Sumter to Appomattox

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

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Please note, our new website www.americancivilwar.asn.au is now up and running

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A Message from the Chairman –

The delay in circulating this edition of our Newsletter is the consequence of your Committee having to make some hard decisions about our Conference scheduled for July. Difficulties encountered recently in confirming the availability of some of our speakers for the scheduled date has led your Committee to the decision to postpone the Conference until April 2006. Whilst appreciating some members might be disappointed in this decision, it will guarantee that when the Conference is now held, we will have a panel of speakers that is without equal and the reputation our Chapter has for having top quality conferences will be enhanced.

During April, I was privileged to be invited to speak at the regular meeting of our Victorian "cousins", as part of a regular exchange of speakers across the border. The meeting was very well attended to hear my "Life and Death of Custer" presentation and I appreciated their great hospitality.

By the time you are reading this Newsletter, the Memorial Day Commemoration at Waverley Cemetery will have been held. As in previous years I am sure our members will be well represented and our presence noted by the American veterans' community resident in Sydney.

Modesty prevents me from encouraging you to attend our next meeting, except to say that, if the presentation were a movie, it would be "R" rated. Please read the notice of the meeting in the other column of this page and I look forward to seeing you at the meeting on Monday, June 6.

Elsewhere in this Newsletter is a notice of a G-I-A-N-T sale of Civil War books by Paul Spencer, one of our South Australian members. The catalogue of books available involves 11 A-4 pages of closely typed print. Copies of this catalogue will be available at our June meeting.

Paul Kensey

Our Next Meeting

The next meeting is to be held at our normal venue, the **Roseville Memorial RSL Club, Pacific Highway, Roseville,** on the evening of **Monday, June 6, 2005,** with members, **a**s usual, members being able to meet at the Club **from 6pm for a bistro style meal.**

The speaker at this meeting will be our Chairman, Paul Kensey, who will speak on the topic:

Remembered Not For Their Greatness But For Their Flaws

The presentation will chronicle the lives of three Civil War generals, Hugh Judson Kilpatrick, Earl Van Dorn and George Edward Pickett, two of whom had sexual appetites that were not readily satisfied and the third appeared to be a somewhat immature serial romantic, falling madly in love with a succession of women throughout his career.

Paul's inimitable presentation style guarantees that this "Adults Only" lecture is something that must not be missed.

As is our normal practice, a paper of the presentation will be available to members at the conclusion of the meeting. Members living outside the Sydney Metropolitan Area will have the paper mailed to them with the next Newsletter in July.

Memorial Day Commemoration

This year the Memorial Day commemoration will be held at the Solomon Thompson Gravesite in Waverley Cemetery on Sunday, May 29, commencing at 1pm. The commemoration will be then followed by afternoon tea at the Bronte RSL Club, McPherson Street, Bronte.

It Happened in June

HATCHES AND DESPATCHES

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

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

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

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

June 14, 1811 – Harriet Beecher Stowe, auther of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is born
Litchfield, Conn;

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

COMMAND AND POLITICAL APPOINTMENTS

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

April 22, 1861 – Robert E Lee is named commander of the forces of Virginia;

BATTLES / MILITARY ACTIONS

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

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

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

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

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

BATTLES / MILITARY ACTIONS cont'd

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

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

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

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

OTHER SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Famous Last Words

"If the Confederacy fails, there should be written on its tombstone, Died of a Theory"

- Jefferson Davis, 1864

"If this cause that's so near to my hear tis doomed to fail, I pray that heaven may let me fall with it, with my face toward the foe, and my arm battling for that which I know is right"

- Major General Patrick Cleburne,
Confederate division commander, six weeks
before his Death at the Battle of Franklin, 1864

Military Blunders – The Crater Battle

In the last Newsletter, Burnside's Mud March after the Union defeat at the Battle of Fredericksburg in late 1862 was presented as the first case-study in our 'Military Blunders' series. We now look at Burnside again nearly two years later, during the siege of Petersburg.

At this time, as Ulysses S Grant's forces moved closer to the capture of the Confederate capital of Richmond, Burnside was commanding the Union's IX Corps and was positioned opposite a critical enemy position called Elliott's Salient. One of the units in Burnside's corps was the 48th Pennsylvania Regiment commanded by Henry Pleasants, who before the War was a civil engineer. Colonel Pleasants believed he could tunnel under the Confederate position and blow it up.

