

THE CHARGER

December 2009

464th Meeting

Vol. 31, #4

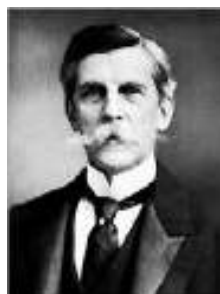
Tonight's Program:

Three Soldiers and the Negro

After 1863, if not before, the point of the Civil War was the fate of slavery. But what was to be the fate of the freedman after the war? The war-time experiences of three men, each destined to be great in the law, gives us a clue as to why the legacy of the North's victory was so long delayed. Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., Albion Tourgee, and John Marshall Harlan served with honor, but the war gave each of them a trajectory of life that would intimately affect the future of the black American.



A recruiting poster for black soldiers during the war.



Oliver W. Holmes Jr.



Albion Tourgee



John M. Harlan

David F. Forte

David F. Forte is Professor of Law at Cleveland State University and was the inaugural holder of the Charles R. Emrick, Jr.- Calfee Halter & Griswold Endowed Chair. He holds degrees from Harvard College, Manchester University, England, the University of Toronto and Columbia University. During the Reagan administration, Professor Forte served as chief counsel to the United States delegation to the United Nations and alternate delegate to the Security Council. His Holiness, John Paul II, appointed Dr. Forte as Consultor to the Pontifical Council for the Family, and Pope Benedict XVI has reappointed Dr. Forte. Professor Forte is an expert on constitutional law, religious liberty, Islamic law, and family rights and has authored several books and a number of briefs before the United States Supreme Court. He is an avid Civil War re-enactor with the Ohio Light Artillery and a merit badge counselor for the Boy Scouts.

**Date: Wednesday,
December 10, 2009**

**Place: Judson Manor
1890 E. 107th Street
Cleveland, Ohio**

**Time: Drinks 6 PM
Dinner 6:45 PM**

**Reservations: Please Call
Dan Zeiser (440) 449-9311
Or email ccwrt1956@yahoo.com
By 8 pm Tuesday before meeting**

**Meal choice: Entree, vegetable,
salad, and dessert.**

CLEVELAND CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE

FOUNDED 1957

President: **Dennis Keating** (216) 397-0188
Vice President: **Lisa Kempfer** (440) 526-1318
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website: clevelandcivilwarroundtable.com

email: pburkholder@ameritech.net

Editor - THE CHARGER - Dan Zeiser

Cleveland Civil War Roundtable Past Presidents

<p>2009 Jon Thompson 2008 Terry Koozer 2007 John Fazio 2006 Dave Carrino 2005 Mel Maurer 2004 Warren McClelland 2003 Maynard Bauer 2002 Bill McGrath 2001 William Vodrey 2000 Bob Boyda 1999 Dick Crews 1998 John Moore 1997 Dan Zeiser 1996 John Sutula 1995 Norton London 1994 Robert Battisti 1993 Kevin Callahan 1992 Bob Baucher 1991 Joe Tirpak 1990 Ken Callahan Jr. 1989 Neil Glaser 1988 Martin Graham 1987 George Vourlojianis 1986 Tim Beatty 1985 Brian Kowell 1984 Neil Evans</p>	<p>1983 William Victory 1982 John Harkness 1981 Thomas Geschke 1980 Charles Spiegle 1979 William Bates 1978 Richard McCrae 1977 James Chapman 1976 Milton Holmes 1975 Thomas Gretter 1974 Nolan Heidelbaugh 1973 Arthur Jordan 1972 Bernard Drews 1971 Kenneth Callahan 1970 Frank Schuhle 1969 Donald Heckaman 1968 Frank Moran 1967 William Schlesinger 1966 Donald Hamill 1965 Lester Swift 1964 Guy DiCarlo, Jr. 1963 Paul Guenther 1962 Edward Downer 1961 Charles Clarke 1960 Howard Preston 1959 John Cullen, Jr. 1958 George Farr, Jr. 1957 Kenneth Grant</p>
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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

DECEMBER 2009

Greetings,

As we head into the December holidays, I hope that you had a safe and enjoyable Thanksgiving. It was officially proclaimed a national holiday by President Abraham Lincoln on October 3, 1863. In the latest newsletter of the Cuyahoga County Soldiers & Sailors' Monument, Mary Louise Jesek Daley has a piece on "Christmas and the Civil War." Of course, not all was peaceful in this month in the Civil War, with major battles fought in 1862 (Fredericksburg and Stone's River) and 1864 (Nashville).

