

Sumter to Appomattox

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

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Please visit our website www.americancivilwar.asn.au

A Message from our Secretary –

I had hoped that my message in the last issue of our Newsletter would be my “one-and-only” with our new Chairman taking on the role of providing the message to members. Unfortunately, the small attendance at our first meeting for 2009 precluded our having an election for the Executive and Committee and last year’s Committee will have to continue in a temporary capacity until we can hold elections, hopefully at our next meeting in April.

The small number of members that attended the first meeting of the year was treated to a talk by John Cook that was both interesting and at times provoking, on *Lincoln as Commander-in-Chief*. A copy of the talk is enclosed for those who missed out and for those who would like to have their memory refreshed on the subject.

It is with regret that I must advise members that the Roseville Memorial RSL Club is not available to us in April due to Easter and other bookings. As a consequence we have taken the first available Monday which is May 4. I trust this arrangement will not inconvenience members and we will have a full attendance at the meeting

Finally, the invoice for your subscription for this year is enclosed for your attention. The subscriptions have been delayed this time around to change the basis of payment from financial year to calendar year basis of accounting. We would greatly appreciate your prompt attention to paying this subscription as it will provide a reliable indicator of the continuing interest in our activities and, as a consequence, the viability of the Chapter as an active and worthwhile group.

I look forward to seeing you at our next meeting in April.

Brendan O’Connell

Our Next Meeting

The second regular meeting for 2009 for the NSW Chapter of the ACWRTA will be held at the **Roseville Memorial RSL Club, Pacific Highway Roseville** will be held on **Monday, May 4**. As is our custom, the meeting will commence with a bistro-style meal from 6pm with the meeting proper to start at 7:15pm.

The meeting will commence with the election of the Executive and Committee for 2009 and transact other business as required. The presentation that will follow will be given by Brendan O’Connell who will discuss the story behind his daughter’s recently published book:

The Ballad of Blind Tom

Brendan tells us that this book is the remarkable life story of a Georgia slave, a pianist and autistic savant, who is best described as the “Forrest Gump” of his time. In 1860 he performed in the White House before President James Buchanan and witnessed the Democrat’s tumultuous convention in Baltimore. He was there when a Georgia gun running scandal rocked New York and he heard St Louis burn in the wake of the Camp Jackson massacre. In 1862 he composed *The Battle of Manassas*, a battle-piece that captured the soldiers’ march, rumble of artillery and mayhem of battle and in April 1865, travelled through war ravaged Georgia where he encountered a detail of Union soldiers *en route* to Andersonville.

RJ Smith of the LA Times wrote: “Tom’s is a story with bottomless complexity, touching on race and sanity and slavery and art. But ultimately, his life makes us think about what it means to be human.”

Brendan’s presentation will certainly be “something different”, but you will be guaranteed the narration of a little known but most enthralling character of the Civil War era. Don’t miss the opportunity of hearing this address by Brendan.

It Happened in March

Hatches and Dispatches

March 6, 1831 - Philip H Sheridan is born in Albany, New York;

March 22, 1817 – Braxton Bragg (CSA) is born in Warrenton, North Carolina;

March 28, 1818 – Wade Hampton (CSA) is born in Charleston South Carolina.

Command Changes

March 5, 1862 – Pierre G T Beauregard assumes command of the Confederate Army of Mississippi;

March 9, 1864 – Ulysses S Grant is named General-in-Chief of the Army of the United States;

March 11, 1862, - Lincoln removes McClellan from his command as General-in-Chief of the Union armies;

March 17, 1864 – Lieutenant General U S Grant formally assumes command of the armies of the United States.

Battles / Military Actions

March 2, 1865 - Battle of Waynesborough – the last campaign in the Shenandoah Valley;

March 7, 1862 – Battle of Pea Ridge (Elkhorn Tavern), the biggest battle west of the Mississippi;

March 9, 1862 – Ironclads CSS *Virginia* and USS *Monitor* engage at Hampton Roads, Virginia;

March 12, 1864 – Red River campaign begins under command of Nathaniel Banks (USA)

March 16, 1865 – Battle of Averasborough, N.C.

