Richard M. McMurry on John Bell Hood

On July 17, 1864, while at Nelson's House on the Marietta Road three miles from Atlanta, Joseph E. Johnston received a message from President Jefferson Davis, signed by Adjutant General Samuel Cooper: "Lieutenant General Hood has been commissioned to the temporary rank of general, under the late law of Congress. I am directed by the Secretary of War to inform you that, as you have failed to arrest the advance of the enemy to the vicinity of Atlanta, far in the interior of Georgia, and express no confidence that you can defeat or repel him, you are hereby relieved from the Army and the Department of Tennessee, which you will immediately turn over to General Hood."

At the April 13 meeting of The Round Table, Professor Richard M. McMurry, adjunct professor of history at North Carolina State University, will explore the factors leading to Davis' decision to supplant Johnston with Hood. In his remarks Dr. McMurry will attempt to present a balanced view of the problem that Davis faced and the possible solutions that he could have chosen. Dr. McMurry feels that the answer that he will develop in his address may well surprise those of us with a traditional view of the 1864 campaigns.

When Hood assumed command, he realized that he was expected to save Atlanta by driving Sherman's forces from the city's gates. He struck first at Thomas' Army of the Cumberland at Peachtree Creek on July 20th but was repulsed with 5,000 casualties. His next move pitted him against McPherson's troops in the battle of Atlanta, south and east of the city on July 22nd. Here again his troops failed to dislodge the Union forces (though McPherson himself was killed) and he suffered 7,500 casualties. The fighting now shifted to the west at Ezra Church Crossroads on July 28th where troops led by S. D. Lee and Stewart lost 5,000 men in a futile slugfest with Howard's Army of the Tennessee. The last battle for Atlanta occurred at Jonesboro on August 31st where Hood failed to prevent the encirclement of the city. He then evacuated Atlanta on September 1st. The news of Sherman's victory ruined the claims of the opposition party in the North that the war had become stalemated.

With his army reduced to 35,000, Hood retreated southward to concentrate at Palmetto. He knew that he lacked the strength to engage Sherman in pitched battle, but believed that by striking at Sherman's lines of communication he could lure the Union army northward and away from Atlanta. He struck at both Resaca and Dalton, and this caused Sherman to move out of Atlanta in pursuit. After trailing Hood's forces to Gaylesville, Alabama, Sherman realized that Hood was leading him on a wild-goose chase and returned to Atlanta. There, he ordered Thomas and Schofield to defend Tennessee and began planning operations that would take him on his march to the sea and the capture of Savannah.

In the past two months there has been a problem with members making reservations and not showing up (The Round Table must then pay for those meals) or showing up without reservations. Please remember to make a reservation by returning the postcard or calling the Book Shop. If you subsequently find that you will not be able to attend, notify the Book Shop. The cooperation of all will be appreciated.

(continued on page 2)
Hood now developed a desperate plan of action in which he would strike north from Alabama through Tennessee into Kentucky, defeat any Union troops there, and then turn east along the Ohio River into Virginia. There he would unite with Lee and crush Grant. Never interested in detail or administration, Hood’s plan ignored the realities of manpower and logistics, but reflected his hope that an aggressive spirit would restore success to Confederate fortunes. Without referring his plan to either Davis or the theatre commander, Beauregard, he started his troops westward to encamp for more than two weeks at Tuscumbia, Alabama. Hood’s plan required speed for its ultimate success, but this delay permitted Schofield and Thomas time to prepare defensive arrangements.

Crossing the Tennessee River on November 18th, he moved successively to Columbia and Spring Hill, where he hoped to cut off Schofield’s retreat. Poor staff work and his own carelessness permitted Schofield’s troops to escape up the Columbia Pike to Franklin. Hood, blaming everyone for this failure, but particularly Cheatham, moved to Franklin, where he found that Schofield had had time to set upholsteryworks for defense. With only two of his three corps on the field, Hood ordered an attack in the late afternoon on November 30th. In bitter fighting Hood lost 6200 men, including six generals.

