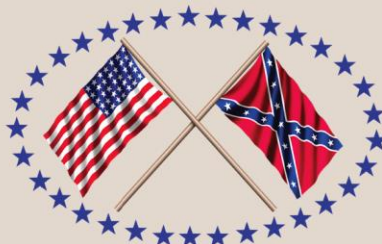


Sumter to Appomattox



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

www.americancivilwar.asn.au

Patron: Prof the Hon Bob Carr

Number 119 July – August 2023

President's Message

Dear Round Table members,

The Roseville Club has bowled us a curve ball that caused us to change our plans. The Club has decided NOT to open on Mondays henceforth so we have had to change our meetings to Tuesdays. I am sorry if this has disrupted your normal pattern. It has certainly disrupted our plan to have Bob Carr present on General Fremont at our next meeting as he is already committed on 22 August, and also for all of the remaining meetings in 2023. There is always 2024 and we can wait until then.

Our current thinking is 22 August, 17 October and 6 December for our future meetings in 2023. We have notionally planned out a possible program until April 2024 and it looks good.

The next meeting will focus on the battle of Shiloh or Pittsburgh Landing in South West Tennessee which occurred early in April 1862. It was the biggest battle in US history to that time. It was a big event with far reaching consequences. To borrow the words of Wellington in relation to another battle on another continent in a different era, it was "A close run thing" with one side prevailing on the first day and the other side prevailing on the next.

Angus Hordern will also present on a painting associated with Shiloh.

Mike Bosch will talk about the real Western Theatre of New Mexico in 1862.

See you there.

Ian McIntyre
August 2023

Our Next Meeting

Tuesday, 22nd August

The Roseville Club
Pacific Highway

Following our theme of events during 1862, three members will discuss the following topics -

Western Theatre of New Mexico

A related painting

Western Theatre & Battle of Shiloh

You are welcome to have dinner at the Roseville Club before the meeting.

As usual, we are keen to hear from our membership so if you have a particular subject, please get in touch with Program Director John Morrison.

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

Our Last Meeting

REPORT OF OUR MEETING ON 19TH JUNE – THREE EXCELLENT TALKS

The depth of our members' scholarship was well and truly on display at this meeting, where three of our members gave outstanding twenty-minute talks for our continuing chronological excursion through the American Civil War. As we revisit 1862, what better topics to hear about than a fabulous biographical sketch of General George B McClellan (presented by Tony Kovacevic); the emergence of General U.S. Grant as the victor of Fort Donelson and Fort Henry (presented by Peter Zacharatos) and finally the historic battle of the ironclads CSS *Virginia* and USS *Monitor* at Hampton Roads (presented by John Verhoeven). The following details of the talks are from the notes kindly provided by the speakers. Some few pictures have been added.

George Brinton McClellan (1826 – 1885) Tony Kovacevic



No other Northern general presents more of a paradox than George B McClellan. In some ways, McClellan was the most brilliant strategist to defend the Union. Even General Robert E Lee, who in later years seldom discussed the war, admitted that McClelland was his brightest adversary and yet, history has not been kind to McClellan.

He is seen today as overly cautious, vindictive, vain and generally a detriment to his cause. Even in his own day, many Northerners were delighted when Lincoln finally replaced him as commanding general. The men under his command however loved him and in the Presidential election of 1864, he was sufficiently popular to win the Democratic Party's nomination. Ultimately, we must understand

him as a military genius crippled by his own insecurity, a brilliant strategist but an incapable tactician. A master of planning who could not boldly execute his own plans. He also failed to recognise the relationship between military action and the political imperatives of the time.

He was a Union General, civil engineer, and the 24th Governor of New Jersey, a graduate of West Point, who served with distinction in the Mexican-American War.

Early in the Civil War was appointed to the rank of Major General and played an important role in raising and training what would become the Army of the Potomac and served a brief period from November 1861 to March 1862 as Commanding General of the United States Army.

General McClellan and President Abraham Lincoln developed a mutual distrust of each other and McClellan was privately derisive of Lincoln. McClellan was removed from command in November in the aftermath of the 1862 mid-term elections. A major contributing factor in this decision was McClellan's failure to pursue Lee's army following the strategic Union victory at the Battle of Antietam outside Sharpsburg Maryland.

McClellan never received another field command and went on to become the unsuccessful Democratic Party nominee for the 1864 Presidential election against the Republican Lincoln. The effectiveness of his campaign was damaged when he repudiated his own party's platform, which promised an end to the war and negotiations with the Confederacy. He served as governor of New Jersey from 1878 to 1881. He became a writer and vigorously defended his Civil War conduct.



An 1864 Campaign poster 'McClellan for President'

With the assistance of his father's letter to President John Tyler he was accepted to West Point in 1842 at the age of 15, with the Academy waiving its usual minimum age of 16.

At West Point he was energetic and ambitious. His closest friends were aristocratic Southerners such as George Pickett, Stonewall Jackson and AP Hill. These associations gave what McClellan believed to be, an understanding of the southern mind and an understanding of the political and military implications of the sectional differences in the United States that led to the Civil War. He graduated in 1846 at the age of 19, second in his class of 59 cadets, losing the top position to a Charles Seaforth Stewart, only because of his inferior drawing skills. He was commissioned a 2nd lieutenant in the US Corps of Engineers.

During the period between his graduation and the Civil War, McClellan performed a number of roles including training West Point cadets in engineering studies, inspecting forts, exploration and surveys for the Transcontinental railroad. He was an official observer during the Crimean war. He also designed the McClellan Cavalry saddle which was in use by the US cavalry until WW2.

With the outbreak of the Civil War he accepted command of regular and volunteer forces in Ohio. In June and July of 1861 McClellan fought some minor actions against so-so opposition in West Virginia. He wrote some flamboyant reports of his victories which enhanced his reputation amongst Northerners.

