Robert E. Lee Krick on “The Army of Northern Virginia’s Staff Corps: ‘Bomb-Proof’ Officers or Backbone of the Army?”

by Barbara Hughett

THE MOST famous soldiers in the Army of Northern Virginia were men of the line—generals and field officers. Their colleagues on staff duty are less well known. The more prominent officers have told the story of the staff officers, but have left the duties and background of the more than 2000 men of the Army of Northern Virginia’s staff corps obscured.

Historian Robert E. Lee Krick has made a study of those staff officers and has found them to be a remarkably well-educated, literate, and often wealthy collection of men. He will address The Round Table on December 13 on the topic of “The Army of Northern Virginia’s Staff Corps: ‘Bomb-Proof’ Officers or Backbone of the Army?”

Staff duty attracted a colorful set of men. Among these were H.S. Farley, of J.E.B. Stuart’s staff, who became a silent movie actor later in life; John T. Magruder, who served the first eighteen months of the war in the Union cavalry, defected to the Confederacy, and was killed in Pickett’s charge; and the caustic John T. Pickett, of General Breckinridge’s staff, who once wrote of his position: “The duties of the office can be discharged by any school boy possessed of common sense.” The staff system of the Army of Northern Virginia represented what might be the most obvious example of nepotism in military history. At least 75 percent of all generals in that army had a close kinsman on their staff.

In addition to briefly reviewing the difference in the various duties of staff members (aide-de-camp, adjutant general, inspector general ordnance officer, etc.), Krick will analyze their roles in the army. He will talk about what made a good staff officer, how the generals used these men, and their level of effectiveness. One of the oldest criticisms of Robert E. Lee as a general is that he misunderstood the role of staff officers, despite being one himself fifteen years earlier. This criticism will be addressed, and an analysis will be presented to show how the Confederate staff system compares with that of other armies in other wars.

Robert E. L. Krick, son of noted historian (and 1988 Nevins-Freeman Award honoree) Robert K. Krick, has lived in Virginia for the past twenty-five years, and spent his earliest years in memory in a house on the Chancellorsville battlefield. He graduated from Mary Washington College in Fredericksburg with a B.A. in history, and immediately joined the National Park Service.

He has served as an historian at several sites, most
BATTLEFIELD PRESERVATION
☆ UPDATE ☆
by David Richert

Legislation creating the Shenandoah Valley Battlefields National Historic District was passed by Congress in the closing days of the session. Part of the Omnibus Parks and Public Land Management Act of 1996, it authorizes up to $3.5 million per year for land acquisition and historic interpretation and networks ten Civil War battlefields in the Valley—Opequon, Second Winchester, Second Kernstown, Cedar Creek, Fisher's Hill, Tom's Brook, New Market, Cross Keys, Port Republic, and McDowell. The secretary of the interior will appoint a nineteen-member commission, which will draft a historic district plan and establish a management entity. Although the original legislation called for a new national battlefield park, it did not have the support of the National Park Service.

The act also authorized allocation of $51.9 million to move U.S. 27 out of the middle of Chickamauga-Chattanooga National Military Park. The historic road, which currently carries 18,000 vehicles a day through the heart of the park, will be relocated as a four-lane divided highway around the park's western boundary. According to park superintendent Patrick Reed, relocating the highway "will have a significant impact on restoring the historic scene for the visitor, and on our ability to protect the historic resource here." The parks bill also formally establishes the American Battlefield Protection Program. The program, in effect since 1991, existed previously as only a line-item appropriation. It is authorized for ten years with a $3 million annual appropriation.

In other news from Congress, legislation to restrict growth at Richmond National Battlefield Park (see Battlefield Preservation Update, April, 1995) was dropped. As noted in Battlefield Preservation Update last month, a new management plan proposes a 7,121-acre expansion of the park. Legislation to achieve that will be introduced in the next session.

The National Park Trust, a non-profit land conservancy, has donated $26,000 to the National Park Service to preserve almost an acre of battlefield land atop South Mountain in Maryland. The land will be preserved in perpetuity as part of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail. The .92 acre parcel is located across from the old South Mountain Inn, which served as headquarters for Confederate General D.H. Hill during the battle. The land preserved is part of Hill's staging area and the site of a Confederate battery.

Bentonville Battlefield in Johnston County, North Carolina, has been awarded National Historic Landmark designation by the secretary of the interior. The 6,500-acre landmark includes the site of the conflict, Union and Confederate earthworks, portions of the historic road system, and a building, the Harper House, that was used as a hospital for the Union XIV Corps.

Former Round Table President Michael S. Lerner (1966-67) died last month in Evanston. He was 81. We offer our deepest sympathies to his family.
NOVEMBER MEETING

by Larry Gibbs

On November 8 at the 555th regular meeting of The Civil War Round Table, 102 members and guests heard Dr. Phillip Shaw Paludan give a provocative presentation on "Lincoln and the Propaganda of War and Peace." Dr. Paludan, a professor of history at the University of Kansas, has authored five books, including A People's Contest: The Union and the Civil War 1861-1865 (1988) and The Presidency of Abraham Lincoln (1995). The thesis of his talk was that Lincoln used some deliberate deception to form Union policy. Lincoln, according to Paludan, influenced public opinion in a unique manner, which helped ensure Union resolve and ultimate triumph.

