



# THE drum roll

401st Regular Meeting Volume 41 Number 3 November 3, 2023



## PLEASE NOTE!!!!

The November meeting will be in person at the Arlington Hts. Historical Society on Friday, November 3, 2023, and on ZOOM, at 7:00 P.M. The Arlington Hts. Museum is located at 110 W. Fremont St. in Arlington Hts. This is across the street from the Library, just west.

Our speaker for the November meeting is David A. Powell. You won't want to miss Dave's talk. He is probably the country's foremost authority on the Battle of Chickamauga and the battles around Chattanooga.

### *The Impulse of Victory: Grant at Chattanooga*

Though Major General Ulysses S. Grant's tremendous victory at Vicksburg made him a household name in the North, for several months after that success, Grant languished in Mississippi. The War Department seemed unable to assign a new mission to Grant and his army. Then, in September, crisis erupted anew when William Rosecrans was defeated at Chickamauga and forced to retreat to Chattanooga, and President Lincoln turned to Grant to redeem

Union fortunes. The Battles for Chattanooga, and Grant's impressive successes there, would within months elevate him to command the entire Federal war effort.

### Author Biography:

David A. Powell is a graduate of the Virginia Military Institute (1983) with a BA in history. He has published numerous articles in various magazines, and more than fifteen historical simulations of different battles. For many years David's focus has been on the epic battle of Chickamauga, and he is nationally recognized for his tours of that important battlefield and for publishing six books on the campaign, including *The Chickamauga Campaign* Trilogy, completed in 2016. More recently, Dave has published a book on the battle of New Market, co-authored *The Tullahoma Campaign* with renowned historian Eric Wittenberg, and published *The Impulse of Victory: Ulysses S. Grant at Chattanooga*. Both the latter two books appeared in 2020. Future projects include a multi-volume examination of the

Atlanta Campaign, the first of which should appear in 2024.

David, his wife Anne, and their three bloodhounds live and work in the northwest suburbs of Chicago, Illinois. He is retired and writes full-time.

October recap.

## NEWSPAPERS AND MILITARY INTELLIGENCE

During World War II, the famous slogan “Loose Lips Sink Ships” reminded the American public that incautious talk about impending ship sailings and other such tidbits could compromise the security of military moves. On October 6, Bruce Allardice revealed that the “loose lips” of 1861-65 were most prominent in newspapers.

Allardice presented military intelligence as a jigsaw puzzle, in which the object is to complete the picture – without knowing beforehand what it should look like, with many of the pieces missing, and with pieces from other puzzles thrown in. Spies have the reputation of being a key ingredient in the mix, but he pointed out that in fact they tend to be worth little. Part of the problem is timeliness: by the time a spy’s information reaches the authority which could benefit from it, said information might be out of date or already discovered through other channels. Allardice also noted that, often, knowing where the enemy isn’t can be at least as important as knowing where he is. Orders of battle can also be key pieces of information.

These factors converged in the single most “leaky” aspect of Civil War information security: newspapers. There was nothing new in this (and for that matter, the problem continued long after the war, with Allardice citing a World War Two newspaper report revealing that the U.S. had broken Japanese military codes). Most prominent among pre-Civil War examples was the Mexican War, in which newspapers routinely reported troop movements, orders of battle, and strengths. (The goal of the papers was to sell their product, and if the military was making no effort to conceal this information, why should the newsmen?) Here is where the concept of timeliness was a key; by the time this information was disseminated to the public by the papers, read by Mexican operatives in the States, and relayed to Mexican authorities, it was months old and essentially worthless.

But during the Mexican War, a new technology came to the fore that was too late to impact that conflict, but would be a major part of the next one: the telegraph. Now, instead of weeks or months to transmit information made public through newspapers, it could be disseminated with lightning speed. Instead of months, information published in Northern newspapers could be in the hands of Confederate authorities in one or two days. Northern newspapers would prove to be the single most important intelligence source for the Confederacy – and vice versa.