With only 23,000 men left after his ill-advised assault at Franklin, Hood moved up to the outskirts of Nashville where he hoped to establish his army in a good defensive position and await Thomas’ attack. His hope was that he could contain such an attack and deliver a crushing counterstroke. This was not to be. Thomas attacked on December 15th and 16th, routing Hood’s troops and sending them in disarray to retreat from Tennessee and then concentrate at Tupelo, Mississippi. When the authorities in Richmond realized that responsibility for this total defeat lay with Hood, he was removed from command on January 23, 1865, and the war in the West was all but over.

A native of DeKalb County, Georgia, Dr. McMurry received his bachelor’s degree from VMI in 1961, as well as M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from Emory University. His dissertation at Emory was under the guidance of Bell Irvin Wiley, who received our Nevins-Freeman award in 1978, and dealt with the Atlanta campaign. He has published articles in the Confederate Historical Society Journal, Civil War Times Illustrated and Civil War History. He wrote The Road Past Kennesaw: The Atlanta Campaign of 1864 which appeared as a National Park Service Handbook in 1972, and he and James I. “Bud” Robertson, Jr. served as co-editors for Rank and File: Civil War Essays in Honor of Bell Irvin Wiley.

His book, John Bell Hood and the War for Southern Independence, published in 1982, was a History Book Club selection and received the 1982 U.D.C. award for the best book in the field of Southern history. Dr. McMurry is currently engaged in research for a detailed history of the Western theater of the Civil War, as well as a biography of Francis Stebbins Bartow, a prominent legal, political and military figure in antebellum Georgia.

The Seventeenth Annual Reenactment of the Battle of New Market will be held Sunday, May 13, 1984, at the New Market Battlefield Park. Participation will be limited to 600 Confederate and 600 Federal troops. For further information, write: New Market Battlefield Park, P.O. Box 1864, New Market, Virginia 22844.
March meeting

The bloody battle of Cold Harbor on June 3, 1864 was the centerpiece of the address given by Col. Roy K. Flint to 90 members and guests on March 9th. Col. Flint became interested in Cold Harbor through reading accounts of the battle in Freeman’s Lee’s Lieutenants, Maj. Gen. Martin T. McMahon’s account in Battles and Leaders, and Shelby Foote’s The Civil War. He asked “How could the Confederate forces inflict such a costly defeat on the Army of the Potomac in such a short period of time?”

As Col. Flint explained, Grant’s plan was to cross the Rapidan east of Lee’s positions in order to have easy access to resupply by sea, and to maintain the ability to cooperate with Butler operating against Richmond. Grant intended to attack at Cold Harbor early on the morning of June 2nd with the goal of turning Lee’s right flank. Hancock’s II Corps was moved to the extreme left flank, but due to staff errors, poor guides and extreme heat, he arrived later in the morning than expected. Grant therefore postponed the attack until 5:00 p.m. Hancock couldn’t get to the necessary starting point but had to fight a skirmishing action. Grant then postponed the attack again until 4:30 a.m. the next morning.

Col. Flint then discussed the battle of June 3rd in terms of its essential components; first, terrain. The battlefield is located about 12 miles north of Richmond. This part of Virginia is somewhat hilly and Lee concentrated his army on the only rolling country in the area. The conclusion about the terrain is that it was an obstacle to movement and favored the defense. Federal commanders noted that the Confederate position was of great natural strength.

Orders and arrangements. It was Grant’s intention that the main attack would be made by the corps of Hancock, Wright and Smith to turn the southern flank of the Confederate lines. The corps of Warren and Burnside were to conduct secondary attacks to the north as support of the attacks on Lee’s left flank. Corps commanders were to select the points in their respective fronts where the assaults would take place. Hancock and Wright were to attack in a southwesterly direction, while Smith attacked relatively parallel to Wright. The divergence in the attacking units permitted those Confederates not directly engaged to fire into the flanks of Federal units attacking to their north and south. It was an important failure to permit the Union corps commanders to select their own objectives.

The main weakness in coordination was the failure to concentrate the 3 corps’ assaults. The center of the Federal line was outflanked by the long Confederate line, at least in the south. Hancock stated that the division commanders found conditions generally unfavorable for an attack. The attacking lines formed in the first light, right behind the picket line, at 4:30 a.m. Lee’s army formed a solid line from right to left. As one observer said, “Their works consisted of tiers of rifle pits, behind which were a continuous line of breastworks, solidly constructed of pine logs and earth, the top log raised in some instances so that the muskets could be fired under it.”

