



THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

Volume LIV, Number 10

Chicago, Illinois

June 1994

Stacy D. Allen on "Endurance Ceased to be a Virtue: A Revision of the Action at the Shiloh Hornets' Nest"

by Barbara Hughett

Ulysses S. Grant wrote in his *Memoirs* that the Battle of Shiloh (or Pittsburg Landing, as the Confederates called it), fought on April 6-7, 1862, in southwestern Tennessee, "has been perhaps less understood, or to state the case more accurately, more persistently misunderstood, than any other engagement between National and Confederate troops during the entire rebellion." Current published history acknowledges that the most significant fighting of the first day of the battle occurred during the seven-hour Federal defense of the oak thicket known as the "Hornets' Nest."

Most historians of the battle have routinely concluded that the stout resistance conducted by the Union forces defending the Hornets' Nest probably saved Ulysses S. Grant's army from complete destruction. All past interpretations of the action at the Hornets' Nest agree that it was Confederate General Braxton Bragg who exercised command over the "entire" Confederate offensive hurled against the Union forces defending the oak thicket. Historians have criticized Bragg for tactical negligence in his personal command of this action.

Traditional accounts argue that he failed to mass his available infantry brigades and did not concentrate sufficient combat strength to decisively crush the Federal stronghold. Instead, the general repeatedly ordered his brigades forward, wholly unsupported by field artillery. The resulting Confederate assaults floundered under a murderous storm of Federal musketry and cannon, and achieved nothing. Casualties were heavy and brigades were shattered.

No interpretation to date has challenged this popular and critical view of Braxton Bragg's generalship at Shiloh.

However, evidence exists which supports a conclusion that Bragg's seemingly miserable performance at the Hornets' Nest may have been a result of circumstances beyond his control. Additionally, there has been a persistent failure in Shiloh studies to set the day-long Hornets' Nest struggle into the proper time/motion context. Stacy D. Allen will present these new views when he addresses The Civil War Round Table on June 10. His topic will be "Endurance Ceased to be a Virtue: A Revision of the Action at the



Stacy D. Allen



532nd Regular Meeting

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Stacy D. Allen on "Endurance Ceased to be a Virtue: A Revision of the Action at the Shiloh Hornets' Nest"

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Friday, June 10

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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: Roast Baron of Beef with Bordelaise Sauce, Orange Roughy, or Fruit Plate



PLEASE NOTE

Please make your reservation by Wednesday, June 8. 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.

Shiloh Hornets' Nest."

A native of Kansas and graduate of the University of Kansas at Lawrence, Stacy Allen began his career with the National Park Service at Vicksburg National Military Park in Mississippi. In 1989 he accepted the position of lead park ranger at Shiloh National Military Park and was promoted to park historian in 1992. He has written book reviews and articles for historical publications, including *The Alabama Review: A Quarterly Journal of Alabama History*. Stacy

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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.

ALLEN (continued from page 1)

serves as editor of *The Journal of Civil War Fortifications*, an annual collection of essays on the historical significance of fortifications. He is currently preparing articles for a journal of historical essays on the Battle of Shiloh, scheduled for publication by the University of Tennessee Press.

The destinations of the Spring Battlefield Tour (May 3-7, 1995), as announced earlier, will be Charleston, Columbia, and Savannah. Tour co-chairs are Larry Gibbs and Richard McAdoo.

BATTLEFIELD PRESERVATION

☆ UPDATE ☆

by Mary Munsell Abroe

It is as impossible to make history happen again as it will be for the Disney Company — not the comfortable kingdom of “Uncle Walt” but a multi-billion dollar conglomerate whose top priority is the bottom line — to transport us to the past a la “Disney America.” Make no mistake: an amusement park — and it *is* an amusement park — where World War II and the Industrial Revolution will be interpreted through high-tech rides and “high-speed adventure” is aiming for entertainment, not understanding. As a *New York Times* editorial recently noted, “[Disney America] is not an educational undertaking; it is a business venture.” It is, moreover, patently absurd to think that the tragedy of civil war and the monstrosity of slavery can be staged for onlookers in a 360-degree “circlevision” theatre or on a pretend plantation, as Disney proposes. Those at Disney know that serious episodes and issues cannot be so presented; the Washington area merely becomes the magnet and sanitized, commercialized history the gimmick through which to snag an audience.

