



Sumter to Appomattox

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

Patron: Professor the Hon Bob Carr

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Please visit our website www.americancivilwar.asn.au

A Message from Our Chairman

Our next meeting on 16 April (see next column) deals with a subject we haven't looked at for a long time, and raises lots of questions. Some notes will be circulated for reading before the meeting and John Morrison will lead a discussion around the topic. Please feel you can read more broadly around this subject before the meeting and come along prepared to put in your thoughts (and see next page). A new approach!

Last meeting we heard from Ian McIntyre about his fascination for the Ironclad riverboats and the important part they played in the war. A good attendance and we were drawn into the engineering achievements and how quickly they were put into practice.

As we discussed at the last meeting, your committee would like to start the meetings promptly at 7.00 in future. The Club has advised that to allow for meals to be prepared in time, orders should be placed no later than 6.20pm. We ask for your assistance in this matter.

I urge you all to go to our [Facebook](#) page and click "Going" to this "Event". By doing this, you will help publicise our event and attract new members for our group.

On our **Website** you will always find the date of our next meeting. Our Facebook page is also easily accessed from our website www.americancivilwar.asn.au

Our Next Meeting

The next meeting of our NSW Chapter of the ACWRTA will held at

**The Roseville Memorial Club
Pacific Highway, Roseville,
on Monday April 16th**

Please join us for a bistro-style meal from 6.00pm. To assist with starting our meeting promptly at 7.00, please order your meal before 6.20.

This meeting will involve a presentation and discussion on:

Prisoners of War

Few aspects of the war were so emotionally charged – each side accusing the other of atrocities and failures of care. Memoirs written after the war fuelled different points of view. An early exchange program broke down. As the war progressed different approaches came to the fore. In 1864 both sides prisons filled up. Andersonville in Georgia, and Elmira prison in New York State, stand out as especially hellish.

Please read up on this aspect of the war and come along prepared for a discussion after the presentation.

Bruce McLennan

Preparation for our next meeting

Prisoners of War during the American Civil War

With thanks to John Morrison

The issue of prisoners taken during war goes back many centuries. Depending on the nature of the conflict prisoners were either i) regarded as booty/slaves belonging to the conqueror, ii) hostages to be held for ransom or exchange, or iii) slaughtered outright.

It is probably true to say that the American Civil War, as the first modern war, marked a change in how prisoners were regarded and treated. The early stages of the Civil War reflected more modern thinking on the status of prisoners of war; individual soldiers were enemies only so long as they were armed and the captor's only rights over prisoners were to keep them from returning to the battle lines. This resulted initially in more humane treatment for those officially classified as prisoners of war. A system of paroles and exchanges was used where prisoners were released ("paroled") to their homes after signing a document declaring that they would not raise arms until a formal exchange occurred - whereby the two sides met on the battlefield and exchanged men of equal rank.

All this seemed very civilized, even chivalrous. Sadly, accusations and confusion about the number of equivalent prisoners and importantly the South's refusal to take - let alone exchange - black prisoners meant that by mid-1863 the exchange system had completely broken down. The inevitable consequence was that the number and size of prison camps drastically increased and severe overcrowding occurred. And with the severe shortages of food, clothing and medicine that existed particularly - but not exclusively - in the South, prison camp conditions deteriorated massively. The largest prison camp of the war was Camp Sumter, usually called Andersonville, and whose very name has become synonymous with prisoner of war suffering, although such conditions were common in the more than 150 civil war prison camps.



It was because of concern over the treatment of civilians, prisoners and soldiers that President Lincoln requested Professor Francis Lieber of Columbia College to develop a set of rules covering the treatment of prisoners of war. The 1863 "Lieber Code" accorded POWs basic rights and importantly designated as "prisoners of the government and not the captor." The first Geneva Convention in 1864, commenced the development of international rules of war and universal standards for the treatment of prisoners.

Confederate prisoners of war take an oath of allegiance to the United States during the Civil War.

Out of close to 4 million combatants in the Civil War, more than 400,000 (greater than 1 in 10) were at some point taken prisoner - greater than the total number of troops who died, and almost as many as the number wounded. Of those paroled, despite the required oath of non-combat, many returned to their regiments to fight again. Many languished for months or years under increasingly poor conditions. A few escaped. Probably as many as 50,000 died in prison - from wounds, from infectious diseases such as smallpox, or, most commonly from illnesses related to substandard sanitary conditions, contaminated food and water, abysmal nutrition, and from lack of proper clothing and shelter.

In 1865, as the war was ending, the Confederates sent 17,000 prisoners North while receiving 24,000 men in return. On April 23, after the war ended, the riverboat *Sultana* was taking 1900 ex-prisoners North on the Mississippi River when it exploded, killing about 1500 of them.

Questions to Consider

1. Was the tragedy of POW's in the Civil War inevitable?
2. Are there examples on either side of great compassion towards prisoners?
3. Was the execution of Capt. Wurtz simply "victors' vengeance"?

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;

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.

Snippets

Thanks to Len Traynor

General Grant Obeys Orders

One day in 1864 General Grant was walking on the dock at the Union supply depot at City Point.

Absorbed in thought and puffing on his inevitable cigar, he was stopped by a sentry.

