

# THE CHARGER

December 2012

491st Meeting

Vol. 34, #3

*Tonight's Program:*

## The Irish and the Civil War

There is perhaps no other ethnic group so closely identified with the Civil War years and the immediate aftermath of the war as Irish Americans. Of those Irish who came over much later than the founding generations, fully 150,000 of them joined the Union army. Unfortunately, statistics for the Confederacy are sketchy at best; still, one has but to listen to the Southern accent, and listen to the sorts of tunes Southern soldiers loved to sing, to realize that a great deal of the South was settled by Irish immigrants. But because the white population of the Confederate states was more native-born than immigrant during the Civil War years, there did not seem as much of a drive in the Southern army to recognize heritage in the names and uniforms of regiments as there was in the Union forces.

In the North, centers of Irish settlement were Boston and New York, both of which had sizable Irish neighborhoods. The Irish Brigade, the 69th New York Infantry, is the best known Irish unit of the war. There were major immigration periods in the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s; the numbers steadily increased until, according to the 1860 census, well over 1.5 million Americans claimed to have been born in Ireland. The majority of these lived in the North.

The Irish were often distrusted because they were Catholic and there was much opposition in the United States to the Church of Rome. The frustration this prejudice caused led indirectly to the boil-over of tempers in July 1863, when the first official draft was held; a mob of mostly immigrant laborers gathered at the site of the draft lottery, and as names were called and those not wealthy enough to purchase a substitute were required to join up, the mob's temper flared. The situation escalated into full-scale rioting; for three days, cities like New York and Boston were caught up in a rampage of looting, burning, and destruction. Many of the rioters were frustrated Irish laborers who could not get jobs.

Such events did little to help the image of the Irish in America, until many years after the war. Despite their wartime heroics, many Irish veterans came home to find the same ugly bias they faced before going off to fight for the Union. Many of them chose to go into the post war army. Taken from [www.civilwarhom.com/irish.htm](http://www.civilwarhom.com/irish.htm)

*Tonight's Speaker:*

## Dr. W. Dennis Keating

Dr. Dennis Keating is a Levin College Distinguished Professor at Cleveland State University. He holds a joint faculty appointment in the Cleveland-Marshall College of Law. He teaches courses on housing, neighborhood development, urban planning, and land use law, as well as the Planning Capstone Studio, the undergrad Senior Seminar, and Contemporary Urban Problems. He has published widely in these fields. His most recent research has been on the mortgage foreclosure crisis and its aftermath, including the responses of cities like Cleveland and the Cuyahoga County Land Bank. In the fall of 2003, he was a Visiting Fellow at the Department of Urban Studies, University of Glasgow.

Dr. Keating earned his Ph.D. in City and Regional Planning from the University of California at Berkeley (1978) and J.D. from the University of Pennsylvania Law School (1968). Dr. Keating is, of course, also a keen student of the Civil War, having authored several articles on the Civil War and served as President of the Cleveland Civil War Roundtable for the 2010-2011 season, as well as all things Irish.

**Date: Wednesday,  
December 12, 2012**

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

**Time: Drinks 6 pm  
Dinner 6:45 pm**

**Reservations: Please send an email to  
[ccwrt1956@yahoo.com](mailto:ccwrt1956@yahoo.com) with your reservation, or call  
Dan Zeiser at (440) 449-9311 by 9 pm the Sunday  
before the meeting.**

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

**CLEVELAND  
CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE  
FOUNDED 1957**

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## Cleveland Civil War Roundtable Past Presidents

2012 Paul Burkholder  
2011 Lisa Kempfer  
2010 Dennis Keating  
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  
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

## President's Message

This month our speaker is past CCWRT president Dr. Dennis Keating and his subject is *The Irish in the Civil War*. Of course Irish culture and the folks who brought it to North America have played a large role in United States history. This role is apparent in Civil War history and literature. Scarlett O'Hara's father, the philosophical sergeant in *The Killer Angels*, the many Irish who served both North and South, and even several characters in the Civil War novels of Owen Parry (nom de plume of Ralph Peters) are only a few examples. In his first novel, Parry has his Welsh hero describe the Irish: "I was patient with the Irish, having served among them, and knew they could be put to honest work with supervision. They could be sweet as children, the sons and daughters of Erin, and great in their imaginings. Yet there lay a despair in such folk that would not be quenched by all the liquor in the world. I hoped that America might make something of the Irish, for the Lord knows Britannia never did." Later on this same character drops a few bon mots about the French (but that is a different story). Parry always has an afterword in his novels explaining his careful research. Dennis's talk will help us see how careful this Civil War novelist and historian has been in plying his craft and remind us of the contributions Ireland made to Civil War America.

