

Sumter to Appomattox



American Civil War Round Table of Australia (New South Wales Chapter)

www.americancivilwar.asn.au

Patron: Prof the Hon Bob Carr

Number 101 July-August 2020

Chairman's message

Whilst the COVID-19 situation is better than it was in May when our last (excellent) newsletter was issued, we will again not be able to meet as a group for the planned 3 August 2020 meeting.

We will meet by way of Zoom. Whilst face to face would be better, Zoom actually worked quite well for our last meeting, given the restricting circumstances. Zoom meeting invitations will be issued.

Please do not hesitate to get involved. Perhaps there can be more cross room chatter this time. It is important for us to keep our group connected and interacting even when we cannot gather together for dinner and talk in our customary manner. Please join us in the half-hour before the presentation for catch-up and chat.

I hope that none of you has had to deal directly with COVID-19 but, if that is not the case, please send me an email on president@americancivilwar.asn.au to let me know. We are before anything else a group of friends with a quirky common interest. Until we can again meet in person, please stay connected and stay safe.

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

Best wishes,

Ian McIntyre

Our Next Meeting

Please join us for dinner – by Zoom

**Monday, August 3rd
6.30 for 7.00 pm**

War gaming Chickamauga

War gaming – taking important historical battles or events and asking modern day persons to assume historic roles, then seeing how they cope with the circumstances and challenges our predecessors faced – is a recognized and important method of training in a variety of areas (emergency services do this routinely in order to train for potential disasters; one of the recent ones apparently conducted in the middle of last year, was to game the Spanish Flu pandemic; somewhat appropriate!)

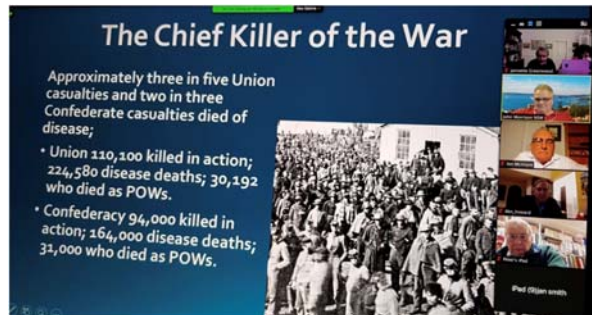
Our Treasurer Wayne Morrison recently participated in a gaming of the famous Battle of Chickamauga. At our next meeting, we will look at the actual battle, and then Wayne will review how things developed in his game.

Tips to improve your video call

- You will receive a meeting code number
- Check mic and camera working
- Light from a lamp on your face
- Avoid lights, white walls behind you
- Don't point camera at the ceiling
- Sit close to camera to improve sound
- Let others finish speaking

Our Last Meeting

Epidemics (Infectious Disease) in the Civil War



Our last Zoom meeting with members' images

Our June meeting was an unusual one in that, like many other groups and associations, we met via Zoom. Even so, a good group gathered and from their images, appeared to be engaged. Ian welcomed the gathering with hopes for getting together at future meetings.

Last Meeting Follow-on

Letter Readings

Dan Howard referred to the subject of one of his online readings, Randolph McKim (please go to the sidebar on our website to listen to these excellent readings). His subject in later life became a minister, achieved Officer's rank and became well-known as the flag waver of the Lost Cause of the Confederacy.

Dan invites others to read letters to be posted online. There are further references to letters in this newsletter.

As follow-on to our last newsletter, Wayne Morrison filled the group in on his War Games event over Easter. In the re-fight at Chickamauga he claimed that they got it right. It was difficult for the Confederacy to make a breakthrough based on their re-enactment.

Meeting Presentation

Epidemics in the Civil War: Background

John Morrison then followed with a very timely presentation: "Epidemics (Infectious Disease) in the Civil War". John's background is in microbiology and pharmacology. As a Staff Officer in the Australian Army Medical Corps, he always referred to previous military experiences when considering the locations of field kitchens and latrines - which armies pay great attention to.

The British Infantry placed great stress on these aspects of health and studied the Civil War for lessons in this area. John began with illustrations of Union Army hospitals.



The second photo above of a field hospital shows the unhygienic conditions endured by patients. In fact, it had not been so bad in the past, in the Crimean War especially, where there had been practices of washing everything and taking advantage of sunlight. So why had it got so bad?