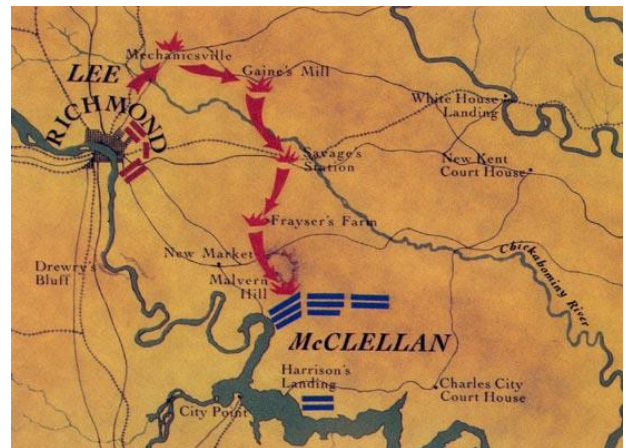
In the wake of First Bull Run, McClellan was put in charge of the Washington defences, which he accomplished with his trademark of slow deliberation. In November of 1861, McClellan was given command of all the Union Armies with Lincoln hoping that this would lead to a campaign against the South. As the weeks and months went by with nothing happening, Lincoln began to feel exasperated and in January 1862, he issued General Order No 1 in which he commanded that on February 22nd, there should be a general movement of land and sea forces against the enemy.

In early April 1862, 9 months after assuming command, McClellan launched the Peninsula campaign. McClellan's own account of the campaign is quite telling. According to McClellan, he was plagued continually by bad weather, muddy roads, impassable country, unsafe bridges, inadequate transport, inefficiency and bad faith in Washington, the unexpected failure of others and ever and always, an enemy of overwhelming numbers. McClellan could devise masterful plans, but if

something went wrong, or if conditions failed to be optimal, he was incapable of improvising or of revising his plans on the fly. As a result, it took 3 months to advance the length of the peninsula, a distance of around 130 kilometres.

In late June, Robert E Lee, who had taken over command of the Confederate army from a wounded Joseph Johnson, found the Union Army straddling the Chickahominy River and attempted to destroy it. In a series of savage engagements which became known as the Battle of Seven Days, Lee was unsuccessful.

In the aftermath, McClellan could have counterattacked with a good chance of success, but he did not! Instead, he retreated back down the Peninsula to a base on the James River and then back to Washington. The campaign had collapsed with the loss of 20,000 men. The irony of the failure is that McClellan's plan was basically good. All it required was a leader with the initiative to carry it out.



The 'Seven Days

The campaign's importance extended far beyond setting a new standard of carnage in Virginia. Lee had seized the initiative, dramatically altering the strategic picture by dictating the action to a compliant McClellan. Lee's first effort in field command lacked tactical polish but nevertheless generated immense dividends. The Seven Days Battles saved Richmond and inspired a Confederate people buffeted by dismal military news from other theatres.

On the Union side, the campaign dampened expectations of a victory that had mounted steadily as United States armies in Tennessee and along the Mississippi Rivers won a string of successes. McClellan's failure also exacerbated political divisions in the United States, clearing the way for Republicans to implement policies that would strike at slavery and other Rebel property.

The end of the rebellion had seemed to be in sight when McClellan prepared to march up the

Peninsula; after Malvern Hill, only the most obtuse observers failed to see that the war would continue in a more comprehensive manner. "We have been and are in a depressed, dismal ... state of anxiety and irritability" wrote a perceptive New Yorker after McClellan's retreat. "The cause of the country does not seem to be thriving just now". In all his months as army commander, Major General George Brinton McClellan fought just one battle, Antietam, from start to finish. Antietam, then, must serve as the measure of his general ship.

Colonel Ezra Carman, who survived that bloody field and later wrote the most detailed tactical study of the fighting there, had it right when he observed that on September 17, 1862, "more errors were committed by the Union commander than in any other battle of the war". General McClellan's most grievous error was hugely overestimating Confederate numbers.

This delusion dominated his military character. In August 1861, taking command of the Army of the Potomac, he began entirely on his own to over-count the enemy's forces. Later he was abetted by Allan Pinkerton, his inept intelligence chief, but even Pinkerton could not keep pace with McClellan's imagination.

On the eve of Antietam, McClellan would tell Washington he faced a gigantic Rebel army "amounting to not less than 120,000 men," outnumbering his own army "by at least twenty-five per cent." So it was that George McClellan imagined three Rebel soldiers for every one he faced on the Antietam battlefield. Every decision he made that September 17 was dominated by his fear of counterattack by phantom Confederate battalions.

The testing of battle uncovered another McClellan failing – his management of his own generals. Of his six corps commanders, he displayed confidence in only two – Fitz John Porter and Joseph Hooker. McClellan called no council of his generals to explain his intentions, issued no plan of battle, and on September 17 conferred at length only with Fitz John Porter. Before long in that day of savage fighting, General McClellan lost control of the battle and fell captive to his delusions about the enemy he faced.

Antietam must be judged the best chance to utterly defeat Robert E. Lee until that day two and a half years later at Appomattox. Against an enemy he outnumbered better than two to one, George McClellan devoted himself to not losing rather than winning. Nor would he dare to renew the battle the next day.

The final measure of his self-delusion is his letter to his wife on September 18: "Those in whose judgment on whom I rely," he wrote, "tell me that I fought the battle splendidly & that it was a masterpiece of art". The Battle of Antietam was the single bloodiest day of combat in the Civil War, and while it was presented as a Union victory in the Northern press, it was in effect a tactical draw. Frustrated that McClellan had again failed to destroy Lee's army, Lincoln officially removed him from command in November 1862 to await orders that never came.



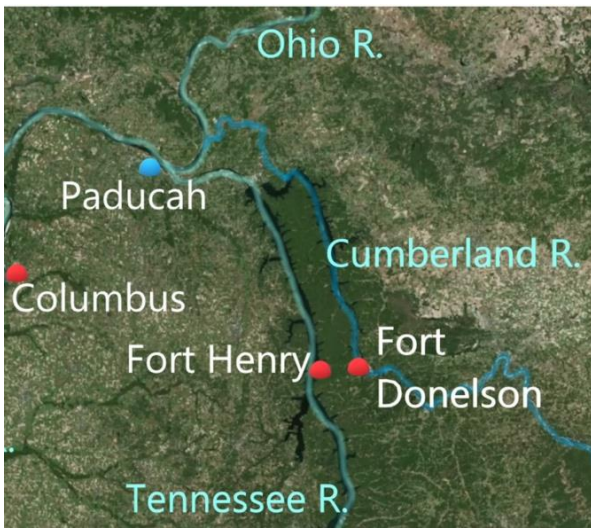
Check the body language here - you can almost see in his eyes McClellan's disdain for Lincoln in this famous photo of their meeting at the Antietam battlefield after the fight, as well as Lincoln's frustration with his overly cautious Army Commander - he had had enough of McClellan, who was about to lose his job.

