

THE CHARGER



CLEVELAND CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE

FEBRUARY, 2015

VOL. 36, #7

CCWRT Officers 2014/2015

President - Patrick Bray

Vice President—Christopher Fortunato

Treasurer - Jean Rhodes

Secretary - Hans Kuenzi

Executive Committee

Jim Heflich Paul Burkholder C. Ellen Connally

Michael Wells Howard Besser

Historian: Dave Carrino

Website : clevelandcivilwarroundtable.com

E-mail: m.wells@csuohio.edu or w.keating@csuohio.edu

Editors: Dennis Keating, Michael Wells

Newsletter Design: Catherine Wells

President's Message for February 2015 “ Anchors Aweigh!”

As the Civil War began, our disunited country—both in the North and South-- found itself in a familiar position: unprepared for war. Although our republic was less than a century old, Americans were once again first engaging in a war before seriously ramping up for it.

Although not as woefully under resourced as the United States Army at the start of the Civil War, the United States Navy (USN) wasn't in much better shape, strategically given the exceedingly difficult mission it was expected to accomplish. Aging General-in-Chief Winfield Scott had proposed a naval blockade of all the Southern ports, as well using a naval flotilla to exert permanent military control over the entire length of the Mississippi River. Implementation of this combination of a “blue-water” and “brown-water” naval strategy presented the USN with an infinitely complex set of problems.

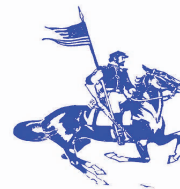
There were good reasons for concern: the South had 3,500 miles of coastline and 189 harbors and navigable river mouths. When Lincoln was inaugurated, the USN had 42 ships in commission most of which were far away keeping the vital trade routes open around the world. The United States had fewer than a dozen warships immediately available to conduct the Anaconda Plan which critics ridiculed as wildly impracticable.

How did the United States Navy ultimately accomplish the “mission impossible” of its time? As with most matters concerning the Civil War, it's a long and interesting voyage of historical discovery. To get properly launched I suggest you join us for two upcoming Roundtable meetings: on **February 11** Neil Evans will discuss “How the U.S. Navy Won the War,” and on **April 8** William F. B. Vodrey will present “Lincoln's Father Neptune: Navy Secretary Gideon Wells.”

Come aboard and get up to speed!

Patrick Bray

THE CHARGER



CLEVELAND CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE

FEB., 2015

VOL. 36, #7

Clouds of Glory – The Life and Legend of Robert E. Lee (Harper Collins 2014) is a new and quite hefty biography of Robert E. Lee aimed at the general audience. At 693 pages it took several renewals from the library to complete it – but I found it both informative and enjoyable.

Michael Korda, British by birth and educated in England and on the Continent, is an eminent figure in the New York publishing world, but as quickly becomes apparent, not a Civil War historian. Nonetheless, one ends with a full understanding of Lee's life from start to finish. He worshipped both George Washington and his father "Lighthorse" Henry Lee, III who served under Washington in the American Revolution, but his father's dissolute post-war life is – according to Korda – the impetus for Lee's unbending moral and fiscal rectitude throughout both his army and civilian career. It wasn't until January 1862, while on an inspection tour of southeastern coastal fortifications for Jefferson Davis prior to assuming command of The Army of Northern Virginia, that Robert E. Lee first visited his father's grave on Cumberland Island, GA – 44 years after his father's death.

Korda relies considerably on Douglas Southall Freeman's multi-volume biography of Lee, and James L. Robertson Jr.'s works on Stonewall Jackson – though taking care to point out much of Freeman's "lost cause" hagiography. Lee's battles in the East are thoroughly, if conventionally, described through the course of the book – no great insights to be had. Lee's famously imprecise orders to his subordinates are cited often as prominent causes of Confederate misfortune – though time and again Korda credits Jackson with an almost psychic ability to divine Lee's precise intentions – something Longstreet, Hill and Lee's other commanders could not.

Errors of fact, major and minor, are rampant in the text: John Bell Hood, though the commander of the famed Texas Brigade early in the war, was a Kentuckian by birth, not himself a Texan; George Pickett is first a regimental commander at Gettysburg but a few pages later corrected to division command; Robert Selden Garnett was killed in western Virginia (WV) in July 1861 – not leading Pickett's Charge in July 1863. That was Richard Brooke Garnett. This mix-up is repeated several times in both text and index.

But Korda writes with a smooth, easy-flowing style that carries the reader along through the amazing arc of Lee's life – including insightful descriptions of his excellent working relationship under Gen. Winfield Scott during the Mexican-American War; Lee and his wife's tangled relationships of both blood and propinquity to nearly all the great families of antebellum Virginia; his superintendency of West Point; his long years away from his family fighting Indians in the wild lands of Texas; and perhaps too briefly, his post-war life as President of Washington (now Washington and Lee University) College.

