

# THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

Volume LVI, Number 5

Chicago, Illinois

January 1996

## Brigadier General Harold W. Nelson on "Teaching Generalship on Civil War Battlefields"

by Barbara Hughett

Since 1951, The Civil War Round Table has been sponsoring battlefield tours. Tour chairs are now in the midst of planning our 46th annual tour, to Chickamauga and Chattanooga, which will take place on May 1-5. Those of us who have participated in these tours appreciate the enhanced learning that "being there where it all happened" affords. Walking those battlefields where Civil War history was made makes three-dimensional that which has heretofore come to us from the pages of books.

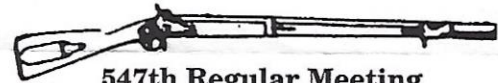
Brigadier General Harold W. Nelson (retired) is a great advocate of learning about the Civil War at the actual sites where battles took place; he is also an advocate of teaching the art of generalship on these "hallowed grounds." On January 12, General Nelson will address The Round Table on the topic of "Teaching Generalship on Civil War Battlefields."

The general's speech will be built around a trip he made to the Gettysburg battlefield with the President's National Security Advisor, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Army Chief of Staff. He will discuss the purpose of the trip—the reasons that such a group would choose to spend a day at a Civil War battlefield—and the framework within which he "taught" the history they used that day. He will focus on a few specifics of the campaign and battle of Gettysburg that he believes illustrate the art of generalship. General Nelson will contrast the external environments in which Generals Meade and Lee were working, and will talk about the changes in warfare which became important during the Civil War.

Harold W. Nelson earned a B.S. in engineering at the U.S. Military Academy and an M.A. and Ph.D. in history at the University of Michigan. He has taught military history at the U.S. Military Academy (1970-73), the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College (1975-78), and the U.S. Army War College (1984-1995). He has delivered papers and given lectures throughout the world. In 1989, he delivered a paper on "Using History to Develop Strategies" at the Military History Institute of the Ministry of Defense, in Moscow, Russia. He served on Ad-



Brigadier General  
Harold W. Nelson (Ret.)



### 547th Regular Meeting

☆ ☆ ☆

Brigadier General Harold W. Nelson on "Teaching Generalship on Civil War Battlefields"

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Friday, January 12

☆ ☆ ☆

Union League Club  
65 West Jackson Boulevard

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

\$25 - The Civil War Round Table of Chicago members  
\$30 - Nonmembers

*Entree:* Roast Loin of Pork with Applesauce  
or Catch of the Day



### Please Note

Make your reservation by Wednesday, January 10, by calling The Civil War Round Table offices at 312-341-1865. People who attend without having made a reservation will pay a \$5 walk-in charge. If you make a reservation and then find you cannot attend, please call to cancel or you will be billed for a dinner. **No last-minute orders for the Catch of the Day can be honored. The chef must have at least twenty-four hours notice.**

The Union League Club is located at the corner of Jackson Boulevard and Federal Street. Federal Street runs north and south between Dearborn and Clark Streets. Parking is free at the General Parking lot, just south of the Union League Club.

visory Team Two in the Republic of Vietnam in 1965-66 and was Commander, 2/377 Field Artillery Battalion, in the Federal Republic of Germany, in 1980-82. General Nelson was Chief of Military History for the United States Army from 1989 until 1994.

General Nelson is the author of numerous publications. These include: "Leon Trotsky and the Art of Insur-  
(continued on page 3)



## THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE



Founded December 3, 1940  
410 South Michigan Avenue, Suite 802  
Chicago, Illinois 60605-1402  
Phone: 312-341-1865  
Fax: 312-341-1863

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*Founding Newsletter Editor: Gil Twiss, 1954-1968*

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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 Membership Committee, 410 South Michigan Avenue, Suite 841, Chicago, Illinois 60605-1402.

**Old Baldy, the newsletter of the Civil War Round Table of Philadelphia**, reports that several members attended the rededication of the tomb of Union General Winfield Scott Hancock in Montgomery Cemetery in Norristown, Pennsylvania.

## BATTLEFIELD PRESERVATION

☆ UPDATE ☆

by David Richert

The city of Manassas, Virginia, has launched a \$400,000 project to preserve and interpret two forts that once guarded this key wartime rail junction. They are the only two left of seventeen that once stood within city limits. Both are city property but are overgrown and have never been interpreted.

Mayfield Fort, built by the Confederates in 1861, is on a twelve-acre parcel. It consists of an open-sided circular earthen berm 200 feet in diameter. Cannon Branch Fort, on the opposite side of the city about four miles away, is on an eleven-acre parcel. It was built by Union troops around 1863-64 to guard a bridge where the Orange & Alexandria Railroad crossed a stream. It is about 100 feet in diameter.

