

# Sumter to Appomattox

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

No. 72, May – June 2015

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Please visit our website [www.americancivilwar.asn.au](http://www.americancivilwar.asn.au)

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## A Message to Members –

Your Committee has now finalised the program for the remainder of 2015 with a most interesting set of presentations. In the meetings for the remainder of the year we have varied the meeting format away from the straight lecture to involve members in the conduct of proceedings. We would welcome any feedback members might have in this modification of format, particularly if it doesn't work!

Our first meeting for the year was an outstanding success with over 30 members and guests in attendance. Special thanks must go to Bruce Dennett for his contribution to the meeting's proceedings – without him the meeting would certainly have been a pedestrian affair! Thanks Bruce from all of us present – you made it a great night. It is my hope that this meeting will set the tone for all of our meetings for the remainder of the year.

Details of our May meeting are presented in the adjoining column and we will be continuing the 'Lincoln' theme from our last meeting with a look at Lincoln's political acumen and the role he played in formulating the role of the President as Commander-in-Chief, a feature, which has continued to the present time. Harking back to some of the comments from our March meeting where Father Dave made the observation regarding Lincoln's failure to resolve the slavery issue peacefully (in contrast to Wilberforce in Great Britain), this issue will be taken up further in the forthcoming May meeting's presentation. I'm hoping a robust discussion!

As you will see, also, we are proposing to introduce a "lucky door" prize" at the meeting – nothing to contribute except your being at the meeting! The prize at the meeting will be a newly published Civil war book on the last days of the War.

I urge you to make every effort to make the time to attend the forthcoming meeting this month – you will certainly not be disappointed.

*John Cook*

## Our Next Meeting

Our Chapter's next regular meeting will be held on **Monday, May 11**, at the **Roseville Memorial Club, Pacific Highway Roseville**. The meeting will commence, as usual, with a bistro-style meal from 6pm with the meeting proper to start at 7:30pm. At this meeting we will continue the 'Lincoln' theme of our March meeting with John Cook presenting a paper entitled:

### Abraham Lincoln – The Consummate Politician

In this presentation, we will be using Doris Kearns Goodwin's book *Team of Rivals* to demonstrate how Lincoln "out-foxed" his rivals to gain the Republican nomination for the 1860 Presidential election and then went on to include these men in his Cabinet. In addition, the presentation will highlight Lincoln's contribution in defining the role of President as Commander-in-Chief.

The paper of this presentation will be available to members at the conclusion of the meeting. Furthermore, due to the generosity of an American book publisher, we will be presenting a "lucky door prize" to one of the meeting's attendees in the form of the recently published (2015) book *Their Last Full Measure*, which documents the last months of the War. Please make a special effort to be at the meeting and, if possible, bring a friend to the meeting

## Un-Financial Members

There are a small number of members receiving this Newsletter who have yet to pay their annual subscription for 2014 – 2015. The costs involved are \$40 for metropolitan members and \$30 for country members. These costs apply to both individuals and as a "family" membership. If this has slipped your mind to date, please contact our Secretary/Treasurer, Brendan O'Connell to effect payment. Brendan may be contacted directly by telephone on (02) 9449 3720.

# George McClellan's Achievements

In the eyes of many historians George B McClellan single-handedly did more damage to the Union war effort in the Civil War than any other individual, including Confederate commander Robert E Lee! Promoting his own ideas and career regardless of the consequences, McClellan eventually became such a thorn in the side of President Lincoln, that the President removed him from command on November 5, 1862. McClellan's legacy of excessive caution, however, continued to affect the performance of the Army of the Potomac until Grant took command of all Union armies in March 1864.

As background to ensuring a more balanced view of this Civil War personality, however, it is considered appropriate to present some of the achievements this controversial Union general and failed contender for the 1864 Presidential election.

George McClellan was born in 1826, the son of a prominent Philadelphian surgical ophthalmologist. His mother was the daughter of a leading Pennsylvania family, a woman noted for her "...considerable grace and refinement." As a child he demonstrated his academic ability when at the age only 13 years he entered the University of Pennsylvania to study Law. Two years later he terminated these legal studies to enter the United States Military Academy, West Point, where it was necessary to have the normal minimum age for entry waived to allow his entry.

McClellan's academic record at West Point was outstanding and he graduated second in his class, the famous Class of 1846. His standing at graduation enabled him to be commissioned as a Brevet Second Lieutenant into the prestigious US Corps of Engineers. His first posting, which lasted only three months, was back to West Point where he trained enlisted men within his Corps as sappers, miners and "pontooners". With the Mexican War now being fought, McClellan was posted to General Winfield Scott's command. His bravery under fire during the Mexican War led to his being brevetted to First Lieutenant following action at Contreras and Churubusco and to the rank of Captain after Chapultepec.

After the Mexican War, McClellan was posted again to West Point where he had independent command of an engineering company. It was here that McClellan came into conflict with the Academy's Superintendent and the Army's Chief of Engineers, mostly over trivial matters but where these senior officers' views differed from McClellan's.

