

Sumter to Appomattox

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

Patron: Professor the Hon. Bob Carr

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Please visit our website www.americancivilwar.asn.au

A Message from Our Chairman

By now we all know much more about the Corona Virus, also known as COVID-19, and it will now not seem so surprising that we will not be holding the previously scheduled meeting on 6 April 2020. We will consider the advisability of the June meeting closer to the date. We needed to be careful not to contribute to the problem, especially given the number of our members over the age of sixty and/or seventy or eighty. We need to stay at home as much as possible. This is not a time for complacency or bravado. I hope that you agree that our caution is prudent and in the best interests of our members and their families.

We will continue our newsletter compilation and promulgation so that, as members, you can remain engaged with the wider group.

Several comments made to me after the last meeting indicated that people enjoy the camaraderie of our quirky assembly and they enjoyed Rod Cooke's presentation on the Iron Brigade. I also received several favourable comments about the discussion that followed. It is unfortunate that we have to interrupt our gatherings but it will not last forever. I am sure that our next meeting, whenever that might be, will be special in celebration of the retreat of COVID-19.

Dan McIntyre

Our Next Meeting

Monday, 6th April - **Cancelled**

We are hopeful this will start a new series:

My Favourite Brigade.

Also, any contributions to our *Favourite Moments of the Civil War* slot will be welcome. Come along with a short prepared talk on your *Favourite Moment*.

Anyone interested in participating should contact

John Morrison by email
(johnjmorrison@bigpond.com)
or on 0411 197 935.

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 (New South Wales 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

Our Last Meeting

The Iron Brigade

Presented by Rod Cooke



Rod gave a comprehensive and very interesting presentation on the Iron Brigade, ably supported by John Morrison.

The Iron Brigade, one of the most celebrated military organizations of the American Civil War, was composed originally of the 2nd, 6th and 7th Wisconsin and the 19th Indiana and later 24th Michigan. It was the only Western brigade in the Eastern Theatre until 1863. After a number of command changes, the Iron Brigade became the 1st Brigade, 1st Division, 1 Corps in May 1863.

This Brigade was easily identifiable because of its distinctive uniform – Dark blue single-breast frock coat; Light blue trousers; White leggings or gaiters; and Black felt Hardee hat. These became standard uniform.



The Brigade was noted for its iron discipline under a total of 8 Commanders, the most famous of whom was its first Brig. Gen., Rufus King. Rod summarised the qualities of each of these Commanders and, through maps, described the various battles the Brigade took part in. He also explained the various theories regarding how the Brigade earned its name “The Iron Brigade”. This was after battles where the Brigade was tested and where there were a large number of casualties.



One report, from the *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, filed on 22 September, 1862 after South Mountain and Antietam, stated that “... The last terrible battle has reduced this brigade to a mere skeleton ... the 2nd Wisconsin, which but a few weeks since, numbered over nine hundred men, can now muster fifty-nine. This brigade has done some of the hardest and best service. It has been justly termed the Iron Brigade of the West.” At Antietam, on 17 September 1862, the Iron Brigade was commended but lost 342 casualties from the 800 infantry soldiers present.

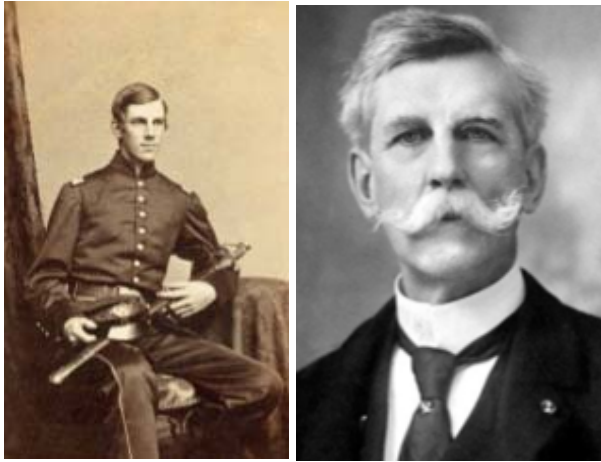
Rod described the Brigade’s actions at Fredericksburg on 13 December 1862, and Chancellorsville, 30 April – 6 May 1863, where the Brigade crossed the Rappahannock River and established a bridgehead under fire.