Plans call for clearing underbrush; making minor repairs to the earthworks, which average eight feet in height; and creating interpretive trails. Tree screens at each fort would shield the sites from modern intrusions.

**The Franklin Memorial Association**, with the assistance of others, is nearing completion of a project to restore the McGavock Confederate Cemetery at Carnton Plantation. Most of the nearly 1500 marble and granite headstones of Confederate soldiers killed in the Battle of Franklin have been repaired and cleaned, and work is beginning on damaged fences and trees.

Many of the casualties of the Battle of Franklin were treated at Carnton Plantation, the home of Colonel John McGavock. Four of the six generals killed there were laid out on the house's front porch. The Confederate dead initially were buried near the Carter House breastworks, which were at the center of the fighting. In 1866 McGavock donated two acres adjacent to Carnton and had the bodies reinterred, by state, at the site.

Donations are needed to complete the restoration work. Particularly, sections of the ornate wrought-iron fence will have to be remanufactured, an expensive and time-consuming process. For further information contact Franklin Memorial Association president Ronnie Clemmons, PO Box 1641, Murfreesboro, Tennessee 37133. 615-895-1490.

**The historic Wheatley's Ford Road** to the Rappahannock near Kelly's Ford has been bulldozed to accommodate modern logging equipment. The half-mile dirt road and a stone wall alongside were the focus of sharp fighting in the battle of Kelly's Ford, March 17, 1863, when Confederate artilleryman John Pelham was mortally wounded. The bulldozed area is within ten feet of a four-foot granite monument erected by the John Pelham Historical Association to mark the spot where Pelham fell.

Frank O'Reilly, historian at Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park, said not only is the trace of the historic road gone, but the stone wall that Federal cavalry used as a first line of defense was in places knocked down, pushed through, or covered with dirt and debris. The road is part of the 4500-acre state-owned Phelps Wildlife Management Area. State officials deny the damage is as extensive as claimed. The regional manager of the game department said "If there's anything that's been done improperly it will be taken care of."



## ☞ DECEMBER MEETING ☞

by Larry Gibbs

On December 8, at the 546th regular meeting of The Civil War Round Table, 107 members and guests were treated to a presentation by William C. (Jack) Davis. One of the most prolific writers of the Civil War, Davis is an editor and TV commentator on *Civil War Journal*. His topic was "Davis, Beauregard, and Johnston: The Triple Play that Crippled the Confederacy."

According to Davis, the Confederate government was restricted and badly hurt by the seniority system, ranking procedures, and petty differences exemplified by three Rebel leaders—President Jefferson Davis, General P.G.T. Beauregard, and General Joseph E. Johnston. This situation so severely crippled the Confederacy that Jack referred to it as "The Crime of '61."

The seniority system had a profound negative impact on the formation of the Rebel officer corps. Except in the case of Robert E. Lee, this system proved unworkable. After the death of General Albert Sidney Johnston at the Battle of Shiloh (April 6, 1862), Beauregard and Joe Johnston dominated the Confederate officer corps because of seniority. However, Joe Johnston was upset about his rank after the Mexican War. Davis ruled against him at the outset of the Civil War and Johnston held a grudge against Davis.

President Davis reluctantly gave Beauregard a generalship after his success at Ft. Sumter (April 12-13, 1861). At the Battle of First Manassas (July 21, 1861) all three men (Davis, Johnston, and Beauregard) were present for the only time in the conflict. Davis strongly advocated immediate pursuit of the Yankees at Manassas, but Johnston did not advance.

Petty bickering continued among the three Rebel leaders throughout the war. According to Jefferson Davis, Beauregard was a coward and lunatic. Consequently, Braxton Bragg replaced him as commander of the Army of Tennessee. With regard to Johnston, Jack Davis opined that "Johnston could not take the responsibility of leadership and refused to fight at all costs." For instance, he would not move against Union General George McClellan in the Peninsula Campaign of 1862, ignoring the pleas of Jefferson Davis. Johnston wanted instead to retreat to Richmond. Johnston, surly and disrespectful of Davis, was replaced after suffering wounds at the Battle of Seven Pines (May 31, 1862). Fortunately for the Confederacy, General Robert E. Lee took command. "Finally, Davis had found a real general," proclaimed Jack Davis. "However, Jefferson Davis was far too tolerant of the disrespectful Johnston."