Tony then referred to a number of pertinent extracts a fascinating interview about McClellan that historian Richard Slotkin gave to the American Battlefield Trust. This is well worth reading and can be found at <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/book-long-road-antietam>

Fort Donelson & Fort Henry **Peter Zacharatos**

Next, Peter Zacharatos made a splendid power-point presentation on these key battles, which he described as Grant's expedition that broke open the West.

The key was to gain control of the Cumberland and Tennessee Rivers. The loss of Forts Henry and Donelson in February 1862 was the first major defeat of the Confederacy in the western theatre. These forts controlled access from the north to the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers, which were effectively twin invasion corridors into the interior of the South for water-borne federal troops. Once the Forts fell, the South never regained the strategic initiative in the West.



As Peter described it, in 1862, the Union was reeling from two black eyes, with their defeats at Manassas in Virginia and Wilsons Creek in Missouri. On 28 January 1862, a largely unknown Brigadier General by the name of Ulysses S Grant, stationed in Cairo Illinois, sent a telegram to his superior, Major General Henry Halleck in St Louis. The bland one sentence message read, “with permission I will take Fort Henry on the Tennessee and establish a large camp there” and here, we begin our story. At this time, the Western theatre of the Civil War spanned from the Appalachian Mountains in the East to the Plains of Missouri in the West. Altogether there was a 300-mile front stretching from just above the Cumberland gap in the East to Columbus Kentucky in the West, which was to be main theatre of operations in 1862.

The war in the West was an entirely different animal from the War in the East. Whilst the Eastern Theatre focused on a narrow corridor between Richmond Virginia and Washington DC, the War in the West spanned a large section of the American continent as seen in the map below:



It is important to understand that out West, the roads were largely poor, especially for moving huge numbers of troops, supplies and munitions, as such controlling natural waterways and rail lines were critical for any

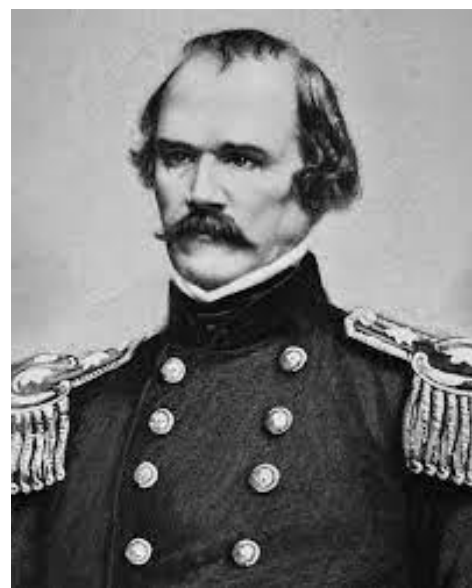
meaningful logistics and this underpin much of the military logic on both sides in this theatre.

At this early stage of the war, the state of Kentucky was the key battleground because, as a slave state, the South were hopeful of bringing this state into the Confederacy. Meanwhile the Union needed this Kentucky as a vital base of operations for launching future offensive into the Southern heartland. President Abraham Lincoln once summed up the states strategic importance by saying “If we lose Kentucky, we lose the war”.

The Confederates recognised the importance of river control early in the war. As such, they captured Columbus Kentucky and established key fortifications around the city in order to prevent the Union army from penetrating the Mississippi River.

Under the leadership of Albert Sidney Johnson, the Confederates waged a propaganda campaign, spreading rumors of huge numbers of troops and large defensive networks, which made the Union Army nervous of a direct assault on Columbus. In reality, the Union army outnumbered the Confederates more than 2-1 being 200,000 to 75000 troops.

The Union army at this time was under two regional commands with Brig. General Don Carlos Buell being in Kentucky and Major General Henry W. Halleck in Missouri. Neither man trusted each other, and both reported directly to McClellan, who often ignored them. Underneath Halleck was Grant, who was situated at Cairo Illinois. Grant had 15,000 men at his disposal, and he also understood the importance of river control in this theatre.



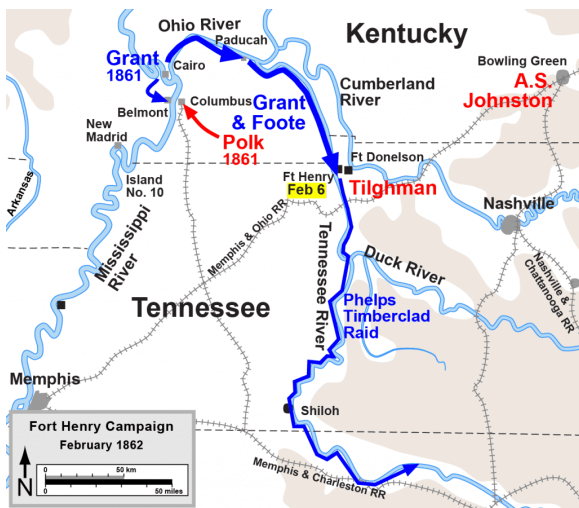
Albert Sidney Johnson



Ulysses S Grant

As seen highlighted on the map below, the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers cut through the entire rebel front from Southern Kentucky to Northern Tennessee. Grant noticed that these strategically important rivers were less well defended than the Mississippi River. If the Union controlled these rivers, the Confederate defenses in Columbus would be cut off from supplies and reinforcements. Moreover, a decisive strike on these river systems would open these rivers to union gunboats and troop transports and the entire Western Theatre would be in jeopardy for the South.

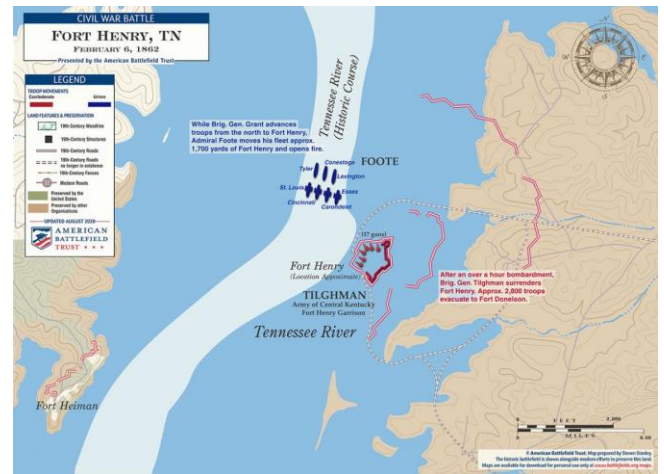
Guarding these two rivers were Fort Henry on the Tennessee River and Fort Donelson on the Cumberland River. After getting reconnaissance that Fort Henry's earth works were less than 10 feet high, Grant proposed to take the fort, believing it would fall to a river boat strike. Although Halleck was reluctant to approve Grant's plan, he knew that PGT Beauregard's men, fresh from their victory at Manassas on were on their way, so it was now or never.



