



THE drum roll

Volume 31 299th Regular Meeting
Number 8 April 5, 2013

Letters from veterans of America's bloodiest day

Friday, April 5, 2013, 7:30 p.m.

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

Antietam in Their Own Words



Tom Clemens

In November 2012 Tom Clemens gave an excellent presentation to the Chicago Civil War Round Table on Ezra Carman, a participant in the Maryland campaign who was appointed in 1894 as the “historical expert” to the Antietam Battlefield Board. Clemens is an expert himself on this subject, having edited and annotated Carman’s manuscript in a two-volume work entitled *The Maryland Campaign of September 1862*.

Aware that we have some overlap in membership between the Chicago and Northern Illinois Round Tables, Tom decided to build upon his earlier topic in addressing us. Here is how Tom describes what he will be talking to us about:

“To assemble and write his authoritative 1800-page manuscript of the pivotal Maryland Campaign, Antietam's first official historian, Ezra Carman, solicited and used hundreds of letters from many veterans of the battle. Carman mostly sought details of troop movement and time of day, but some veterans offered many personal details of their experiences in this climactic battle. These stories, for all their bias and memory flaws, often present wonderful details and human-interest aspects which were not included in Carman's finished work. Listening to some of these memoirs will add a new perspective to the battle; one that most people have no idea existed. Come and hear about Antietam in their own words.”

Thomas G. Clemens earned his doctoral degree at George Mason University, where he studied under Maryland Campaign historian Dr. Joseph L. Harsh.

A teaching professor of history, Clemens has studied the Antietam campaign and the Civil War for more than 30 years. He co-founded the Save Historic Antietam Foundation and serves as a licensed battlefield guide and a National Park Service volunteer interpreter.

Clemens has been featured in numerous Civil War documentaries as well as programs on the History Channel and C-span. A regular contributor to several military and history magazines, he has written many articles on Antietam and Gettysburg.

All those who would like to join us for dinner with Clemens and his wife, Adrienne, at 5:30 p.m. before the meeting on April 5, 2013, at Sam’s of Arlington restaurant, 1863 West Central Road, Arlington Heights, please notify me at (847) 985-1466 or at gaviganthomas@comcast.net no later than Wednesday, April 3. — *Tom Gavigan*

George Buss and Tim Connor will speak at the annual banquet, June 7

The Anatomy of a Murder (of a General)

By Tom DeFranco

On March 1, 2013, Rob Girardi addressed the Northern Illinois Civil War Round Table on the subject of the murder of General William “Bull” Nelson by fellow Union General Jefferson C. Davis. Girardi, a Chicago homicide detective, is uniquely qualified to address an audience on this topic. He also brought a good sense of humor. He imitated the opening sequence of the old TV show, *Dragnet*. I wonder if he carries badge number 714, though. He also gave the audience a handout emulating a homicide report.

On September 29, 1862, the ironically named Davis robbed the Union cause of an aggressive and competent commander, Bull Nelson. The murder was a result of an ongoing verbal altercation between the victim and the killer. Nelson was a former navy officer who commanded the Washington Navy Yard when the Civil War started. President Lincoln assigned Nelson to Kentucky to help to gather recruits to the Federal cause and to assure his loyalty to the Union.

Nelson had a short fuse and had a tendency to be a martinet. He especially disliked men from Indiana (where Davis was from), referring to them as “poor trash” from the hill country of North Carolina, Tennessee, and Kentucky. Needless to say this appellation had a negative impact on the Indiana governor, Oliver Morton, who was very sensitive as to how men from his state were treated while in the ranks. Nelson had already seen action at Shiloh, commanding a division

there. Davis had previously fought at Wilson’s Creek and Pea Ridge.

In late summer of 1862, the Confederates launched offensives into Maryland, northern Mississippi, and Kentucky. The fatal altercation occurred during the Kentucky Campaign.

After a sharp Union defeat at the battle of Richmond, Kentucky, fought at the end of August,

Nelson (who commanded the Federal forces in Louisville) recuperated from a slight wound. Commanding at Cincinnati was General Horatio Wright (future commander of the VI Corps). Wright detailed Davis to work with Nelson. Nelson wanted a numbers report

on a brigade from Davis. Nelson took umbrage with the lack of detail in Davis’s report. Davis was no less agitated with Nelson for making *him* file the report and then demanding answers from a regular army general.

Davis was relieved of command of the Home Guard on September 22. Exactly a week later, the still seething Davis shot Nelson at the Galt Hotel in Louisville in the presence of Governor Morton, Senator John Crittenden of Kentucky, and Henry Villard of the New York *Tribune*, among others. The murder weapon (a Tranter revolver) was given to Davis by Captain Thomas Gibson (a lawyer). At 8:30 a.m., Nelson succumbed from a gunshot wound to the chest. After being arrested, Davis claimed that the murder was not premeditated, but he had had seven days to recover from his rage, weakening that claim.



General William “Bull” Nelson



General Jefferson C. Davis

When the smoke cleared, literally and figuratively, the corps that Bull Nelson would have commanded at Perryville was instead commanded by an inexperienced captain (yes, a captain). The result there was a tactical loss for the Federals (although a strategic success, once Confederate General Braxton Bragg realized that he was up against the bulk of the Army of the Ohio).

The bottom line is that despite Nelson's crude ways as a commanding officer he had every right to expect a timely and complete report from Davis.

On behalf of the Northern Illinois Civil War Round Table, I wish to thank Rob Girardi for a great presentation delivered in a fashion that only he could give.

April Events

April 3, Lake County Civil War Round Table.

Charlie Banks will speak on Nathaniel Banks.