I look forward to our December presentation by my Cleveland-Marshall College of Law colleague David Forte. In addition to David's very distinguished legal and academic careers, he (like our October speaker Michael Kraus) is a Civil War re-enactor. David is a corporal and chief of caisson in the Ninth Ohio Light Artillery. David's wife Julie plays a nurse.

I encourage you to participate in the auction organized by Marge Wilson of the "La Belle Re-belle" print.

Respectfully,

Dennis Keating

**CLEVELAND CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE
2009/2010 SCHEDULE**

September 9, 2009

**Plenty of Blame to
Go Around: Jeb Stu-
art's Controversial
Ride to Gettysburg**



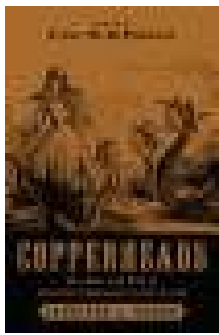
Eric Wittenberg

October 14, 2009

Behind the Scenes at a Civil War Movie

**Michael Kraus
Curator of the Pittsburgh Soldiers &
Sailors Military Museum & Memorial
Advisor on Cold Mountain and
Gettysburg movies**

November 11, 2009



**The Copperheads:
Lincoln's Oppo-
nents in the North**

**Prof. Jennifer L.
Weber**

December 9, 2009

Three Soldiers and the Negro

**David L. Forte
Professor
Cleveland-Marshall College of
Law**

January 13 2010

**The Dick Crews Annual
Debate**

*After Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E.
Lee, William Tecumseh Sherman Was
the Greatest General of the War*

Moderator: William F. B. Vodrey

February 10, 2010

**The 26th Ohio
Volunteer Infantry:
The Ground Hog
Regiment**
Jeff Hill



March 10, 2010

**Steps Toward War: Two Dramatic
Rescues That Led To It.**
Nat Brandt

April 14, 2010

**Rutherford B. Hayes
and the
23rd Ohio Volunteer
Infantry**
Thomas J. Culbertson



May 12, 2010



**John Wilkes
Booth:
Escape and
Capture**
Mel Maurer

**For membership in the Cleveland Civil War Roundtable, please visit our web site:
<http://clevelandcivilwarroundtable.com>**

The Decisive Battle of the Civil War: Another Nomination

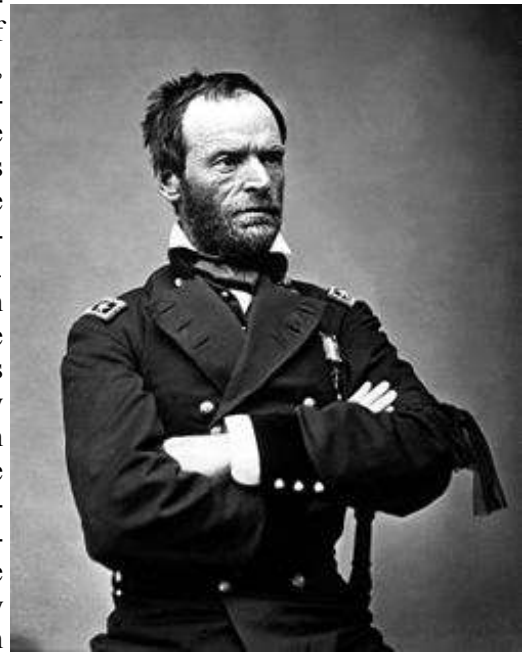
by David A. Carrino

One of the much debated topics about the Civil War is which battle was the decisive battle. Much effort and time have been expended in support of one or another Civil War battle for this distinction. A great deal of energy and thought have also been devoted to the point of view that no Civil War battle merits this title. Herein is offered another nomination for this designation as well as the case for this contention. Note that the choice of the word "contention" is intentional, because the battle which is proposed as the most decisive is not one which is likely to be selected and which is instead likely to provoke disagreement. Rather than championing this battle as the most decisive, the intent is to provide a different and hopefully thought-provoking point of view about a little known Civil War battle, the ramifications of which are greater than the apparent insignificance of the battle. The battle in question is Rocky Face Ridge, the opening battle of William Tecumseh Sherman's Atlanta campaign. This battle is nominated as the decisive battle of the war because it set the pattern for the entire Atlanta campaign, and the Atlanta campaign, as argued below, was the most significant military action in ensuring Union victory.