Using maps, Rod described in detail the Brigade’s actions in Gettysburg 1 – 3 July 1863 and its role in enabling General Meade on Cemetery Ridge and Culp’s Hill and to win the battle. However, this battle was brutal for the Brigade. Of the 1,883 men who marched in, 1,153 were killed, wounded or missing (61% casualties). Of the field officers, 9 of 14 were killed or wounded; the 2nd Wisconsin suffered 77% casualties; 24th Michigan suffered 80% casualties (397 of 496) soldiers. The Battle of Gettysburg was their “last stand”. After this, the Brigade was a merely a shadow of its former self with reinforcements coming from eastern brigades and with Regiments merged. The Brigade did continue and fought at the Wilderness, Spotsylvania, Petersburg and Appomattox.

In all, the Iron Brigade suffered proportionally the most casualties of any brigade in the Civil War.

Civil War Profile

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES



Oliver Wendell HOLMES Jr. (1841 – 1935)

Anyone who has seen the Ken Burns documentary on the Civil War will recall the opening scene of a silent cannon against the setting sun with the voice-over of this famous quote from a Memorial Day speech made by Oliver Wendell Holmes at Harvard University (Holmes' alma mater) long after the war, in 1895:

"We have shared the incommunicable experience of war, we have felt, we still feel, the passion of life to its top. In our youth our hearts were touched with fire."

Holmes spoke from experience. Commissioned in 1861 as a young lieutenant in the 20th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, he saw much action and took part in the Peninsula Campaign, Fredericksburg and the Wilderness and suffered serious wounds that missed killing him by fractions of an inch at the Battle of Ball's Bluff (shot through the chest) and Antietam (shot through the neck) as well as being injured at Chancellorsville and suffering a near-fatal case of dysentery.

Holmes was born to a well-known Boston 'Brahmin' family (the city's wealthy, educated elite with old New England roots). Indeed, his father Oliver Wendell Holmes Snr., the well-known physician (he was Dean of medicine at Harvard) and man of letters, first coined the phrase 'Boston Brahmin'.

Holmes Jr., still a young student in his senior year at Harvard (where he was the class poet known for his eloquence), had put his name down for call-up, if required, by the New England Guard (militia) in early 1861. Holmes was

strongly anti-slavery (the abolitionist Wendell Phillips was his cousin) and he recalled later in life when speaking of his closest class-mates that "We believed that the Union is indissoluble. Many of us, at least, also believed that the conflict was inevitable, and that slavery had lasted long enough".

According to Holmes biographer Sheldon Novick: "Holmes had been a thin and fearful child and his father was amused at the young intellectual's war fever, writing:

'Even our poor 'Brahmins' - ...pallid, under-vitalized, shy, sensitive creatures, whose only birthright is an aptitude for learning – even these poor New England Brahmins of ours...count as full men, if their courage is big enough for the uniform which hangs so loosely about their slender figures'."

Lucky to have survived the war, Holmes returned to Harvard and obtained his law degree in 1866. He was a competent legal practitioner, but an outstanding academic. In 1881 he published a famous legal treatise, '*The Common Law*', widely considered the finest book on the law written by an American. He served for a brief time as a Harvard Professor before being appointed to the Massachusetts Supreme Court in 1883 on which he served for twenty years, the last three as Chief Justice. In 1903, he was appointed to the U. S. Supreme Court by President Theodore Roosevelt and served on the court until his retirement in 1932.

It is clear that his experiences in the Civil War had a significant impact upon Holmes' approach to life and the law. Through his writings and judgments, he was a leader of the Legal Realist (or Pragmatist) movement, which legal scholar Richard Posner describes as 'the most influential school of twentieth century American legal thought and practice'. Holmes wrote that "The life of the law has not been logic; it has been experience." Holmes espoused a form of moral scepticism and opposed natural law doctrines - a significant shift in American jurisprudence. He was a proponent of freedom of speech and he believed that the Constitution was a living document that should generally be interpreted pragmatically to deal with the modern world. This is in contrast to the 'originalist' approach to constitutional interpretation espoused by some members of the court today, an approach which holds that the Constitution should be given the meaning that the original founders understood it to have.

In the 1919 case of *Schenck v US*, Holmes wrote a judgment that has been frequently quoted on the limits of free speech (although the test has

since been re-defined differently in a subsequent case):

"The most stringent protection of free speech would not protect a man falsely shouting fire in a theatre and causing a panic. [...] The question in every case is whether the words used are used in such circumstances and are of such a nature as to create a clear and present danger that they will bring about the substantive evils that Congress has a right to prevent."

