

Sumter to Appomattox

The Official Newsletter of the New South Wales Chapter of The American Civil War Round Table of Australia

No. 14, March 2004

Message from the Chairman –

This year's program of meetings got off to a great start at our February meeting with Len Traynor's excellent presentation on General Officers of the Union and Confederate Armies. Len's encyclopaedic knowledge of the American Civil War is truly a wonder to behold. Those of us that were at the meeting were greatly privileged to hear Len share with us some of his knowledge and views on the War and the Commanders on both sides of the conflict.

Unfortunately, as a direct consequence of our not taping the presentation and Len's "failure" to use notes for his presentation, we do not have a paper to circulate to members as promised. This will be addressed for future meetings and our normal practice of providing a written paper at the conclusion of each meeting will continue in the future.

Next month, I hope to maintain the high standard of presentations set in previous meetings with my presentation on the life (and death) of George Armstrong Custer. This flamboyant officer has held a particular fascination for me for many years and I hope that I will be able to show members why I developed such an interest.

Looking to the future, I intend to raise with the membership the proposal that we have our elections for the Executive positions and the Committee for the Chapter for 2004 -2005 earlier than scheduled. In this regard, I am proposing that these elections be held at the last scheduled meeting of the year on December 1. My reasoning for such a change is that it will enable the new Committee to set the program of meetings for 2005 rather than have it determined by the outgoing Committee. This is particularly important if we are to hold a full-day conference in 2005 as we have in 2001 and 2003. Please give some thought to this proposal and the advantages it has for planning our future programs of meetings. I will raise the issue at one of our forthcoming meetings later in the year.

I look forward to another year of informative meetings and fellowship amongst the members of the Chapter.

**Paul Kensey
Next Month's Meeting**

Our next scheduled meeting for this year is to be held at our normal venue, the **Roseville Memorial RSL Club, Pacific Highway, Roseville**, on the evening of **Wednesday, April 21, 2004** with the meeting's proceedings to commence at **7pm**. As usual, members will be able to meet at the Club **from 6pm for a bistro style meal**.

Again, the presentation planned for this meeting is something really special with our Chairman, **Paul Kensey**, speaking on the topic:

"American Hero or Just Plain Stupid? The Life and Death of George Armstrong Custer"

Paul has visited the site on the Little Big Horn in Montana where Custer met his death on June 25, 1876 and has prepared a well researched paper with appropriate visual materials that effectively separates the facts from the myths that have persisted about this daring and reckless officer whose vanity, ambition and thirst for glory were to bring about his downfall. Paul's presentation will highlight, also, Custer's Civil War service and his earlier experiences at West Point prior to the War.

As with all of Paul's presentations you can be guaranteed of an outstanding and memorable night at this meeting that will maintain the high standard of presentation that your Committee has set for this year's meetings. This is a meeting not to be missed!

It is proposed that a question and answer/comment session will follow Paul's presentation and, as with most of our meetings, a copy of Paul's paper will be available at the conclusion of the meeting and later, on request. Members living outside the Sydney Metropolitan Area will have the paper mailed out automatically with the next Newsletter in May.

A Trivia Question –

Who was the army's only survivor at the Battle of Little Big Horn?

(Answer on the third page of this Newsletter)

Civil War Happenings – Continuing the Change

In previous years' issues of this Newsletter a section was devoted to Civil War happenings in the month of that the Newsletter was circulated.

Rather than repeat these happenings in this year's editions of the Newsletter, it is proposed to detail the happenings in the following month. Any member who has mislaid last year's Newsletter for a particular month and would want that month's happenings, should contact John Cook for a copy of the earlier publication.

It Happened in April

HATCHES AND DESPATCHES

April 2, 1865 – Confederate general A P Hill is killed outside Petersburg, Virginia;

April 5, 1839 – Robert Smalls (USN), the only African American naval captain during the Civil War is born in Beaufort, S.C.;

April 15, 1865 – President Lincoln dies at 7:22am after being shot the previous night at Ford's Theatre by John Wilkes Booth;

April 26, 1865 – John Wilkes Booth is shot and killed;

April 27, 1822 – Ulysses S Grant is born at Point Pleasant, Ohio.

COMMAND AND POLITICAL APPOINTMENTS

April 15, 1865 – Andrew Johnson sworn in as President after Lincoln's death;

April 22, 1861 – Robert E Lee is named commander of the forces of Virginia;

BATTLES / MILITARY ACTIONS

April 1, 1865 – At the Battle of Five Forks Lee's forces are defeated by the Union army, which now threatens his route of retreat;

April 3, 1865 – Federal troops occupy Richmond and Petersburg;

April 6, 1865 – The last major engagement between the Army of Northern Virginia (Lee) and Army of the Potomac (Grant) occurs at Saylor's Creek, Virginia;

BATTLES / MILITARY ACTIONS cont'd

April 8, 1864 – Nathaniel Banks' Federals "skedaddle" from Richard Taylor's Confederates at the Battle of Sabine Crossroads, La;

April 11, 1861 – Confederate representatives visit Fort Sumter and demand its surrender

April 12, 1861 – Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor is fired on thus beginning the War;

April 13, 1861 – After 24 hours of bombardment, the Union Force within Fort Sumter is forced to surrender.