It is not a question of building Disney America elsewhere, removed from Manassas and other vulnerable historical and natural resources in Virginia’s northern Piedmont. It should not be built PERIOD, though unfortunately it probably will be. Ask someone of the MTV generation which he or she would pick if a historic site and amusement park were next to each other. Notwithstanding Disney’s portrayal of this project as a gateway to northern Virginia’s rich heritage, impressions of the family vacation if this theme park becomes a reality *anywhere* will be of exciting technology, not history; memories will be of theatrics, simulated parachute drops, and “playing” at war rather than of silent battlefields — if there is even an inclination to visit them. If Disney was serious about contributing to the study of American history, it would not be threatening to intrude on precious landscapes that provide the only real link over time to our common past. That being the case, let us at least understand the organization for what is and refuse to buy the sales pitch.

While this member of the Association for the Preservation of Civil War Sites is troubled by the group’s consultant role on the Disney America project, it is understandable perhaps how anticipation of donations to battlefield preservation and the hope of influencing positively the final product of an apparently unstoppable drive led to the ill-advised involvement. The APCWS, however, remains one of the few truly effective organizations currently in the business of saving battlefields; the group’s track record in fund raising and land acquisition stands on its own merits. The integrity and commitment of the Association’s leadership is unquestioned, even if some decision makers have exercised poor judgment. Those who have seized upon the current situation as an opportunity to attack the Association would better serve battlefield preservation by focusing their energies on constructive opposition to Disney America. Those in the Association who have chosen to take it down the path with Disney might reconsider the wisdom of that choice as it leaves the organization’s reputation open to attack. Our movement is too important and the stakes too high for us to defeat ourselves through fragmentation; unfortunately, that continues to be one of our greatest problems, and it is one which we bring on ourselves.

☛ MAY MEETING ☛

by Barbara Hughett

General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia included about 150 regiments of infantry and cavalry, commanded at any given time by nearly 500 field-grade officers. Because of attrition and evolution in command, nearly 2000 men held such commissions during the war's four years. Many of these individuals brought nothing to their assignments to commend themselves beyond an aptitude for politics, legal matters, or making money. "Lawyers, Politicians, and Clerks: The Regimental Command of the Army of Northern Virginia" was the topic of Robert K. Krick on May 13, when he spoke before 108 members and guests at the 531st regular meeting of The Civil War Round Table.

In his research for this address, Krick found that most of these 2000 regimental officers were rich, tall, young, and rather well-educated. Frank Hampton, of the 48th Alabama, spent \$60,000 of his own money outfitting his own regiment—from clothes to weapons. To get a rough idea of what that would mean in today's monetary value, multiply by 100, and "imagine someone today spending that much money to outfit a regiment of his very own."

The average net worth of these men was somewhere between \$15,000 and \$20,000—a great deal of money in 1860. "Does this mean," Krick asked, "that the Civil War, on the Confederate side, was a rich man's war and a poor man's fight? Or does it merely mean that antebellum economic skills were presumed to translate into military skills on the battlefield?"

The average age of Lee's regimental commanders was 32. However, Richard Cotton, of the 44th North Carolina, who had fought in the War of 1812, was 77 when he became a colonel. Half of the commanders went to college—"a remarkable figure for a group of any size in the middle of the 19th Century." Approximately two men per regiment had graduated from a military school—West Point, VMI, or lesser-known institutions—but that left 85% with no military training whatsoever. A handful—about one man per regiment—had fought in a previous war.

The average height of the colonels in Lee's army was 5'10 1/2"—two inches taller than the men in the ranks and, interestingly, a full inch taller than the average for men separating from the U.S. Army in 1946, following World War II. Only 80 of the 2000 were born outside the Confederate states—half of those in northern states.