Respectfully submitted,

Mike Wells

**CLEVELAND CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE  
2012-2013 SCHEDULE**

*September 12, 2012*

***South Mountain***

**John  
Michael  
Priest**



*January 9, 2013*

***Dick Crews Annual Debate:  
President Lincoln's Biggest Mistake***

**Moderator: William F. B. Vodrey**

*February 14, 2013*



***Edwin M. Stanton  
Buckeye Warlord***

**William F. B. Vodrey**

*October 10, 2012*



***Morgan's Raid***

**Lester Horwitz**

*March 13, 2013*

***The Assassination***

**Michael Kaufman**



*November 14, 2012*



***Fort Pillow***

**Dr. John V.  
Cimprich**

*April 10, 2013*

***Lincoln***

**Harold Holzer**



*December 12, 2012*

***The Irish and the  
Civil War***

**Dr. W. Dennis Keating**



*May 8, 2013*

***Cleveland Civil War Roundtable  
Players Present:  
Grant and Lee at the White House***



## Fort Pillow and Ball's Bluff, A Response

In the November issue of the *Charger*, President Michael Wells wrote about the controversy of Fort Pillow. He made mention of our time at the Tilghman House in Paducah and how the guide there compared the casualties at Ball's Bluff to Fort Pillow and wondered why, since Ball's Bluff had very similar casualty rates, it was also not called a "massacre." The person who brought up this discussion was not the house guide, it was me.

To begin, what, exactly, is a massacre? Wikipedia, citing a dictionary source, calls it, "A **massacre** is an incident where some group is killed by another, and the perpetrating party are perceived to be in total control of force while the victimized party is perceived to be helpless and/or innocent with regard to any legitimate offense. There is no clear-cut definition for when killings are referred to as massacres or not, rather, this choice is a result of an individual or collective assessment, depending e.g. on how the circumstances of the killing align with given ideas of acceptable use of force and on the desired status of an event in collective memory."

In other words, who really knows what comprises a massacre. The definition seems to dovetail with the assertion that the side who wins the war gets to write the history books.

The comparison I was trying to make between Ball's Bluff and Fort Pillow was based on many calling Fort Pillow a massacre due to the skewed figures of killed to wounded in that engagement. Typically, the ratio of wounded to killed is 4 or 5 wounded per one killed in the Civil War. At Fort Pillow, it was skewed the other way, more killed than wounded. It is largely from this that the description of a massacre comes. The terrain at Ball's Bluff and Fort Pillow are virtually identical, the only exception being that the Mississippi River (now Cold Creek) runs to the west of Fort Pillow and the Potomac River runs to the east of Ball's Bluff. I have been to both battlefields.

Secondly, the Union garrison at Fort Pillow was driven from its works and towards and down into the river; the Union battle line at Ball's Bluff was shattered and also driven into the Potomac River. Union troops were shot down while trying to get down each bluff and even while getting into the water to try and escape. Lastly, I checked with Jim Morgan, THE expert on Ball's Bluff as to the Union casualties there and they were one per cent (1%) different than those of Fort Pillow and skewed much more towards the killed to wounded ratio. Hence my comparison, which I think is still valid. It matters not what color these troops were. The fact that the kill to wounded ratio was higher towards the former, under the oft used definition of Fort Pillow being a massacre, could easily determine the same for Ball's Bluff. Again, what is a massacre?

Fort Pillow was held by white and black Union troops. Your November speaker, John Cimprich, has written a fine book on the fort, its history, and how it became viewed after the war. However, he repeats the same mistake that every other author has made for the white Union unit holding the fort, that is, calling them the 13th Tennessee Cavalry (U.S.). There was an existing 13th Tennessee Cavalry (U.S.) in the field commanded by another officer, which had been raised earlier in the war. According to the two volume set, *Tennesseans In The Civil War*, written by the state centennial committee in the 1960s, which is the definitive account of all Tennessee units, Union and Confederate, the unit holding Fort Pillow was raised as the 14th Tennessee Cavalry (U.S.) and that it was, "erroneously called 13th Tennessee Cavalry..." The black artillery units were raised from west Tennessee. White Unionist Tennesseans, called "renegade Tennesseans" by Forrest in his reports, and black Union troops confronting Confederates, many of whom came from the same areas, was a volatile mix.