OTHER SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

April 2, 1865 – The Confederate government evacuates Richmond;

April 9, 1865 – Confederate General Robert E Lee surrenders to Union General Ulysses S Grant at Appomattox Court House;

April 17, 1861 – Virginia adopts an ordinance of secession;

April 17, 1865 - Joseph E Johnston surrenders to Sherman near Durham Station N.C.;

April 18, 1865 – Johnston and Sherman sign "a memorandum or basis of agreement" calling for an armistice by all armies in the field;

April 19, 1865 – Funeral services held for Lincoln;

April 21, 1865 – The train bearing Lincoln's body leaves Washington for Springfield, Illinois;

April 24, 1865 – President Johnson rejects the terms of agreement of Sherman and Johnston and directs that hostilities must resume if there is no surrender;

April 26, 1865 – General Johnston formally surrenders troops under his command to General Sherman;

Famous Last Words

"If there is a worse place than Hell, I am in it"

- Abraham Lincoln on hearing of the Union disaster at Fredericksburg Dec, 1862

"Forward! For God's sake, forward!"

- General John Reynolds before his mortal wounding at Gettysburg on July 1, 1863

Religion During the War

These three short articles are the final part of a series prepared to complement the paper by David Smith that was the basis of his presentation to our members at our meeting in December 2003. The earlier articles in this series appeared in the January 2004 Newsletter.

Religion figured largely in the lives of both Federal and Confederate troops throughout the War although the nature of religious observance differed on the two sides as a consequence of their respective religious traditions prior to the War. Furthermore, religious practice and observance tended to become more flexible with time and exposure to camp life and battle. The differences between the two sides is illustrated below with the order from General George B McClellan early in the War after he had experienced a religious "conversion" and the recollections of campaigning by a Confederate soldier in 1864:

"The major general commanding desires and requests that in future the may be more perfect respect for the Sabbath on the part of his command. We are fighting in a holy cause, and should endeavour the benign favor (sic) of the Creator. Unless in the case of an attack by the enemy, or some other extreme military necessity, it is commended to commanding officers that all work shall be suspended on the Sabbath; that no unnecessary movements shall be made on that day; that the men shall, as far as possible, be permitted to rest from their labors (sic); that they shall attend divine service after the customary Sunday morning inspection, and that officers and men shall alike use their influence to insure (sic) the utmost decorum and quiet on that day...the observance of the holy day of the God of Mercy and of Battles is our sacred duty."

Major General George B McClellan,
General Orders No. 7, September 6, 1861

*"...every evening, about sunset, whenever it was at all possible, we would keep our, and such of us as could get together, wherever we might be, should gather for prayer...Sometimes a few of the fellows would gather in prayer, while the rest of us fought the guns, Several times... we met under fire...we held that prayer hour every day, at sunset, during the entire campaign. And some of us thought, and think that the strange exception our Battery experienced, our little loss, in the midst of unnumbered perils, and incessant service...was an answer to our prayers, "the God of battles covered our heads in the day of battle" and was merciful to us, because we "called on Him". If any of you think this is a "fond fancy" **we don't**" (emphasis in the original)*

William M Dame, Richmond Howitzers, CSA
Recollection of Campaigning in 1864

The Effect of Religion on Battles and the Effect of Battles on Religion

As previously noted in this series of articles, a significant victory or defeat in battle had the effect of initiating a religious revival amongst the troops involved. These religious revivals were particularly significant during the critical campaigns of 1863 and 1864. Religious beliefs provided, also, a strong motivation for individual soldiers and units/formations of troops to display and sustain extraordinary levels of courage in their performance in battle. Furthermore, there are numerous examples of officers and soldiers facing combat with the possibility of violent death displaying both courage and resolution, which appear to be based on their firm religious beliefs. Extracts from letters home written by two officers, one Confederate, the other a Federal, clearly illustrates these displays of courage and resolution:

"There is a reality in Religion...I am able to look death in the face without fear ...Sometimes when I think of you at home it is hard to be entirely willing never to see you and the boys again, but...we will meet again in the better land...Kiss the boys for me. Goodbye, my dearest. God Bless you."