Burnside was impressed with Pleasant's plan and although ridiculed by the Union Army's Corps of Engineers, Burnside managed to convince Grant to adopt Pleasant's plan. Pleasants encountered strong opposition from the Army's engineers who refused him both men and materiel to undertake the task. Pleasant overcame all of these obstacles and by July 17, 1864, he was able to inform Burnside the tunnel was complete. In achieving this task, Pleasants was able to use Pennsylvanian miners from his Regiment, many of Welsh origin.

Grant had been impressed by Pleasant's idea and considered that it might provide the decisive Union breakthrough needed to achieve an early victory in the War. Grant promised Burnside additional troops and massed artillery support. Pleasants had the shaft under the Confederate position with four tons of explosives and Burnside planned an infantry attack with four divisions on the Confederate position after the explosion in the mine. He proposed that an all-black division, commanded by General Ferrero, lead the attack, but this was vetoed by Grant on the political grounds that the attack was a dangerous one and it should not be seen that the black units were being used as "cannon fodder". Burnside was particularly disappointed in Grant's decision, as were the black troops, and seemed to lose interest in the whole operation. He eventually chose from his other three divisions by drawing straws! The choice to lead the attack fell on General Ledlie, described as a most "… unreliable commander, suspected of being both a coward and a drunkard". Even Burnside had described Ledlie's men as "gun-shy".

Ledlie's men assembled in the Union's forward trenches in darkness for the blowing of the mine at day-break. Unfortunately, nobody seems to have told Ferrero that his black troops were now no longer required to lead the attack and they too assembled in these trenches. Not surprisingly, chaos regained! Burnside was "smart" enough not to get caught up in this chaos, positioning himself under cover a half a mile behind and was to play little part in what was to follow. There was some trouble igniting the fuse and it finally went off 90 minutes late but with a shattering effect. So enormous was the blast that many of Burnside's own men fled.

The plan was for once Grant's 80 heavy guns put shells into the smoking ruins of the Confederate position, Burnside's infantry could sweep through the crater and on to take Petersburg.

Unfortunately for the Union forces, a major problem was discovered. No one had given orders for the Union parapets to be lowered Ledlie's men found themselves at the bottom of 8 foot trenches unable to climb out to advance on the enemy in battle formation. Some were able to improvise with ladders and sandbags, but the delay meant that subsequent advance to contact became a mere dribble rather than the anticipated forward rush.

When they reached the crater they found 60 yards of the Confederate line was completely destroyed and replaced by a hole 30 feet deep. Ledlie's men climbed into the hole, some rescuing buried Confederates, others digging weapon pits as if this were their ultimate objective. The major problem was, however, the absence of their senior officers! The divisional commander, Ledlie, was hiding in a bomb-proof shelter some 400 metres back drink rum and refusing to give any orders. Burnside, the corps commander, was even further back giving orders for more troops to move forward from the safety of his shelter.

Two more divisions of Union troops moved forward across "no-man's-land" and climbed into the crater. Once there, however, they advanced no further and soon were unable to move because of the thousands of troops in the crater. Meanwhile, the Confederates began to recover from the initial blast and from the top of the crater began to fire on the mass of troops below.

Ferrero's black division, unaware that the plan was in chaos, charged towards the Confederate line and captured a number of trenches. When runners were sent back for further orders, found General Ferrero had joined Ledlie's drinks party. They were ordered just to capture whatever came next and remain in those positions.

The Confederates reacted strongly to the sight of black soldiers in their trenches and showed no mercy with their catch-cry – "Take the white man, kill the nigger". It was not long before Ferrero's division was retreating back to the Union lines with 50% casualties. The immediate problem of how too save the 10,000 men trapped in the crater was taken out of their commanders' hands when the Confederates mounted a massed counter-attack, killing hundreds and capturing thousands of the trapped Union troops.

Grant has seen enough: IX Corps needed a new commander with Burnside being given extended leave and retired from the Army. Ledlie was court-martialled for drunkenness and cowardice but, somewhat strangely, Ferrero escaped disciplinary action. Thus, one of the most brilliantly conceived operations of the War ended in bitterness and recrimination.

Source: The Guinness Book of Military Blunders

Spencer's Giant Book Sale

As advised in our Chairman's message, Paul Spencer is having a giant book sale, clearing out much of his Civil War library. Perusal of the catalogue of reveals that this is the best deal you are likely to get ever!