Source: History on the Net
<https://www.historyonthenet.com/history-civil-war-10-battles-part-3-border-states-war-west>

Grant formulated a unique strategy to take Fort Henry - he combined his ground forces with Captain Andrew Foote's naval forces, consisting of new ships, known as 'ironclads' along with smaller 'timber-clads'. Grants troops moved largely by river towards the fort. Grant's army was composed of two divisions, one under General McClelland and one under General Smith.

Grant's flotilla neared Fort Henry on the morning of 3 February. Grant initially stopped the fleet 8 miles before the fort because he wanted to test the fort's range before he brought his transport ships any closer. Grant, who was onboard the ironclad 'Essex' moved forward, flanked by 2 other ironclads. The ironclads then opened fire 2 miles out from the fort. Grant soon learnt that the Confederates had an ace artillery officer, called Captain Jesse Taylor, who scored a direct hit on the Essex, barely missing Grant, which left him visibly shook, but this taught him the range.



On 4 February, Grant had his troops disembark four miles north to avoid artillery fire. He then had McClelland's division secure all country roads between Fort Henry and Fort Donelson, effectively cutting off Fort Henry from any supplies or reinforcements.

Meanwhile, after a few days, Smith's division landed west of the river and secured an abandoned fortification known as Fort Heiman, directly opposite Fort Henry. McClelland's division then dug in rifle pits on the East side of the Fort effectively surrounding it.

Fort Henry was situated in a terrible position on the Tennessee River; it was lower on the riverbank and the river would occasionally flood the entire area, damaging equipment and wetting gunpowder.

At daybreak on 6 February, the Confederate General Lloyd Tilghman knew he was under siege. Tilghman only had two brigades totaling less than 2,500 men, compared to Grant's

15,000. He was outnumbered 7-1. The river had taken its toll on the fort, which left him with only 11 serviceable guns. Knowing that his position was indefensible Tilghman ordered the majority of his forces to retreat and left only 100 men with 11 guns at Fort Henry.

Grant then ordered Foote to steam his 4 ironclads towards the fort and this would be the first battle in history that utilised ironclads; nobody knew how these strange turtle ships would perform. Foote's ironclads opened fire from 2 kms outside the fort and continued to steam forward, firing at point blank range, destroying the Confederates' largest guns. The ferocity of the ironclad attack was too much for the defenders and they stuck their colours and surrendered to Foote. The battle of Fort Henry is significant because, moving forward, iron warships would slowly begin to replace timber warships.

As McClelland's division approached the fort, after the surrender, the battle was essentially over.

The consequences of the fall of Fort Henry were immediate – the Confederate line was broken along the Tennessee River. Grant then sent his timberclads down the Tennessee River, burning rebel warships, disabling rail bridges all the way to Florence Alabama. This was a visible symbol that Tennessee, Mississippi and Alabama were all penetrable by Union forces via the Tennessee River. Columbus, Kentucky, which used to be considered impenetrable, now had its primary supply and communications rail cut. All of this had been achieved without a major battle being fought.

Grant telegraphed Halleck in St Louis: *Fort Henry is ours, the gunboats silenced the batteries before the investment was completed, I think the garrison must have commenced retreat last night, our cavalry followed and found two guns abandoned during the retreat, I shall take and destroy Fort Donelson on the 8th and return to Fort Henry.*

The same day that Fort Henry fell, Grant turned his attention to Fort Donelson, 12 miles to the East. His attack was delayed by a several days as two of his ironclads needed repairs and were sent north to Cairo. On 12 February, with the repaired fleet now steaming down the Cumberland River towards Fort Donelson, Grant sent Smith and McClelland's divisions East. It was unseasonably warm, and many Yankees threw off their warm cotton jackets on the way. There were some minor skirmishes with cavalry, but the advance continued largely unopposed toward Fort Donelson.

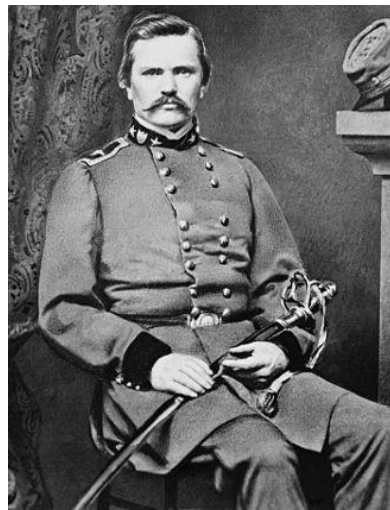
Grant knew that Fort Donelson would be a tougher nut to crack than Fort Henry. Firstly, the fort was well positioned on high ground that overshadows the town of Dover Tennessee. Secondly the Rebels actually had superior numbers to Grant's forces, being 17,000 to Grant's 15,000, and they had dug in a number of strong entrenchments around the fort.

As Grant's troops reached the outskirts of Fort Donelson on the evening of the 12th, he set up headquarters at Widow Crisp. Grant knew that he would need reinforcements and his gunboats for his assault on the Fort to succeed.

Unbeknownst to Grant, however, the leadership of the defenders at Fort Donelson was nothing short of a disaster. The fort had changed commanders no less than seven times in the previous fortnight alone. The fort was now left in command of three men. The first was Gideon Pillow, whose record in the Mexican War and actions in the Civil war showed him to be 'incompetent', Pillow was also the only Confederate general for whom Grant in his memoirs would express nothing but utter contempt, and Grant was not quick to anger either.

Secondly, there was John B. Floyd, a politician-general who not only was highly inept when it came to military matters at the best of times, but has been described by historian Frank Cooling as a *treasonous ass* for using his position as Secretary of War under the Buchanan administration to funnel federal weapons and funds to secessionists.