Rocky Face Ridge is in northwest Georgia, 30 miles southeast of Chattanooga, and is one of the folds of land which, like Missionary Ridge to its west, jut upward like sharp pleats in the terrain. In fact, Rocky Face



Ridge is the easternmost of this series of elevations and, as such, stands as the last topographical barrier to the flatter terrain to its southeast, in which the city of Atlanta is situated 100 miles away. Interspersed within these hundred miles are three major rivers which an invading army would have to cross on its way to Atlanta: the Oostanaula, the Etowah, and the Chattahoochee. Rocky Face Ridge is pierced by three main gaps, which are named, north to



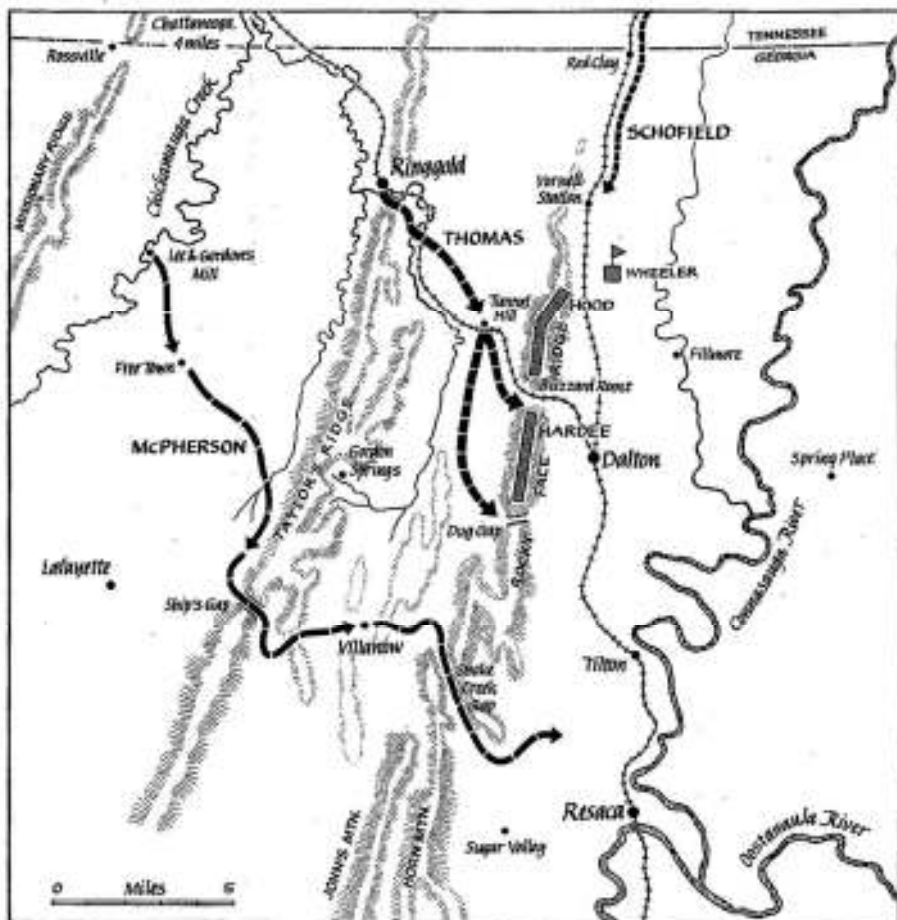
south, Mill Creek Gap (known to the locals as the Buzzard Roost), Dug Gap, and Snake Creek Gap. From Chattanooga to Atlanta and through Mill Creek Gap ran the Western & Atlantic Railroad, the line on which the Great Locomotive Chase took place in 1862 and to which were connected other railroads that ran all the way to Union supply depots in Nashville. Four miles east of Rocky Face Ridge was the town of Dalton, through which the Western & Atlantic ran and into which also ran the East Tennessee & Georgia Railroad from the north, the latter railroad lying east of Rocky Face Ridge. Approximately ten miles south of Dalton along the Western & Atlantic was the town of Resaca, which was situated on the Oostanaula River and almost directly east of Snake Creek Gap. Rocky Face Ridge and the towns east of it comprised the area from which Sherman's drive to Atlanta would begin, and it took no great military insight for Sherman to envision the Western & Atlantic as a supply line which would be available to him all the way to his objective.