This being the first full-length biography of Robert E. Lee that I've read, I have a better appreciation for the complexities of this most iconic American figure.

Jim Heflich 1/26/15



Barlow–Gordon Revisited

By

John C. Fazio

Most of you know, I am sure, that I have been pushing for the veracity of the Barlow-Gordon story for a long time. In addition to *Charger* articles, my lengthy argument on the subject appeared in the July, 2009, issue of *The Gettysburg Magazine* and generated some commentary. Even the stellar Ed Bearrs weighed in, advising our own Mel Maurer that he had read the article and was persuaded to change his previously skeptical view of the matter.

Well, it happens that quite serendipitously I came upon another source for the story, which I would like to share with you. It comes from a little book, which is now all but forgotten, titled *Blood is Thicker Than Water: A Few Days Among Our Southern Brethren*, by Henry M. Field, originally published in 1886 by George Munro, Publisher, New York.

On page 33 of the book, the author describes the funeral of General Ulysses S. Grant, which took place in New York on August 8, 1885. He writes:

In the procession of that day rode a Southern officer, of whom (as his home is here in Atlanta) it seems not inappropriate to tell a story in harmony with the spirit of the hour. As it has been related to me by *both* the actors in the scene described, I can vouch for its literal accuracy. (*Italics in original*) I give it as nearly as I can in the very words of that gallant soldier of Georgia, General John B. Gordon:

"It was the first day of Gettysburg. The battle was in progress when I came into it with my division, and struck the Federal line at an angle, which caused it to break, doubling on itself, so that it was driven back in some disorder. As it was retreating, and our line advancing, in crossing a field I saw an officer lying on the ground, and dismounted to see if I could render him any assistance. Raising him up, the blood spurted from him, and I thought that he must be mortally wounded. To my inquiry for his name, he answered that he was General Barlow of New York.* I asked him if I could be of any service to him. He said 'No,' and told me to leave him and go and do my duty. But on my pressing the offer of assistance, he asked me to send word to his wife, who was in the rear of General Meade's army. I answered that I would not only send *to* her, but send *for* her. I called for bearers, who were coming on the field to pick up the wounded, to bring a stretcher. They took him up and carried him back to 'the branch' (the name given at the South to a stream), on which a camp hospital had been improvised; and I sent an aid with a flag of truce to the lines to forward the message to the wife of the wounded and, as I supposed, dying officer. The message reached its destination, although Mrs. Barlow was seventeen miles back from the front, and at two o'clock in the morning word was brought to me that she was at the lines. I sent word to have her immediately passed through, but bade the messenger tell her that her husband was 'desperately wounded.' I had no idea that she would find him alive.

"The next morning the battle was resumed, and all that had passed was forgotten in the great struggle. It was nearly two years more to the close of the war. I remained in the army to the last, and was with General Lee when he surrendered at Appomattox. When all was over I returned home to help restore the fortunes of my State, if anything were left to her in the general ruin. Years passed on, and I was chosen United States Senator from Georgia. When in Washington, I was invited one evening to dine at Mr. Clarkson N. Potter's. I did not arrive till the guests were seated. Among the others to whom I was introduced I heard the name of Barlow, but took no notice of it till there was a pause in the conversation, when I turned to the gentleman so designated and said, 'Pray, sir, may I ask if you are a relative of the General Barlow who was killed at Gettysburg?' Imagine my astonishment at the answer: 'I am the man!' 'And you, sir,' he asked in reply – 'are you the General Gordon who picked me up on the field?' I could not deny it. At this he sprang to his feet, and I thought would have leaped over the table. And then he told the story of the scene in which we had met before, at which not only the ladies, but the men round the table, found it difficult to control their emotion."



Barlow –Gordon cont.

How can officers who have met thus on the field of battle ever regard each other but with manly affection? And can we of the North ever look upon men who have shown such qualities as "enemies"? On the contrary, we claim them as our friends and brothers, and would defend them with our lives.

It was nearly eleven o'clock when we rose from the table only to renew, with many a warm grasp of the hand, the expressions of mutual regard. Half an hour later, we were on our way to Chattanooga.

*An officer of whom we heard a great deal during the war, as his courage made him always seek the place of danger, so that it was not uncommon after a battle to see his name reported with the brief announcement: "Wounded as usual!"

