



THE drum roll

Volume 36 343d Regular Meeting
Number 2 October 6, 2017

Scandals, cost cutting, training restraints, more

Friday, October 6, 2017, 7:30 p.m.

Arlington Heights Historical Museum
110 West Fremont Street, Arlington Heights, Illinois

Untold Facts of the Custer Debacle



Don Sender

On June 27, 1876, the nation was stunned by telegraph reports from Fort Lincoln, Nebraska Territory, that Civil War hero Lt. Colonel George Armstrong Custer and a large part of his vaunted Seventh United States Cavalry had been massacred by renegade Indians somewhere west of the Mississippi River in Wyoming Territory.

Theories abounded, fed by the newspapermen of the day, suggesting in one tale that Custer had been outwitted by Sitting Bull because Sitting Bull had attended West Point incognito and was thoroughly grounded in infantry tactics. Reservation Indians and captives were thoroughly interrogated but, wary of being killed or punished severely, denied their participation or said very little about their role in the fight.

For many years, various writers blamed Custer for recklessness, bad judgment, or bravado for his defeat, feeding on the derogatory ravings of a single author who seemed to delight in twisting the knife in Custer, even questioning his Civil War record.

Others attacked Major Reno and Captain Benteen, who, it was charged, “failed to support Custer” when the Indians surrounded him. Reno insisted on a military court-martial to clear his name and furnished copious amounts of hard liquor and cigars to the officers and enlisted men who waited at one of Chicago’s better hotels to testify. All generally agreed that Custer was responsible for the debacle and that the surviving officers and men were heroic in their efforts to save what could be saved of the situation while they waited for the relief column to arrive.

As time passed, Custer’s fate continued to interest anyone who had a new idea to propose and a desire to sell a book. Few invested time in actual research; fewer had any military experience to draw from to form a background to interpret the event.

On October 6, Donald Sender will cover Custer’s Civil War record, post-war scandals regarding the Indian Bureau, the composition of the army, bureaucratic cost cutting that caused problems with the cavalry’s weapons, and training restraints, as well as officers’ jealousies, attitudes, and actions in the field that complicated the mission and almost destroyed the 7th Cavalry.

If you would like to join us for dinner with Don Sender at Sam’s of Arlington restaurant, 1863 West Central Road, Arlington Heights, at 5:30 p.m. before the meeting on October 6, please contact me at kberlant@comcast.net or (847) 506-1807 by Wednesday, October 4. — *Wayne Rhine*

Please note change in location for October meeting

From the Rock to the Sledge

By Pat McCormick

On Friday, September 1, 2017, the round table was graced with the presence of none other than Major General George H. Thomas (in the person of our own Jerry Allen).

After being awakened from one of his customary snoozes, General Thomas led us through the portion of his career that bestowed upon him two classic nicknames. He began with an overview of the Tullahoma Campaign in the summer 1863, orchestrated by General William Rosecrans. It was a masterpiece of maneuver that, despite heavy rain, managed to take the rough terrain of middle Tennessee's Highland Rim and force Confederate General Braxton Bragg's pullback all the way to Chattanooga. Yet it did not garner a great deal of notice, then or now, perhaps due to the comparative lack of casualties inflicted on the Rebels: roughly 2,000 as opposed to 28,000 at Gettysburg and 32,000 at Vicksburg, both of which ended about the same time as Tullahoma.

He then introduced us to his fellow corps commanders in the army: besides his own XIV Corps, the XX Corps was under General Alex McCook, the XXI under General Thomas Crittenden, and the reserve corps led by General Gordon "The Count" Granger. From there, the general took us through the late August crossing of both the Tennessee River southwest of Chattanooga and Lookout Mountain (by his XIV Corps and McCook's XX Corps, while Crittenden's XXI and Wilder's mounted infantry feinted upstream of the city). At this point he described his division commanders: Generals Absalom Baird, James Negley, John Brannan, and Joseph Reynolds. Thomas described the Union overconfidence that led to near disaster when Negley's division was almost cut off and destroyed in McLemore's Cove on September 11. Now the spread-out army had to gather quickly!

As Thomas's corps marched north on Lafayette Road the night of September 18–19, the general himself got about an hour's sleep on a blanket

before the battle of Chickamauga got into full swing. Bragg's intention to turn the left of Rosecrans's army, held by Thomas, became clear, and Thomas realized the left was the crucial flank. At the end of September 19, XIV Corps (with additions from the other corps) held a salient at Kelly Field and spent the night building breastworks, while Rosecrans summoned his commanders for a council. The general recalled how he cat-napped through the meeting, awakening periodically to recommend strengthening the left.

September 20 was the decisive day at Chickamauga. Thomas described the heavy attacks on his flank in the morning and at midday, his calls for reinforcement, and a near-miss when a Rebel shell hit near him. Then suddenly the Union right and center were gone (Thomas later learned the full details from his aide, "Captain Sanger Wikipedia") and it was up to him to save the day. This he did, at one point personally halting two retreating

regiments and receiving timely help from General James Steedman's division of Granger's corps, whose approach kicked up enough dust that Thomas was not sure at first whether Steedman was friend or foe. Thomas held until dusk, then reached Chattanooga safely, his stand having saved the army. For this he earned the nickname "Rock of Chickamauga," the moniker first appearing in *Harper's Weekly* on October 10. (Thomas said he much preferred that nickname to another of his, "Old Slow Trot.")

