



# THE drum roll

Volume 35 339th Regular Meeting  
Number 8 April 7, 2017

## *Ideas on Civil War tactics are quietly changing*

Friday, April 7, 2017, 7:30 p.m.

Arlington Heights Memorial Library  
500 North Dunton Avenue, Arlington Heights, Illinois

### Civil War Tactics



Dave Powell

It was once a truism of Civil War scholarship that the American Civil War was a conflict waged with modern weapons but outmoded tactics; Civil War soldiers still maneuvered and fought using Napoleonic methods designed for battlefields where the effective range of artillery was 1000 yards and of infantry muskets no more than 100 yards. But by 1860, artillery could deliver accurate fire at 2000 yards (a mile or more) and fired much more lethal ammunition, and in theory, the newly introduced rifled-musket's range was anywhere from 500 to 800 yards.

As a result, attackers faced much more difficult odds, casualty rates increased dramatically, and — as conventional wisdom had it — the Civil War emphasized the power of the defense. The burden of the attack was heavier than ever, which is why it took so long and cost so many lives to subdue the Confederacy. That view certainly prevailed among Civil War historians of the Centennial generation, the 1960s and 70s.

Today, much of that conventional wisdom is open to question. Starting in the 1980s, military historians began to challenge the idea that infantry weapons, no matter what their theoretical range might be, were not used much beyond 100 or 200 yards, distances very similar to Napoleonic Era engagement ranges. Moreover, Civil War infantry drill bore only a passing resemblance to Napoleonic drill. Civil War formations were looser, moved much more quickly, and relied far less on massed columns when compared to the heyday of that earlier period, from about 1800 to 1815. Clearly, some sort of evolution had occurred.

Most of those differences in drill came in direct response to advances in weaponry. Military theoreticians, far from ignoring changes in weapons, in fact tried to compensate for them with changes in the way troops fought. As is often the case, theory and practice were not always congruent, but the idea that an older generation of hide-bound military minds simply refused to understand the new generation of weaponry isn't accurate. In fact, European tactical practices changed significantly between 1815 and about 1855 as that new generation of weapons became widely available. Equally important, American military thinkers closely studied these developments and tried to keep pace.

Complicating our understanding of the art of war in the 1860s, the era of the rifled musket proved fleeting. Although rifles had been around for a long time, it took the development of the Minie bullet, with its cleverly designed expanding base, to make rifled muskets as quick to load and easy to use as smoothbores. Such weapons didn't come into widespread use until the mid-1850s. Weapons development didn't slow down, however; breech-loading rifles and metallic cartridges

**The April meeting is back at the Arlington Heights Memorial Library**

were already beginning to appear, and by 1865 they were clearly the weapon of the future. Rifled muskets were the dominant combat arm for less than a decade, outmoded almost before they were fully fielded among the world's armies. Perhaps it is not so surprising, then, that their actual impact has often been misunderstood.

Compounding this lack of comprehension is the fact that never before had Americans waged war in such huge numbers and with so little training or experience. In the earliest period of the war, tactics and formations tended to be rudimentary at best. Both the soldiers and their officers underwent a brutal sort of on-the-job training, a method

of instruction that proved profligate in blood. The armies that waged the war in 1864–65 were not the neophytes of Bull Run, Wilson's Creek, or Shiloh.

On April 7 our own Dave Powell will explain why our modern understanding of Civil War Tactics is undergoing a quiet revolution in scholarship.

If you would like to join us for dinner with Dave Powell at 5:30 p.m. before the meeting on April 7 at Sam's of Arlington restaurant, 1863 West Central Road, Arlington Heights, please contact me at [ccars@comcast.net](mailto:ccars@comcast.net) or (847) 738-4141. — *Charles Carr*

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## Secession Crises in Our Nation's History

By Pat McCormick

**W**e all know that the secession crisis of 1860–1861 led to the Civil War. However, it was far from the first such crisis in our nation's history. On March 3, Harold Knudsen led us through the many, many such threats that percolated prior to 1861.

