*Tonight's topic:*

U.S. Marine Corps. in the Civil War

The United States Marine Corps in 1861 consisted of 1,892 officers and men; about half of whom were stationed aboard U.S. Navy vessels in small ship's detachments. There, Marines performed the same duties as generations of Marines before them; guard duty aboard ships, service as sharpshooters and in repelling boarders, the heading landing operations, and furnishing a flash of color on special occasions. At the outset of the War, Congress authorized an increase of the Corps' strength to a total of 3,167 officers and other ranks. At no time during the Civil War did the Marines strength exceed 3,900 men, with which they had to provide detachments for a constantly expanding U.S. Navy. The U.S. Marines played a gallant role at sea, as elements of landing parties, and as members of Naval Brigades serving with the Army.

Dress up Night

Come in uniform or period dress. The best outfit will receive a prize.
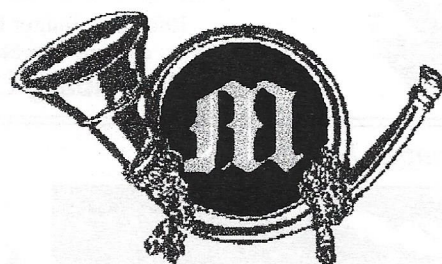
Kepi Badge

The Marine ornament, adopted with in 1859, was the light infantry bugle, surrounding an Old English "M." The ornament for officers was embroidered on a scarlet wool backing with gold thread. The white metal "M" had a shank similar to a button, to ease its removal for cleaning. The red patch that the bugle was embroidered on was trimmed to one eighth of an inch from the outer edge of the bugle. The enlisted ornament was made of brass, with a red leather insert behind the circle of the bugle.

Date: **Wednesday, December 12, 2001**

Place: **The Cleveland Playhouse Club 8501 Carnegie Ave.**

Time: **Drinks 6 PM Dinner 7 PM**

Reservations: **Please Call JAC Communications (216) 861-5588**

Meal choice: lamb or trout

CLEVELAND CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE
2001/2002 SCHEDULE

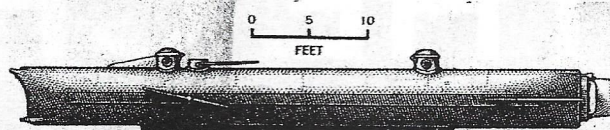*Note this is a Friday*

October 10, 2001

Lincoln

The Great Emancipator: Did he dream of a lily white America?

Gabor Boritt
Robert C. Fluhrer Professor of Civil War Studies
Gettysburg College

November 14, 2001

The ships of Army Colonel Charles Ellet's Mississippi River ram fleet.

The Army's Navy
1861-1865

Roger Bohn
President of Chicago CWRT

December 12, 2001 "Period Dress"

Marines in the Civil War

Maj. David A. Dawson

January 9, 2002

"The Rock of Chickamauga"
George Thomas

Dan Zeiser
Past President Cleveland CWRT

February 15, 2002   *World's first submarine*

0   5   10
FEET

H.L. Hunley

South Carolina State Senator
Glenn McConnell
Chairman, Hunley Commission

March 13, 2002

An Evening *With* Mary Todd Lincoln

April 10, 2002

John C. Pemberton > < Ulysses S. Grant

Unvexed to the Sea"
The Vicksburg Campaign

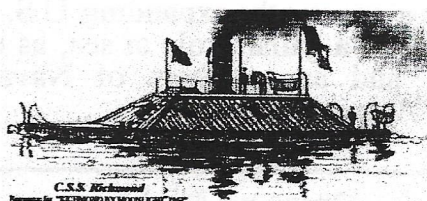### Terry Winschel
Park Historian, Vicksburg Military Park

May 8, 2002   "Guest Night"

Capital Navy

Confederate Navy guarding Richmond

C.S.S. Richmond

John Coski
Historian and Library Director, Museum of the Confederacy

Membership in the Cleveland Civil War Roundtable: Call (800) 800-8310 or visit our web site.
In AOL or Yahoo: internet > | cleveland civil war roundtable | Search

Technology in the Civil War:

COLD STEEL!

by Sid Sidlo

It is a truism that by the time of the Civil War, the bayonet had outlived its usefulness in combat. Yet like many truisms, it tells only part of the story. Certainly the bayonet was not used in the 1860s as it had been before then. Up through the war with Mexico, the last conflict fought with smoothbore muskets, the bayonet's value was as a "shock tactic" to disorganize the defenders and take the ground, but not necessarily to win by killing. Men would often break and run from an attack of gleaming bayonets. Most, if not all, the casualties would be caused by rifle fire, but in a sense the victory belonged to the bayonets.