No smoking on the dock please Sir, said the sentry.

Are these your orders, asked Grant. Yes Sir, said the sentry firmly but courteously.

Very good orders said Grant throwing his cigar into the water.

A Young Soldier of Experience

George H. Matterson from the town of Swanzy in New Jersey, a young man of eighteen years of age had served in the Union Army for three years. In the course of his service he had fought in forty three battles, and twenty seven skirmishes, had two horses shot from under him, never at any time was he wounded or injured, and not absent from a duty a single day.

A war record extremely difficult to equal.

The Kentucky Giant

Reputed to be the tallest soldier in the Confederacy if not the civil war, Martin Van Buren Bates was said to be eight feet tall, and weighing two hundred kilos.

Born on the 9th of November 1837, he was a school teacher by profession and on the outbreak of the civil war he joined the 5th Kentucky Volunteer Infantry, rising to the rank of Captain.

After the war he made a career in circus where he met Anna Swan herself standing seven eleven inches tall. Needless to say they married in 1871, the marriage was a happy one until her death on the 5th of August 1888 due to the complications of childbirth.

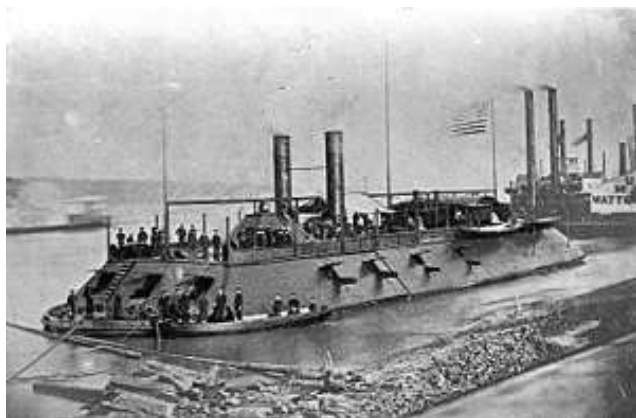
Martin himself died of nephritis on the 19th of January 1919.

City Class Gunboats

USS Cairo Museum, Vicksburg

The speaker at our last meeting was our member, Ian McIntyre who, with a group of other members, recently completed a tour of the Western theatre campaign. One stop-off on this tour was to visit the reconstructed ironclad riverboat at the USS Cairo Museum in Vicksburg, Mississippi (Cairo, incidentally, is pronounced 'Kayro' in this context).

The history of riverboats and the story of this reconstructed gunboat is a fascinating one and Ian was able to give a detailed and entertaining explanation, ably assisted by John Morrison's excellent photographs used in the PowerPoint.



USS Cairo

The history of this class of vessel is interesting. There were only seven commissioned, all built quickly between August 1861 to February 1862. Of the seven, all named after towns along the Mississippi and Ohio rivers, USS Cairo is the only one that has any artefacts remaining.

One purpose of this class of gunboat was to clear what were termed torpedoes (but which were actually mines) from rivers and their tributaries (some very shallow). They were also part of the Anaconda Plan, to travel on the Ohio and Mississippi rivers and their tributaries and prevent the South using the rivers.

The incident which sank the USS Cairo occurred on the Yahoo River, 8 miles north of Vicksburg. When travelling in company with other vessels, the Captain heard firing, went around other vessels and encountered two mines. There is some debate about the actual cause of the sinking, with conflicting information regarding whether it was Confederates on the shore detonating mines or a line of mines in the water.

Whatever the cause, the design weakness of this class of vessel became apparent because, with armour only above the waterline but not below (nor on the top of the vessel), they were very vulnerable. As a result, the USS Cairo was hit below the waterline and sank in 36 feet of water in 12 minutes, fortunately with no casualties amongst the 158 sailors and 12 officers (incidentally, nearly half of the crew were immigrants).



Partial reconstruction of the USS Cairo

Ian provided other statistics regarding the USS Cairo. With a displacement of 888 tons, she was 175 feet (53 m) long, with a beam of 51'2" (15.6m) and with a draught of 6 feet (1.8m). She carried four guns on each side, three at the front and two at the stern. She had two reciprocating engines as well as a 22ft (6.7m) paddle wheel and used less than one ton of coal per hour and managed a speed of 8 knots.

A very interesting aspect of the story of the USS Cairo was her re-discovery in 1957 and then bungled recovery in 1966 when there was less knowledge of this type of salvaging. She was actually remarkably intact when located but, with limited funds available according to Ed Bears, she was lifted, using ropes and wires, without slings or a lifting frame.

As she was lifted from the water, she was sliced in half as if by a cheese cutter, ending up as heap of wreckage. Despite efforts to keep the wood wet, the wreck was exposed to the elements for ten years, leading to further deterioration. Also affected were the artefacts, many of which were lost in the salvage operation, and others then irreparably damaged by "over-enthusiastic amateurs" who, for example, emptied and then cleaned bottles and, in one case, scrubbed off the photographic image on a glass plate.

The USS Cairo at the museum is a reconstruction but has incorporated some original parts and is now covered with a canopy as protection. However, the artefacts in cases are all original, showing interesting aspects of naval life, including a number of sauce bottles.



Ian McIntyre addresses the meeting