John provided statistics (below) on how epidemics were the Chief Killer of the War and then explained how this had happened.

Union: 110,100 killed in action; 224,580 disease deaths; 30,192 who died as POWs

Confederacy: 94,000 killed in action; 164,000 disease deaths; 31,000 who died as POWs.

The Medical "Middle Ages"

Why was the disease situation so bad? John provided a short history of what he termed the Medical "Middle Ages" where there was intermittent awareness of the causes of contagions or epidemics over a 200-year period. He identified brave scientists such as Ignaz Semmelweis, who progressed knowledge between 1668 and 1860, often facing strong

opposition. Between 1846 and 1860, just prior to the Civil War, there was a Cholera pandemic. This was the period when John Snow famously removed the Broad Street Pump to remove a focus of infection.

The Medical “Coming of Age” (1860 – 64)

This period, which almost overlapped with the Civil War, occurred with Louis Pasteur’s experiments on the relationship between germs and disease. Following these experiments, Joseph Lister, in 1865, showed that application of carbolic acid solution could stop infection from developing in a compound fracture. In the 1870s, Lister developed practical applications of the germ theory of disease by developing carbolic acid (phenol) as an antiseptic. This, of course, was too late to be utilized in the Civil War.

Prior to the germ theory of transmission, the general belief was that epidemic diseases were caused by “miasma” or “bad air” from rotting organic matter and was therefore caused by environmental factors.

Civil War Medicine

Civil War doctors usually underwent only two years of medical school. Medicine in the United States was woefully behind Europe. Most surgeons had never treated a gunshot wound or performed surgery. Altogether, 10,000 surgeons served in the Union army and about 4,000 in the Confederacy.



Medicine made significant advances during the war and the tragedy of that period was that the medical knowledge of the 1860s had not yet encompassed the use of sterile dressings, antiseptic surgery and awareness of the importance of sanitation and hygiene. As a result, thousands died from diseases such as typhoid, dysentery, malaria, smallpox and measles, as well as from infections acquired from wounds.

Factors influencing public health in all armies

According to John, there are four characteristics influencing public health in every wartime army:

- Enlisted men are aged 20–30 years
- They live in crowded circumstances
- Environmental conditions in the field are primitive
- Military objectives sometimes override sanitary ones

In the Civil war, poor sanitation in camps was due to a number of further factors:

- Horses and mules were kept too close to camps and their dung was often not removed
- An army of 50,000 men and 15,000 horses and mules was excreting 1.3 million kilograms of feces per day
- Strangely, neat, clean camps had the same number of ill soldiers with the same illnesses as dirty unkempt ones



Common Illnesses and Epidemics

These can be divided into the following groups:

- Dysentery and diarrhea (the biggest killers)
- Outbreaks of Typhoid, measles, small pox, malaria, pneumonia and camp itch
- The high incidence of disease was caused by
 - Inadequate physical examination of recruits
 - Ignorance
 - Rural origin of many soldiers
 - Neglect of camp hygiene
 - Insects and vermin
 - Exposure
 - Lack of shoes and clothing
 - Poor food and water

The main killer – Diarrhea and Dysentery

Diarrhea and Dysentery claimed more men than did battle wounds. It was a major Confederate Epidemic. In the Peninsula Campaign of Eastern Virginia, 36,500 of the 49,000 soldiers (74%) suffered acute dysentery or severe diarrhea in the preceding nine months and 10% of the number died.



On the Union side there were more than 1.6 million cases with 27,000 deaths caused in the course of the war. The illness often persisted throughout the soldier's life.

Robert E. Lee was suffering from it during the Battle of Gettysburg. Did it affect his decision-making ability?

Another major killer

Smallpox, caused by the *Variola* virus, causes a rash and then raised skin filled with fluids. Lesions contain infectious virus.

Even though a vaccine had been discovered in 1796 by Edward Jenner it still led to several epidemics in the Civil War.



Although vaccination was relatively common, slaves had not been vaccinated, leading to a higher incidence of the disease in this group, including colored troops. It is estimated that there were 5.2 cases per thousand in white soldiers per year and 35 per thousand per year in colored troops. There were also outbreaks in prisons. Interestingly, Lincoln contracted smallpox at the Gettysburg address.