Another of Holmes' well-known phrases that he coined in the context of free speech was 'the marketplace of ideas'. Nevertheless, sometimes his views were somewhat Darwinist, as exemplified by this quote of his:

"I rejoice at every dangerous sport which I see pursued. The students at Heidelberg, with their sword-slashed faces, inspire me with sincere respect. I gaze with delight upon our polo-players. If once in a while in our rough riding a neck is broken, I regard it not as a waste, but as a price well paid for the breeding of a race fit for headship and command."

It is perhaps not surprising that Theodore Roosevelt, the archetypical 'man in the arena', found Holmes' views attractive and considered him a suitable appointment to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Holmes was a great dissenter on the court, and many of his dissents later came to be regarded as the correct interpretation of the law. He wrote eloquently and is one of the most cited of judges.

Holmes was happily married to Fanny Dixwell for sixty years, although they had no children. He had a prolific correspondence with numerous famous scholars and intellectuals of the day and with his wide circle of friends, including some flirtatious but platonic correspondences with women, whose company he greatly enjoyed.

On his 91st birthday, Holmes received a surprise visit from newly elected President Franklin D Roosevelt, who politely asked Holmes if he had any advice for him. Holmes replied "Form your battalions and fight, sir."

There is so much more to say about Holmes' fascinating life than we have the space for here. If you are interested to read more see:

G Edward White '*Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes – Law and the Inner Self*' (1993 Oxford University Press); Richard Posner (Ed), '*The Essential Holmes*' (1992 University of Chicago Press); Sheldon Novick, '*Honourable Justice - The Life of Oliver Wendell Holmes*' (2013 Plunkett Lake Press).

With thanks to Dan Howard

Civil War Profile

FOUR LEGGED SOLDIERS,

Horses and Mules during the Civil War

Horses and mules played a very important role in all theatres of war during the years 1861-1865, having no choice in their involvement in the conflict between North and South. Nevertheless they served admirably on all battlefields and shared the same risk of death or wounding along with their two legged comrades. Sadly it is estimated that over a million horses and mules became casualties of that terrible war, falling victim to bullets or shells, disease, starvation and mistreatment.



Gen. Grant with his famous horse Cincinnati

Horses served as officers' mounts, also giving valuable service pulling guns and other artillery pieces, and ambulances, and added to that was the sterling service given with the cavalry, their major roll in warfare.

According to the 1860 U.S. census, there were 6,115,458 horses across the country with the majority in the North, the seceding states possessed of that number 1,698,328. However, the South had the majority of mules - 800,663, compared to 328,290 above the Mason-Dixon line.

During the war the North had in service 278 cavalry regiments, six of regular troops and the balance in the volunteer force. The U.S. was opposed to forming too many mounted units due to the very high cost of outfitting the twelve

companies of troops at about \$300,000 per regiment, [equal to about \$6,000,000 today] a long way from petty cash in the 1860's. The cost of outfitting the various volunteer mounted units was met by the individual states. One can understand the cost involved when at the beginning of hostilities each horse cost the government \$125.00 later rising to \$185.00 by war's end.



A Union artillery battery with its horses

The main breed of horse in the U.S. cavalry was the **Morgan**, a strong sturdy reliable horse, very much like the Whalers serving with our Light Horse regiments.

The manuals of the day clearly defined the physical requirements of each horse

"The horse for service should stand between 15 ½ and 16 hands high, should stand erect on all legs, be strongly built but free in his movements, his shoulders should be strong but not too heavy, his body full but not too long, the sides well rounded but not too long, the limbs solid with rather strong shanks, the feet in good condition, should trot and gallop easily, have an even gait, and not be too skittish".

Geldings between the age of five and seven years were preferred, mares and stallions not considered for obvious reasons. Of course due to the outbreak of war and the high demand for horses along with high their casualty rate these standards were not always met. Due to slick horse traders and some corrupt army purchasing officers, the army received horses that were completely unsuitable.

As each Cavalry horse carried an average weight of over a 100 kilos, short light men 5' 7" (1.7m) in height or less were preferred - there were of course exceptions.

Regulations stated that each horse was to receive a daily ration of fourteen pounds (6.4kg) of hay and twelve pounds (5.4kg) of grain, usually oats, corn or barley. Often due to the

failure of supply trains for any number of reasons, the horses were often short of rations just like the men. The Siege of Chattanooga is a good example when horses died by the score of starvation when no fodder was available.

