

Sumter to Appomattox



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

www.americancivilwar.asn.au

Patron: Prof the Hon Bob Carr

President's Message

Dear Friends,

Our 12 April 2021 meeting was another in-person meeting and we only had two spare seats. I presume that I am not the only one holding my breath lest we incur a collapse of our COVID defences, or even an invasion from the South, North or West. Some of the outpost quarantine defences have been less than reliable when under pressure.

John Verhoeven gave us a thoroughly researched and well-presented examination of the development and use of submarines in the Civil War. It was a revelation to those of us who had only heard of and/or seen the *Hunley* that there was much more to the submarines in the Civil War story. Who would have thought! I now have a new project to risk 50 years of friendship in order to exhort John to address another topic for our entertainment and education.

Please do not hesitate to volunteer (to me or John Morrison) on a topic of your choice, be it short or long. Remember that we are a group of friends and a friendly audience. I know there are several amongst us who have not yet broken cover but who would be interesting and insightful presenters.

In 2019 Bruce McLennan organised and, with others, presented a very successful WEA adult education course titled "*Origins of the American Civil War – How did it come to this?*" We have decided to dust off some of those presentations from time to time for our regular meetings. Our next meeting will focus on "Bleeding Kansas" and John Brown, elements of the course. Please have look at the overall course topics ([Click here](#)) and let me know if you wish to see any particular topics revisited in our meetings.

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At our **9 August** meeting we will again be welcoming Bob Carr as our speaker - on "***A House Divided – today's America***". Bob is always an interesting speaker in relation to the Civil War. It will be a good opportunity for you to invite your friends who might be interested in joining our quirky and diverse group with a shared interest in everything related to the American Civil War.

Best wishes

Ian McIntyre

Our Next Meeting

Monday 7 June 2021, from 6.15pm

The Roseville Club

Bleeding Kansas as Fake News

Presented by John Morrison

... Background notes next page

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

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

Background to the topic

As most people are aware, the term Bleeding Kansas' refers to a series of violent confrontations between 1854 and 1861 which emerged from the political and ideological debate over the legality of slavery in Kansas Territory - the proposed state of Kansas. At its heart was whether Kansas Territory would allow or outlaw slavery - and thus enter the Union as a slave state or a free state. The Kansas-Nebraska (1854) Act called for "popular sovereignty", requiring that this decision be made by the territory's settlers (rather than outsiders) and decided by popular vote. By the mid-1850s, the United States was coming apart over the issue of slavery, with the abolitionist movement becoming increasingly vocal, and through the controversy over new states allowing slavery. Kansas was eventually admitted to the Union as a free state in 1861.

We want to look at a modern take on Bleeding Kansas - that, having lost the vote in the Congress, fanatical "Free-Staters" were not beyond using fake news to whip up support for their cause. The Free-Staters set up a northern outpost in Lawrence and brought in a newspaper printing press especially to spread their own version of the story. Local men from Missouri were painted as "border ruffians" and "pukes" by incoming northern settlers. There was the over-dramatizing of the rather isolated sackings of two newspaper offices and the governor's residence – as if this was the whole State.

These images were greatly exaggerated – and were written into history – by the two-day speech of one-eyed Charles Sumner in the Senate May 19-20.

So there was -

- Exaggeration and promotion of one side by Northern Interests, which has come down to us
- No sign of compromise
- No sign of a Statesman who might find a way through

All of which led to division, intransigence, and an inability to compromise (on either side).

This will be a lead-in to Bob Carr's "House Divided" presentation at our next meeting.

10-minute Presentation

Peter Zacharatos will give a short presentation on:

John Brown – The Meteor of the War

Our Last Meeting

Ian began the session with a warm welcome to all members and guests.

John Morrison followed with a request for volunteers to fill the 10-minute slot with a short presentation. He also brought attention to the fact that, on the same date as our meeting - 12 April – Fort Sumpter was attacked, heralding the beginning of the Civil War 160 years ago. He then introduced John Verhoeven.

Civil War Submariners – valor or suicide?

John Verhoeven



John began his presentation by referring to the 2019 tour that he participated in with other ACWRTA members, an occasion when he was able to visit museums which held information on Civil War submarines, including the Warren Lasch Conservation Centre in Charleston. As an engineer, he finds this area of the war fascinating.

It might generally be thought that submarines are 20th century technology but in fact the first submarine dates back to 1620, when Cornelius van Drebel, a Dutch Inventor, manoeuvred his leather-covered wood-framed submarine 4 – 5 m. under the surface of the Thames.