Quarantine

When the first cases of smallpox broke out, military officials, both Union and Confederate, quarantined the infected to prevent transmission. However, this did not occur with formerly enslaved people. What happened to this group was that Federal and military authorities forced freed people, both sick and well, into makeshift

camps together, leading to the explosive spread of the virus throughout the African-American community.

In fact, following the Emancipation Proclamation (January 1863), there was no infrastructure to help the newly-freed slaves with basic necessities, leading to increased mortality rates when faced with the virus.

Harriet Jacobs (pictured), a formerly enslaved woman, sought help from charitable groups for resources and, with help from the military, eventually constructed a makeshift hospital for freed people.



Other African-American women such as Miss Downs of Baltimore looked after children orphaned by smallpox. She was one of many who took on this role. This community had to look after itself during the epidemic and, in fact, the health of the African-American community suffered well into the 20th century.

Malaria

This was classified as "Intermittent Fevers" and was caused by *Plasmodium* parasites carried by mosquitoes. It was thought of as "swamp miasma", an invisible, floating substance. Around one million cases were reported in Union records, with approximately 4,800 deaths. However, it was most common amongst those soldiers serving in the South. An effective preventative and cure was available, quinine. Nets were used against bothersome mosquitoes, but the connection was never made between this disease and mosquitoes.

Typhoid

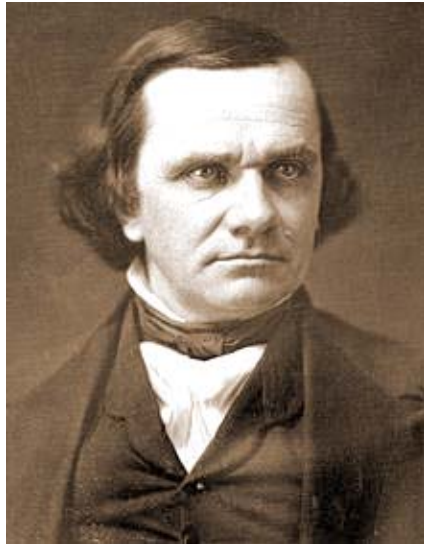
Called "Camp Fever" at this time, Typhoid is an intestinal infection caused by *Salmonella typhi* and was contracted from contaminated food or water. The associated symptoms, including delirium and fever as well as diarrhea, can lead to puncturing of the intestines and death.

There were 75,148 cases and 27,058 deaths (36% mortality) among white Union troops and similar rates for black Union and Confederate troops.

Treatments, which included opiates, quinine and calomel, were generally ineffective.

Lincoln's opponent in the 1858 Senate Primary, Stephen Douglas (pictured below), died of the disease on 3 June 1861.

In mid-1861, Typhoid was spreading among the soldiers massing around Washington as they protected the capital from a potential Confederate army attack.



Measles

This highly-contagious disease, caused by the *measles* virus, is spread through aerosols and leads to fever, cough, runny nose and red rash, with severe cases leading to diarrhea and pneumonia. It is usually the first epidemic to sweep through troops and, in one Confederate camp of 10,000 men, led to 4,000 being stricken with this virus. It was so common that recruits were often held back until they had contracted it. Rural recruits were more likely to be susceptible because urban soldiers had had exposure at an early age. In ordinary circumstances, individuals would recover but in army camps the disease was often fatal. It was more prevalent and fatal among black units.

In the Union army, more than 67,000 men contracted measles and over 4,000 died. In all, 11,000 soldiers on both sides died of the disease.

Thanks to John Morrison for an extremely informative and interesting talk. The presentation concluded with questions and further discussion.

Letters from the period

Introduction: Bob Blaisdell. *Civil War Letters: From Home, Camp and Battlefield*. Dover Publications. Kindle Edition.