Finally, there was Simon Buckner, who was the only competent soldier on the scene, but he was often overshadowed by the larger personalities of Pillow and Floyd. The disastrous cadre of leadership effectively negated many initial Confederate advantages.



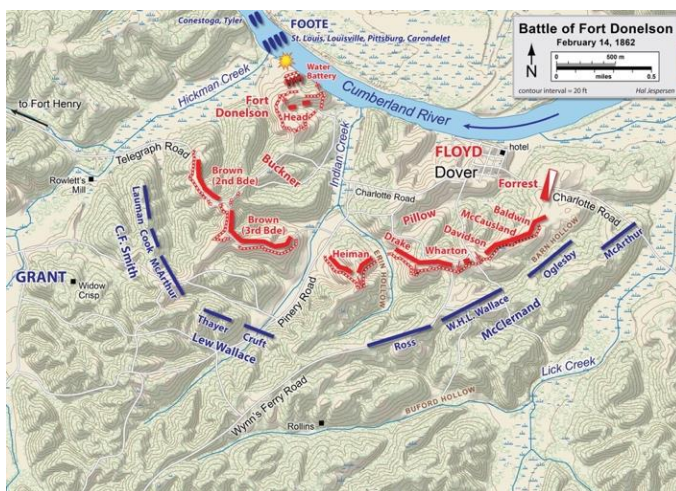
Simon Bolivar Buckner

On the morning of the 13th February, the Confederates opened with an artillery barrage on the right wing of McClelland's division. The first day of the battle had begun. McClelland launched an attack on the Confederate centre holding the heights but was pushed back. A standstill ensued for the rest of the day, with both sides exchanging cannon fire. Grant was, however, purposely delaying. He knew that his gunboats were yet to arrive, bringing an additional 10,000 men. That evening, there was torrential rain which turned much of the battlefield into a quagmire.

On the next day, on 14th February, Foote's ironclads arrived. Foote's fleet steamed directly towards Fort Donelson firing at point blank range, hoping to repeat their earlier success at Fort Henry. However, the well-positioned defenders counterattacked with a barrage of artillery that left two ironclads damaged and with the other two taking heavy fire. The defeated ironclads steamed further down river out of the fort's range.

The failed attack showed that Fort Donelson would not fall as easily as Fort Henry, however the fleet brought additional troop transports, which bolstered Grant's forces to three divisions – roughly 25,000 men – easily outnumbering the Confederates. Whilst Grant was disappointed with the failure of his fleet, he was unfazed.

Grant knew the Confederates could not get significant reinforcements into the fort nor bring supplies to the besieged men. He was also certain that there was going to be no attack on his rear. Grant was willing to wait for starvation to bring him victory. That evening, snow and ice started falling and many Yankees, who had earlier discarded their warmer clothing on the march over, spent a bitterly cold night and some even froze to death.



Troop dispositions at Fort Donelson on 14th February 1862

At dawn on 15 February, knowing that they were surrounded with no hope of supply, the Confederates had no choice now but to try to cut their way out and retreat to Nashville. In the snowstorm the Confederates moved out of the fort, launched a surprise attack and drove back the troops on McClelland's right. The force of the attack pushed the union lines and almost outflanked them.

McClelland's brigade commanders got their units into line and began to return fire, though still falling back. The firefight lasted all morning, "spreading a lurid red over the snow". The Federals started to hold their line but now a large gap had opened up on the Union left presenting the opportunity to for the Confederates to retreat.

Had the Confederates started out at noon, they all could have made it safely to Nashville.

In a moment of hubris, or what his contemporaries described as a "brain explosion", Confederate General Pillow was convinced that his earlier attack left the Union army routed and that Grant was fleeing back to Fort Henry. Believing his men were victorious, Pillow ordered them back to the trenches to resupply and regroup before launching the pursuit of a broken Union Army. This decision shocked Floyd and Buckner.

Once Grant got word of the attack, Grant galloped full speed over ice-covered roads to survey the situation. What he did next is what separates him from most of Generals of the war. Grant did not panic; he instead noticed that the Confederates were all holding haversacks of rations and that this was a breakout attempt, which left the rest of the army vulnerable on the flanks. Grant directed the bulk of his army to shore up the Union right, whilst directing Smith to launch a counterattack on the Confederate right.

The counterattack was a difficult objective because it was uphill and "criss-crossed" with felled trees. Smith, in what Grant described as in "an incredibly short time", had his men in line and led the attack from the front to keep his men from firing while they worked their way through the obstacles of felled trees. The attack surprised and scattered the Rebels.

Meanwhile, Grant's other divisions launched their own attacks on the rebels' left flank, which retook many of the hard-fought gains the Confederates had won in the morning and closed off a large portion of the escape route. The Confederate attempt to break out had failed.

It was apparent by nightfall that Fort Donelson could not hold another day. Confederate Generals Floyd and Pillow escaped in the night, as did Nathan Bedford Forrest and his cavalry. General Buckner was left with the unfortunate task of surrendering the garrison. Buckner had gone through West Point with Grant, served with him in the Mexican War and even lent Grant money some years earlier. Buckner was hopeful his previous relationship with Grant would allow him to get generous terms.

Buckner sent Grant a note requesting terms of capitulation, Grant received the note just before daylight and his reply was terse and to the point:

No terms except unconditional and immediate surrender can be accepted. I propose to move immediately on your works.

Buckner's reaction was one of shock. He had not slept for over thirty hours and was disgusted with the cowardly actions of his superiors, who had fled. Buckner reluctantly surrendered the fort and his 12,000 men unconditionally.

After Buckner surrendered, he and Grant met and had a conversation that was described as "very kind and civil and polite", Grant agreed to treat wounded Confederates, provide hungry Rebel troops with rations, and forbade any formal ceremony designed to humiliate the men in their defeat. Grant even offered to repay the money Buckner had lent him years earlier. Somehow, their relationship survived Fort Donelson. After the war, in keeping with Grant's hopes for reconciliation and unity, two former Union generals and two former Confederate generals served as pallbearers at Grant's funeral. One of them was Simon Buckner.

With the fall of Fort Donelson, Grant had captured more soldiers than all American generals combined at this point, which deprived the Confederates of a powerful and desperately needed field army. The North was ecstatic with the news of their victory; it was even joked about in the Northern Press that U.S Grant stood for 'Unconditional Surrender Grant'.