A submarine was used unsuccessfully during the American Revolution. *The Turtle* was powered by propellers cranked by the operator.

During the Civil War, there were over 20 vessels which could be termed submarines, many of which were private ventures and did not see action. Many used features which were not perfected until the 20th century.

Submarines served different roles in the South and the North during the war. In the South, they were used to try to overcome the blockade by offensive action against Union ships. They were operated by the intelligence

or 'secret service' of the day rather than the Navy. Because submarine warfare was considered to be almost illegal, records relating to submarines and mines were destroyed at the end of the war to protect the identities of those involved.

The Northern Navy used submarines in a more passive role, landing small reconnaissance teams ashore or clearing underwater obstacles. Even so, the increasing urgency to design, build and successfully employ submarines was evenly matched.

John described some early unsuccessful submarines, including USS Alligator, made of iron and designed to carry 18 men. Another was a Confederate vessel found in Lake Ponchartrain and now in the Louisiana State Museum (*see photo*). It may have been a prototype for a larger vessel.



The *HL Hunley* was the first submarine to sink an enemy ship in wartime. It was actually the third vessel developed in two years by a group of Southerners, members of the Singer Secret Service Corps, who were able to benefit from the knowledge gained by the first prototypes. Named after her inventor, Horace Lawson Hunley, she was developed by a group of private New Orleans citizens, who financed and designed the submersible torpedo boat.

While her role in the Civil War was small, her role in the history of naval warfare is considered to be very important. In only three short voyages, she demonstrated both the benefits and the dangers of undersea warfare.



Horace L. Hunley

The first vessel built by this group was *The Pioneer*, which was completed and was undergoing trials when she was scuttled in Lake Pontchartrain after the fall of New Orleans in 1862. She was 9.1m. long and 1.2m in diameter with her only offensive weapon described as a 'magazine of powder'.



1st vessel: *The Pioneer*

The second vessel, *the American Diver*, was built in Mobile, Alabama by members of the Corps James McClintock, Baxter Watson and Horace Hunley. She was 11m. long, 0.9m. wide and 1.2m. high. Her means of propulsion was a hand-cranked drive operated by four men driving a propellor shaft. In mid-January 1863, in sea trials in Mobile Bay she became unmanageable in rough seas and sank without loss of life and has never been found.



2nd vessel: *The American Diver*

The third vessel, *the HL Hunley*, was designed for a crew of eight, with seven turning the hand-cranked ducted propellor and one to steer and direct the boat.



Placement of the 8 crewmembers

She was 12m. long with a beam of 1.2m and a height of 1.3m. She was equipped with ballast tanks at each end, which could be flooded or pumped dry by hand pumps.



3rd vessel: *the HL Hunley*

Hunley was originally intended to attack by using a floating explosive charge with a contact fuse towed at the end of a long rope. She was to approach an enemy ship on the surface, then dive under the ship and surface beyond it. The torpedo would be drawn against the targeted ship and exploded. However, this plan was considered too dangerous and, instead, a spar torpedo was attached to a 6.7m. long wooden spa. This would be used to ram the side of a vessel and then detonated. In July 1863, *Hunley* successfully attacked a coal flatboat in Mobile Bay and after this was shipped by rail to Charleston. Shortly after this, she was seized by the Confederate military and turned over to the Army, becoming a Confederate Army vessel from then on. However, *Hunley* and his partner remained involved.

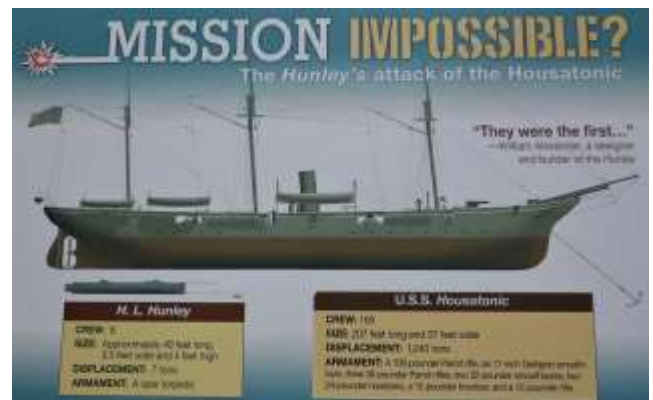
Hunley had three different crews and suffered three sinkings in 1863-1864. The first occurred on 29th August when, preparing to dive, Navy Lieutenant Payne, accidentally stood on the lever controlling the sub's diving planes as she was running on the surface. This caused *Hunley* to dive with one of her hatches open. Five crewmembers drowned and three escaped.