The general then led us through the fighting at Chattanooga and the Atlanta Campaign, then his being sent to Nashville to head off General John Bell Hood's threat to middle Tennessee in November 1864. Arriving to find a garrison of perhaps 4,000 men, Thomas gradually received reinforcements from as far away as Missouri and Georgia, including two corps under General John Schofield that bloodied Hood at Franklin before reaching Nashville December 1. By the next day,



General George H. Thomas led the XIV corps at Chickamauga.

general-in-chief U.S. Grant was growing impatient, bombarding Thomas with messages to attack. (Thomas's ambitious subordinate Schofield was telling Thomas he would sustain him, while simultaneously telling Grant that Thomas was slow.) Then, when Thomas was ready to attack, a winter storm hit and delayed his attack another 5 days, by which time Grant had sent General John Logan to take over, then decided to come himself.

As the general then related, the weather finally broke, and he attacked Hood on December 15, collapsing his right flank and sending him in retreat to a shorter line a bit farther south. Thomas repeated the next day, using the same plan and

completely routing Hood's army. Logan thus halted his journey, and Thomas's job was safe, though he was left in what became a backwater for the remainder of the conflict.

An interesting sidelight was Thomas's shifting attitude toward black soldiers. Although he had a poor opinion of them prior to Nashville, the hard fighting of U.S. Colored Troops (part of the command under Steedman) turned his view of them 180 degrees. The smashing of Hood gave Thomas a new nickname, "The Sledge of Nashville."

On behalf of the round table I would like to thank George Thomas/Jerry Allen for an engrossing trip from the Rock to the Sledge.

November Events

October 3, Civil War Museum, Kenosha, WI. Lance Herdegen will present a workshop on the Iron Brigade at Fredericksburg and how the area altered the history of the Brigade, 6:30–8:30 p.m., \$15/\$10 Friends of the Museum. Information on Civil War Museum programs is available at (262) 653-4140 or www.thecivilwarmuseum.org.

October 10, McHenry County Civil War Round Table. Jerry Allen will speak on Hotbed of Secession: Wisconsin.

October 11, Civil War Museum, Kenosha, WI. Rob Girardi will present a workshop on the Changing Memory of the Civil War, 6:30–8:30 p.m., \$20/\$15 Friends of the Museum.

October 13, Second Friday Lecture Series, Civil War Museum, Kenosha, WI. Tom Staats will present a program on the history of the American flag with images of flags from his own collection, noon. Free program is sponsored by the Milwaukee Civil War Roundtable and the Iron Brigade Association.

October 13, Chicago Civil War Round Table. David Powell will speak on the Chickamauga campaign.

October 18, Civil War Museum, Kenosha, WI. Kevin Levin will present a free program on the history of Confederate memorials in America at 7 p.m.

October 20, Salt Creek Civil War Round Table. Bruce Allardice will speak on Sherman's March to the Sea: War Crime or Military Necessity?

October Saturday Discussion

All members and guests are invited to participate in the session to be held at the Barrington Area Library on Saturday, October 28, 2017, from 10:00 a.m. until noon. Please note the change from the usual date. The discussion will cover the Bristoe Station and Mine Run campaigns of 1863.

These discussions are generally held on the third Saturday of the month from October 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 October 7 the group will discuss the beginning of the Chickamauga campaign.

Women's Civil War Book Club

The Civil War book club for women will meet at 2 p.m., on November 26 at the home of Denise Limburg. The book to be discussed is *Chain of Thunder* by Jeff Shaara. Anyone interested in joining the group should contact Denise Limburg at (847) 382-1022 or dlimburg@prodigy.net or Mary Banks at zeller1@comcast.net or (847) 497-3149.



2017–18 Officers and Trustees

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Book Raffle	Charles Banks
Newsletter Editor	Sally Smith

September Raffle

The lucky winners at the September raffle were Frank Crawford, who won *The Battle in the Bayou Country* by Morris Raphael; Alfred Kitch, who won *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South* by Drew Gilpin Faust; Bill Werst, who won *Those 163 Days: A Southern Account of Sherman's March from Atlanta to Raleigh* by John M. Gibson; Janet Linhart, who won *The Siege of Washington: The Untold Story of the Twelve Days That Shook the Union* by John Lockwood and Charles Lockwood; Mark Schmitz, who won *History of the 90th Ohio Volunteer Infantry Regiment*, Mary Banks, who won *Flight into Oblivion: A Novel* by A. J. Hanna; and Bruce Allardice, who won *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* by James McPherson.

Congratulations to the winners and sincere thanks to the donors.

Get Involved

All members are encouraged to participate in all activities of the Northern Illinois Civil War Round Table. There are a number of ways for members to serve the organization, for example, as an officer, committee member, or speaker. Anyone who would like to get more involved in these activities may contact President Wayne Rhine or any other current officer or past president.

Lee Descendant

Jaxon Lee Rhine, three-year-old grandson of president Wayne Rhine, is a direct descendant on his mother's side of Confederate General Robert E. Lee.

Dues Are Due

Dues forms and checks should be sent to assistant treasurer Pat McCormick, 1444 North Lee Boulevard, Berkeley, Illinois 60163-1314. Dues are \$55 family, \$45 individual, and \$5 student. A sustaining membership is any payment over the normal rates. Deduct \$5 if you receive the newsletter by e-mail.

To Contribute to the Drum Roll

All members are welcome to contribute to the newsletter. If you have information to share, contact Sally Smith, 328 Eastern Avenue, Barrington, Illinois 60010, telephone (847) 381-6486, or e-mail drum_roll4@juno.com.

2017–2018 Speakers

November 3	Robert Girardi	TBD
December 1	Pat McCormick	Irish Brigade
January 5	Wayne Rhine	Cushing Brothers

**To learn more about the Northern Illinois Civil War Round Table
visit our website at www.northernilcwrt.org**