

Sumter to Appomattox

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

No. 59, May 2012

Please visit our website www.americancivilwar.asn.au

A Message from the Chairman –

In writing my message for this Newsletter, I must start with a sincere apology for the lateness of the distribution to members. For just over three weeks in March and April I spent the time overseas in Hong Kong, visiting my younger son, daughter-in-law and two grandsons. Although returning to Sydney in mid-April, I had some difficulty in switching off the holiday mode. Indeed, I am even undertaking the preliminary planning for next year's overseas visit. No excuses but sincere apologies for my tardiness.

In my absence overseas, Brendan and Bruce have been working feverishly and the results of their planning can be seen in the arrangements for our May meeting as presented in the adjoining column of this Newsletter. Thanks Brendan and Bruce!

With the scheduling of the next meeting being around Memorial Day, I hope the focus of our principal speaker's address will centre on the Civil War veterans, including his Civil War and Revolutionary War ancestors.

I ask that you make a special effort to be at the May meeting and, if possible, bring a friend to hear what looks like being a most interesting perspective the seminal 19th Century American conflict, supported by a series of short presentations by our members. This new format for our meetings stems from the fresh ideas of new Committee members Margaret Neil-Smith, Peter Zacharatus (have I got the spelling right this time?) and Jennifer Kirkby!

Again, thanks to our Committee members for their valued input that does really make it worthwhile for an exciting and stimulating program of our meetings.

John Cook

Our Next Meeting

Brendan O'Connell has received a letter from a descendant of a Civil War veteran in the following terms:

"Dear Brendan,

My Great Grandfather Henry Gunning Plunkett fought in the Civil War 69th Irish Brigade (his great grandfather John Gunning fought in the War of Independence, 43rd Regiment). My wife Rebecca has spoken with Len Traynor and he suggested we might be interested in attending the May Dinner. We certainly would like to attend. Can we register our interest with you or perhaps you may be able to advise the appropriate contact for the dinner.

Sincerely

Bill Power"

We jumped at the opportunity of hearing Bill Power speak and Brendan has organised for him to speak at our next regular meeting as one of the "mini-talks" that were introduced at our last meeting.

The main presentation at this forthcoming meeting, now scheduled for **Monday, May 21**, is the showing of the video and some subsequent discussion of:

The Northern Homefront – Politics and Economy

As is the normal custom for our meetings, the evening will commence with a bistro-style meal from 6pm with the meeting proper to start at 7:30pm. In addition to the presentation by Bill Power, we intend to continue with some other short "show and tell" presentations by members that proved so successful at our last meeting. If you have something you wish to share with other members in this way, please contact Bruce McLennan ('phone (02) 9400 9898 or on his mobile 0416 231 939) before the meeting to ensure you get a time allocation for your presentation.

The venue for this meeting is our normal venue – the **Roseville Memorial RSL Club, Pacific Highway, Roseville**. Parking is available behind the Club premises, with entry via Maclaurin Parade.

It Happened in May

Hatches and Dispatches

May 10, 1863 - Thomas J (Stonewall) Jackson dies at Guinea Station, Virginia, aged 39 years;

May 11, 1864 - JEB Stuart is mortally wounded at the Battle of Yellow Tavern, Virginia;

May 23, 1824 - Ambrose Burnside (USA) is born in Liberty, Indiana;

May 28, 1818 - Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard (CSA) is born in St Bernard, Louisiana;

Command Changes

May 2, 1863 - JEB Stuart assumes command of the Confederate cavalry after "Stonewall" Jackson is mortally wounded at Chancellorsville;

Battles

May 1, 1863 - Battle of Port Gibson, MS, which begins Grant's Vicksburg Campaign;

May 1 - 4, 1863 - Battle of Chancellorsville, that results in stunning Confederate victory for Lee's Army of Northern Virginia;

May 5, 1864 - Battle of the Wilderness begins;

May 8, 1864 - Fighting begins at Spotsylvania Court House, Virginia;

May 12, 1864 - Battle of Bloody Angle, Spotsylvania;

May 12, 1865 - The last land battle between large forces resulting in a Confederate victory takes place at Palmito Ranch, Texas;

May 16, 1863 - Battle of Champion Hill, Mississippi;

May 17, 1863 - Battle of Big Black River Bridge, MS;

May 18, 1863 - Siege of Vicksburg, MS, begins;

May 19, 1863 - Grant launches his first unsuccessful attack against the besieged Vicksburg;

May 23 - 26, 1864 - Battle of North Anna, Virginia;

May 25, 1862 - Jackson attacks the Federals in the First Battle of Winchester, VA and captures the town two days later;

May 27, 1862 - Battle of Slash Church (Hanover Court House);

May 31, 1862 - Battle of Seven Pines (Fair Oaks) where General Joseph Johnston (CSA) is severely wounded.