The demand for horse fodder was immense, the Army of the Potomac alone required four hundred tons a day, a requirement not always available. This noble animal in the service of the Nation suffered terribly in the course of the war. It is estimated that over a million horses and mules died during the four years, from a variety of

reasons. The Army of the Potomac in the winter of 1861-1862 were losing about a thousand horse a month, and in attempt to combat this terrible attrition rate the U.S. Government established a cavalry depot on the edges of Washington DC. At Giesboro [now the site of the Andrews Air Force Base] it had stable facilities for over six thousand horses, where new ones were trained before being sent to the units that required them, along with the sick and wounded ones were healed.

The Confederate cavalry was much different from its Union counterparts. The individual soldier supplied his own horse, which of course had advantages and disadvantages. It meant more to the soldier if his mount was lost through battle or disease, or any other cause, since he had to replace it at his own cost, therefore he was more inclined to care for his four footed comrade. If he couldn't supply a replacement mount he was transferred to the infantry. Finding a replacement horse for one that had been killed, died of wounds or disease became a vexing problem in the South and contributed to the decline of their once magnificent cavalry. By July 1863 the Army of Northern Virginia itself had over six thousand horses not fully fit for campaigning.

Civil War Profile

SALLY LOUISA TOMPKINS 1833-1916

- one of a kind

Sally Louisa Tompkins holds the distinction of being the only female officially commissioned in the Confederate Army. A resident of Richmond, Virginia she was well known pre-war for her sterling work in local charities.



After the first battle of Bull Run on the 21 July 1861, Richmond residents were called upon by the Government to open up their homes to care for the sick and wounded soldiers flooding into the city. Sally answered the call and used the home of her good friend Judge Robinson as her first hospital. It would appear without much previous medical experience she ran the hospital with great efficiency and success. Even though she received many of the worst cases under her care, unlike so many other Confederate hospitals, hers had a very low mortality rate, only seventy three deaths out of nearly fourteen hundred admissions, a remarkable achievement considering the medical and hygiene standards of the day.

On the 9 September 1861 all hospitals caring for wounded and sick soldiers came under Confederate Military control, and rather than lose Sally's valuable services. President Jefferson Davis commissioned her a Captain. Not accepting any pay for her work, she made good use of her rank to make sure the hospital continued its high standard of efficiency.

Even after Richmond surrendered to Union forces in April of 1865 Sally continued her work of nursing soldiers from both sides until the hospital closed on 13 June 1865. With the country at peace she continued her charity work with the local Protestant Episcopal Church until her death in 1916, and she was buried with full military honours. From all accounts she never married.

WHEELS OF WAR.

The six-mule army supply waggon 1861-1865

Developed from farm waggons in the early days of the colonies, improved and modified during the wars of 1812 and 1846-47, the six-mule army supply waggon Model 1858 played a most vital role serving in all armies in every theatre of war during the turbulent years of the Civil War. Without its presence, campaigns would have ground to a halt lacking supplies and materials of war these waggons carried to every battlefield. They were utilized by the thousands, yet despite the valuable service they rendered, history doesn't seem to give them the attention and credit they so richly deserved.

The extensive railways and river systems allowed trains and ships to bring the materials to the closest and safest points to supply the armies. These goods by the thousands of tons were brought to wharfs and railway depots, and it was from these locations the supply waggon came into its own. Light, sturdy and reliable, manufactured in their thousands by various waggon builders across the country, many of which were located in the Philadelphia area. One of the very early suppliers' of army waggons were the Studebacher Brothers who went on to garner world recognition and fame as motor vehicle manufacturers.

The waggon body was 10 feet (3m) long and three feet six inches (1.05m) wide, and the sides two feet (0.6m) high. The body could be removed from the running gear if the transport of longer items were required [e.g. telegraph poles] Traditional colours for the army wagons were light blue bodies, and chocolate coloured wheels and running gear, this along with the white canvas top presented a colourful and picturesque sight on the road and battlefields.

In the early stages of the war these waggons caused confusion and bottlenecks when the army was on the move, as an individual regiment of a thousand men required some twenty five waggons to carry their tents, tent floors, camp furniture, cooking equipment, ammunition and supplies for both animals and men. Commanding Generals soon took steps to stop this misuse of the vehicles, and the following regulation was issued.