The United States had barely been established before stresses began tugging at the seams. In fact, the first disunion threat came in the midst of the Revolution: In 1777 a group from the colony of Vermont, led by Ethan Allen, among others, championed the establishment of Vermont as an independent state and in 1780 even threatened to make a separate peace with England, and perhaps annex New Hampshire in the process. (Although this did not happen, note that Vermont was not one of the "original 13.")

Although slavery was always a concern from the nation's founding, the early secession crises had naught to do with the "peculiar institution" and instead were based on opposing concepts of

governmental power. The original Articles of Confederation featured a weak central government. That was favored by some (who eventually became the early Republicans, commonly if inaccurately referred to as the Democratic Republicans), but others favored a stronger national government (the Federalists).

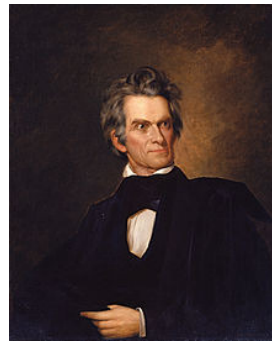
The establishment of a more federalist constitution in 1787 did not eliminate the tensions. For a time it seemed as if there were a crisis every two years or so. In 1794, John Taylor of (where else?) South Carolina, the first to mention secession, was talked down

by Rufus King of New York, among others.

In 1796, the Jay Treaty with England — at a time when the British were refusing to evacuate northwestern U.S. forts and impressing U.S. citizens at sea — caused another crisis to rear its head. Fisher Ames of Massachusetts, a Founding Father who had written the religion clause in the First Amendment, delivered a powerful speech in favor of the treaty, which was the centerpiece of



*Fisher Ames of Massachusetts spoke in favor of the Jay Treaty.*



*John Calhoun supported South Carolina's right to nullify federal legislation.*

another secession threat. And in 1798 the Alien and Sedition Acts threatened to split the country asunder yet again.

Disunion continued to be a concern into the early 19th Century. Many in New England were against the War of 1812 (referred to by some as “Mr. Madison’s War”) and discussed the possibility of secession. It was also at this time that the concept of “nullification” — individual states refusing to obey federal laws — was posited.

Nullification was most famously, and seriously, threatened in 1832 by (once again) South Carolina, now led by John Calhoun. Although President Andrew Jackson was a Southerner and generally against too much federal power — he discontinued the national bank, for example — he was also a firm Unionist, and stood firm against South Carolina.

As the 1800s marched forward, slavery’s importance in disunion crises steadily increased, being of particular importance in the annexation of Texas and the acquisition of territory in the Mexi-

can War (territory that the Wilmot Proviso attempted — and failed — to keep free of slavery).

In roughly the same time span, a non-slavery crisis erupted in the Pacific Northwest, where for a time the Oregon Territory (1843 and 1849–53) and California (1848) considered establishing a Pacific republic. California even briefly considered such a move in 1862, during the Civil War.

The coalescence of governmental power disputes and the slavery crisis created a “perfect storm” that led to the actual break in 1860–61. Tellingly, the Confederate constitution, besides expressly protecting slavery, also prohibited such central-government actions as infrastructure funding and bounties (subsidies) to private citizens.

Since the Civil War the United States has been more stable — though (as Knudsen pointed out) even in our times secession is occasionally threatened. But these threats do not have the power that the myriad of antebellum crises had. On behalf of the round table I would like to thank Harold Knudsen for taking us through them.

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## April Events

**April 7, Second Friday Lecture Series,** Civil War Museum, Kenosha, WI. Dave Powell will speak on Chickamauga, the second-bloodiest battle of the Civil War, noon. Free program is sponsored by the Milwaukee Civil War Roundtable and the Iron Brigade Association. Information on all Civil War Museum programs is available at (262) 653-4140 or [www.thecivilwarmuseum.org](http://www.thecivilwarmuseum.org). This meeting will be held the first Friday this month only.

**April 11, McHenry County Civil War Round Table.** Dave Powell will speak on Tullahoma.

**April 13, Lake County Civil War Round Table.** David Noe will speak on the Pennsylvania Home Guard.

**April 14, Chicago Civil War Round Table.** Diane Smith will speak on Command Conflict in the Overland Campaign.

**April 21, Battlefield Balladeers** will present Songs of the Civil War at 1 p.m., Arlington Heights Memorial Library.

**April 21, Salt Creek Civil War Round Table.** Steve Alban will speak on Lincoln's Political Generals and the Roles They Played.