Other Significant Events

May 4, 1865 - Lincoln is buried in Springfield, Illinois;

May 9, 1865 - The trial of the 8 accused Lincoln assassination conspirators begins;

March 4, 1865 - Lincoln is inaugurated for a second term as President;

May 10, 1865 - Jefferson Davis is captured near Irwinville, Georgia;

May 16, 1861 - Tennessee is officially admitted to the Confederacy

May 20, 1861 - North Carolina becomes the 11th state to join the Confederacy whilst Kentucky issues a proclamation of neutrality;

May 29, 1865 - President Johnson grants amnesty and pardon to all who participated in "the existing rebellion", with a few exceptions.

Famous Last Words...

"... In my latest writing and utterance, I repeat my unmitigated hatred to ... the vile Yankee race."

- Edmund Ruffin, June 17, 1865
prior to his committing suicide.

"Were the thing done over again, I would do as I did. Disappointments have not changed my convictions"

- Jefferson Davis, in his
post-war memoirs

"Death in its silent sure march is fast gathering those whom I have longest loved, so that when he shall knock at my door, I will more willingly follow."

- Robert E Lee, 1869

"Strike the Tent!"

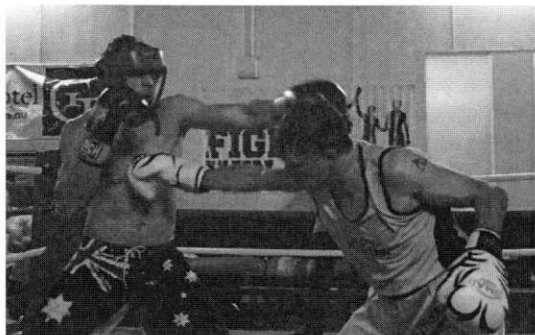
- Lee's last words, October 12, 1870

This publication is the official newsletter of the New South Wales Chapter of the American Civil War Round Table of Australia. All inquiries regarding the Newsletter should be addressed to the Secretary/Treasurer of the Chapter by telephone on 9449 3720 or at PO Box 200, St Ives, NSW, 2075 or to secretary@americancivilwar.asn.au

Congratulations Father Dave!

On Sunday, April 1, Father David Smith, one of the Chapter's long-time members and Parish Priest of Holy Trinity Anglican Church, Dulwich Hill, took to the boxing ring where he boxed 120 continuous three-minute rounds against a myriad of opponents to raise money for the Church's Youth Centre. In doing so, he broke the Guinness World Record for the most number of continuous rounds of boxing and raised over \$20,000 for the youth centre. **(Please note, this is NOT an April Fools Day story!!)**

Father Dave's opponents included Anthony "the Man" Mundine, television personality Andrew Denton, a number of former champion boxers and many friends and admirers of Dave and his work. In the photographs, below, Father Dave can be seen in action, first, punching, jabbing (and slipping) with one of his many opponents and then in a state of some exhaustion during a break between rounds towards the end of his marathon effort:



The vast majority of Father Dave's opponents conducted themselves in the true sporting spirit that characterised the event, although, unfortunately, two of them wanted to "teach him a lesson". One of these, a large "smiling assassin", even tried to get another go at Dave later in the "box-a-thon" by trying to enter again under assumed name! The other opponent, unknown to Dave until after the fight, was, in fact, a woman! She really tried to hurt him and turned out to be a welter-weight champion from Germany. We're told that Dave was more than a little embarrassed when he found out this opponent's gender, particularly as he had given as much as he took in their rounds. Members interested in reading more about this event should access Father Dave's ezine at: <http://www.fatherdave.org/news>.

Congratulations David, on the magnificent effort with both the world record and the large amount of money raised for the Trinity Youth Centre!

Some Quotable Quotes

The following quotes relating to the beginnings of America's Civil War have been gleaned from a number of sources:

"As a nation we began by declaring that all men were created equal. We now practically read it, all men are created equal, except negroes"

Abraham Lincoln, 1855

"A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure permanently, half-slave and half-free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved – I do not expect the house to fall – but I expect it to cease to be divided"

- Abraham Lincoln, opening statement of the Lincoln-Douglas debates 1858

"The time for compromise has now passed. The South is determined to maintain her position and make all who oppose her smell Southern powder and feel Southern steel"

- Confederate President Jefferson Davis
February 16, 1861

"South Carolina is too small for a republic and too large for an insane asylum"

- James L Petigru, on hearing of its secession from the Union

"I am with him"

- Stephen A Douglas, following Lincoln's inaugural address

"If the Union is dissolved and the government disrupted, I shall return to my native state and share the miseries of my people and, save in defense (sic), draw my sword on none"

Robert E Lee, 1861

"War means fighting, and fighting means killing"

Nathan Bedford Forrest

"We will fight you to the death. Better to die a thousand deaths than to submit to live under you"

John Bell Hood, CSA

"The time for war has not yet come, but it will come, and that soon; and when it does come, my advice is to draw the sword and throw away the scabbard"