She was raised by mid-September but, with her future uncertain, Horace Hunley wrote to the military requesting that the original civilian crew be given the project to relaunch her. The military agreed, putting Lt. George Dixon in command.

On 15th October, Horace Hunley insisted on commanding the vessel for a demonstration dive under the *CSS Indian Chief*. Unfortunately, after diving, *Hunley* did not resurface and was located in 17m. of water three days later. Investigations following her salvage showed that the forward sea cock was open. Horace Hunley had been manning this position.

She was then refurbished in the following months, with her crew rehearsing running attacks using a new torpedo fixed to the bow of the vessel. In late 1863, she was relocated to Breach Inlet, at the northern tip of Sullivan's Island.

In early February 1864, the *USS Housatonic*, a Union sloop-of-war began anchoring in this area trying to intercept blockade runners. On the night of 17 February, *Hunley* made her only attack on an enemy target by attacking the *Housatonic*, 1,260 ton wooden-hulled, steam-powered sloop-of-war with 11 cannons.



Housatonic, a 1,260 ton wooden-hulled, team-powered sloop-of-war with 11 cannons. The *Housatonic* was stationed at the entrance to Charleston and about 8kms offshore in about 7m. of water to prevent submarines going under it. However, Lt. Dixon and his crew of seven were successful in attacking *Housatonic*, ramming the spar torpedo against the enemy's hull, detonating it and causing *Housatonic* to sink in five minutes, and killing five of its crew.



The *Hunley* crew (using facial reconstruction):

- Lt. George E. Dixon Commander (Alabama or Ohio)
- Arnold Becker (Germany)
- C. Lumpkin (British)
- Frank Collins (Virginia)
- Corp. Johan Carlsen (Denmark)
- Augustus Miller (German)
- James Wick (North Carolina - Florida)
- Joseph Ridgeway (Maryland)

After the attack, witnesses recorded that *Hunley* gave a prearranged signal with a blue lantern to sentries on shore. A large fire was then ignited on the beach at Breach Inlet to guide it home but it did not return.



Hunley's action against the *Housatonic*

The location of the *Hunley* was not identified for over 100 years. In the 1970s two different individuals claimed to have discovered her. The first was Underwater Archaeologist, E. Lee Spence in 1970 and, as a result, *Hunley* was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1978. Spence also wrote a book published in January 1995, which included a map of her location.

The wreck was located in April 1995 by diver Ralph Wilbanks, leader of a National Underwater and Marine Agency (NUMA) dive team organized by archaeologist Mark Newell, with funding provided by writer Clive Cussler.

The vessel was found 91m. and on the seaward side of *Housatonic* and buried under several feet of silt, which had concealed and protected her.

The find was finally made public in 2000 with the announcement that the find matched Spence's 1970s plotting of the site and he was credited with discovering her.

On 8 August 2000, *Hunley* was raised.



Prior to the raising, a large group of professionals measured and documented her in situ. When this was finished, harnesses were slipped under her and she was transported back to Charleston. She was then placed in a purpose-built tank of fresh water at the Warren Lasch Conservation Center.

Restoration took place in three phases:

Phase 1: Rotation. Over 10 years, *Hunley* rested on her side at the same angle as she had been found, and the crew's skeleton were examined and removed.

Phase 2: Removal of concretion. The layers of shells and other materials were removed.

Phase 3: Soaking out the salts. The tank was filled with a sodium hydroxide solution over 8 years, which stabilized the *Hunley*.



On the day members of the ACWRTA visited the site on a day that the tank had been drained.

There is mystery regarding the crew's fate. Their skeletons show that they were all still at their stations when they died and had not suffered broken bones. The air hatches were closed.

Five possible causes of death have been put forward:

The torpedo incapacitated the crew or damaged the submarine.

They were trapped by the tides. Possibly while she was waiting on the ocean floor for the tide to turn, the crew ran out of oxygen.

There may have been a collision. Possibly the *USS Canandaigua* clipped *Hunley* as she rushed to assist the *Housatonic*.

***Hunley's* fate was sealed by 'a lucky shot'.** Another possibility is that a port window showed a light, providing a bull's eye target for Union sharpshooters. If Dixon had been hit by gun fire through the window, the sub would have left without a captain and with water pouring in through the shattered glass window.

A powerful shockwave led to fatal lung trauma, termed 'blast lung'. This more recent theory was put forward by researcher Rachel M Lance, whose evidence points to sudden, soft-tissue injury rather than drowning or suffocation.