Prewar prominence was parlayed again and again into military leadership. Nearly 400 had been politicians at the federal, state, or local level and/or lawyers and judges. Other occupations prevalent among Lee's command included: 87 medical doctors, 18 preachers, and a host of clerks and the like. Among these men were Theodore O'Hara, who wrote "Bivouac of the Dead" about the Mexican War; G.T. L. Preston, the founder of VMI and Stonewall Jackson's brother-in-law, and the two men who had founded the Pony Express prior to the war.

"These men," Krick related, "good, bad, and indifferent, faced in the spring of 1862 the almost incredible task of getting reelected by the men they commanded. The Confederate Congress, in a fit of imbecility, passed a law that the men would elect their own officers. So in April of 1862, with the Federals virtually beating at the gate of the capital city, the Army of Northern Virginia had to go through this upheaval. A few of the colonels were so highly principled that they refused to stand for reelection."

But most of the officers campaigned. "An orderly sergeant campaigning for lieutenant in the 1st Virginia Cavalry performed the morning roll call with the men standing in line, as was his duty, and assured them that if they would elect him, he would see that the roll call was taken while they still lay in their bedrolls." One of the men in the 40th Virginia wrote in early April, "We find worthless, intriguing politicians using bribery, a good deal of flash plausibility, and arguments which any worthless demagogue is capable of making." More than 150 field officers were replaced in this election, almost exactly one per regiment. Four hundred twenty-six of the 2000 were killed in the war, almost one in four—a staggering rate for field officers. Fifty-four died during the war of other causes; two-thirds were wounded at least once.

What happened to these fellows after the war? "A good many of them, inured to violence by America's most violent experience, had grown accustomed to it, proficient at it, and carried it forward. William Lowry, colonel of the 11th Mississippi, was killed in a gunfight in Texas. . . . Colonel Cash of Kershaw's brigade, fought the most famous duel in South Carolina history in 1880, with a fellow named Shannon. . . . William Falkner, the great-grandfather of the famous writer William Faulkner [who changed the spelling of the family name], was elected in 1899 to the Mississippi legislature. After the election, he answered a knock on the door. It was his opponent in the election who shot him dead, and he was never brought to trial for it."

Some former commanders went abroad. Robert Miner built gunboats for Chile. Others, along with some former Federal officers, served in Egypt. Many wrote manuscripts and 272 won political office, "waving the bloody shirt."

"In conclusion," Krick said, "I would suggest to you that these young, well-educated, rather well-heeled men who took Lee's army with them into history clearly suffered from just about as broad a range of foibles as any other grouping of humans. . . . But they also stood at the tactical cutting edge of one of the most famous armies of all times, for which, by and large, they performed surprisingly ably, given their backgrounds and their lack of experience."

SUMMER EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

President-elect Barbara Hughett has announced that the summer meeting of the Executive Committee of The Civil War Round Table will be held on Saturday, July 9, beginning at 10:00 a.m., in the Board Room of the Union League Club, 65 West Jackson Boulevard. A luncheon will be served. All past presidents and 1994-95 officers and committee chairs are urged to attend.

The Fall Kentucky Bluegrass Tour is set for October 12-16. See the enclosed flyer for details and registration deadlines.

The annual Round Table picnic will be held on July 31. A flyer will be mailed to all members this month.

The New Books

Compiled by C. Robert Douglas



- Billings, John D. *Hardtack & Coffee: The Unwritten Story of Army Life*. U. of Nebraska Press. Pbk. \$14.95. Original of 1887.
- Blackford, W.W. *War Years with Jeb Stuart*. LSU Press. 1993. Pbk. \$12.95. Original of 1945.
- Blessington, Joseph P. A *Brief History of Walker's Texas Division*. Introduction by Norman D. Brown. State House Press, Box 15247, Austin, TX 78761. 1994. \$29.95. Original of 1875.
- Brown, Kent Masterson. *Cushing of Gettysburg: The Story of a Union Artillery Commander*. U. of Kentucky Press. \$32.00.