**April 28, Theatrical Tours of the Fiery Trial,** Civil War Museum, Kenosha, WI. Fiery Trial exhibit comes to life as actors portray seven people behind the stories of the Civil War, 6–9 p.m. Tours begin at 6:30, 7, and 7:30 p.m.; \$35/\$25 Friends of the Museum; for adults 21 and over only. Tickets include exhibit tour and theater performances, as well as appetizers and drink offerings from Twisted Cuisine.

**April 29, Home Front Seminar,** Civil War Museum, Kenosha, WI. The day will be filled with talks pertaining to the social history aspects of the Civil War Period. Speakers include Dr. Jennifer Bridge on Curiosities, Popular Entertainments, and Sectional Identity at the Northwestern Sanitary Fairs; Galin Berrier on the Underground Railroad in the Upper Middle West; Brian Jaeschke on Mackinac Island’s Influence on the Civil War; and Bjorn Skaptason on Rooster Cogburn, Jesse James, and Bloody Bill: Historic Fiction and Fictional History. Check-in is from 8:30–9:30 a.m.; programs begin at 9:30 a.m.; \$50/\$40 Friends of the Museum includes lunch.



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### Appointed Positions

Book Raffle	Charles Banks
Newsletter Editor	Sally Smith

## Book Raffle

The lucky winners at the March book raffle were Bruce Graham, who won *The Last Road North: A Guide to the Gettysburg Campaign, 1863* by Robert Orrison and Dan Welch, and Harold Chinick, who won *Out Flew the Sabres: The Battle of Brandy Station, June 9, 1863* by Eric Wittenberg and Daniel Davis, both donated by Charlie Banks; Bob Kast, who won *Don't Know Much About the Civil War* by Kenneth C. Davis, donated by Dave Noe; Vernon Blessing, who won *General James Longstreet: The Confederacy's Most Modern General* by LTC Harold M. Knudsen, donated by the author; Alfred Kitch, who won *The Cavalry at Gettysburg* by Edward G. Longacre; Janet Linhart, who won *American Scoundrel* by Thomas Keneally; and Mark Strand, who won *The St. Albans Raiders* by Daniel S. Rush and E. Gale Pewitt.

Congratulations to the winners and sincere thanks to the donors.

## April Saturday Discussion

All members and guests are invited to participate in the session to be held at the Barrington Area Library on Saturday, April 15, 2017, from 10:00 a.m. until noon. Pat McCormick will lead the discussion on the second and third days at Gettysburg and Lee's retreat.

These discussions are generally held on the third Saturday of the month from September through June. They are held to generate and foster a free exchange of ideas on Civil War events.

## Eisenhower Library Discussion

The Civil War discussion group at the Eisenhower Library, 4613 North Oketo Avenue, Harwood Heights, meets on the first Saturday of the month from 10:00 until 11:30 a.m. On April 1 the group will discuss Grant's movements toward Vicksburg in 1862.

## Speakers 2016–2017

**May 5.** Daniel Josephs will speak on the Illinois 82nd Regiment.

**June 2.** Wayne Motts will speak on the National Civil War Museum in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

## Women's Civil War Book Club

The Civil War book club for women will meet again in the summer. If you are interested in joining the group, contact Denise Limburg at (847) 382-1022 or [dlimburg@prodigy.net](mailto:dlimburg@prodigy.net) or Mary Banks at [zeller1@comcast.net](mailto:zeller1@comcast.net) or (847) 497-3149.

## To Contribute to the Drum Roll

All members are welcome to contribute to the newsletter. If you have information to share, send it to Sally Smith, 328 Eastern Avenue, Barrington, Illinois 60010; or [drum\\_roll4@juno.com](mailto:drum_roll4@juno.com).

**To learn more about the Northern Illinois Civil War Round Table  
visit our website at [www.northernilcwrt.org](http://www.northernilcwrt.org)**