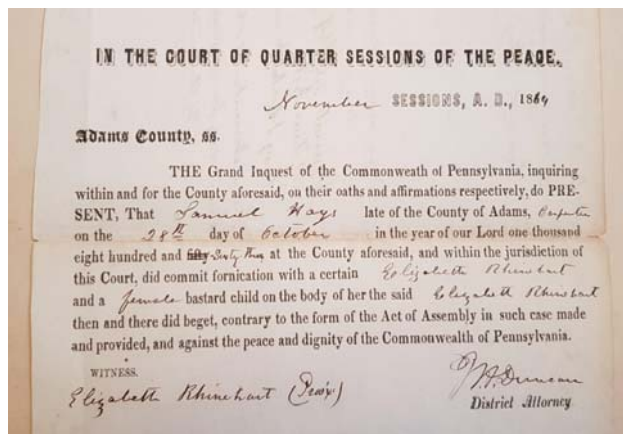
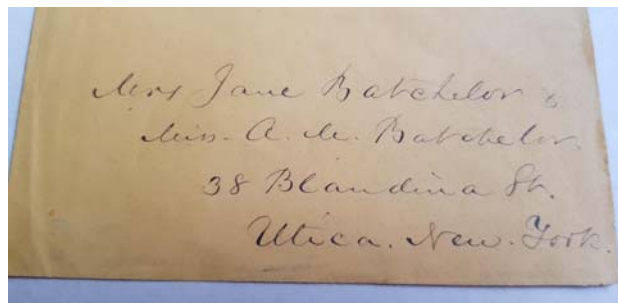
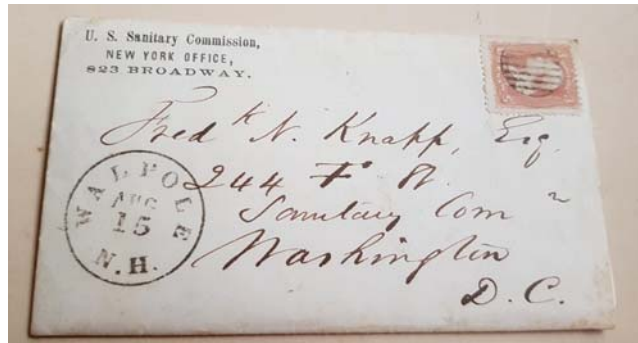
During the Civil War years, soldiers' letters home from camps, battlefields and hospitals could shine with rays of hope and glory when they were not bearing thunderbolts of tragedy. Letters from home, at the same time, animated and refocused those soldiers. Two years into the war, Union Captain Charles Francis Adams Jr., wrote from Amissville, Virginia: "Letters are more than ever before prized by me, for now they constitute absolutely my only link with the world and my own past, and moreover my only pleasure. . . You should see the news fly round the camp and the men's faces light up, and how duty, discipline, everything, at once gives way to the reading of the letters. It's like fresh water in an August noon".

Though the soldiers and officers regularly discuss the joy of receiving letters, this collection puts us in the frame of mind of the families and friends anticipating dreadful news, which was always on the verge of arriving.



Civil War women reading letters

Some memorabilia envelopes of letters written in the period – with thanks to one of our members.

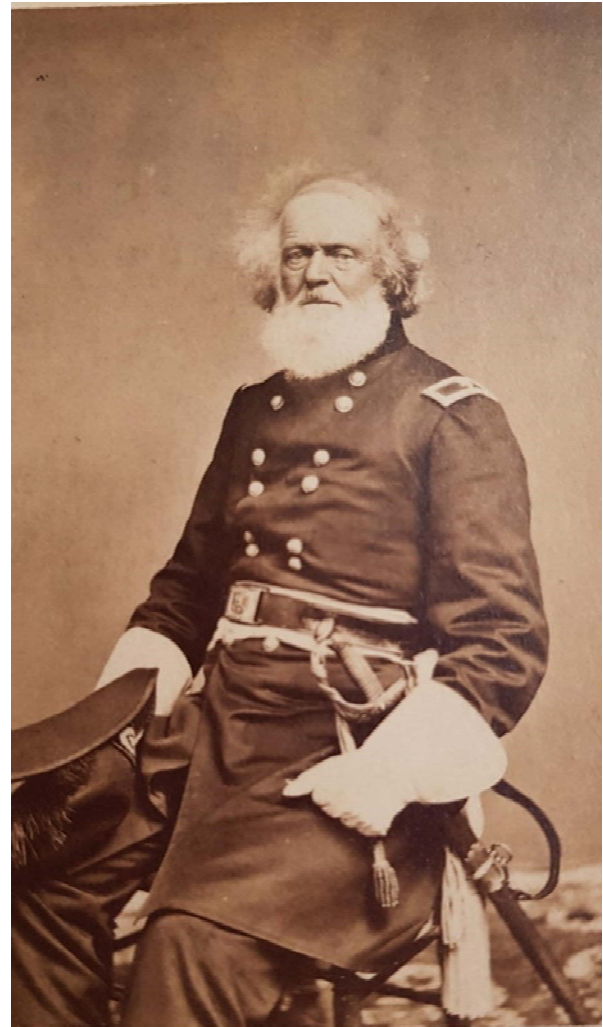


Letter from the U.S. Sanitary Department
(forerunner of the Red Cross)

Hear our members read letters at

www.americancivilwar.asn.au/letters/

- Ian Blayden has recently recorded two excellent new letter readings - One is a letter from Robert E Lee to his wife, and the other from George B McLellan to his wife.