Allardice used as an example an early war expedition to the North Carolina coast, under the command of Ambrose Burnside. One of his slides was an item in the New York Herald of November 28, 1861, listing the officers (down to company level) of his nascent expeditionary force. This was a wealth of information for the enemy; the numbers of brigades, regiments, and companies (not to mention artillery pieces) was an excellent way to estimate the strength of the enemy force. The Herald was hardly alone in publicizing this intelligence. Articles appeared in Harper’s Weekly, the Washington DC Star, and a Lowell, Massachusetts paper, among others. (In this specific case, fortunately for the Union, the Rebels were unable to successfully counter the move, despite the detailed info).

Naturally, Confederate newspapers were just as bad. On both sides, sometimes brief bios of key officers would be included, which could indicate the capabilities of the individuals involved. And there would often be specifics of movements – dates of departure or arrival at specific locations, probable destinations, etc. Newspapers were less likely to know the specific intentions of operations; this was more along the lines of guesswork, albeit sometimes educated guesswork. And there was one saving grace in all this: the notorious unreliability of newspapers. As examples, sample stories from 1863 and 1864 papers proclaimed the deaths of U.S. Grant (twice), Robert E. Lee, and both Presidents. (One northern paper joked that Jefferson Davis had died 87 times during the war, 12 of those by his own hand.)

Nonetheless, as the war progressed, the need for tighter security was recognized. In 1863, Joseph Hooker established the first modern intelligence service, in the Army of the Potomac, led by George Sharpe. This unit collated information from newspapers, Confederate POWs, and spy reports in an

organized fashion. Consequently, during the Gettysburg campaign the army had detailed knowledge of the Army of Northern Virginia's approximate strength and order of battle. And the other side of the coin – revealing details of moves in newspapers – was also tightened up. When the Union moved the 11th and 12th Corps of the Army of the Potomac to Tennessee in fall 1863 in response to the crisis at Chattanooga, it was not reported to the public. In his research into wartime newspapers, Allardice found one mention of these troops on the move: an Indianapolis newspaper noted that the 26th Wisconsin had passed through town, and it was known to be a Potomac regiment. But no context was known. As far as anyone knew, the regiment could have been headed home on furlough. However, such later-war caution was not universal; in fall 1864, Jefferson Davis himself declared in a public speech that John Bell Hood's Army of Tennessee would soon be invading the state whose name they bore. Regardless, what was incredibly lax security in 1861, with no organized doctrine, was tightened up as the conflict progressed.

On behalf of the Round Table, I would like to thank Bruce Allardice for his illuminating exploration of the 1860's "loose lips."

Pat McCormick

## Upcoming Events

We are exploring moving our third Saturday discussion back to the Barrington Library. Stay tuned for that. On another note, about the Saturday discussions, we have just completed a series following the War from the Carolinas up to Gettysburg. We spent three sessions on the three days of Gettysburg. On November 18, we will be moving with the War to Bristoe Station. These discussions are led by Pat McCormick and participants are encouraged to break in anytime with relevant questions or comments. Attendance at the Saturday session has been dwindling, so I am encouraging you to attend. It would be sad to drop these free for all discussions, and Pat is very good and welcoming.

### Speaker lineup

Sept. 1, 2023: Jerry Allen: Old Abe the War Eagle  
 Oct. 6, 2023: Bruce Allardice: "Loose Lips"--  
 Military Secrecy During the Civil War  
 Nov. 3, 2023 Dave Powell, Grant at Chattanooga  
 Dec. 1,, 2023: Rob Girardi TBA  
 Jan.5, 2024: Larry Hewitt Port Hudson  
 Feb. 2, 2024: Dennis Doyle TBA  
 Mar. 1, 2024: Steve Alban: The Election of 1860  
 Apr. 5, 2024: Leslie Goddard TBA  
 May 3, 2024: Jon Sebastian TBA  
 June 7, 2024: Diana Dretske: The 96<sup>th</sup> Illinois



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### Appointed Positions

Newsletter Editor	Jerry Rodosky gjrodosky@gmail.com 847-420-1639
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At this time, we are not charging dues for the 2023-2024 year. This makes it a great time to invite new prospective members!

Join Zoom Meeting on Friday, Nov. 3, 2023, at 7 PM

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81433758155?pwd=S1FqVjJ1WmZsTTd1VIJNRCtLcjJLdz09>

Please include the link to our website: <http://www.northernilcwr.org/>

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