At the same time, Sherman's adversary, Joseph E. Johnston, was using that same railroad to supply the army which he commanded, the Army of Tennessee. Johnston had been named to command of this army after its disastrous performance at Chattanooga. The battle of Chattanooga was the culmination of lengthy and widespread disenchantment among both officers and enlisted men toward the Army of Tennessee's previous com-

mander, Braxton Bragg. Johnston restored the morale and confidence of this army and now had it deployed in a formidable position on Rocky Face Ridge, which Johnston correctly recognized as an advantageous location to block the advance of Union forces into Georgia toward the enticing objective of Atlanta. Johnston had at his immediate disposal the two corps of William Hardee and John Bell Hood, each approximately 20,000 men, deployed to the left and right (south and north), respectively, of the Buzzard Roost and, hence, of the railroad which Johnston anticipated Sherman wanted to cling to during an advance on Atlanta. Johnston's 5,000 cavalry under Joseph Wheeler were positioned east of Rocky Face Ridge and north of Hood's corps to guard against an advance along the East Tennessee & Georgia Railroad around the northern end of Rocky Face Ridge. The southern end (left) of Hardee's corps extended to Dug Gap, which allowed this passage to be command of Leonidas Polk, who were currently in Alabama, but who were available to join Johnston in the event that he needed them. Their availability was due to the fact that Nathaniel Banks no longer demanded attention from any Confederate forces east of the Mississippi, although Johnston still had to convince the authorities in Richmond that Polk's force was needed in Georgia. Polk was in Alabama because, almost three months after his suspension by Johnston's predecessor, Bragg, Polk had been sent west and eventually replaced the man who was brought east to succeed Bragg and who was now requesting that Polk, along with the 19,000 troops under his command, be sent east to Georgia.

This was the situation and the force which were Sherman's immediate concern as he contemplated his thrust at Atlanta. When Ulysses S. Grant was appointed general-in-chief of all Union armies and attached himself to the Army of the Potomac to direct its thus far fruitless attempts at eliminating Robert E. Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia, Sherman was placed in charge of the western theater, for which the focus by this time in the Civil War had become the southeast. Sherman's force was composed of three armies: the Army of the Cumberland, 70,000 strong under George H. Thomas; the Army of the Tennessee, 25,000 strong under James B. McPherson; and the Army of the Ohio under John M. Schofield, which at 19,000 troops was in reality a corps. Sherman had these forces deployed with Schofield on the left (north), Thomas in the center, and McPherson (whose army Sherman called "my whiplash") on the right (south). This arrangement of the three armies was to be used for most of the drive to Atlanta.

Sherman's plan to dispossess Johnston of his formidable position took into account its stoutness. In a foreboding phrase in a letter home, Sherman gave his assessment of the Confederate defenses and the likely outcome of a direct assault by his men against "the terrible door of death prepared for them in the Buzzard Roost." Accordingly, Sherman intended Schofield to feint from the north along the East Tennessee & Georgia and Thomas to assault frontally, but only as a means of holding Johnston in place, while the main thrust would be delivered by the whiplash McPherson. McPherson was to move from Chattanooga under cover of Taylor's Ridge, which lies between Missionary Ridge to the west and Rocky Face Ridge to the east. Then McPherson was to move eastward through Taylor's



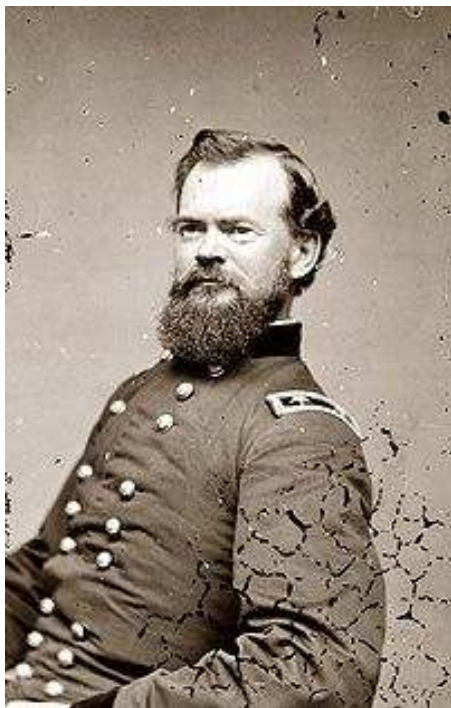
Ridge at Ship's Gap, which lies south of the Dug Gap end of Johnston's line, then through the town of Villanow, and finally through the undefended Snake Creek Gap to emerge in rear of the Army of Tennessee for a strike at Resaca to cut Johnston's supply line. On May 4, 1864, the three Union armies commenced their coordinated movements against the Army of Tennessee. While Schofield's force was stalled by Wheeler's cavalry, and Thomas' men met expectedly stiff resistance, McPherson's intricate movement came off precisely as planned, and on May 9 the Union Army of the Tennessee found itself east of the Confederate Army of Tennessee and a mere five miles from Resaca. McPherson reported this in a dispatch to Sherman, who was with Thomas' army. McPherson also reported in the dispatch that the only enemy forces so far encountered were some rebel cavalry. Sherman was at dinner when this news reached him, and he pounded the table in triumphant jubilation and shouted, "I've got Joe Johnston dead!"