Major General Joseph Mansfield 1803 - 1862

Killed in the Battle of Antietam, his widow received a letter from Dr. Patrick Henry Flood, Surgeon, 107th N.Y. Regiment stating "I found the clothing around his chest saturated with blood, and upon opening them, found he was wounded in the right breast, the ball penetrating about two inches from the nipple, and passing out the back, near the edge of the shoulder blade".

This publication is the official newsletter of the American Civil War Round Table of Australia (NSW Chapter). All inquiries regarding the newsletter should be addressed to the Secretary of the Chapter by telephone on 0411 745 704 or by e-mail to: secretary@americancivilwar.asn.au

Civil War Cigar Stories



This short article looks at some interesting instances of the role played by cigars in the Civil War.

U.S. Grant and cigars

Many will recall Lincoln's response to someone's criticism of Grant's fondness for whisky: "I wish some of you would tell me the brand of whisky that Grant drinks. I would like to send a barrel of it to my other generals."

A heavy drinker since his West Point days, Grant by his own account was only a light smoker when the Civil War commenced, but as the war progressed (and no doubt as the stresses increased) his habit grew to smoking as many as 18 to 20 cigars a day (his record was 20, according to General Horace Porter, one of his staff officers, which he smoked after a particularly stressful day during the fighting in the Wilderness; according to Porter the cigars 'were of formidable size'). Grant's wife Julia once described him, as he worked his way through numerous dispatches whilst smoking: "All this time, the only expression of excitement was the rapid puffs of his cigar. I remember it was like a little steam engine".

Grant would often chew unlit cigars and he received many gifts of cigars from grateful civilians and well-wishers - one estimate is 20,000! There are numerous photos showing Grant with a cigar in his hand or mouth. Sadly, his cigar habit eventually led to his death by throat cancer, which caused him a great deal of discomfort during his final days whilst writing his famous Memoirs -which he nevertheless worked tirelessly to complete, which he did five days before he succumbed to his illness. His physician had prescribed him with a throat spray of French wine laced with cocaine (which was legal then) to numb his pain. Grant once said of cigars: "*Cheap cigars come in handy – they stifle the odour of cheap politicians.*"



For more on Grant and cigars, see the blog piece at <http://rediscoveringourpast.blogspot.com/2019/02/champion-of-weed.html>



Images of Grant with a cigar during the Civil War

Cigars and Lee's 'Lost Dispatch'



On 13 September, 1862, Corporal Barton Mitchell of the 27th Indiana Volunteers found an envelope containing three cigars wrapped in a piece of paper, in the grass near a former campsite which had recently been vacated by Confederate General D.H. Hill.

It turned out that the piece of paper was an authentic copy of General Lee's Special Order 191, issued a few days before, which gave detailed instructions to his senior generals for their deployments during the forthcoming Maryland campaign, for which Lee had, at some calculated risk, divided his forces into five distinct groups which were thus more susceptible to being defeated in detail if their movements became known.

After the lost order was established to be genuine (by a Union officer who knew the signature of the Adjutant who had signed the document) and delivered to General McClellan, he

said "Now I know what to do...here is a paper with which, if I cannot whip Bobby Lee, I will be willing to go home." He also cabled Lincoln "I have all the Rebel plans and will catch them in their own trap." The trouble was, among the group of citizens meeting with McClellan when the order arrived was a Confederate sympathiser who, without knowing the details, realised that McClellan had learnt something significant. This unknown sympathiser got word to J.E.B. Stuart, who passed the information on to Lee.