In just two weeks, the entire strategic picture of the war in the Western Theatre had changed as the South was forced to give up southern Kentucky and much of middle and western Tennessee. The Union now had command of the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers.

The significance of this river control cannot be overstated. The fortifications on the Mississippi were now isolated and the road to Nashville was open. The Confederates would even abandon Nashville on 23rd February, just one

week after the fall of Fort Donelson. This would be the first Confederate capital to fall.

President Lincoln had received the best news of the war thus far. Grant was promoted at Lincoln's urging to Major-General and placed in command of the Army of the Tennessee and was poised to launch offensives. From this point, the Confederates had lost the initiative in the West and, as some historians have argued, they never really regained it. Many of their future campaigns in this region were about rectifying their blunders at Fort's Henry and Donelson. Albert Sidney Johnston reflected that, for the Confederates, this campaign was "...most disastrous and almost without remedy".

The Battle of Hampton Roads John Verhoeven

John Verhoeven closed the evening with a terrific presentation on this historic battle of ironclads. John commenced his talk by highlighting that:

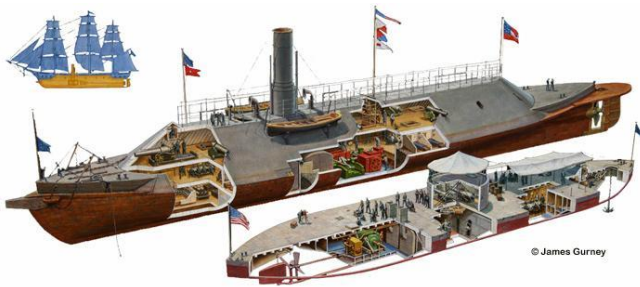
- This was the first engagement of sea-going ironclad warships during the Civil War and globally.
- Up to this point France and Great Britain had commenced experimenting with and building sea-going ironclad ships from the keel up, with *La Glorie* launched in 1859 and HMS *Warrior* launched in 1861, but none had engaged in naval warfare.
- Although the battle was inconclusive in that neither side could claim victory, the battle demonstrated the viability of ironclad technology and overnight made navies of the world with wooden warships obsolete.

The South needed warships to break the Union blockade, but with few ships, Confederate Secretary of the Navy Stephen Mallory decided to challenge the Union Navy with the latest technology - a small number of ironclad ships.

The South took advantage of what the North left behind. After Virginia seceded in April 1861, many of the US Navy repair facilities and ships at Gosport Navy Yard at Portsmouth were hastily destroyed or sunk by retreating Union troops, including the USS *Merrimack*. Confederates raised her from the Elizabeth River mud, moved her into an undamaged graving dock, and transformed her into a steam-powered, heavily armed ironclad ship, renamed the CSS *Virginia*.

Meanwhile, the Union Navy discovered what was happening and developed their answer; the USS *Monitor*, a steam-powered ironclad with a

revolving gun turret. The two ships were radically different, as shown in the figure.



The steam frigate USS *Merrimack* had been flagship of the Pacific squadron.

The South was short of iron and had to reuse old railway ties and other scrap metal beaten into flat metal plates. It did not have the machinery to bend heavy metal plate and could not manufacture curved metal plates to fabricate items such as the *Monitor's* gun turret.

Given shortage of iron, and time constraints, the South was limited to building a casement design, using the existing wooden hull below the waterline and the steam engine of the *Merrimack* as a platform. On this they built an iron fort with 45° angle sides comprising 4-inch-thick iron plating over 2 feet thick timbers. Cannon balls bounced off the angled sides. The iron fort mounted 10 guns; 6x9 inch Dahlgren cannon and 4 smaller cannon. To increase her threat a 1,500-pound iron ram was attached underwater to the bow.

The *Monitor*, built in 90 days, was one of three designs selected by the Union Navy.

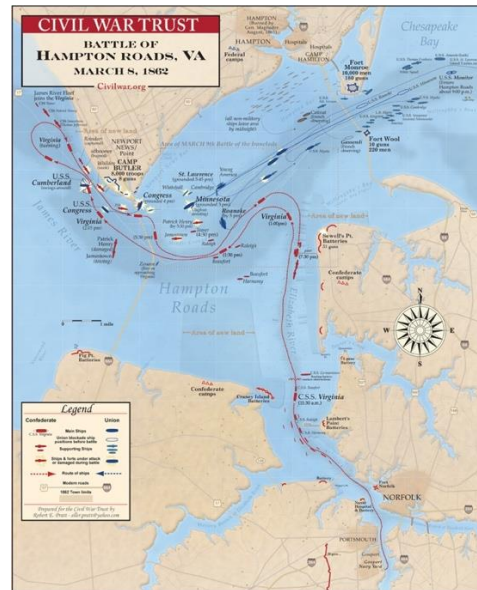
John Ericsson's Monitor design was the most revolutionary, with a steam-powered rotating gun turret fitted with two 11-inch Dahlgren cannon. The ship incorporated 40 patentable inventions and was nicknamed 'cheesebox on a raft' for obvious reasons.

The ship sat low in the water, with her armoured deck just 18 inches above the waterline.

Each ship had its strengths and weaknesses: the *Virginia* was a better gun platform, bringing more guns to bear on the enemy, but it was slow and cumbersome to steer. The Monitor, with its shallow draft, could steam into places which the *Virginia* couldn't, but with only two guns it had limited firepower.

On the eve of battle the forces engaged comprised: Union – the *Monitor* (commander John L Worden); Blockade ships and 1,400 naval personnel. Confederacy – The *Virginia* (commander Franklin Buchanan) and 188 naval personnel,

The map shows the Hampton Roads battleground with present-day land, bridges over and road tunnels under the battleground.



On 8 March 1862 the *Virginia* left Portsmouth on its commissioning run and steamed down the Elizabeth River to attack Union ships at anchor.

The *Virginia* headed straight for the most powerfully armed ship in the line, the USS *Cumberland* off Newport News Point. Around 2pm the *Virginia* struck the *Cumberland* with its ram, smashing a huge hole in its wooden hull. The *Virginia's* ram became entangled in the *Cumberland*, but at the last minute the ram broke off and the *Cumberland* rapidly sank, taking 121 sailors with her.