Past President C. Robert Douglas has been named president of the Stephen A. Douglas Association. Two other former Round Table presidents have also become officers of the Douglas Association—David Richert is treasurer and Glen Wiche has joined the board of directors.

Past President and Honorary Life member Paul Klinger has written an article on "The Confederate Invasion of New Mexico," which is the cover story of the June, 1994, issue of *Blue & Gray* magazine.

Senior Vice President Barbara Hughett was recently elected to the board of directors of the national Abraham Lincoln Association.

C-SPAN, the cable industry's public affairs network, will commemorate its fifteenth anniversary this year with a special series entitled "The Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858." The series will feature complete historical reenactments of each debate in its entirety from the original debate sites, using local actors to portray Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas.

The debates will air live from noon-6:00 p.m. on the weekend days closest to the dates in 1858 when they took place. Each program will offer the three-hour debate surrounded by two ninety-minute segments of contextual programming. The Ottawa debate will be televised on August 20, the Freeport debate on August 27. The other five debates will air in September and October.

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. **Beginning with the September 9 meeting, our regular meeting place will be the Union League Club, 65 West Jackson Boulevard.**

- June 10:* Stacy Allen on "Endurance Ceased to be a Virtue: A Revision of the Action at the Shiloh Hornets' Nest"
- July 9:* Summer Executive Committee Meeting, Board Room, Union League Club
- July 31:* Annual Round Table Picnic
- September 9:* Frank J. Williams on "Abraham Lincoln: Our Ever Present Contemporary"
- October 7:* Alan T. Nolan, Nevins-Freeman Address, "Grant and Sherman: An Effective Partnership" (Please note: this is the **first** Friday of the month.)
- October 12-16:* Fall Kentucky Bluegrass Tour
- November 11:* Terry Van Meter on "The Cavalry Corps of the Army of the Potomac"
- December 9:* David E. Long on "I Shall Never Recall a Word": Emancipation and the Race Issue in the 1864 Presidential Election Campaign"
- January 13:* James I. (Bud) Robertson, Jr., on "New Viewpoints on Stonewall Jackson"
- February 17:* Ralph G. Newman on "A Handful of Lincoln and Civil War Authors" (Please note: this is the **third** Friday of the month.)
- March 10:* Ervin L. Jordan, Jr., on "Give Us A Flag: Afro-Confederate Loyalty in Civil War Virginia"
- April 14:* William Hanchett on "Lincoln's Assassination After 130 Years"
- May 3-7:* Annual Spring Battlefield Tour—Charleston, Columbia, and Savannah
- May 12:* Tamara Moser Melia on "James B. McPherson and the Ideals of the Old Army"
- June 9:* John Y. Simon on "Forging a Commander: Ulysses S. Grant and the First Year of the Civil War"

New Members

- Jim Davids, 125 32 S. Nashville, Palos Heights, IL 60463, 708-389-5602
- John Gaffney, 175 East Delaware Place, Chicago, IL 60611, 312-440-0278
- John Gavin, 2226 Chestnut, Wilmette, IL 60091, 708-256-6902
- Sylvia Gordon, 200 East Delaware Place, #16-D, Chicago, IL 60611-1735
- Marilyn Jacobs, 1130 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL 60605
- Reginald Martin, 210 Bauer, Naperville, IL 60563, 708-357-2024
- Barbara Ostrowski, 702 E. Harding Avenue, La Grange Park, IL 60525, 708-579-5305
- George Pair, P.O. Box 5096, Durango, CO 81301, 303-385-6846
- John Reinhardt, 1600 Sunset, #202, Waukegan, IL 60087
- K. Jerry Williams, 49 Parkhill Road, Prenton, Birkenhead, Merseyside L42 9JD, England, 051-608-3769

Changes of Address

- Ralph David Davison, 341 Amherst Drive, Birmingham, AL 35242
- Bing Owens, 6033 N. Sheridan Road, #191-C, Chicago, IL 60660
- Bjorn Skaptason, 4331 N. Ashland Avenue, #2, Chicago, IL 60613, 312-665-8523