In 1855, McClellan was sent with two other officers as official observers to the European armies involved in the Crimean War. These three officers were to report on technical aspects of the new technology, especially rifled-muskets and rifled artillery. Whilst the other two observers reported on these terms of reference, McClellan focused his report on the organisation of European cavalry and the Russian Army's organisation and methods. Not surprisingly, McClellan's report did not have the impact in practical terms as the other two observers' reports.

Transferring in 1855 from the Corps of Engineers to the Cavalry Corps to gain promotion to the rank of substantive Captain, McClellan was assigned to the 1<sup>st</sup> US Cavalry Regiment. He wrote a handbook on cavalry tactics, which was adopted by the US Army and he designed a saddle based on that used by the Prussian and Hungarian Hussars that the US Army was to adopt as standard issue for its horse cavalry and which is still used today for ceremonial purposes.

In 1857, McClellan resigned his army commission to become Vice-President and Chief Engineer of the Illinois Central Railroad and later, in 1860, as President of the Ohio and Mississippi Railroad.

With the outbreak of war following the shelling of Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861, McClellan re-entered service with the Army, initially in accepting the position of Major General of Ohio Volunteers on April 23, 1861 and subsequently, on May 3, entering the federal service and being given command of the Department of the Ohio with a commission as major general in the regular army. In what was later to become West Virginia, McClellan was victorious in engagements known as the Battle of Philippi Races and at Rich Mountain. Although not major battles, after the Union defeat and rout at Bull Run, any victory by Union forces was seen as significant. Lincoln called McClellan to Washington to take command of all Union forces defending the capital. His engineering and his organisational skills shone brightly in the creation of what was to be the mighty Army of the Potomac, but his reluctance to use his forces effectively limited success it was to have under his command. Even his strongest critics acknowledge that he was an exceptional planner and organiser and a skilled trainer of troops – but he turned out to be an absolute disaster as a battlefield commander!

The disastrous Peninsula Campaign and the Battle of Second Manassas proved how ineffective McClellan was in overestimating the enemy's strength and how over-cautious he was in using his own troops. At Antietam, in September 1862, McClellan gained a strategic victory over the Confederates, a victory that stopped France and Great Britain from entering the War. McClellan had Lee's plans for the battle fall into his hands but, again, allowed Lee to withdraw with his Army intact. This was the last straw for a patient ever-forgiving Lincoln and McClellan was relieved of his command.

Lincoln was to "cross swords" with McClellan again when McClellan was nominated as the Democratic Party's nomination for the 1864 Presidential election. Again, Lincoln won! This was not McClellan's last political foray and, in 1878, he was elected Governor of New Jersey, a position he held until 1881.

There is no doubt that George Brinton McClellan had a full and successful career with many great achievements – **but certainly not as a battlefield commander!**

## It Happened in May

### Hatches and Dispatches

**May 10, 1863** – Thomas J (Stonewall) Jackson dies at Guinea Station, Virginia, aged 39 years;

**May 11, 1864** – JEB Stuart is mortally wounded at the Battle of Yellow Tavern, Virginia;

**May 23, 1824** – Ambrose Burnside (USA) is born in Liberty, Indiana;

**May 28, 1818** – Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard (CSA) is born in St Bernard, Louisiana;

### Command Changes

**May 2, 1863** – JEB Stuart assumes command of the Confederate cavalry after “Stonewall” Jackson is mortally wounded in the Battle of Chancellorsville;

### Battles

**May 1, 1863** – Battle of Port Gibson, MS, which begins Grant’s Vicksburg Campaign;

**May 1 - 4, 1863** – Battle of Chancellorsville, that results in stunning Confederate victory for Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia;

**May 5, 1864** – Battle of the Wilderness begins;

May 8, 1864 – Fighting begins at Spotsylvania Court House, Virginia;

**May 12, 1864** – Battle of Bloody Angle, Spotsylvania;

**May 12, 1865** – The last land battle between large forces resulting in a Confederate victory takes place at Palmito Ranch, Texas;

**May 16, 1863** – Battle of Champion Hill, Mississippi;

**May 17, 1863** – Battle of Big Black River Bridge, MS;

**May 18, 1863** – Siege of Vicksburg, MS, begins;

**May 19, 1863** – Grant launches his first unsuccessful attack against the besieged Vicksburg;

**May 23 – 26, 1864** – Battle of North Anna, Virginia;

**May 25, 1862** – Jackson attacks the Federals in the First Battle of Winchester, VA and captures the town two days later;

**May 27, 1862** – Battle of Slash Church (Hanover Court House);

**May 31, 1862** – Battle of Seven Pines (Fair Oaks) where General Joseph Johnston (CSA) is severely wounded.

### Other Significant Events

**May 4, 1865** – Lincoln is buried in Springfield, Illinois;

**May 9, 1865** – The trial of the 8 accused Lincoln assassination conspirators begins;

**May 10, 1865** – Jefferson Davis is captured near Irwinville, Georgia;

**May 16, 1861** – Tennessee is officially admitted to the Confederacy

**May 20, 1861** – North Carolina becomes the 11<sup>th</sup> state to join the Confederacy whilst Kentucky issues a proclamation of neutrality;

**May 29, 1865** – President Johnson grants amnesty and pardon to all who participated in “the existing rebellion”, with a few exceptions.