The *Virginia* then turned on the USS *Congress* which ran aground, was pounded by the *Virginia*, was wrecked and caught fire.

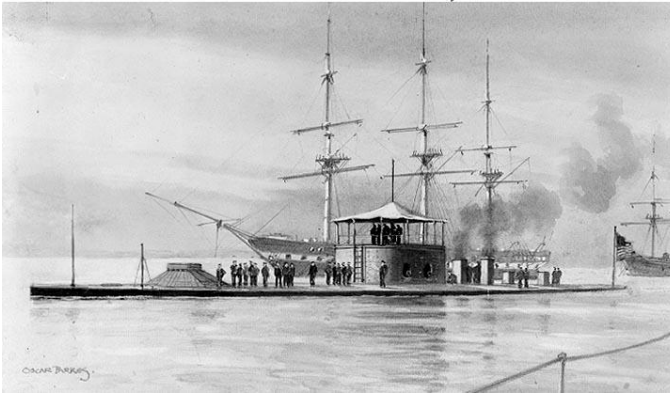
Confederate commander Buchanan who came out on deck to accept the Congress' formal surrender, was wounded by musket fire from on-shore Union infantry.

The next Union target, the USS *Minnesota* turned and also ran aground.

However, with its captain injured and daylight waning, the *Virginia* ceased its attack and returned to the Elizabeth River.

Around 9pm on 8 March the USS *Monitor*, under tow from New York, entered Hampton Roads and positioned itself near the grounded *Minnesota*.

This watercolour of the *Monitor*, made after the battle, shows a canvas awning added over the gun turret for sun protection and an enlarged pilot house with sloping armour protection.



On the morning of 9th March, the *Virginia* (now commanded by Catesby Jones), steamed into deeper water and turned to port to attack the grounded *Minnesota*. As the *Virginia* started firing at the *Minnesota*, Jones noticed a strange vessel by its side, initially thinking it was a water tank or steam boiler being moved on a raft.

With the *Monitor* bearing down on the *Virginia*, the *Virginia* shifted its fire to the *Monitor*. Both ships settled into close-range cannon exchange, firing into each other with little effect as shots bounced off their armoured sides. *Virginia* tried to ram the *Monitor* which turned sharply to avoid it.

After 3-4 hours the *Monitor's* commander, standing in the pilot house, was temporarily blinded by an exploding shell from the *Virginia*. The *Monitor* disengaged from the battle and steamed for the safety of shallow water where the *Virginia* could not follow.

The *Virginia*, short of ammunition and concerned about the outgoing tide, withdrew and steamed for the safety of Portsmouth, marking the end of the battle.



Tactically the results of the battle were inconclusive, but the Union had a strategic victory as the blockade was maintained.

Estimated casualties were Union 261 killed and 108 wounded, Confederacy 2 killed and 22 wounded.

8 March 1862 was the worst defeat in the history of the US Navy until the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941.

Following the battle, the *Virginia* ventured out of Portsmouth occasionally, but never confronted the *Monitor* again.

With the threat from the *Virginia* neutralised, and the Union blockade restored, Union Major General George B McClellan was free to advance his Army of the Potomac up the Virginia peninsula towards Richmond.

Could the battle have ended differently? The Union Navy learned that blockade ships riding at anchor pose a greater target and are much less effective than ships underway.

Virginia's armour-penetrating capabilities were reduced on 9 March because it did not anticipate the *Monitor*. The *Virginia* carried only explosive shells effective against wooden ships, not solid shot. As the *Virginia* fired more shells, she became lighter in the water, exposing her unarmoured sides, which were initially below the waterline and becoming more vulnerable to attack.

Monitor had been hurried to Hampton Roads with little time for testing its weapons system. It was launched with two 11-inch Dahlgren cannon, although it had been designed to carry two 12-inch cannon. Furthermore, these cannons were restricted to 15-pound gunpowder charges because their use in the gun turret had not been tested using larger charges. Later tests showed that if *Monitor* had used 25-or-30 pound-charges with 165-pound solid shot shells it could have punctured the *Virginia's* hull.

And what of these two trailblazing ships? The Union recaptured Norfolk on 10 May 1862. The *Virginia* was trapped by Union troops on land, shallow rivers and the *Monitor* in Hampton Roads. Confederate troops burned the *Virginia* off Craney Island, five miles from where she had been resurrected, rather than allow her capture. She exploded dramatically when fire reached her gunpowder magazine.

The *Monitor* sank in a heavy gale on 31 December 1862 in the Atlantic Ocean while transiting Cape Hatteras (North Carolina). Sixteen of her crew of 62 died.

Both the Union and the Confederacy built more ironclads during the war.

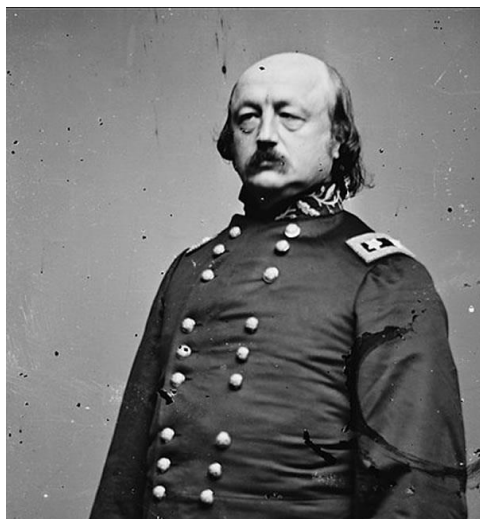
Sewell's Point, where the *Virginia* docked on 8 March is now the massive Naval Station Norfolk, one of the world's largest naval bases and home to the descendants of these two ironclads. It includes numerous aircraft carriers,

amphibious assault ships, nuclear submarines, cruisers, destroyers, frigates and a hospital ship.

Acknowledgements: Information from:

- American Battlefield Trust: <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/civil-war/battles/hampton-roads>
- American Battlefield Trust: <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/10-facts-hampton-roads>
- American Battlefield Trust: <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/battle-hampton-roads-then-now>
- Civil War Trust: Maps prepared by Robert E Pratt <https://www.peachmountain.com/5star/Monitor-and-Merrimack.aspx>

General Benjamin Butler in New Orleans *With thanks to Dan Howard*



According to an entry on Butler in *The Civil War Encyclopedia* (William Barney, OUP):

A general who owed his appointment to President Abraham Lincoln's need to cultivate support from northern Democrats, Benjamin F. Butler had a genius for fomenting controversy. His actions as military commander of Union-occupied New Orleans made him hated throughout the South.