April 7, Lincoln Funeral Train Open House,

Kloke Construction, 1325 Spaulding Road, Elgin. Tour the shop where the Lincoln Funeral Train replica is being built. Hear updates on funeral train progress and upcoming fundraising events, 11 a.m.–4 p.m. More information is available at www.the2015lincolnfunealtrain.com.

April 9, McHenry County Civil War Round Table. Robert Girardi will speak.

April 11, Civil War Museum, Kenosha, WI. Dr. Eric Pullen, professor of history at Carthage College, leads a discussion on the constitutionality of slavery. Free readings provided by Carthage College and the Museum may be picked up at the museum after April 1. Registration not required. Information on all Museum programs is available at (262) 653-4140 or www.thecivilwarmuseum.org.

April 12, Civil War Museum, Kenosha, WI. Panel discussion by Marquette University High School students on the future of Civil War history, 12 noon.

April 12, Chicago Civil War Round Table. John Fitzpatrick will speak on President Lincoln at Gettysburg.

April 12–May 19, Comrades Mine: Emma Edmonds of the Union Army, City Lit Theater, 1020 West Bryn Mawr, Chicago. Play about a woman who served in the Army of the Potomac for 2 years disguised as a man is based on a true story. More information is available at www.citylit.org or (773) 293-3682.

April 19, Salt Creek Civil War Round Table. Don Sender will speak on the Lincoln assassination.

April 20, Civil War Museum, Kenosha, WI. Guy Fraker discusses Abraham Lincoln's service as a

lawyer and how it built his political base and understanding of the Constitution, 2 p.m.

April 21, Civil War Museum, Kenosha, WI.

Wayne Jorgenson presents the stories of over a hundred men of the 1st Minnesota regiment. Copies of Jorgenson's new book, *Every Man Did His Duty*, will be available for purchase.

April 25, Civil War Museum, Kenosha, WI. Dr. Eric Pullen, professor of history at Carthage College, leads a discussion on a defense of the institution of slavery. Readings provided by Carthage College and the Civil War Museum free of charge may be picked up at the museum after April 1. Registration is not required.

April 26–27, Civil War Seminar, Renaissance Convention Center, Schaumburg. Nine free presentations by re-enactors, professors, lawyers, and Civil War buffs are being held in conjunction with the Central States Numismatic Society convention, 10 a.m.–4 p.m. each day. More information is available at www.centralstates.info or (765) 664-6520.

April 28, Civil War Museum, Kenosha, WI.

George Buss's first-person portrayal shows how President Abraham Lincoln met the political and constitutional challenges of secession, slavery, and war-time civil liberties, 1 p.m.

Book Discussion Group

The Civil War book discussion group at the Eisenhower Library, 4613 North Oketo Avenue (just south of Lawrence Avenue), Harwood Heights, meets on the first Saturday of the month from 10 until 11:30 a.m. The book for April 6, 2013, is *Shiloh and the Western Campaign of 1862* by O. E. Cunningham. The book the group will read for May is *Chancellorsville* by Stephen W. Sears.



2012–2013 Officers and Trustees

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Appointed Positions

Book Raffle	Charles Banks
Newsletter Editor	Sally Smith

New Member Orientation

All new members of the Northern Illinois Civil War Round Table are invited to attend a short orientation meeting to be held before the monthly Saturday discussion on April 20, 2013, from 9–10 a.m. at the Hoffman Estates Community Bank. Members of the executive committee will be available to answer questions and provide insights into the organization. All who have joined the NICWRT within the past several years are welcome and encouraged to attend. Those who have not previously attended the Saturday discussions, will have an opportunity to do so by staying on from 10 till 12 and getting a taste of this very important aspect of the organization. There will be door prizes for new members attending.

2012-2013 Speakers

May 3. Harold Knudsen will speak on the Chattanooga Campaign of 1863: The Lost Victory.

June 7. George Buss and Tim Connor will appear as Lincoln and Douglas.

March Raffle

The March raffle winners were Tom Jones, who won *Shenandoah 1862* by Peter Cozzens, Jeff Johnson, who won *The Confederacy's Last Hurrah* by Wiley Sword, and Dave Powell, who won *Bloody Roads South* by Noah Andre Trudeau, all donated by Wayne Rhine; Jan Rasmussen, who won *Fields of Glory* by Jim Miles, donated by Madeleine Brennan; Jerry Allen, who won *The Blue and the Gray* by Henry Steele Commager; and Tom DeFranco, who won *The American Heritage Century Collection of Civil War Art* edited by Stephen W. Sears.

Congratulations to the winners and sincere thanks to the donors. If you would like to donate Civil War-related books or items, please contact Charlie Banks.

April Saturday Discussion

All members and guests are invited to participate in the session to be held at the Hoffman Estates Community Bank, 1375 Palatine Road, Hoffman Estates, on April 20 from 10:00 a.m. until noon. The bank is on the south side of Palatine Road between Roselle Road and Barrington Road. Attendees are asked to park in the adjacent lot rather than in spaces provided for bank customers.

The discussion of the Vicksburg campaign will be led by second vice president Dave Powell. 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 events that transpired during the Civil War.

Women's Civil War Book Club

The next book for the Civil War book club for women is *The Red Badge of Courage* by Stephen Crane. The next meeting of the group is scheduled for Saturday, June 15, at 2 p.m. at the home of Ellen Allen, 755 Fox Trail Terrace, Cary. If you are interested in joining the group, please contact Denise Limburg at dlimburg@prodigy.net or (847) 382-1022, or Mary Banks at (847) 497-3149 or zeller1@comcast.net.

To learn more about this Round Table call Tom DeFranco at (708) 456-2251 or visit our website at www.northernilcwrt.org