- Thomas J Jackson to VMI cadets, April 13, 1861

The Battle of Shiloh

By the spring of 1862, Major General Ulysses S. Grant had pushed deep into Confederate territory along the Tennessee River. In early April, he was camped at Pittsburg Landing, near Shiloh, Tennessee, waiting for Don Carlos Buell's Army of the Ohio to meet up with him. On the morning of April 6, Confederate troops based out of nearby Corinth, Mississippi, launched a surprise offensive against Grant's troops, hoping to defeat them before the Buell's army arrived. Grant's men, augmented by the first arrivals of Buell's Army, managed to hold some ground and establish a battle line anchored with artillery. Fighting continued until after dark and by the next morning, the full force of the Ohio had arrived and the Union outnumbered the Confederates by more than 10,000. Eventually, the Southern commanders realised they could not win this battle and fell back to Corinth until another offensive in August.

All told, the fighting at the Battle of Shiloh left more than 16,000 soldiers wounded and more 3,000 dead, and neither federal or Confederate medics were prepared for the carnage. The bullet and bayonet wounds were bad enough on their own, but soldiers of the era were also prone to infections. Wounds contaminated by shrapnel or dirt became warm, moist refuges for bacteria, which could feast on the damaged tissue. After months marching and eating field rations on the battlefield, many soldiers' immune systems were weakened and couldn't fight off infection on their own. Even the army doctors couldn't do much: microorganisms weren't well understood and the germ theory of disease and antibiotics was still a few years away. Many soldiers died from infections that modern medicine would be able to nip in the bud.

Some Soldiers Glowed in the Dark ...

Some of the wounded soldiers at Shiloh sat in the mud for two rainy days and nights waiting for the medics to get around to them. As dusk fell the first night, some of them noticed something very strange: their wounds were glowing, casting a faint light into the darkness of the battlefield.

Even stranger, when the troops were eventually moved to field hospitals, those whose wounds glowed had a better survival rate and had their wounds heal more quickly and cleanly than their "unilluminated" brothers-in-arms. The seemingly protective effect of the mysterious light earned it the nickname "Angel's Glow."

Why Was this So?

In 2001, almost one hundred and forty years after the battle, a seventeen-year-old student, Bill Martin, was visiting the Shiloh battlefield with his family, where he heard about these glowing wounds. His mother was a microbiologist at the USDA Agricultural Research Service who had studied luminescent bacteria that lived in soil, so he questioned her about the phenomenon and whether such bacteria could that have caused the glowing wounds.

The Contemporary Investigation

The student, Bill Martin, Bill Martin and his friend, Jon Curtis, decided to do some research on both the bacteria and the conditions that were present during the Battle of Shiloh. They thought that the bacteria, *Photobacterium luminescens*, which Bill's mother had previously studied, might have something to do with the glowing wounds.

These bacteria live inside parasitic worms called **nematodes** and the two share a strange and inter-related lifecycle. Nematodes hunt down insect larvae in the soil or on plant surfaces, burrow into their bodies, and take up residence in their blood vessels, where they regurgitate the bacteria living inside them. Upon their release, the bacteria, which are bioluminescent and glow a soft blue, begin producing a number of chemicals that kill the insect host and suppress and kill all the other microorganisms already inside it. This leaves the bacteria and their nematode partner to feed, grow and multiply without interruptions. It is this process that might then have been the cause of assisting in the recovery of the wounded soldiers.

Looking at historical records of the battle, Bill and Jon figured out that the weather and soil conditions were right for both *P. luminescens* and their nematode partners to flourish. Their laboratory experiments with the bacteria, however, showed that they couldn't live at human body temperature, making the soldiers' wounds an inhospitable environment. They then realised that the temperature in Tennessee in the spring is very cool. Night-time temperatures in early April would have been low enough for the soldiers, who were out there in the rain for two days, to get hypothermia, thus lowering their body temperature and giving *P. luminescens* a good home.

Based on the evidence for *P. luminescens*'s presence at Shiloh and the reports of the strange glow, the boys concluded that the bacteria, along with the nematodes, got into the soldiers' wounds from the soil. This not only turned their wounds into night-lights, but may have saved their lives. The chemical cocktail that *P. luminescens* uses to clear out its competition probably helped kill off other pathogens that might have infected the soldiers' wounds. Since neither *P. luminescens* nor its associated nematode species are very infectious to humans, they would have soon been cleaned out by the immune system themselves (which is not to say you should be self-medicating with bacteria; *P. luminescens* infections *can* occur, and can result in some nasty ulcers). The soldiers shouldn't have been thanking the angels so much as the microorganisms.

As for Bill Martin and Jon Curtis, their investigation earned them first place in team competition at the 2001 Intel International Science and Engineering Fair.

(Source: Smithsonian Associates eNewsletter, Volume 11, Issue 4, Spring 2012)