Men of both colors, not just black troops, died in a greater killed to wounded ratio at Fort Pillow. Cimprich has the casualty tables in his book for reference. Using his research, the white Tennesseans numbered some 285-303 men. Of these, 85-103 men died in the battle or shortly after. Only 30 were wounded. Of the black troops, some 304 were in garrison and 192 died in battle or from wounds while 30 were wounded. 157 whites were taken prisoners and 56 blacks. Comparing the two, three times more white died than were wounded and about six and one-half times more blacks. Cimprich correctly delves into the reasons why and no doubt will do so in his program. I do not disagree with any of his reasoning.

Cimprich makes another mistake in his book and fails to add to his analysis why the killed to wounded ratio skew may have happened, at least in the initial fight. He cites an account that mentions some of the Union garrison being killed by bayonets and then states that, since Forrest's command was cavalry, they would have had carbines. He is incorrect. Anyone who has studied Forrest, as I have, knows full well that Forrest started his command with shotguns and Maynard carbines in 1861, which they carried at Fort Donelson, as I mentioned on our tour. As the war progressed, Forrest rearmed his command, mostly with captured Union weapons, arming his troops with Springfield and Enfield muskets exactly like those used by the infantry. His reasoning was simple; since he fought so many Union infantry units, he believed that his men had to be able to match them in terms of longer range fire power when fighting dismounted, as his men often fought. When they captured these weapons from the Federals they also took their bayonets, so some of his troopers had bayonets on their muskets at Fort Pillow.

What Cimprich omits from his book and analysis of the killed to wounded ratio is that, when the Confederates made their final assault and reached the top of the wall of the inner earthwork, the Federal garrison was packed therein like sardines confined in a reasonably small place. I co-led a tour there some years ago with Ed Bearss and Brian Wills and made mention of this. Thus, as Confederates topped the wall it was like shooting fish in a barrel. Even with a Colt Navy six shooter, a man shot at ten feet is dead, not wounded. It gets even worse when you factor in rifled muskets in the hands of veteran soldiers. Thus, the ratio of killed to wounded was skewed towards the killed from the start without even considering any men shot after surrendering. Bearss and Wills concurred with my analysis. I am not just picking on Cimprich here, as most authors who have written about Fort Pillow make the same omission. I only know of one who used it as part of his analysis. Most who have written about Fort Pillow have also never been there; Cimprich seems to have been and that is to his credit. When you see how small the final earthwork is, it becomes apparent.

John Cimprich's book is a good read and offers the reader quite a bit to think about. I found it to be one of the finest accounts of the controversial battle written. You will enjoy his program I am sure. Brian Wills, one of Forrest's more recent biographers is, I understand, also going to tackle Fort Pillow with a new book and I will state here what he stated on the tour that I co-led; if Bedford Forrest wanted to slaughter the garrison to the man before he attacked then they would have been slaughtered to a man during it. No one would have remained alive. There is no such order, verbal or written, that demanded this result. Forrest went there, in his own words written to his commanding officer, to get supplies and horses from the garrison. Whenever Forrest needed supplies, he often beat up a Union garrison somewhere and took all of their stuff and he had been doing so successfully from mid-1862 onwards.

Brian Wills, in his fine biography of Forrest (*A Battle From the Start*), analyses what made Forrest tick as a man better than any other recent biography. Once you get into it you will learn several facts. Forrest had a volcanic temper that could be aimed towards Federals in battle as well as at



his own men. The aftermath was quite different; he often became quite serene following his explosions. He did not suffer fools well be they inferior or superior officers. Forrest was also a control freak and at Fort Pillow he lost some control over his troops. Yet accounts exist, that Cimprich cites, of Forrest and James Chalmers, one of his division commanders, stopping the shooting after Union troops had surrendered. Still, an officer is responsible for the conduct of his soldiers in any army.