March 19, 1865 – Battle of Bentonville, North Carolina;

March 21, 1865 – Last major effort by the Confederates to Stop Sherman's march south of Bentonville, N.C.

March 23, 1862 – Jackson and Shields Clash at the Battle of Kernstown, VA;

March 25, 1865 – Grant defeats Lee at Fort Stedman, Virginia.

March 25, 1865 – Union troops begin the siege of Mobile, Alabama

March 29, 1865 – The beginning of the final Appomattox campaign;

March 30, 1864 – Confederates attack Snyder's Bluff, Mississippi.

Other Significant Events

March 4, 1861 – Lincoln is inaugurated as the 16th President of the United States;

March 4, 1861 – The “Stars and Bars” is designated as the official Confederate flag;

March 4, 1865 – Lincoln is inaugurated for a second term as President;

March 13, 1863 – Explosion at the Confederate Ordnance Laboratory in Richmond kills or injures 69 people;

March 14, 1863 – Farragut leads his Union flotilla up the Mississippi past Port Hudson, La;

March 21, 1861 – Louisiana ratifies the Confederate Constitution;

March 26, 1863 – West Virginia voters approve the gradual emancipation of slaves;

March 27, 1865 – President Lincoln meets with Grant, Sherman and Porter aboard the *River Queen* at City point, Virginia;

March 28, 1865 – Lincoln offers terms of surrender.

A New Book on Lincoln

At a time when the life of Abraham Lincoln, America's 16th President is being commemorated with the 200th Anniversary of his birth, a new and exciting book has just been published. This book, *Our Lincoln, New Perspectives on Lincoln and His World*. demonstrates that, even now, it is possible to shed new light on the most studied figure in American history.

Edited by Columbia University's distinguished academic, Eric Foner, the book presents a collection of original essays that spans many aspects of Lincoln's life and work. James M McPherson examines Lincoln's deft navigation of politics and war-time strategy whilst Foner himself explores Lincoln's controversial proposal to move the emancipated slaves “off-shore” to a colony outside the United States. Mark E Neely brings fresh evidence to bear on the issue of Lincoln and civil liberties in wartime whilst Richard Carwardine examines Lincoln's religious beliefs and Catherine Clinton his family life.

The fresh, authoritative scholarship that characterises *Our Lincoln* is a “must read” for anyone interested in this great figure! The hard-cover edition of the book is available on-line through Amazon.com for \$US 18:45 plus \$9:98 shipping and handling.

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 secretary@americancivilwar.asn.au

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;

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;

OTHER SIGNIFICANT EVENTS cont'd

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.

Positions Vacant

As noted previously in this Newsletter, we will be holding an Extraordinary General Meeting at the beginning of our next meeting on May 4. Its purpose is to elect an Executive and Committee for 2009 and 2010.

Please note that we are looking for "new blood" on both the Executive and Committee and those who have served in these capacities will not be upset if they are voted out of office.

We are sure that the Chapter will benefit by the introduction of fresh ideas so, please consider... that is consider – why not!

Famous Last Words:

"Well if we are to die, let us die like men"

Last reported words of Patrick Cleburne, Franklin, 1864.

Governor Harris: *"General, are you wounded?"*

General Johnston: *"Yes, and I fear seriously"*

These were the last words of Albert Sidney Johnston who bled to death during the Battle of Shiloh in April 1862, after being struck in the leg by a stray minie ball. A simple tourniquet would have saved his life.

Cavalry Action at Gettysburg

The unsuccessful Confederate attack on the Union defensive position on the Cemetery Ridge feature, commonly known as 'Pickett's Charge', on Day 3 of the Gettysburg battle (July 3, 1863), tends to overshadow the cavalry battles that also took place on that day.