The Civil War started out with just that tactic in mind, but the superior range and accuracy of the rifled musket, developed betwen the wars, changed everything. The charging line would be stopped in its tracks before it was close enough to use bayonets. It was only at times of desperation, when a unit under heavy attack ran out of ammunition and the options were to turn and run or make a desperate charge with cold steel, as did the 20th Maine at Gettysburg, that a bayonet charge would be ordered.
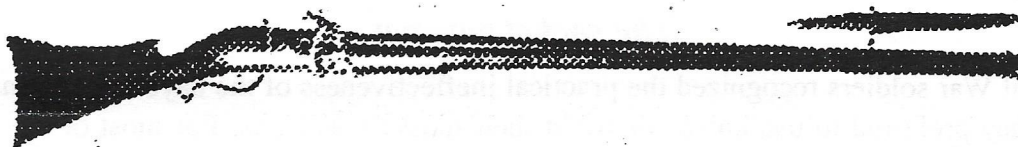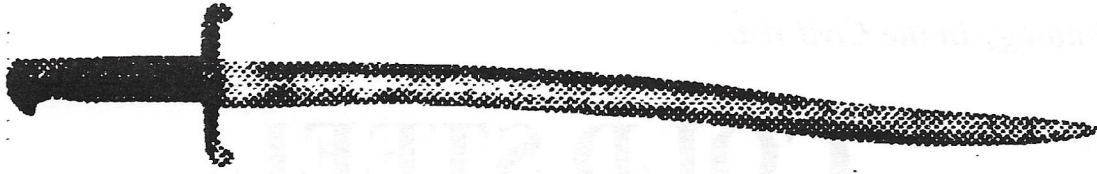
A harquebus and its plug bayonet

The bayonet originated in the 16th century when the dagger used for hand-to-hand fighting was inserted into the muzzle of the harquebus, the first gun fired from the shoulder, and its successor, the musket, to forma long lance. This "plug" bayonet had a crossguard and a straight double-edged pointed blade.

In the latter part of the seventeenth century, British and French armies shortened the blade and extended and tapered the hilt to fit different calibers so that the handle could be inserted into the mouth of any firearm, eliminating the need for separate units of infantry pikesmen carrying "pikes," or long spears.

Toward the end of the 18th century the sword bayonet was replaced by the angular socket, or ring, bayonet, with a sleeve that fit around the barrel and was held in place with a slot and stud. Also called a "spike" bayonet, it was about 14" to 18" long, round or triangular in shape, lighter in weight than a sword bayonet, and did not interfere with firing. Full-length arms, as the Springfield rifle, were equipped with the socket bayonet, which was standard equipment for both sides during the war. As terrible as bayonets may seem, few in the Civil War ever died from bayonet wounds received in combat. Gen. John Gordon wrote: "The bristling points and the glitter of bayonets were fearful to look upon as they were leveled in front of a charging line, but they were rarely reddened with blood."

*Sid Sidlo is editor of the North Carolina CWRT newsletter's **The Ramrod** and a long time friend of the Cleveland CWRT.*

The sword bayonet

To be effective, the bayonet had to be aimed to reach a vital spot, deep in the body or protected by bone (they were also hard to pull out). While bayonet wounds were frightening and painful, they were generally not as devastating as bullet wounds. The accompanying excerpt from the report of a Confederate surgeon describes the differences.

During the ten months of Grant's overland campaign, from the Wilderness to Sayler's Creek, only some fifty bayonet wounds were treated surgically at Union army hospitals. In his *Regimental Losses*, Fox claims that of 250,000 Union wounded treated in hospitals, only 922 **(.4 of 1%)** were victims of cavalry sabers or bayonets.
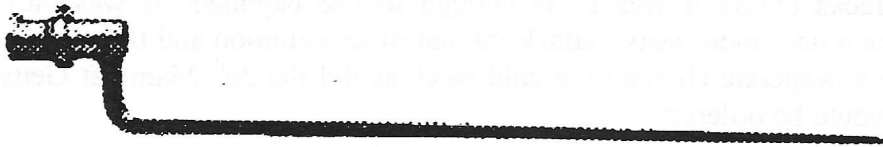
The socket bayonet

Most Civil War soldiers recognized the practical ineffectiveness of the bayonet. In hand-to-hand combat they preferred to use knives or wield their muskets as clubs. For most of the war, both Yanks and Rebs chose to use their bayonets as entrenching tools, tent pegs, candle holders, roasting spits, or can openers.

In the years since the Civil War, the bayonet has had many modifications, but has not disappeared as an infantry weapon. One model of rifle had a permanently-attached folding bayonet. During World War I, the British preferred the knife bayonet, the French the spike bayonet, and the Germans a knife bayonet with a saw at the rear to be used for construction. Yet World War I had about the same percentage of bayonet victims as the Civil War.