On 17th April 2004, the remains of the *Hunley's* final crew were laid to rest in Magnolia Cemetery, in the same plot as the crews of the first two sinkings; 10,000 people attended.



The crewmembers were awarded the Confederate Medal of Honor, a posthumous award created by the Sons of Confederate Veterans in 1977 to recognize Confederate veterans who had 'distinguished themselves conspicuously ... at the risk of life beyond the call of duty' during the Civil War.

They had succeeded where others had failed and had pushed the limits of industrial age technology.

They were the world's first submariners and could be compared with the astronauts in Tom Wolfe's novel *The Right Stuff* a century later.

John finished his very interesting and informative presentation by returning to his initial question: was their action valor or suicide?

References:

Confederate Submarine Crew Killed By Their Own Weapon; Duke Today; 23 August 2017.

Confederate Submarine H L Hunley. First in History to Sink an Enemy Ship in Wartime; M K Ragan; in Sea History 158; Spring 2017.

Louisiana State Museum exhibit.

Sea of Darkness. Unravelling the Mysteries of the HL Hunley; B Hicks; 2014.

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The Hunley; 290 Foundation.

USS Alligator (1862); Wikipedia.

Warren Lasch Conservation Center exhibits.

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Civil War Profile

Thanks to Dan Howard

William Henry Johnson



There is no known photo of William H. Johnson.

On a recent trip to Newcastle, the writer walked past an intriguing looking barber shop in Hunter Street Newcastle called 'The Lincoln Room Barbers' that rather charmingly adopts a variety of 'retro themes' including some around Abraham Lincoln. This started me wondering whether there was any historical record of the person who actually used to cut Abraham Lincoln's hair and trim his beard. This led to the surprising discovery of the story of William Henry Johnson.



photo credit: clickhole.com

Johnson was a free black American and a valet and barber to Abraham Lincoln. There is a record of him announcing guests arriving at Lincoln's Springfield home for a Republican Party function hosted by Lincoln in May, 1860. He accompanied Lincoln on the train journey to Washington via Baltimore for Lincoln's inauguration, although it is unclear whether or not he remained a member of the smaller party that travelled secretly with Lincoln via a special train from Baltimore organised by Alan Pinkerton in order to foil an assassination plot.

What is clear is that Johnson became a member of Lincoln's domestic staff at the White House, where owing to the particularly dark colour of his skin, he was apparently ostracised by the lighter-skinned negro members of the domestic staff, to such an extent that Lincoln considered it necessary to find another suitable place of employment for Johnson. To that end, Lincoln recommended Johnson to Treasurer Salmon P Chase, who employed him as a labourer and messenger. Nevertheless, Lincoln would still

call upon Johnson to run errands for him, and he asked Johnson to accompany him on the presidential train to Gettysburg on 18th November, 1863, where Lincoln was to deliver his famous address. Contemporary accounts indicate that Johnson was a young man in his early 20's who was dedicated to looking after Lincoln's comfort and security.

When they travelled to Gettysburg, Washington was in the grip of a smallpox epidemic, and Lincoln's son Tad had caught it. It is not well known that Lincoln himself was ill at the time that he delivered his speech, suffering from the early symptoms of a mild form of smallpox called 'Varioloid'. On the train trip back to Washington, Lincoln had a serious headache and went to bed in his presidential car, while Johnson attended to him, bathing his head in cold water and generally helping Lincoln to be comfortable. On returning to Washington, Lincoln became bedridden, where Johnson and others attended to him. Lincoln is alleged to have quipped during his illness "Now let the office-seekers come, for at last, I have something I can give all of them!" He eventually recovered by mid-December.

Johnson, unfortunately, was not so lucky. He contracted full-blown smallpox and tragically died of this in January 1864. It is impossible to know whether his proximity to Lincoln during the latter's illness led to Johnson contracting the disease, but the possibility cannot be discounted. Indeed, there is a possibility that Lincoln felt some sense of responsibility for causing the man's illness, in addition to the genuine affection that he had for Johnson, for when Johnson was ill in hospital, a journalist from the Chicago Tribune noticed Lincoln counting out some dollar bills and reported Lincoln as saying that:

"A President of the United States has a multiplicity of duties not specified in the Constitution or acts of Congress. This is one of them. This money belongs to a poor negro [Johnson] who is a porter in one of the departments (the Treasury) and who is at present very bad with the smallpox. He did not catch it from me, however; at least I think not. He is now in hospital and could not draw his pay because he could not sign his name. I have been at considerable trouble to overcome the difficulty and get it for him, and have at length succeeded in cutting red tape ... I am now dividing the money and putting by a portion labelled, in an envelope, with my own hands, according to his wish."