Each infantry regiment was allocated six waggon:-

- No.1 waggon carried medical stores and equipment.
- No. 2 waggon carried wall tents, and baggage of Field and Staff officers.
- No. 3 waggon carried the personal baggage of Company Officers
- No. 4 waggon carried the kettles and pans for the ten companies.
- No. 5 & 6 waggons carried ammunition and stores (two days rations for men, and five days rations for animals).

Carrying capacity of these waggons varied greatly, depending on the condition of the mules, waggons, roads, terrain and weather. On a good macadamized road [which was very rare] the load could be as heavy as four thousand pounds (1.8 mt).

To make transportation as least congested as possible these waggons were formed into trains under the command and jurisdiction of an officer. These waggon trains were attached to individual Brigades, Divisions and Corps, and to avoid confusion the individual waggon carried the insignia of its unit or branch of the service to which it was attached and the contents it carried, so the waggons required could be quickly located and indentified. Ammunition waggons had preference on the right of way and were usually placed at the head of these trains.

A waggon and a full team of mules extended for forty feet (12m). With thousands of waggons attached to an army, these trains extended for miles. Union General Irwin MacDowell's operations in the Shenandoah Valley mid-1862, his army was accompanied by two thousand waggons, and General Sherman on his March to the Sea in 1864-65 took with him two and half thousand waggons.

Army supply trains were often prime targets during cavalry raids, for obvious reasons - either to deprive their enemy of much needed supplies, or to acquire the contents for their own forces. If they couldn't be captured they were destroyed. The Confederate cavalry leader General Joe Wheeler on one occasion attacked a Union heavily-laden waggon train as it was not possible to take them with him. They plundered as much as they could carry, shot the mules, and put more than eight hundred waggons to the torch. This is just one example of the thousands of these vehicles that suffered the same fate during the four years. That and the vast numbers that were sold as army surplus at war's end and used for an endless variety of reasons explains why so few original ones survive today.

Army regulations forbade any soldier or group of soldiers riding in supply waggons unless a special order to that effect was issued. In times of emergencies they could be used as ambulances.

At first teamsters were civilians not subject to army discipline, which created numerous problems, but they were later replaced by soldiers or men of African descent many of whom escaped slavery to serve with the Union forces.

Humble as these waggons may have been, and often ignored and unappreciated as they were in the years ahead, their efforts were irreplaceable. They were important sinews of war and without them the armies - both Blue and Grey - would have had their movements paralysed, and the war fought in an entirely different way.

THE ARMY MULE.

Despite having a well-deserved reputation as being stubborn, bad-tempered and possessing unpredictable behaviour, the army mule played a most important part in the campaigns of all the armies during the Civil War and served in all theatres in vast numbers. By the end of the financial year in 1862 the Federal government had already purchased over 83,000 of these hardy animals with many more purchases to follow.

The mule's temperament made it unsuitable for pulling guns in the field artillery or being attached to ambulances as they were known to panic at the sound of exploding shells. On some occasions they were used as a replacement for horses in cavalry operations, and in most cases, they were a failure.

They were, however, more suitable than horses for pulling the army supply waggons or as pack animals because horses were required for field artillery or cavalry operations. Mules were found to be sure-footed, tough and resilient for pulling freight - they could stand the rough terrain and rigours of the service much better than their four-footed cousins.

Just like the soldiers, thousands of mules became casualties of war through enemy action, and thousands of others were declared unfit for service due to starvation - coupled with harsh and injudicious treatment while in the service.

Maybe mules were not the most popular animals in the army, but because of their behaviour and attitude, they were hated and detested by many. Notwithstanding this attitude, their service and performance was admirable under the most trying circumstances and the war could not have been waged successfully without their contribution. They too have often been unappreciated by history.

At war's end, they were deemed surplus to the service needs and were sold off at public auction. We don't know of any monuments to commemorate the Civil War service and sacrifice of the humble army mule. Can you find one?

Social isolation solution

Members staying home during the current pandemic might enjoy this podcast of a reading of Ambrose Bierce's short story '*An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*' to help while away the hours of social isolation!

The link is

<https://listentogenius.com/author.php/195>



Famous 19th Century American author
Ambrose Bierce

KEEP KUPS

A few of our "conversation-starting" Keep Kups" are available for members or guests at \$5 each. Check them out next time we meet.