The catalogue for this sale spans 11 closely typed A4 pages and will be available for perusal from John Cook at our next meeting on Monday, June 11. You should remember, however, that the deals are so good that many of the books will be sold within days. Orders can be made with Paul by e-mail at:

spence02@ihug.com.au

Alternatively, you could use "snail mail" to him at:

17 Surf Street, South Brighton, SA, 5048

Paul asks that you send no money for an order until the purchase has been confirmed as the books are going quickly.

A New Book: "The Sword of Lincoln"

Jeffry D Wert's newly published book "*The Sword of Lincoln – The Army of the Potomac*" is the first authoritative single volume history of the Army of the Potomac for many years. The hard-cover edition of the book was released this year and is published by Simon and Schuster. It is available through "Amazon.com" for a heavily discounted price of $US 19:80. Jeffry Wert is one of the finest Civil War historians and his latest book with its swiftly moving narrative style and perceptive analysis is destined to become of the classics on the army that was so central to the history of the Civil War.

Wert chronicles the battles fought by the Army of the Potomac from Bull Run to Gettysburg to Appomattox against Robert E Lee and his Army of Northern Virginia. The obligation to defend Washington infused a defensive mentality amongst the soldiers of the Army of the Potomac and they suffered a succession of defeats under a succession of flawed commanders – McClellan, Burnside, Hooker – until they won a decisive victory at Gettysburg under a new commander, Gordon Meade. Within a year of their Gettysburg victory, the Army of the Potomac had come under the overall command of the Union's General-in-Chief, Ulysses S Grant, although he was never their actual Commander. From this time they marched through Virginia stalking Lee until they finally trapped him and the remnants of the Army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox in April 1865.

Wert shows how Lincoln carefully oversaw each of the operations of the Army of the Potomac until he found in Grant the commander he had long sought. The baton for the Army's operations could now be passed to a Commander-in-Chief who knew how to use it as Lincoln wanted.

This is a modern book detailing the history of an army central to the history of America's Civil War and has a place in the reference libraries of academic history scholars and Civil War enthusiasts alike.

The Charge of the Mule Brigade

Following the crushing Confederate victory at the Battle of Chickamauga in September 1863, fell back on Chattanooga where they endured a partial siege and were sustained by a tenuous supply line known as the *"Cracker Line".* For weeks, with the Union troops surviving on slender rations, Union and Confederate forces manoeuvred to gain an advantage and by late October Hooker's forces had been able to capture Wauhatchie, a small town west of Chattanooga, on a bend of the Tennessee River. This enabled Union steamers to reach Chattanooga but set the scene for the Battle of Wauhatchie where Longstreet sought to eject Hooker's troops.

Towards the end of this battle, a curious incident occurred. Since Wauhatchie was a way station on the Cracker Line, there was a depot located in the town with some hundreds of mules used for changing the teams of the wagons. As the fighting drew to a close several hundred of these mules broke out of their enclosure and stampeded many towards the Confederate lines. This led to the Rebels to believe they were under attack from Union cavalry, causing them to fall back.

Although the overall effect of this "Mule Charge" was minor, it made a great folk tale, with some suggesting the mules should be brevetted as horses and prompted a poet to appropriate Tennyson's *The Charge of the Light Brigade.* The first three verses of this appropriated poem, *The Charge of the Mule Brigade,* is presented below with apologies, of course, to Alfred Lord Tennyson:

> *Half a mile, half a mile,*
> *half a mile onward,*
> *Right through the Georgia troops*
> *Broke the two hundred.*
> *"Forward the Mule Brigade!*
> *Charge for the Rebs" they neighed.*
> *Straight for the Georgis troops*
> *Broke the two hundred*
>
> *"Forward the Mule Brigade!"*
> *Was there a mule dismayed?*
> *Not when their long ears felt*
> *At their ropes sundered*
> *Their's not to make reply,.*
> *Their's not to reason why.*
> *Their's but to make Rebs fly.*
> *On! to the Georgia troops*
> *Broke the two hundred.*
>
> *Mules to the right of them,*
> *Mules to the left of them,*
> *Mules behind them*
> *Pawed, neighed and thundered*
> *Breaking their own confines*
> *Breaking through Longstreet's lines*
> *Into the Georgia troops*
> *Stormed the two hundred*