## It Happened in June

### HATCHES AND DESPATCHES

**June 1, 1831** – John Bell Hood (CSA) is born in Owingsville, Bath County, Kentucky;

**June 3, 1808** – Confederate President Jefferson Davis is born in Christian County, Kentucky;

**June 5, 1864** – On Matagorda Island, Texas, 13 black members of the Union’s Corps de Afrique are hanged by Federal military authorities after convictions for mutiny;

**June 5, 1864** – Brigadier General William E (Grumble) Jones (CSA) is killed in action in the Shenandoah Valley;

**June 14, 1811** – Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is born in Litchfield, Conn;

**June 14, 1864** – General Leonidas Polk, (CSA) is killed at Pine Mountain, Georgia during the Atlanta Campaign.

### COMMAND AND POLITICAL APPOINTMENTS

**June 17, 1862** – Braxton Bragg succeeds General Beauregard as Commander of the Western Department of the Confederate Army

**June 22, 1861** – Robert E Lee is named commander of the forces of Virginia.

## It Happened in June (cont'd)

### BATTLES / MILITARY ACTIONS

**June 1 – 3, 1864** – Battle of Cold Harbor, Virginia;

**June 1, 1862** – Second day of fighting in the Battle of Seven Forks;

**June 6, 1862** – The Battle of Memphis, Tennessee;

**June 8, 1862** - Confederate forces under “Stonewall Jackson, successfully fight off Federal attacks and achieve victory at the Battle of Cross Keys, Virginia;

**June 9, 1863** – Battle of Brandy Station, Virginia, which is the largest cavalry battle ever fought on American soil. In this battle JEB Stuart was surprised by the Union forces commanded by Alfred Pleasanton and narrowly escapes defeat;

**June 10, 1861** – Battle of Big Bethel, Virginia, is the first major battle of the Civil War. Although outnumbering the Confederates by more than four to one, the Union attack failed disastrously;

**June 12 – 15, 1862** – JEB Stuart’s spectacular four-day reconnaissance that develops into a ride around McClellan’s army on the Virginia Peninsula;

**June 21, 1863** – Heavy skirmishing marks Lee’s advance north with engagements at several places in Virginia and in Frederick, Maryland;

**June 27, 1864** – Battle of Kennesaw Mountain, Georgia, results in a Confederate victory thus temporarily checking Sherman’s march on Atlanta.

### OTHER SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

**June 4, 1862** – Southern planters burn huge stocks of cotton on the Yazoo and the Mississippi to prevent their capture;

**June 19, 1862** – President Lincoln signs into law a measure prohibiting slavery in the territories of the United States;

**June 20, 1863** – By presidential proclamation West Virginia is admitted to the Union as the 35<sup>th</sup> State;

**June 23, 1861** – Federal balloonist Thaddeus Lowe observes and maps the Confederate lines over northern Virginia;

**June 25, 1864** – At Petersburg, Federal engineers begin digging a tunnel towards Confederate lines which they hope will enable them to blow apart the Southern earthworks;

**June 28, 1863** – Lee diverts Confederate forces from an intended drive to Harrisburg to march them towards Gettysburg;

**June 30, 1865** – All eight alleged conspirators in the Lincoln assassination are found guilty.

## Distribution of Our Newsletter

The rising cost of postage necessitates our reviewing the method of distribution of our Newsletter. At present, it costs around \$100 to print and distribute each Newsletter to members. Accordingly, four options are presented for your consideration:

1. Distribute the Newsletter electronically, with provision for those members without an e-mail facility to have a hardcopy version mailed to them;
2. Give members the choice of which format they would wish to receive their Newsletters, possibly with an additional charge for the hardcopy version;
3. As for option 1, but with hardcopies of each Newsletter available at the following regular meeting of the Chapter for collection by members; and
4. Maintain the *status quo* for distribution of the Newsletter.

It is proposed that these options will be discussed at our forthcoming meeting and a decision made by your Committee based on these discussions.

## An Interesting Quote ...

*“As a Virginian, Scott deplored the cry of many Republican politicians and newspapers for an invasion to “crush the rebels.” Even if successful, he wrote, an invasion would produce “...fifteen devastated provinces [that is, the slave states] not to be brought into harmony with their conquerors, but to be held for generations, by heavy garrisons.”*

- James M McPherson, *Tried by War* – Abraham Lincoln as Commander-in-Chief

## May I Quote You General Lee...

*“I tremble for my country when I hear of confidence expressed in me. I know too well my weakness, that our only hope is in God”*

- Robert E Lee to his wife, 1862

*“After it is all over, as stupid a fellow that I am can see that mistakes were made. I notice, however, that my mistakes are never told me until it is too late.”*

- Lee to his officers after Gettysburg, 1863

*“Death in its silent sure march is fast gathering those whom I have longest loved, so that when he shall knock at my door, I will more willingly follow.”*

- Robert E Lee, 1869

*“Strike the Tent!*

- Lee’s last words, October 12, 1870