As it happened, Joe Johnston still had a good deal of life left, both literally and figuratively, and the latter was due as much to serendipity as skill. On the same day that Sherman set his plan and forces in motion, Johnston convinced Richmond to send Polk's 19,000 troops to join the Army of Tennessee as a third corps, and its immediate assignment was to reinforce Resaca once it moved there. The first contingent of these troops, a brigade of 2,000, arrived in Rome on May 5 and at Resaca two days later, where they took position along with the small equally sized garrison in entrenchments Johnston had constructed there. As McPherson's force closed in on Resaca, these rebel troops took them under fire, stopping McPherson in his tracks to assess an enemy infantry force he had not expected to encounter. After considering his situation, unsupported, out in the open in rear of the enemy, and confronting a force of unknown size, McPherson decided that the most prudent course of action was to return to the safety of Snake Creek Gap, and by the end of the day on which he had emerged from the gap, he was back in it in a much more defensible position than the exposed one near Resaca.

When Johnston was informed of the appearance of a large Union force near Resaca, he ordered the movement of Hood with three divisions to reinforce the 4,000 troops who had disquieted McPherson into withdrawing. On the following day, Confederate reconnaissance indicated that Sherman's whiplash had relinquished its threatening position near Resaca and cloistered itself in Snake Creek Gap. This led Johnston to believe that McPherson's movement had been a feint, and this supposition caused Johnston to order Hood to leave one division at Resaca and move the other two to Tilton, between Rocky Face Ridge and Resaca and from which these divisions could be sent to meet a threat at either place. In the meantime, Polk and his 19,000 men were arriving, giving Johnston both comfort and more troops to reinforce Resaca. Because the attacks against Rocky Face

Ridge had all but ceased, Hardee, and eventually Johnston, began to suspect that Sherman was planning to reinforce McPherson for a stronger attack from that direction. In an attempt to determine his adversary's intentions, Johnston sent Wheeler's cavalry around the north end of Rocky Face Ridge for reconnaissance. Wheeler reported that Sherman's entire force appeared to be moving southward, perhaps through Snake Creek Gap for a junction with McPherson. Johnston decided that his stout position on Rocky Face Ridge was no longer tenable and, on May 12, the Army of Tennessee withdrew from the ridge and evacuated Dalton.

Thus it was that Sherman used maneuver more than assault to accomplish his immediate goal of dislodging Johnston's force from its formidable position on Rocky Face Ridge. However, a few days earlier when Sherman pounded his fist on the table, he envisioned much more. The disappointment over this stung Sherman, in part because it had come after such a height of expectant jubilation and in part because it was due to a failure by his protégé, McPherson, who had been appointed Sherman's replacement in command of the Army of the Tennessee when Sherman assumed command of the Union armies in the west after Grant moved east. Sherman had such high regard for McPherson that he once remarked about him, "If he lives, he'll outdistance Grant and myself." Stung by the disappointment over McPherson's failure, Sherman stung back. When Sherman met with McPherson in Snake Creek Gap during the concentration of the Union forces there, Sherman told his protégé,



James B. McPherson

"Well, Mac, you missed the opportunity of your life," although Sherman might have been more impressed with the prescience of his comment had he known how little life McPherson had left. In his memoir, Sherman could accurately state, with the assuredness of hindsight, that for McPherson and his opportunity at Resaca "Such an opportunity does not occur twice in a single life."