By World War II, with the notable exception of the Russians, who carried very long spike bayonets when they attacked German lines, the knife bayonet had become standard issue for most armies. It had been further shortened, and provided with a hand grip as well. Japanese soldiers carried very sharp knife bayonets with a hooked ring that would catch the opponent's blade. For hand-to-hand fighting, they usually held the bayonets in their hands and used them as swords. A common tactic for small attack forces in World War II was to creep up to the enemy line, unleash a shower of hand grenades, then charge with bayonets fixed.

Rather than say that the Civil War made the bayonet obsolete, it is fairer to say that the tactic of charging with bayonets alone, except in desperate situations, ended with the Civil War, but because of its usefulness in hand-to-hand fighting, the bayonet is still a valued member of the arsenal of military weapons.

Sid Sidlo

GOVERNORS ISLAND

By Dale Thomas

I was stationed on Governors Island during the Cuban Missile Crisis in October of 1962. Lying 500 yards off the southern tip of Manhattan, the 170—acre island was at the time First Army Headquarters. A few years later, the base became a Coast Guard station until being closed down in 1997. After a great deal of government red tape, I was able to tour the closed base in the summer of 1998. The next day, my son, Geoffrey, and I looked down on the island from the 110th floor of the World Trade Center's south tower. Tragically, the skyline of lower Manhattan again resembles what I remember from my Army days. Governors Island, which had been a U.S. military post since the Revolution, will be turned over next year to New York City and reopened as a park.

The casualties from the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 now rival the Battle of Antietam as the single bloodiest day on American soil. Although built well before the Civil War, the old forts on Governors Island are an historic link between those two days in September, separated by one hundred and thirty—nine years. Within these walls, POW's were confined at a time when another enemy threatened the security of the United States. New York City was the first northern locality to receive Confederate prisoners.

Standing on the northwestern shore of Governors Island, Castle WilliamsStanding on the northwestern shore of Governors Island, Castle Williams was completed in 1811. Two hundred feet in diameter, the circular fort has walls of red sandstone that are forty feet high and eight feet thick. In a letter to Secretary Stanton, Colonel William Hoffman, Commissary General of Prisoners, said the fort had "two tiers of guns in casemates and one of 15-inch guns in barbettes, the third floor of which consists of arched rooms for the garrison, some 500 prisoners may be accommodated." At one time or another from September of 1861 to the end of the war, Castle Williams held as many as 1500 Confederate enlisted men and U. S. Army deserters. Fewer in number, Confederate officers were billeted in Fort Jay, which had been built in the 1790's on a knoll in a north—central location on the island. Redbrick and star-shaped, the structure has four bastions that once contained one hundred guns and a drawbridge over a dry moat. Governors Island was also a staging area for Federal troops whose presence maintained security on the base.

While Rebel officers could occasionally walk outside the walls of Fort Jay, Dr. William J. Sloan, Medical Director of the Federal army, reported the prisoners in Castle Williams "are crowded into an ill-ventilated building which has always been an unhealthy one when occupied by large bodies of men. There are no means of heating the lower tier of gun rooms and no privies within the area... There are now upwards of eighty cases of measles among them, a number of cases of typhoid fever, pneumonia, intermittent fever, etc...."

Before the attack on the World Trade Center, the Draft Riot in July of 1863 was the worst violence suffered by New Yorkers. Among others, Rebel agents were blamed for helping to incite the riots that resulted in at least two thousand dead and about eight thousand wounded. More than three hundred buildings were looted and either damaged or destroyed by fire. The police force was overwhelmed by the crazed mob, and Federal troops had to be called in to help restore law and order. Most of the garrison on Governors Island was sent to protect the U. S. Sub-Treasury Building in lower Manhattan. Now under defended and vulnerable, Governors Island was attacked, but the insurgents were driven back into the water.

Dale Thomas is a retired history teacher and historian of the Cleveland CWRT.

Fearing another attempt to free the Confederate prisoners, Federal warships sailed into position between the Battery and Governors Island. While further north, Captain Stephen Sluyter, commanding a gunboat off the foot of Wall Street, was ordered to "open fire on Wall or Pine Street or both, if signaled accordingly" to stop any attempt to loot the U.S. Sub-Treasury building. Fortunately the orders were not necessary, but when the four days of rioting ended, the civilian casualties were the worst in American history until September 11, 2001.