I admire much about Nathan Bedford Forrest and made some mention of that on our tour as Michael Wells writes in the November *Charger*. He was a fierce fighter and a brilliant tactician and strategist. He made mistakes and learned from them; the Forrest of 1864 was a very accomplished cavalry commander, arguably the war's best, and he was far superior to the Forrest of 1862. He was feared by the Federals; William T. Sherman detached two full corps to keep him tied up in Mississippi while the Atlanta Campaign was taking place in 1864. Such was the level of Sherman's own fears. No other Confederate cavalry officer commanded such attention by as great a detachment of troops of the Union Army in the war. Forrest was a brilliant raider and a fine combat commander who led the way for his troops. He personally killed thirty Union troops in hand to hand fighting and lost twenty-nine horses shot from beneath him. This attests to his leadership style and bravery. Only three American soldiers began their careers as a private and ended them as a lieutenant general; Forrest was one. If I were commanding an army in 1864, I would want Forrest as my chief of cavalry. I want a fighter leading my troops, not a push over.

Forrest, like all of us, was a human being with good and bad points, as we all have. He knew it, mentioned it, and, after the war, cautioned his son to be more like his mother, a fine Christian woman, rather than him. He was a product of his time with a rough upbringing on the frontier helping to raise his family after losing his father, trying to carve out a life as so many did back then. This is why Wills titled his book as he did. It was indeed a battle from the start. The story of Forrest hunting down the panther that attacked his mother gives you a great insight into the man. He had some six months of education and yet became a millionaire before the war and a Memphis elected official. Some of his character I greatly admire and some I would not care to repeat. Who among us would be that much different if we had been raised as he was? Judge him in the context of his era, not 21st Century mores.

I am a military historian; studying only one war quite frankly bores me. I can attest that, historically, civil wars and wars of religion tend to be the nastiest when compared to wars between nations over territory, etc. (Hitler versus Stalin being the great exception). The Thirty Years War in northern Europe saw the wholesale slaughter of civilians simply because they were of a different religion than those doing the slaughtering. Civil wars, including ours, have their nastier sides as well. East Tennessee (both sides did atrocities on each other), the Crater, Poison Spring, Saltville, bleeding Kansas (both sides did atrocities there as well), "Bloody" Bill Anderson, and William Quantrill are part of our Civil War. So was Nathan Bedford Forrest, warts and all, and he was not nearly the terrible man that the latter two were.

Greg Biggs  
Clarksville CWRT



1st New York Irish Brigade Regiment



9th Connecticut Irish Brigade Regiment



17th Wisconsin Irish Brigade Regiment



69th New York Irish Brigade Regiment



8th Alabama Irish Brigade Regiment 1864



10th Tennessee Irish Brigade Regiment 1864

**FLAGS OF THE CIVIL WAR  
THE IRISH REGIMENTS**

### **Antietam & South Mountain - September 2013**

Save the dates **9/26/13 - 9/29/13** (Thurs. - Sun.) for the Roundtable's next field trip.

We will tour South Mountain on Friday and Antietam on Saturday. Our guide both days will be John D. Hoptack - Civil War historian, author, and Park Ranger at Antietam National Battlefield. Lunch at a historic mountain inn Friday and in the field at Antietam Saturday.

We will tour both days by private motor coach, so we can leave our cars in the Bavarian Inn parking lot in Shepherdstown, WV, where a block of rooms has been reserved. Please send me an email if you think you will participate, so I can arrange the right number of hotel rooms. My email is

[laureldoc@gmail.com](mailto:laureldoc@gmail.com).

The Bavarian Inn sits right on the Potomac River not far from where Lee's army forded the river and in the historic and charming town of Shepherdstown - the oldest town in West Virginia (est. 1762) and the scene of two days of fierce rearguard action covering Lee's retreat from Maryland.

Sunday morning, a private tour of the National Museum of Civil War Medicine in nearby (30 min.) Frederick, MD has been arranged. This will get us back on the road to Cleveland before noon, unless we gather for lunch in Frederick before heading home.

I am looking forward to many of you joining us - as Dan always says, our Roundtable field trips are great fun and we always learn a lot.

Jim Heflich  
Vice President  
Cleveland Civil War Roundtable

**NEXT MONTH  
THE DICK CREWS ANNUAL DEBATE  
PRESIDENT LINCOLN'S BIGGEST MISTAKE**

**MODERATOR: WILLIAM F. B. VODREY**