Inasmuch as this account is, in its essentials, consistent with Gordon's two accounts and Barlow's account, and inasmuch as the author, Henry Field, states expressly that the story was related to him by *both* Gordon and Barlow, I suggest that we should let it serve to remove the last vestige of doubt as to the veracity of the story. Field's reference to the story being related by both of the principals, incidentally, is perfectly consistent with the March, 1879, issue of the *National Tribune*, in which it is stated that the touching story was related to the guests at the dinner party by *General Barlow!*

As far as I am concerned, the issue is nailed down. I hope it is for you too. The naysayers are wrong again. Truth, indeed, is stranger than fiction.

On Naval Matters

Submitted by Dennis Keating

Foiled Johnson's Island Escape Plot

In September, 1864 a plot led by John Yates Beall to capture the USS Michigan at Sandusky where it was guarding the prison on Johnson's Island and liberate Confederate prisoners was foiled. The Confederate raiders had captured the steam boat Philo Parsons and planned to board the union gunboat but the plot was revealed and aborted with the raiders escaping to Canada.

Dale Thomas. "Johnson's Island". The Charger (March 2002)

Beall was later captured at Niagara in another unsuccessful plot and executed on February 24, 1865 despite many pleas for President Lincoln to commute his death sentence

President Lincoln and the USS Monitor

On March 9, 1862 the USS Monitor arrived in Hampton Roads just in time to fight the Confederate ironclad Virginia to a standstill. President Abraham Lincoln played a key role in making this historic moment happen. When Swedish-born John Ericsson presented his unique design for the USS Monitor to the Navy's Ironclad Board, it was rejected. Ericsson had written to President Abraham Lincoln on August 29, 1861 proposing to build his new type of vessel. Through the intervention of Naval Secretary Gideon Welles, another naval designer Cornelius Bushnell met with President Lincoln on September 12, 1861 and the impressed president accompanied Bushnell to meet with the Ironclad Board to present again Ericsson's proposed ironclad. With the board split in its opinion, President Lincoln remarked as he held a model of the ship: "All I have to say is what the girl said when she stuck her foot in the stocking. It strikes me there's something in it". The next day the board gave its approval for Ericsson to proceed with construction. The USS Monitor was launched on January 30, 1862.

Olav Thulesius. "USS Monitor: A Cheeseboard on a Raft". Civil War Magazine (November 2006)

David J. Gerleman. "Will That Thing Work?" Civil War Times (February 2015)

President Lincoln briefly visited the USS Monitor moored in the James River when he came to see General George McClellan following the Seven Days battles in 1862 outside Richmond.

The Monitor sank in a storm off the North Carolina coast, with its remains recovered and displayed at the USS Monitor Center at The Mariners Museum and Park at Newport News, Virginia: www.marinersmuseum.org/uss-monitor-center/



**New Book: Commander Will Cushing: Daredevil Hero of the Civil War (W.W. Norton 2014)
by Jamie Malanowski**

Will Cushing led the dramatic sinking by a torpedo of the Confederate ironclad Albemarle in the Roanoke River of North Carolina in 1864 and participated in the capture of Fort Fisher. The U.S. Navy named several ships after him. His brother Alonzo earlier this year received the Medal of Honor posthumously for his bravery on the third day at Gettysburg and another brother (Howard) was killed serving with the postwar Third U.S. Cavalry fighting Apaches in Arizona.

Submitted By Dennis Keating



BURNING OF THE VIRGINIA

Remember Our Next Meeting:

How the U.S. Navy Won the Civil War

Presented by Neil K. Evans

Wednesday - Feb. 11, 2015

Judson Manor 1890 East 107th St. // Cocktails: 6pm Dinner 6:30pm

Please send an email to ccwrt1956@yahoo.com

A Word From Our Speaker: Neil K. Evans

A case can be made that the American Civil War was “won” not by Ulysses S. Grant, William T. Sherman and Phil Sheridan and by the superior might and material of the Northern Armies but rather by “The Great Communicator”, President Abraham Lincoln, and the United States Navy. The disproportionate capabilities between the Northern and Southern armies were brought in about a 4 ½ year war generated by: (i)Lincoln’s unforgettable clear and motivating articulation of the causes and nature of the war and the reasons it had to be fought and(ii) the United State Navy: (a) blockading southern ports, (b) limiting the effectiveness of Confederate privateers on the high seas (if not, the raiders) and (c) perhaps, most importantly, in projecting U.S. naval might up and down the interior rivers of the United States, thereby precluding Southern troop and supply movements upon those rivers while, at the same time, making possible joint Northern naval and army operations, and, finally, denying the use of those rivers for commercial purposes, except as it served Northern interests. Northern ingenuity in developing and producing such weapons not only won the Civil War, but it also shaped an ever modern Navy, which has since extended national power (sea and air) around the world