During the last year of the Civil War, Rebel agents again tried to cause havoc in New York City. A number of fires were set that included nineteen hotels, two theaters, Barnum's museum, several vessels, stores and factories. Since military intelligence had improved, the plot was uncovered in time, and the damage was minimal in comparison to July of 1863. Eight of the Rebel terrorists escaped into Canada, but one was caught in Detroit. He was returned to the city, tried in a military court and hanged at Fort LaFayette on Staten Island.

Three days before Lee's surrender at Appomattox, Captain William R. Webb became the only Confederate prisoner to escape from Governors Island. Webb later became a Senator from Tennessee, the dramatic story being told in his campaign literature: "He wore a faded Confederate uniform, and found himself enjoying the doubtful freedom of a hostile city clad in this garb and wringing wet. A citizen spoke to him in Battery Park. 'Who are you?' he said. 'How did you come to fall in?' 'I swam across from the Island,' Webb answered. 'I escaped from the prison stockade...' The citizen laughed and passed on." Webb walked about the city for three days telling his story to others, but he remained free to go his own way. Why should anyone care? The war had been won.

Dale Thomas
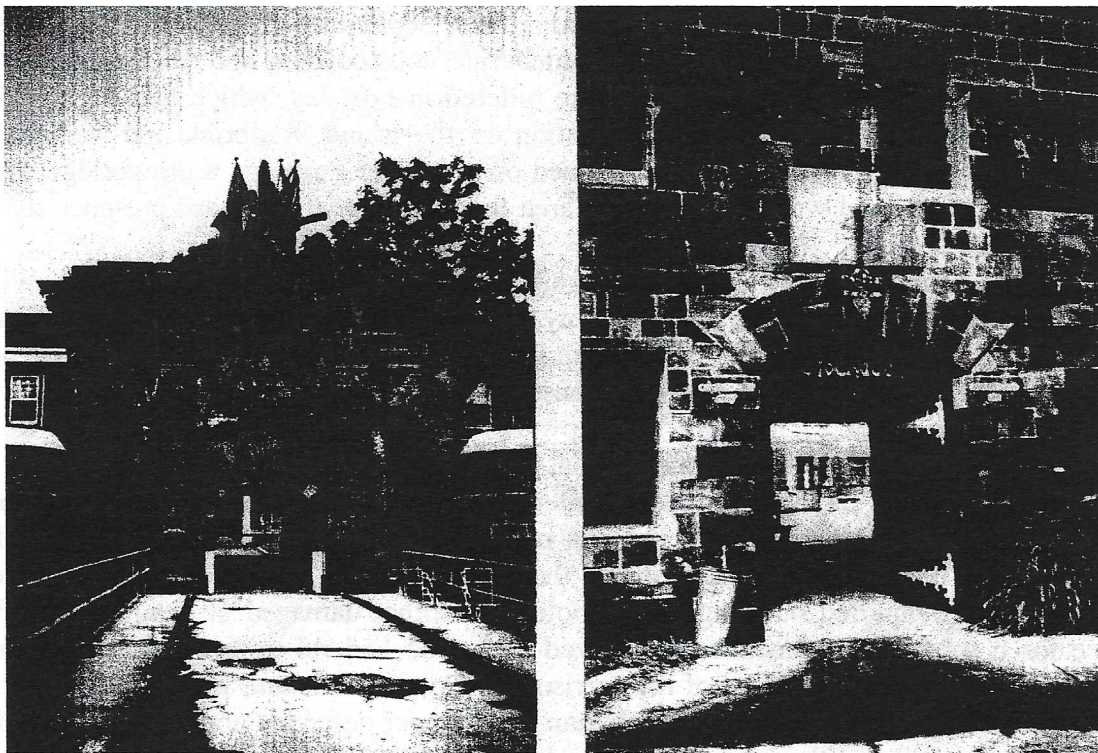
Fort Jay, Governors Island, New York.

As some of you know, I visited Charleston, S.C. in September with a contingent of the Cleveland Civil War Roundtable. Our guide, a very experienced ranger with the Natl. Park Service who's served at various NPS sites around the country, regaled us with some of his favorite tourist questions from over the years:

(At Mt. Rushmore): "How did you know the faces of the four presidents were under all that rock?"

(At Ft. Sumter): 'Was this where Francis Scott Key wrote 'The Star-Spangled Banner'?"

(At Carlsbad Caverns): "How many more miles of cave haven't been discovered yet?"

(At Arlington National Cemetery): 'What are the names of the Unknown Soldiers?"

(At Pea Ridge, Ark.): "Was this a World War I battlefield?"

(At Gettysburg, Pa.): 'Why were so many Civil War battles fought in national parks?' and "Were these monuments here at the time of the battle?"

William Vodrey

A northern newspaper's cartoon on the confederate navy

United States Marines in the Civil War

Wednesday, December 12, 2001