In particular, there was final action of the day, an ill-advised mounted cavalry charge ordered by Brigadier General Judson (Kill-Cavalry) Kilpatrick, commanding the Union 3rd Cavalry Division, of his newly promoted brigade commander, Brigadier General Elon Farnsworth.

This charge was over ground simply not suited for a cavalry charge. The stone fences behind which the Confederate defenders were located and the general rocky nature of the ground made for an operation that was doomed for failure and reinforced Kilpatrick's reputation for lavish expenditure of men and horses.

After consulting with his subordinate regimental commanders, Farnsworth questioned the wisdom of a mounted charge and protested personally to his divisional commander. Kilpatrick retorted by first suggesting the Confederates were in retreat (he appears to be the only one who was of this view) and then, increasing the heat of the exchange, went onto say:

"So you refuse to obey my orders? If you are afraid to lead this charge, I will lead it."

Farnsworth remonstrated with Kilpatrick demanding that he withdraw his assertion of Farnsworth being afraid and then demonstrated his metal by saying:

"General, if you order the charge I will lead it, but you must take the awful responsibility."

He then turned and rode away to brief his regimental commanders and was himself killed in the subsequent charge.

Did He Commit Suicide?

One of the enduring controversies about Farnsworth's ill-fated charge on July 3, 1863 is whether the young brigadier, when grievously wounded in the charge took his own life. This claim came from Confederate sources in the years following the War.

The most credible Southern account came from William C Oates, the Colonel of the 15th Alabama and later governor of Alabama. Oates alleged that skirmishers from the Alabama Brigade shot and wounded Farnsworth and killed his horse. Approaching the fallen officer, they demanded he surrender to them. Farnsworth's refused, saying:

"I'll be damned if I do"

Oates reported that Farnsworth then put his pistol to his head and pulled the trigger. Later, Oates claimed he inspected the body, found some private letters that identified Farnsworth, which he then destroyed. This story was confirmed by a number of Confederate sources each claiming that Farnsworth, knowing he was mortally wounded, shot himself in the head.

Despite these various Confederate accounts of Farnsworth's suicide, there is still conjecture regarding the circumstances of his death. Contemporaneous testimony of two surgeons with the Union brigade that found Farnsworth's body on July 5 presents quite a different story. Their report noted that Farnsworth had suffered five wounds – four in the chest and abdomen and one in the thigh – there were no wounds to the head!

As with many stories from the Civil War, there are conflicting accounts and it is left to the students of today to weigh the available evidence and make a judgement for themselves. Suffice to say, however, that the judgement of the respected historian Jeffrey D Wert is quite definitive on the issue when he asserts that "Post-war accounts by Confederates alleging ...he (Farnsworth) committed suicide **are bogus**" (*emphasis added*).

If we accept Wert's judgement on this issue, the questions could then be asked of 'how' and 'why' did the Confederate version emerge? Was this another manifestation of the "Lost Cause" myth? Was it a vain attempt to denigrate the Union commanders and, thus, in some way, change the perception of result of the Gettysburg battle? Did it seek, in some way, to relieve Lee of any responsibility or blame for the Confederate defeat? There is no doubt that the Farnsworth controversy provides fertile ground for any conspiracy theorists in our midst!

Source: America's Civil War, Volume 15, No 3, July 2002.

Further Reading

A full account of Farnsworth's cavalry charge outlined in the article, above, is presented in an excellent paper by the well-known Civil War historian and author, Jeffrey D Wert, titled 'All the Powers of Hell Were Waked to Madness'. This paper may be accessed in the magazine *America's Civil War, Volume 15, No. 3*

A Meteoric Rise

Edmund Kirby, West Point Class of May 1861, had the most meteoric jump in rank in the Union army. By direct order of Abraham Lincoln, he jumped from the rank of First Lieutenant to Brigadier General as he lay dying from a mortal wound incurred whilst commanding a battery at Chancellorsville with "...undaunting courage".

Not only did he beat Custer to the rank of Brigadier General by a couple of months but did it in one jump!

(Source: North and South, Volume 5, No. 6)