After the failures of Braxton Bragg in late 1863, the next eight months were crucial for the Confederates. Vanity and pettiness among Davis, Johnston, and Beauregard exacerbated Rebel problems. Johnston went to Jackson, Mississippi, to aid General Pemberton at Vicksburg, but again failed to advance. "Davis should have seen that Johnston was inflexible and removed him," said Jack Davis. Although Beauregard successfully defended Charleston, South Carolina, in 1863, Davis found fault rather than praise. "President Davis hated Beauregard more than he mistrusted Johnston," Jack Davis stated. However, after Joe Johnston failed in the 1864 defense of Atlanta, Davis gave command of the Army of Tennessee to John Bell Hood, who at least was a fighter.

The rancorous feelings of these three Rebel leaders continued long after the Civil War. After the conflict all three insulted each other, refusing even to meet. Each was vain, inflexible, and opinionated.

"None of these three men—Davis, Johnston, or Beau-

regard—fought the Yankees as well as each other," Jack concluded. Johnston continuously avoided responsibility and was petty about rank. Beauregard never overcame the Napoleonic ideal of winning the Civil War with one battle. Jack Davis maintains that "even Lincoln could not have made an effective commander of Beauregard, and Davis should have disciplined Johnston but did not." Jack Davis explained that the idea that the South had all of the great generals is a myth, concluding that "In Robert E. Lee, Davis had his one superb general. The Crime of '61 led inexorably to Confederate defeat in 1865."

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**Brigadier General Harold W. Nelson** (from page 1) *rection, 1905-1917* (1988); with M.J. Luvaas, *U.S. Army War College Guide to the Battle of Gettysburg* (1986, 1987, 1994); *USAWC Guide to the Maryland Campaign of 1862 and the Battle of Antietam* (1987, 1988); and *USAWC Guide to the Battles of Chancellorsville and Fredericksburg* (1988, 1989).

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### ERNEST A. GRIFFIN 1912-1995

by Barbara Hughett

The Civil War Round Table and the world of Civil War interest and scholarship lost a very good friend on December 14. Honorary Life member and Honorary Vice President Ernest A. Griffin died at the age of 83. We will miss him.

Ernest Griffin has done much in recent years to enhance public awareness of the sacrifices made by the men in blue and gray. Part of his inspiration came from the knowledge that his grandfather, Private Charles H. Griffin, served in Co. B, 29th Infantry Regiment, United States Colored Troops. Private Griffin enlisted on January 5, 1864, at Camp Douglas. Ernest Griffin's business, the Griffin Funeral Home, is located on land that was once part of Camp Douglas, the Civil War training camp for Northern soldiers and prison camp for captured Confederate soldiers. Ernest's grandfather was one of the survivors of the July 1864 Battle of the Crater.

In 1990, Ernest commissioned the construction of a Heritage Memorial Wall on the grounds of his establishment to honor his grandfather and all veterans of that war. One side of the wall honors the thousands of Union soldiers who enlisted at Camp Douglas; the other side commemorates the 6000 Confederate soldiers who died there. An impressive opening dedication featured speeches by Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley and Round Table founder Ralph G. Newman.

Ernest did extensive research on Camp Douglas, and in appreciation for his work, he was appointed a Captain in the State Militia by the Reactivated Illinois Volunteers. He was named an Honorary Son of Confederate Veterans during our 1993 battlefield tour to Vicksburg. He was a director and Vice President of the Stephen A. Douglas Association, and a director of the Illinois State Historical Society in Springfield. He received many other awards and honors.

Ernest Griffin had been a State of Illinois licensed Funeral Director since 1934, and he produced three motion pictures for the funeral industry. Ernest was the first African-American to be invited into membership in the International Federation of Thanatologists Association, and the first American Funeral Director requested to conduct a state funeral in a foreign country.

We offer our most heart-felt condolences to Ernest Griffin's family—especially to Alyce, his widow; and to his daughters, Dawn and Pearl; and his granddaughter, Suzanne.



## The New Books

Compiled by C. Robert Douglas



- Romero, Patricia W., ed. *Reminiscences of my Life in Camp with the 33rd U.S. Colored Troops, Late 1st South Carolina Volunteers: A Black Woman's Civil War Memoirs* by Susie King Taylor. Markus Wiener Publishers. 1994. Pbk. \$8.95. Original of 1902.
- Rosen, Robert N. *Confederate Charleston: An Illustrated History of the City and the People During the Civil War*. U. of South Carolina Press. 1994. \$39.95.
- Rosenblatt, Emil and Ruth, eds. *Hard Marching Every Day: The Civil War Letters of Private Wilbur Fisk, 1861-1865*. U. Press of Kansas. 1995. Pbk. \$15.95. Original of 1992.