After Johnson died, Lincoln not only bought a coffin for Johnson but financially helped out his family and also paid off a bank loan of \$150 that he had guaranteed for Johnson although the cashier of the bank insisted on accepting half of that sum in full repayment. The cashier told Lincoln *"After this, Mr. President, you can never deny that you indorse the negro"* to which Lincoln replied with a laugh *"That's a fact! But I don't intend to deny it."*

A New York Times article (see <https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/02/01/mr-lincoln-and-mr-johnson/>) notes that a Treasury clerk confirmed that the "president had him [Johnson] buried at Lincoln's expense."

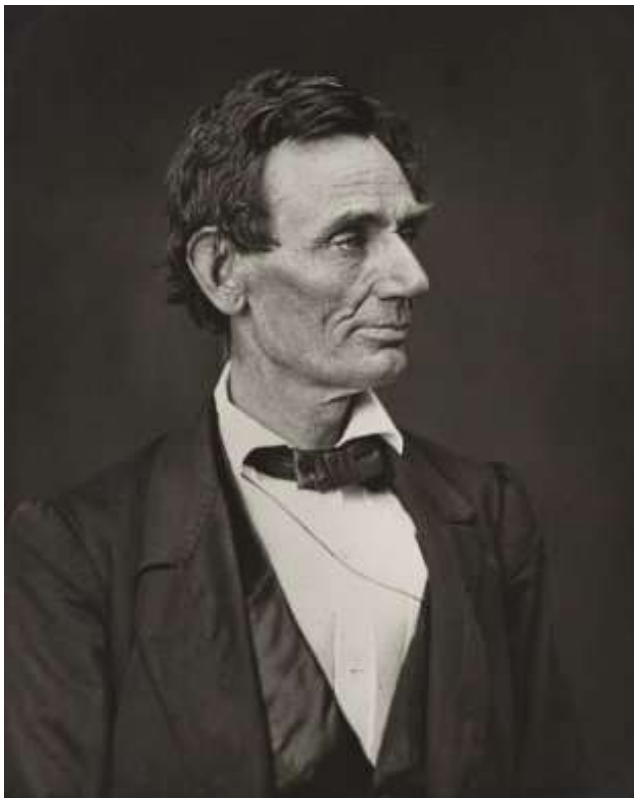
There is a gravestone in Arlington cemetery – plot 3346 in section 27 – that bears the inscription 'William H Johnson – Citizen' (see photo). The cemetery in its earliest times did include some graves of civilians, and this one is recorded as having been interred in 1864 (no date or month given). The Arlington National Cemetery website notes that beginning in June 1863, a large Freedman's Village, established for freed and escaped slaves, was established in what today are Sections 3, 4, 8, 18 and 20; Section 27 became the area for African American soldiers and freed people; more than 3,800 freed African Americans are buried in Section 27.

Is it possible that Lincoln, as well as purchasing Johnson's coffin, arranged for him to be buried at Arlington, and for him to be honoured with the title of 'citizen'? There is no hard and fast proof one way or the other. However, having purchased the coffin, it is reasonable to assume that Lincoln may also have assisted in arranging a place of burial. The use of the word 'citizen' is intriguing – perhaps so describing Johnson (if indeed the gravestone belongs to Lincoln's Johnson) was a statement of defiance of the 1857 Dred Scott decision of the U S Supreme Court that denied African Americans the status of citizenship. Legal and Civil War scholar Eric Foner has accepted this as Johnson's grave, but other scholars have disputed this, and have argued that the use of the word 'citizen' was common in Arlington graves to distinguish civilians from members of the military. Nevertheless, there is no evidence that the grave belongs to a different William H Johnson, and it is tempting to apply to this story the historical reasoning that Churchill applied when asked whether the story of King Arthur was true, to which he replied "Of course it's true...because it ought to be."



Photo credit: findagrave.com

As there is no known photograph or picture of Johnson, we will close this article with two Lincoln photos demonstrating Johnson's probable handiwork. The first was taken on 6th June, 1860. The second was taken on February 9th, 1861, just before Lincoln left Springfield by train on 11th February, 1861, for his inauguration in Washington. The writer postulates that on each occasion, his hair had likely been cut (and his beard trimmed) by Johnson – pretty stylish!



Sources:

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