In a letter that Lee wrote to D.H. Hill after the war, he acknowledged that McClellan was "in possession of the order directing the movement of our troops." Thus, Lee was able to make some fast adjustments to the disposition of his forces to plug the gaps and try to regather his scattered forces, although things were far from easy to retrieve; McClellan still had the balance of advantage, particularly in troop numbers, although, as usual, exercising excessive caution, he delayed setting his troops in motion by many hours and also grossly overestimated the forces arrayed against him at key moments. He thus failed to fully capitalise on the extraordinary good luck fortune had handed to him by the finding of Lee's lost dispatch.

The resulting clash of forces at Antietam was the bloodiest battle of the war. D.H. Hill denied that he had lost the copy of Lee's Order 191 and asserted that he only ever had one copy made for him in the handwriting of Stonewall Jackson.

Theories abound that it was lost by a courier, or perhaps even left where it might be found by a spy or Union sympathiser who thought to make a present of it along with the cigars – we will never know exactly how the order came to be lost.

General Beauregard's gift before bombarding Fort Sumter

Confederate General P.G.T. Beauregard had been taught artillery at West Point by none other than Federal Major Robert Anderson, the commanding officer at Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor. They had a very high regard for one another, so much so that, during the initial standoff period when the Confederates were encouraging Anderson and his troops to quit the fort peacefully, Beauregard sent to Anderson and his officers several cases of fine brandy and good whisky as well as boxes of cigars. The stalwart Anderson refused to accept these. The smoke would have to rise from other causes!



.....Fort Sumter under attack

Ask Honest Abe

Contributions to this segment welcome



Dear Honest Abe,

In preparation for when my time is up, I am trying to think of what to say just before I pass away. Can you give me any inspiration from some of the more notable 'famous last words' from the Civil War?

Yours truly,
Buck Lees-Chance Esq.

Dear Buck,

Well you are a gloomy sort of fellow, but at least you are a forward planner!

As luck would have it, there are many famous last words from the Civil War from which you may draw some inspiration, although best to avoid making the same kind of comment that General Sedgwick did. Here are a few of the best ones I can think of:

General Robert E Lee:

Contrary to mythology in Douglass Southall Freeman's biography of Lee, which records the great general's last words as 'Tell [A.P.] Hill he must come up' followed shortly and finally by "Strike the tent...", his family, who were present, reckoned his last words were the somewhat less grand "I will give that sum...". No one knew what

he was talking about. Lee had suffered a severe stroke some days previously and said little at all that made any sense in the days before he died.

General Ambrose P. Hill:

General A P Hill and his staff accidentally rode into a Union picket line outside of Petersburg on 2 April, 1865. He yelled his last words at the Union soldiers to "Surrender!" – but they opened fire instead and Hill was shot in the heart. My Union boys were no quitters!

General John Sedgwick:

This one is a cracker – sad but true. At the battle of Spotsylvania, the General was irritated that his men were holding back due to irregular distant enemy sharpshooters' fire. He yelled to his men "They couldn't hit an elephant at this distance!" In the next instant his last words were proven incorrect when he was struck by a sharpshooter's bullet in the eye and he died instantly!

General John Reynolds:

In the early stages of the Gettysburg battle, this great general was commanding the left wing of the Army of the Potomac when, on horseback, he called to the troops of the Iron Brigade "Forward, for God's sake, forward and drive those fellows out of those woods!" He was then felled by a bullet, believed to have been from a sharpshooter (although the source of the bullet is disputed). He died almost instantly.

General Stonewall Jackson:

The General had lingered for some days after being shot by friendly fire late in the Battle of Chancellorsville. His last words were indeed rather poetic: "Let us cross the river and rest under the shade of the trees."

An unknown Union Infantryman:

A blood-spattered diary was recovered from the Cold Harbour battlefield that belonged to an unknown Union infantryman. It's last entry on 3 June, 1864, poignantly read "Cold Harbor. I was killed."

Me (that is, Abe Lincoln)

Once that scoundrel assassin John Wilkes Booth shot me, I lapsed into unconsciousness and never recovered. I think the last thing I remember saying was in response to my wife Mary asking me what people might think of us holding hands in public (which we were doing in our box at Ford's Theatre). I replied "They won't think anything about it." I would have preferred it if my last words had been something more inspiring for you Buck – maybe something hopeful about the reconstruction of the Union - but it all happened so suddenly, so there it is...at least my last words were better than Booth's whose last words were "Useless...useless..." – being a good and apt self-description of that traitorous felon.