Butler was put in charge of Union-occupied New Orleans in the spring of 1862. There he became known as the 'Beast of New Orleans' for his controversial General Order No 28 of May 15, 1862 which was in the following terms:

As the officers and soldiers of the United States have been subjected to repeated insults from the women (calling themselves ladies) of New Orleans, in return for the most scrupulous non-interference and courtesy on our part, it is ordered that hereafter when any female shall, by word, gesture, or

movement, insult or show contempt for any officer or soldier of the United States, she shall be regarded and held liable to be treated as a woman of the town plying her avocation.

According to Bob Blaisdell in *Civil War Letters, from home, camp and battlefield* (2012 Dover Publications):

President Jefferson Davis was enraged and responded to this apparent defaming of Southern white womanhood by ordering that in the event of Butler's capture, "the officer in command of the capturing force do cause him to be immediately executed by hanging." Despite its notoriety, Butler's command in New Orleans was generally as temperate as it was firm, and he made a real effort to provide for the city's white poor and its growing numbers of fugitive slaves.

Davis's order was also, in part, in response to another high-handed action of Butler's during his command in New Orleans, namely, his ordering of the execution of a Southerner, William B Mumford, for leading a group of Southern sympathisers in tearing down, stamping on and tearing apart an American Flag that Admiral Farragut had placed on the Mint Building.

President Lincoln recalled Butler from his New Orleans command in December 1862.

It is interesting to read Butler's own justification for his notorious General Order No 28, which is contained in the following letter that he wrote to Mr J.G. Carney of Boston on 2nd July, 1862 (reproduced from *Civil War Letters, from home, camp and battlefield*):

My Dear Sir,

Many thanks for your kind note...

I am as jealous of the good opinion of my friends as I am careless of the slanders of my enemies, and your kind expression in regard to Order No. 28, leads me to say a word to you on the subject. That it ever could have been so misconceived as it has been by some portion of the Northern Press is wonderful, and would lead one to exclaim with the Jew, "O Father Abraham, what these Christians are, whose own hard dealings teach them to suspect the very thoughts of others." What was the state of things to which the women order applied? We were two thousand five hundred men in a city seven miles long by two-to-four wide, of a hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants, all hostile, bitter, defiant, explosive, standing literally in a magazine, a spark only needed

for destruction. The devil had entered into the hearts of the women of this town to stir up strife in every way possible. Every opprobrious epithet, every insulting question was made by these bejewelled, becrinolined, and laced creatures calling themselves ladies, toward my soldiers and officers, from the windows of houses and in the street.

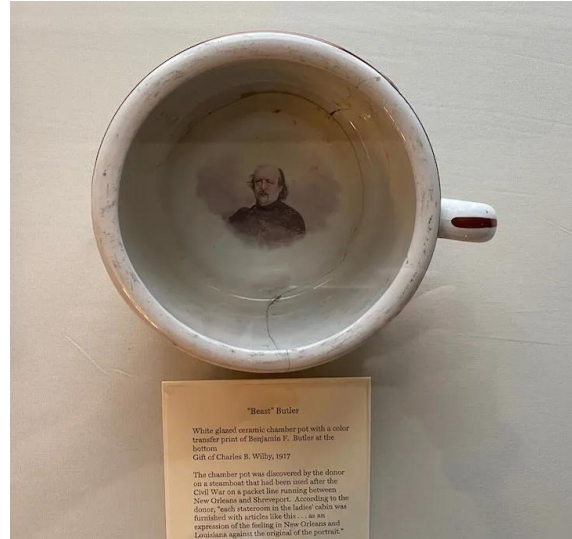
How long do you suppose our flesh and blood could have stood this without retort? That would lead to disturbance and riot from which we must clear the streets by artillery, and then a howl that we had murdered these fine women. I had arrested the men who hurrahd for Beauregard, — could I arrest the women? No — what was to be done? No order could be made save one that would execute itself.

With anxious, careful thought I hit upon this, “Women who insult my soldiers are to be regarded and treated as common women plying their vocation”. Pray how do you treat a common woman plying her vocation in the streets? You pass her by unheeded. She cannot insult you. As a gentleman you can and will take no notice of her. If she speaks, her words are not opprobrious. It is only when she becomes a continuous and positive nuisance that you call a watchman and give her in charge to him. But some of the Northern Editors seem to think that whenever one meets such a woman one must stop her, talk with her, insult her, or hold dalliance with her. And so, from their own conduct, they construed my order.

The Editor of the Boston Courier may so deal with common women, and out of the abundance of the heart his mouth may speak, but so do not I. Why, these she-adders of New Orleans themselves were at once shamed into propriety of conduct by the order, and from that day no woman has either insulted or annoyed my line soldiers or officers, and of a certainty no soldier has insulted any woman. When I passed through Baltimore on the 23rd of February last, members of my staff were insulted by the gestures of the ladies there. Not so in New Orleans.

One of the worst possible of all these women showed disrespect to the remains of gallant young De Kay, and you will see her punishment, a copy of the order for which I enclose is at once a vindication and a construction of my order. I can only say that I would issue it again under like circumstances. Again, thanking you for your kind interest, I am Truly your friend, Etc.

Notwithstanding Davis's wishes, Butler lived long after the war, dying in 1893 after a long and mostly successful (if at times controversial) career in politics. However, Southern animosity towards him lingered long after the war, such that his image was reproduced on the chamber pots in the ladies' staterooms on board certain steamers that plied the Mississippi River in the post war years. An example is shown in the photo below (photo source: <https://emergingcivilwar.com/2022/06/13/beast-butler-in-the-chamber-pot/>)



New members

We are delighted to welcome new members to our Roundtable

Call for short talks

Our short ten-minute presentations on a particular battle or person have been a great success in revealing the depth of talent within our group.

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.

Please do not hesitate to volunteer to myself or John Morrison on a topic of your choice, be it short or long.

Ian McIntyre

This publication is the official newsletter of the American Civil War Round Table of Australia (NSW Chapter). All enquiries regarding the newsletter should be addressed to the Secretary of the Chapter by phone on 0411 745 707 or email: secretary@americancivilwar.asn.au