Flint posed the question: What should officers do when they are ordered to attack in a situation that experience tells them is just murder? His answer: to attack. However, otherwise brave men such as Emory Upton decided not to because of the fate which they knew awaited them. Flint maintains that there was a general assessment by the soldiers that they had been in position too long and that there was no chance for success. This was a war in which the impact of technology far outstripped the progress in doc-

The Third Annual National Forum on Lincoln and the Union will be held in Washington, D.C. May 3-5. Speakers will include John Schildt on “The Birth of the Gettysburg Address,” Howard Westwood on “Lincoln, Secession and Sam Houston,” and Gen. Richard Lee on “The Federal Military in Washington.” The program will also include a tour of the Washington area.

The registration fee is $140 for Civil War Round Table Associates and $160 for nonmembers ($10 discount for registration before April 15). The fee includes all meals, sessions and tours, but not lodging. For further information, contact Civil War Round Table Associates, P.O. Box 7388, Little Rock, Arkansas 72217.
THE NEW BOOKS

(compiled by Dick Clark)


BULLETIN BOARD

Future meetings

Regular meetings are held at the Hotel Continental, 505 N. Michigan, the second Friday in each month, except as noted.

April 13: Richard McMurry on "John Bell Hood."
May 2-6: Battlefield Tour to Washington, D.C.
May 18: Walter N. Trereny on "John Pope." Note: This is the third Friday of the month.
June 8: Dan Jordan on "John S. Mosby."
July 29: Picnic

New members

John C. Murphy, 1943 York Street, Blue Island, Illinois 60406 (312) 385-1388.
Patrick J. Ring, 67 Fenno Street, Revere, Massachusetts 02151.
Barbara Stoecklein, 1329 W. Fargo, Chicago, Illinois 60626 (312) 743-7953

Changes of address


The publishers of Civil War Times Illustrated are offering five separate battlefield tours during 1984. The tour to Gettysburg, from May 9th through the 13th, will be guided by our own past president, Marshall Krolick. Also on the schedule are trips to Fredericksburg (April 26th-29th), a western battlefields tour (June 9th-16th), an eastern battlefields tour (October 13th-21st), and a review of the Peninsula Campaign (October 31st-November 4th). For additional information or to make reservations, contact Historical Times Travel, Box 8200, Harrisburg, PA 17105 or call 1-800-223-8907.

Charter memberships in The Friends of Virginia Civil War Parks are now being accepted; the cost is only $10. The purpose of The Friends is to assist the present and future National Park Civil War Parks in Virginia, to protect and interpret their historical resources for the benefit of this and succeeding generations, and to promote the historical, scientific, educational and interpretative activities of the parks. The first formal meeting of the group will take place at 1 p.m. on Sunday, April 29 at the Fredericksburg Battlefield Visitor Center. At that time a board of directors and officers will be elected.

To become a member, send a check for $10, payable to The Friends of Virginia Civil War Parks, c/o Dean F. Warner, Treasurer, P.O. Box 2358, Washington, D.C. 20013. For further information, contact Dean at (202) 275-1396 (business) or (703) 437-6284 (home). In your plan to attend the meeting on April 29, please contact Mrs. Cynthia Musselman, Route 7, Box 398, Stafford, Virginia 22554 by April 15.

Tickets are still available for the concert of Civil War music which will be presented by the 1st Brigade Band of Milwaukee on April 14 from 2-5 p.m. at the Chicago Public Library Cultural Center. Tickets, $4 for adults and $2 for children, will be available at the April meeting or at the Abraham Lincoln Book Shop. They will not be available at the door.

The following cassette tapes of previous talks to The Round Table have been added to the list of those available published in previous newsletters.

Tapes are $5 each (except as noted) and may be ordered at meetings or by mail from Research Center Committee Chairman Mr. MacDonald, 2744 W. Rascher Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60625. When ordering by mail, please include $2 per order for postage and handling. Make checks payable to The Civil War Round Table.

As of September 1 the cost of tapes will increase to $7 each (due to increased production costs). Buy now and save.