According to Paludan, "A leader must define policy that has impact on public opinion. The public opinion shaped by propaganda involves the deliberate manipulation of symbols." Some words matter a great deal, especially in wartime. In 1864 Union General William Sherman's statements to Confederate General John Bell Hood were published. They boosted Union morale and frightened Southerners. Sherman's impassioned rhetoric of threats of severe Union punitive actions were not matched by the reality of Union army conduct. During the Civil War atrocity stories in northern newspapers attempted to rally Union supporters around the flag. Pamphlets and editorials tried to change attitudes among citizens.

Lincoln thought that people needed to be led. Thus, he believed in shaping public opinion, not simply following events or other people. Paludan stressed the point that "Lincoln as a leader indicated that from the outset of the war Union and liberty were one and inseparable." With regard to the questions of civil liberties and limits of dissent during the conflict Paludan asserted, "Lincoln had very few dissenters arrested. He used the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus very sparingly."

Supporting his opinions with strong rhetoric, Lincoln influenced pro-Union organizations. The Union League, begun in 1861, fell victim to lethargy and Confederate victories in 1862. But in 1863 it came to life to strongly support the Union cause. More than 140,000 Illinois citizens joined the League by the end of 1863. By 1864, the Union League played an instrumental role in the reelection of Lincoln. Taking the high road, Lincoln supported the efforts of the Union League with his inspirational messages to the people, but allowed the League to operate in a heavily partisan way at state and local levels.

An excellent example of Lincoln as a good propagandist revolved around the pre-Civil War debate over slavery. Paludan explained, "Lincoln stated that the U.S. Constitution placed slavery on the road to ultimate extinction because slavery could not be extended into the territories. Chief Justice Roger Taney and Senator Stephen Douglas submitted that slavery could expand into the territories. If Taney and Douglas were correct, the Constitution and democracy meant that the U.S. was a pro-slavery nation and a racist society." Lincoln used propaganda to persuade citizens that Douglas's view was incorrect. In discussing the policies of Douglas, Lincoln said, "If Mr. Douglas should succeed, what barrier against slavery would exist?" During his presidency Lincoln molded public opinion to support the eventual emancipation of slaves everywhere. One of Paludan's most salient points was that from the beginning of the Civil War the preservation of the Union was inextricably intertwined with the emancipation of slaves in the mind of Abraham Lincoln.

ROBERT E.L. KRIC (continued from page 1)

notably Custer Battlefield National Monument and Manassas National Battlefield. He is the author of The Fortieth Virginia Infantry (1985), and has written several dozen articles and essays on Confederate topics, many of which can be found in magazines such as Civil War and Blue and Gray. His biographical register and history of the Army of Northern Virginia's staff officers will be completed in 1997. At present, Robert E.L. Krick is an historian on the staff at Richmond National Battlefield Park, a position he has held since October 1991.

Karen Krieger will address the luncheon Union League Club Civil War Round Table on Monday, December 16, on the topic of "The Chicago Board of Trade Regiments During the Civil War." The reception begins at 11:30 a.m.; a buffet lunch will be served at noon. The per-person cost is $15. For reservations, call 312-435-5000.

The Last Best Hope of Earth: Abraham Lincoln and the Promise of America," one of the most comprehensive exhibitions ever mounted on the life and legacy of Abraham Lincoln, will continue at the Chicago Historical Society, located at Clark Street and North Avenue on the city's North Side, until February 13, 1997. As its yearlong run is ending, the Society will celebrate this extraordinary exhibition with performances, lectures, and family programs exploring Lincoln's America.

"John Brown's Body"—Sunday, January 12, 2:00 p.m. The Radio Ensemble Players, an ensemble of stage, screen, television, and radio professionals dedicated to the rebirth and development of American radio drama, present this memorable Civil War epic which chronicles the impact of John Brown's raid at Harper's Ferry on the abolitionist movement and on the course of the American Civil War. Directed by Chuck Smith, the CHS's "Voices From History" artistic director, this performance brings to life Stephen Vincent Benet's masterful retelling of the Civil War through the voices of ordinary soldiers, abolitionists, wives and mothers, and Northerners and Southerners who lived through this crucial period in American history. The "Last Best Hope" programs are free with regular admission to the Society. For information on fees for those who are not members of CHS and for the regular hours of the Society, call 312-642-5035, extension 318.

Round Table Founding Member Ralph G. Newman celebrated his 85th birthday on November 3. We extend our very warmest congratulations to Ralph!
The New Books
Compiled by C. Robert Douglas


Dawsey, Cyrus B. and James M. Dawsey, eds. The Confederados: Old South Immigrants in Brazil. U. of Alabama Press. 1995. $34.95.


Hafendorfer, Kenneth A. They Died by Tons and Tens—The Confederate Cavalry in the Kentucky Campaign of 1862. KH Press. 1995. $22.50.


