p.m. at the Old State Capitol. "Abraham Lincoln and the Whig Party" will be the theme of the symposium, and speakers include Daniel Walker Howe, Rhodes Professor of American History at Oxford University, England. The featured speaker at the annual banquet of the Abraham Lincoln Association that evening is Garry Wills, author of the highly-acclaimed *Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words that Remade America*. (1992) For further information, call (217) 525-9600. Additional activities in Springfield in honor of Lincoln's Birthday include the Lincoln Heritage Lecture series at the Lincoln Home National Historic Site. The lectures this year are being given by Harold Holzer and Douglas L. Wilson. The program begins at 9:30 a.m. at the Lincoln Home Visitor Center.

Honorary Life member Ernest A. Griffin spoke on "The African American Soldier in the Civil War" to the Federal Records Center, National Archives, Great Lakes Region, on February 3.

William Hanchett, who addressed our Round Table in 1988, is speaking on the Emancipation Proclamation to the San Diego Civil War Round Table on February 17. Hanchett will also address the annual meeting of the Lincoln Fellowship of Wisconsin, in Milwaukee, on April 18

Brian (continued from page 1) served as senior researcher, pictorial consultant, and writer for the publisher's twenty-seven-volume Civil War series. For the past five years, he has been a freelance writer and a leader in the battlefield preservation movement. Pohanka serves as a director of several preservation associations, including the Association for the Preservation of Civil War Sites.

Among his publications are *Custer's Field* (1987) and *Distant Thunder: A Photographic Essay on the American Civil War* (1988). He has written articles for numerous magazines and historical journals, and has served as historical consultant for several video productions, including the Turner Network Television film of "The Killer Angels."

The New Books

Compiled by C. Robert Douglas



- Morris, Roy, Jr. *Sheridan: The Life and Wars of General Phil Sheridan*. Crown Books. 1992. \$25.00.
- Moskow, Shirley B. *Emma's World: An Intimate Look at Lives Touched by the Civil War Era*. New Horizon Press, P.O. Box 669, Far Hills, NJ 07931. 1990. \$20.95.
- Nulty, William H. *Confederate Florida: The Road to Olustee*. U. of Alabama Press. 1990. \$27.90.
- Oates, Stephen B. *Confederate Cavalry West of the River*. Kansas Heritage Press. 1992. Pbk. \$12.95. Original of 1961.
- Parrish, T. Michael. *Richard Taylor: Soldier Prince of Dixie*. U. of North Carolina Press. 1992. \$34.95.
- Phillips, David L. *War Diaries: The 1861 Kanawha Valley Campaign*. Gauley Mount Press, 313 Lounsbury Court N.E., Leesburg, VA 22075. 1990. \$30.00.
- Priest, John M. *Before Antietam: The Battle for South Mountain*. White Mane Publ. Co. 1992. \$34.95.
- Roper, Peter W. *Jedediah Hotchkiss: Rebel Mapmaker and Virginia Businessman*. White Mane Publ. Co. 1992. \$29.95.
- Savas, Theodore P. and David A. Woodbury, project editors. *The Campaign for Atlanta & Sherman's March to the Sea*. Campaign Chronicles, 1475 S. Bascom, Suite 204, Campbell, CA 95008. 1992. \$10.00.

Longtime member William Gimbel died last month. We extend our deepest condolences to his widow Odie and their family.

Member Henry Pomerantz will lead an eight-session adult education study course on "1862 Campaigns" at the New Trier Extension. Classes will be held on Wednesdays, from 7-9 p.m., beginning on March 3. For information, call (708) 446-6600.

Honorary Life member Margaret April wants to thank all her Round Table friends for the flowers and get-well greetings during her recent hospitalization. Margaret is well on the road to recovery and we look forward to seeing her at a Round Table meeting soon.

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 monthly meeting or order it from Morningside Bookshop, 260 Oak Street, Dayton, Ohio 45401 (1-800-648-9710). Add \$2.50 for postage and handling.

Schimmelfennig Boutique

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

- Lapel pins \$3.00 each, two for \$5.00
- Mugs \$2.00 each, two for \$3.00
- Meeting tapes \$7.00 each
- Civil War Buff posters \$10.00 each

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

BULLETIN BOARD



FUTURE MEETINGS

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

February 12: Brian C. Pohanka on "Custer's Last Stand: The Battle of Little Big Horn Reexamined."

March 12: Frank Byrne on "Civil War Prisons: Myths and Realities."

April 16: Frances Kennedy on "Community Benefits of Battlefield Preservation" (Please note: this is the **third** Friday of the month.)

May 6-9: Annual Battlefield Tour—Vicksburg.

May 14: William Piston on "Clio and the General: James Longstreet and the Writing of Southern History."

June 11: Carol Reardon on "The Image of Pickett's Charge in American History."

New Members

John H. Beebe, 1294 Asbury Avenue, Winnetka, IL 60093, (708) 446-9135

Tate Coverdale, 1927 Sherman Avenue, Evanston, IL 60201, (708) 332-2067

John P. Gallagher, 80 Joyce Court, Glen Ellyn, IL 60137, (708) 858-9039

Phil Kendall, 1555 Sherman Avenue, Evanston, IL 60201
M.J. Wiet, 6359 North Le Mai, Chicago, IL 60646, (312) 763-1657

Changes of Address

Ella Clausius, F.C.R.C. #380, 3470 North Alpine Road, Rockford, IL 61114, (815) 637-1333

Warren Haskin, 377 Ridge Road, Kenilworth, IL 60043

W. Frank Meacham, 4832 Hunting Hills Drive, Roanoke, VA 24014

A Message From The President

Many thanks to **Joyce Warshaw** for her service as chair of the Publicity Committee for the past two years. Joyce has submitted her resignation regretfully and it has been received in the same spirit. She and fellow committee members Charles Shields and William Hupp devised the public relations system currently in use. Charlie and Bill will continue to work on the committee. However, a new chair is needed! For information about what this position entails, please call me at (708) 251-4745.

Mary Abroe

Charles (Pie) Dufour, journalist, Civil War author, and longtime friend of The Round Table, celebrated his ninetieth birthday on January 17. Dufour spoke at a regular Round Table meeting in 1963, and served as our host and tour guide during the 1964 battlefield tour to New Orleans. If you want to send belated birthday greetings, his address is: Chateau Notre Dame, 2820 Burdette Street, Apartment 10, New Orleans, Louisiana 70125.