Had McPherson not succumbed to trepidation and missed the opportunity of his life, it is certainly possible that the Union fruits of the battle of Rocky Face Ridge would have led history to categorize it as a truly decisive battle. Even though Polk's force was close to joining Johnston's army, the juncture might have been prevented if the Army of Tennessee had been caught between the two Union forces. While this would have left Polk's force looming in the area around Sherman's armies, it is not inconceivable, in light of the relative strengths and of Johnston's cautious nature, that Polk and his men would have simply hovered uselessly near Sherman's horde, uncertain of what to do, in the same way that Johnston had done outside Vicksburg as John C. Pemberton's Army of Mississippi was inexorably ground into submission. Nevertheless, even without the elimination of the Army of Tennessee, the battle of Rocky Face Ridge can rightly be considered much more important than its obscurity and apparent insignificance suggest. This is the battle that set the tactical pattern for most of the battles of the Atlanta campaign, in terms of the deployment and use of the three armies under Sherman's command as well as Sherman's use of maneuver rather than assault to drive Johnston's forces backward toward the Union objective. Because the Atlanta campaign and the eventual Union capture of Atlanta led to the re-election of Abraham Lincoln, the Civil War could continue until the North emerged victorious and the Union was restored. In spite of the lost opportunity at Rocky Face Ridge and Sherman's resulting disappointment, one important objective had been attained: the dislodging of the Army of Tennessee from its stout position. Although there had been some serious fighting, primarily by Thomas' men in their holding action, the overall Union losses were small (estimated at fewer than 900), and it was maneuver rather than assault that accomplished the expulsion of the Confederate army. In addition to driving the Army of Tennessee out of its formidable position on the ridge, the maneuver by Sherman placed Johnston's army in relatively open and less defensible terrain, where Sherman's superior numbers could be used to greater advantage. Johnston realized this and his plan (which in reality was more a yearning) was to catch Sherman in motion when the Union commander had made an error and exposed his forces, or part of them, to attack. The odds of this were not good, but Johnston felt that, in light of the two to one numerical superiority of Sherman's forces, the odds were not good from the Confederate perspective in any situation. Johnston correctly reasoned that the best chance for driving Sherman's large force away lay in cutting the railroad supply line. To this end, Johnston urged the Confederate government to move Nathan Bedford Forrest from northern Mississippi to middle Tennessee where the Wizard of the Saddle could work his destructive sorcery on Sherman's railroad lifeline. For various reasons, Forrest was never given that task during the Atlanta campaign, leaving Johnston to deal with Sherman's horde without the benefit of the best weapon to strike the best blow to stop or at least slow the Union advance on Atlanta. As a result, Johnston was left with only his yearning for an opportune error by his adversary. While the Confederate commander waited for this and, in his mind, took action to increase the chances of it, his tactics during the Atlanta campaign consisted of a gradual slow withdrawal toward Atlanta with recurrent occupations of strong defensive positions in the hope of enticing Sherman into a ruinous assault. Save for once during the campaign, Sherman refused to be coaxed into it and instead used maneuver to move closer to his objective of Atlanta. Thus it was that the lesson Sherman learned at Rocky Face Ridge was applied throughout the Atlanta campaign. Certainly this strategy was made effective by the necessity of Johnston to defend Atlanta. Nevertheless, Sherman was astute enough to realize that, as at Rocky Face Ridge, maneuver was not only the safer and less costly option, but the more effective course to reaching his objective. The capture of that objective, Atlanta, is what led to the re-election of Abraham Lincoln and the continued prosecution of the war to restore the Union. Hence, it can be said that the battle of Rocky Face Ridge, because it was the place where Sherman developed the tactics used to bring about the capture of Atlanta and Lincoln's re-election, was the decisive battle of the Civil War.

Dave Carrino is a long time member of the Roundtable. He served as President in the 2005-6 year. Currently, he serves as part time bartender for the meetings. Dave is employed by Case Western Reserve University as a biologist. Perhaps Dave's proudest moment came recently when he became a grandfather.

NEXT MONTH

The Dick Crews Annual Debate

After Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee, William Tecumseh Sherman Was the Greatest General of the War

Moderator: William F. B. Vodrey

AUCTION

At December meetings, we will be auctioning a framed, matted John Paul Strain print. Titled "La Belle Rebelle," it depicts Confederate spy Belle Boyd and 1st Lieutenant Henry Kyd Douglas at Front Royal, Virginia on May 23, 1862, during Jackson's Valley Campaign. With the frame it measures approximately, 27 x 39. Below is a picture of the print and information from John Paul Strain about the print and its value. Come and make a bid!



Christmas at the Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Center

The Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Center in Fremont, Ohio has a number of events celebrating the Christmas season, including teas and sleigh rides. Spiegel Grove and the Center are a wonderful place to visit. Check out the website at www.rbhayes.org for events this month.

Christmas at the Soldiers and Sailors Monument Victorian Christmas at the Monument, Saturday December 5

Come see the Christmas tree and learn about Santa Claus in America, especially during the Civil War. Right here in Cleveland, the monument is being restored to its original grandeur. Check it out at www.soldiersandsailors.com.