Captain Thaddeus J Hyatt, Unit unknown, USA
- Letters to his wife, August 4 & 31, 1864

"Now, after all, Love, I think it best to trouble myself little with fears of danger, and to find happiness in the hope that you and I and our children will live together again happily and in peace. It may be, dearest, this hope will never be realized (sic) yet I will cherish it as my greatest source of happiness, to be abandoned only when flowing blood and failing breath shall teach me I have seen the last of earth. All yet may be well with us."

Major Elisha Franklin Paxton, Twenty-Seventh
Virginia, CSA - A letter to his wife, Jan 19, 1862

Whilst both of these officers may have been "putting on a brave face" for their wives, each of the letters displays an acceptance of their fate in the coming battles, maybe even a premonition of death and certainly a lack of fear of death, if it should occur. It is this latter interpretation of the sentiments expressed in the letters that is considered to be the more probable. It is interesting to note, also, that Captain Hyatt was killed three weeks after writing the letter in the third battle of Winchester and Major Paxton was promoted brigadier general and killed at Chancellorsville on May 3, 1863.

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After the War

The end of the War in 1865 brought with it a major problem for the defeated South in explaining how the righteous Confederate cause, blessed by their God, could fail. To address this issue, former Confederates devoted themselves to creating a memory of the conflict as an intensely nostalgic form of worship of its dead heroes. Thus, "Stonewall" Jackson and JEB Stuart became the first two martyrs in what has become known as the mythology of the "Lost Cause". Robert E Lee joined them but only after his death in 1870 in a deification process that was to hold sway for over a hundred years. Unfortunately, this deification process of some required a denigration of others from both sides of the conflict. In this regard, James Longstreet presents an excellent illustration of the systematic denigration used by some of his fellow Confederates when he "went over to the enemy" by joining the Republican Party after the War. It should be noted that Longstreet was his own worst enemy when, in responding to early criticism by the "Lost Cause" devotees, he criticised Lee.

Essentially, the "Lost Cause" myth involved exaggerating the positive features of the antebellum period in the South, focusing on the prowess of Confederate soldiers and raising the images to god-like status of certain, albeit talented, Confederate commanders, who had made the supreme sacrifice or who had since died. So successful were the peddlers of the myth that it was not difficult for Confederate veterans to accept the notion that their participation in the War revealed a trait of honour that outshone their defeat. In this way, they made defeat seem honourable and this had the effect of heightening the South's already high concept of honour. Given this situation, it was easy, therefore, for Confederate veterans conclude after the surrender at Appomattox that they had been overwhelmed, not really beaten and that Reconstruction was a continuation of the same struggle but in a different form.

The "Lost Cause" was as successful as it was unprincipled and devious. Indeed, one must wonder about the justification of the lies that were told in presenting the case of the "Lost Cause" since, with Jubal Early, two of its leading proponents were ordained "Christian" clergy. These were J William Jones, a former chaplain of the 13th Virginia Infantry and William N Pendleton, Lee's Chief of Artillery. Could it be that these men of the cloth were counting on God's infinite forgiveness for these unscrupulous acts of lying?

Answer to the Trivia Question

The army's only survivor from the Battle of Little Big Horn was a horse named 'Comanche', the property of a slain officer. Comanche spent the remaining 15 years of its life as a pampered mascot of the 7th Cavalry.

Now for Something a Little Lighter...

Presented below is a series of interesting coincidences that some will read more into than most.

Abraham Lincoln was elected to Congress in 1846. John Kennedy was elected to Congress in 1946.

Abraham Lincoln was elected President in 1860. John Kennedy was elected President in 1960.

Both were particularly concerned with Civil Rights and both their wives lost children whilst living in the White House.

Both Presidents were shot on a Friday and both were shot in the head.

Now it gets a little weird –

Lincoln's secretary was named Kennedy and Kennedy's secretary was named Lincoln.

Both were assassinated by Southerners and both were succeeded by Southerners named Johnson.

Andrew Johnson who succeeded Lincoln was born in 1808. Lyndon Johnson who succeeded Kennedy was born in 1908.

John Wilkes Booth, who assassinated Lincoln, was born in 1839 and Lee Harvey Oswald, who assassinated Kennedy, was born in 1939.

Both assassins were known by their three names and both names are composed of fifteen letters.

Now hang onto your seat –

Lincoln was shot in a theatre named 'Ford' and Kennedy was shot in a 'Lincoln' car made by Ford.

Both Booth and Oswald were assassinated before their trials.

And here's the big one –

A week before Lincoln was shot, he was in Monroe, Maryland. A week before Kennedy was shot, he was with Marilyn Monroe!

A great story for the conspiracy theorists amongst us!

This publication is the official newsletter of the New South Wales Chapter of the American Civil War Round Table of Australia. All inquiries regarding the Newsletter should be addressed to the Secretary/Treasurer of the Chapter by telephone on 9449 3720 or at PO Box 200, St Ives, NSW, 2075 or by e-mail to bpoconn@bigpond.com