### A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Just a reminder: Please call in your dinner reservation EARLY! To sweeten our request, we will have an Early Bird Raffle for those who call in their reservation by January 9. You may be one of two lucky winners of a free cocktail! Help us out and be a winner!

The twenty third annual Abraham Lincoln Symposium will be held on Sunday and Monday afternoons, February 11 and 12, in Springfield. This year's theme is "Lincoln's Biographers." Speakers and commentators will include Alan C. Guelzo, Wayne C. Temple, Michael Burlingame, and Rodney O. Davis. The event is sponsored by the Abraham Lincoln Association, the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, and the Illinois State Historical Society. The evening of the 12th, the Abraham Lincoln Association will hold its annual banquet. The featured entertainment will be provided by the New Hutchinson Family Singers, performing nineteenth-century songs. For information about both events, call Tom Schwartz at 217-787-2118. Also in Springfield, on the morning of February 12, the Lincoln Home National Historic Site will host the Lincoln Heritage Lectures. The speakers this year are John Y. Simon and David Zarefsky. For information, call Tim Townsend at 217-492-4097.

We are saddened to report the death of George L. Painter, historian at the Lincoln Home National Historic Site and founding President of the Lincoln Group of Illinois. On December 22, George lost a brave and valiant four-year battle with cancer. He was 49. We extend our deepest sympathy to his widow, Rosemary; and his two young children, Amanda and Jeffrey.

The Union League Club Civil War Round Table will hold a luncheon meeting on Monday, January 29 at the club. Frank Patton and Marshall Krolick will present a program on "Stonewall Jackson in the Valley—January to June, 1862." Also featured will be slides by Roger Bohn, of Chicago Round Table's tour to the Valley in 1994. Lunch is served at noon; the per-person cost is \$15. For reservations, call 312-435-5000.

## BULLETIN BOARD



### FUTURE MEETINGS

- Regular meetings are held at the Union League Club, 65 West Jackson Boulevard, the second Friday in each month, except as noted.
- January 12:* Brigadier General Harold W. Nelson on "Teaching Generalship on Civil War Battlefields"
- February 16:* James Ogden on "The Battles of Chickamauga and Chattanooga" (Please note: this is the **third** Friday of the month.)
- March 8:* Brian S. Wills on "The Life of Nathan Bedford Forrest: A Battle from the Start"
- April 12:* John C. (Jack) Waugh on "The Class of 1846"
- May 1-5:* Annual Battlefield Tour: Chickamauga and Chattanooga
- May 10:* Charles P.. Roland on "Reflections on Lee: A Historian's Assessment"
- June 14:* Michael W. Kauffman on "The Lincoln Assassination — The Investigation Continues"

### New Members

- Jane F. Bolin, 2844 W. Logan Boulevard, Chicago, IL 60647, 312-276-1247
- Rocco J. de Grasse, 2444 N. 78th Avenue, Elmwood Park, IL 60635, 312-353-8728
- Kathy Folk, 1241 Oakes Drive, Iowa City, IA 52245, 319-337-3083
- Daniel W. Gillogly, 530 Lowell Avenue, Glen Ellyn, IL 60137, 708-790-9096
- Robert A. Hardin, 505 Tanglewood Drive, Streamwood, IL 60107
- Mitch Mars, 201 N. Delaplaine, Riverside, IL 60546
- Adele C. O'Grady, 643 Washington, Oak Park, IL 60302, 708-383-5797
- Mark S. Proseri, 5330 Wright Terrace, Skokie, IL 60077, 708-966-7446
- Randa C. Sabbagha, 195 North Harbor, # 5104, Chicago, IL 60601, 312-320-4100
- Judge Joseph A. Salerno (ret.), 2625 Mayfair, Westchester, IL 60154-5007, 708-562-5662
- Matthew Schneider, 4819 Cornell Avenue, Downers Grove, IL 60515, 312-353-5300
- Donna Tuohy, 200 E. Delaware Place, #30-C, Chicago, IL 60611, 312-649-1041
- Joseph Tuohy, 200 E. Delaware Place, #30-C, Chicago, IL 60611, 312-649-1041
- Mark J. Vogel, 2243 Henley, Glenview, IL 60025, 708-998-5741
- Stephen A. Vranek, 1421 Raymond Avenue, LaGrange Park, IL 60526, 708-482-4720

The 15th Annual Midwest Civil War Round Table Conference will take place on April 19-20, 1996, in Cincinnati, Ohio, hosted by the Cincinnati Civil War Round Table. Speakers will include A. Wilson Greene, John Hennessy, and Jim Ogden. The cost is \$100 per person; special hotel rates are \$72 per night. For more information, call Michael Rhein at 513-831-4031.