



THE drum roll

396th Regular Meeting Volume 40 Number 8 Apr. 7, 2023



The April meeting will be on ZOOM only at 7:00 P.M. on Friday, April 7, 2023.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND THE COMMON SOLDIER

Few people have been more thoroughly discussed and evaluated than our 16th President, Abraham Lincoln. One aspect that is less often considered is the President's role as Commander in Chief of the Army; more specifically, his relationship with the soldiers under his command. On March 3, Robert Girardi explored this relationship.

Girardi began by noting that most of our Presidents have had some military experience, some of the more notable examples (as far as their military service) being Washington, Jackson, William Henry Harrison, Taylor, Grant, Teddy Roosevelt, and Eisenhower. Compared to these men, Lincoln's brief participation in the Black Hawk War pales to insignificance. Nonetheless, Lincoln exhibited an ability to command the respect of even rough-hewn Western volunteers; they respected and, in most cases, even revered the future Commander-in-Chief. In

Congress during the Mexican War, although he publicly opposed the war, Lincoln voted for military appropriations intended to support the troops.

His experience with, and understanding of, the common soldier quickly became important when the Civil War began. The Regular U.S. Army was only about 16,000 strong in April 1861; Lincoln, who had traveled (under guard) through hostile territory to reach Washington for his inauguration in March, called for 75,000 volunteers to put down the rebellion – then had to sweat out the early days of the conflict as the new troops slowly trickled in. Early on, 50 to 75 soldiers – mainly War of 1812 veterans – slept in the White House itself as guards. When the earliest regiments from Massachusetts and New York arrived, Lincoln shook hands with every single man.

In general, Lincoln met with far more Eastern than Western troops, since he never got a chance to travel very far from Washington during the war. (One exception was the 8th Illinois Cavalry, whom Lincoln considered a big Abolition regiment since it was composed primarily of anti-slavery men.) Regardless of state origin, the President showed a genuine interest in the individual soldiers whom he met, inquiring

of them their names, towns of origin, and other personal details. He made no distinction between enlisted men and officers, and often even bowed to the men as a sign of great respect.

The soldiers repaid Lincoln's sincere regard in kind. Although some considered the ungainly Westerner to be "homely as a mud fence," they nonetheless respected, admired, and even loved their Commander-in-Chief. As Girardi pointed out, these sentiments were not anecdotal or sporadic in nature; they were laid out in thousands upon thousands of letters and other correspondence. Among the more commonly expressed terms were "Old Abe", "Honest Abe", and "Father Abraham;" this latter inspired the popular wartime song, "We Are Coming, Father Abraham." And while the soldiers' love for George McClellan was legendary (at least in the Eastern Theater), Little Mac still played second fiddle to Old Abe – in the 1864 Presidential election, the soldier vote was overwhelmingly in favor of Lincoln.

The President showed his concern for the fighting men in other ways as well. He took a keen interest in new weaponry, even testing it himself when he had the chance. Lincoln also showed a great deal of mercy in soldier discipline issues (Girardi related that Lincoln greatly annoyed Attorney General Edward Bates with reversals of Bates' decisions.) In particular, the President commuted death sentences in cases of desertion. He theorized that second chances made better soldiers; he also blamed "wily agitators" like Clement Vallandigham for encouraging desertion, and suggested that men who ran from battle suffered from "cowardly legs" (as opposed to cowardly heads). He declared at least two general amnesties over the course of the war, allowing deserters to return to the fold without punishment. Overall, only 276 Union soldiers were executed.

Another way Lincoln demonstrated his regard for the fighting man was the frequency with which he visited hospitals, both in Washington and in the field. He even – possibly especially – visited wounded and sick Confederate prisoners. As always, he inquired into the details of the individual soldiers' lives, showing genuine interest. He also took the time, whenever possible, to speak to regiments both newly arrived in service and those departing when their time was up.

Perhaps less well known is that the Commander in Chief actively commanded troops in the field. During the Peninsula Campaign of 1862, frustrated with McClellan's slowness to seize Norfolk Navy Yard,

Lincoln (along with Secretary of war Stanton and Secretary of the Treasury Chase) commanded both men and ships in an operation that seized Norfolk, Portsmouth, and the Gosport Navy Yard. Although not coming under fire during these maneuvers, Lincoln more famously saw live combat at Fort Stevens in July 1864, watching from a parapet as bullets pinged around him. (Legend has it that a Union officer told his President to "get down, you damn fool!") Lincoln also visited Petersburg and Richmond in the wake of fighting, entering the Confederate capital shortly after it fell, with but a small guard of sailors accompanying him.

Lincoln's regard for the fighting man is perhaps best summed up in his Second Inaugural, in this phrase quoted by Girardi: "to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan." This man who was never a general, and barely had a military career at all, nonetheless had an uncommonly strong bond with the soldiers and sailors under his command. On behalf of the Round Table I thank Rob Girardi for the illustration of the depths of this bond.

Pat McCormick

From our speaker, Michael Wynne, coming up on Friday, April 7, 2023:

Here is the book cover intro to my book:

Often Andersonville Prison in Andersonville, Georgia during the Civil War is called the worst prison of the United States. That may be technically true, but Andersonville then was part of the Southern Confederate States, therefore not a "U.S." prison. But Rock Island Barracks Prison was always a U. S. Military Prison and it was definitely the worst U. S. Prison in the history of the United States.

This is not meant to be a formal history of the Rock Island Barracks Prison. The U. S. Army, Armament, Munitions and Chemical Command, Rock Island, Illinois compiled an "official" history, at least from the perspective of the creation of the prison and its' hierarchy. But this account of the prison by two prisoners, (Captain) John Boardman and Corporal Edward Fehrenbach, is the true documentary history of the prison from the perspective of the inhabitants, the Prisoners of War themselves. The reader will find this story, as well as the personal lives of Boardman and Fehrenbach to be quite unbelievable, riveting and overwhelming to read. These never before published accounts of what *really happened* at Rock Island Barracks Prison will become engrained in the reader's mind for all time.

About Michael Wynne:

Michael Wynne is a renowned historian on Southern and Louisiana history and culture. A preservationist for over a half century, Wynne has collected and preserved more stories, documents, letters, and pictures on our 19th and early 20th century history than probably anyone around. He will continue his life of protecting and preserving our mutual history through his speaking engagements, teachings, articles, and books. He lives in Alexandria, Louisiana.

Michael Wynne has been very active in historical research and preservation since the mid 60's. Over the decades, he has served on seven Gubernatorial Commissions related to history, including serving as both the Vice Chairman of the Louisiana Statehood Bicentennial Commission and for the Louisiana Commemorative Quarter Commission. On April 30, 2012, Michael was selected by the governor to speak before a joint session of the entire Louisiana State Legislature about the 200th anniversary of our statehood.

He has also served on numerous museum and historical preservation boards locally and around the South and frequently appears on national and local television and other media sources related to history. He is the author of over 40 books of history on mostly Louisiana history and is the President of the Cenla Author's Club. Michael is also the author of two widely read columns in *CENLA FOCUS* magazine, one on history and preservation and the other profiling Louisiana authors as well as columns in other magazines. He has received many honors over the decades, both for his former occupation in law enforcement of 38 years, as well as for his historic preservation activities, including a special award from the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities. He also frequently donates his skills appraising antiques for fund raising activities for various charitable organizations as well as helping authors write, publish and promote their books. Most recently, he has received national attention on a project documenting lynching in central Louisiana.

Here is the link to my 2 Civil War books, the first of which I wrote on the Rock Island Barracks story:

- **"Rats, Mice and Dogs Were Soon Devoured..."**
The True Very Personal Story of our Nation's
Worst Military Prison- Rock Island Barracks"

https://www.amazon.com/Rats-Mice-Dogs-Were-Devoured/dp/B09TR6SM6P/ref=sr_1_6?crid=WZVCCFIOV6UA&keywords=%22michael+d.+wynne%22&qid=1662309775&s=books&sprefix=michael+d.+wynne+%2Cstripbooks%2C132&sr=1-2

Speaker lineup:

- Sept. 9: Laurie Schiller. The 29th USCT at the Crater
- Oct. 7: Jerry Allen. 8th Wisconsin
- Nov. 4: Phil Angelo. Morgan's Raid
- Dec. 2: Dave Powell. Tullahoma
- Jan. 6: Pat McCormick. North Anna
- Feb. 3: Mary Abroe. Civil War Centennial, Rhetoric, Reality, and the Bounds Of Selective Memory
- Mar. 3: Rob Girardi. TBA
- April 7: Michael Wynne. The Real Story of The Rock Island POW Camp. This Program will be on ZOOM.
- May 5: Wayne Rhine. The Kersage
- June 2: Banquet. David Zarefsky. The Strategy of Lincoln's First Inaugural Address

At the Kenosha Civil War Museum until June 4, 2023, the exhibition "Loyal to the Union: Ohio in the Civil War" is being presented. On April 8, 2023, at 1:30 PM, there will be a presentation on Johnson's Island Prison Uncovered: An Archaeological Exploration of a Civil War Prison in Lake Erie.

On April 14, 2023, Richard Holloway will speak to the Chicago CWRT on the Red River Campaign. Their annual Battlefield Tour will visit the Red River Campaign. Their meeting is at the Holiday Inn Oak Brook, 17W 350 22nd St. Oakbrook Terrace. Cocktails at 5:30 PM, dinner at 6:30 PM. Check their website for details: chicagocwrt.org

I have published a list of books for sale. Anyone interested in these can contact me, Jerry Rodosky.

Please email Laurie or Wayne if you are interested in volunteering for an open position. Also, please think membership! We need new people!

We have two new members: Dave Dailey from Flossmoor, IL and Tony Brcich from Arlington Heights, IL. Thank you, Wayne.



2022-23 Officers and Trustees

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Appointed Positions

Book Raffle	Vacant
Newsletter Editor	Jerry Rodosky gjirodosky@gmail.com

Upcoming Events

As a note the board has decided not to collect dues for the 2022-23 year.