

# THE CHARGER

October, 1999

372 Meeting

Vol.21 #2



C.S.S. *Albemarle* Engaging Union Warships Near Plymouth, North Carolina, April 19, 1864  
By William R. McGrath; Published by WRM Graphics

The *Albemarle* was a Confederate ironclad built to answer the Union blockade of Southern ports. The ship operated in back waters of the now popular beach, Nags Head, North Carolina.

The ship has been called the *Corn Field Ironclad* because it was built in a cornfield and slid into the river.

The *Albemarle* represented a big threat to the Union ships on blockade duty off the North Carolina coast which were mostly wooden steamers.

Bill McGrath's painting shows the havoc the *Albemarle* caused against the Union fleet.

The Union Navy decided the *Albemarle* must be destroyed.

Tonight's Speaker:

## William Vodrey

William Vodrey spoke last to our Roundtable about whether Confederates like General Robert E. Lee were traitors.

He has written many articles for the **CHARGER**. Many of these articles were of the *what if* variety .

However, William's love of the Civil War has always been the naval battles. Tonight he speaks on one of the most famous, *William B. Cushing sinks the Albemarle*.

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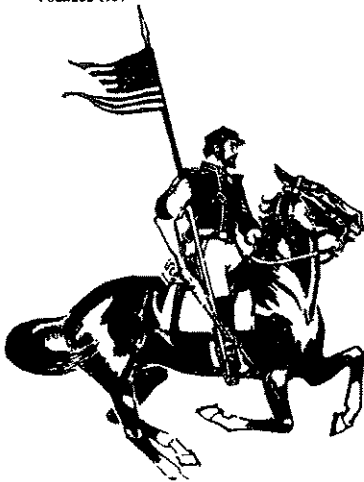
Date: **October 13, 1999**

Place: **The Hermit Club**

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

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

Founded 1957



The Cleveland Civil War Round Table PO Box 1800 Cleveland, Ohio 44115

About the  
**Cleveland Civil War Roundtable**

The 127 men and women of the Cleveland Civil War Roundtable reflect the ethnic, racial, and religious diversity of Greater Cleveland. Members range in age from 16 to 93 years old. The common bond is the belief that the American Civil War was the *defining* event in United States history.

Dinner meetings are normally held on the second Wednesday of each month, September through May. The Roundtable meets at a historic private club in the Playhouse Square area of downtown Cleveland. Dinner is \$20.00. Club dues are \$35.00 per year.

Membership information can be obtained from  
Dick Crews, daytime phone (800) 800-8310.

October 13, 1999



**William B. Cushing**  
*The sinking of the Albemarle*

WILLIAM VODREY

November 10, 1999



**William Quantrill**  
*Confederate Raider – Outlaw*  
THOMAS GOODRICH

December 8, 1999

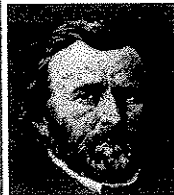


**Union Soldier**  
*An Ohio Soldier*  
DON ALLISON

JANUARY 12, 2000

**The Great Debate**  
*Confederate options after the fall of Atlanta*  
MODERATOR: DICK CREWS

February 9, 2000



**Ulysses S. Grant**  
*From The Wilderness to Cold Harbor*  
NORTON LONDON

March 8, 2000



**Braxton Bragg**  
*Was he really that bad?*  
DAVE SMITH

April 12, 2000



**THE SONS  
OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN**  
DAVE WOOD

MAY 10, 2000



**PATRICK CLEBURNE**  
CRAIG SYMONDS

# **The Cleveland Civil War Round Table Invades Richmond**

**September 16 - September 19, 1999**

**By Joyce A. McGrath, A First-Time Field Trip Attendee**

## **Day One**

With a few false starts and the threat of wind and rain from Floyd looming, 14 CCWRT members arrived at the Arboretum AmeriSuites in Richmond via two cars and two vans late afternoon Thursday, September 16. Some made it safely through the fringes of the rain and stopped off at other historical sites on the way down. The McGrath contingent stopped in Fredericksburg for a visit to a Civil War art Gallery named Valor Art & Frame, owned and operated by Joe Fulgineti. While in Fredericksburg they also walked a portion of the Fredericksburg Battlefield. The Seizer van made its way down to Mt. Vernon. The afternoon was spent touring the splendors of the house and grounds. Bob and Dave Ferencik spent the morning between Breezewood and Richmond forging through the aftermath downpour of nature's latest tropical storm. After hearing about their adventure, the rest of the attendees agreed that leaving later for once paid off!

The Bauers got the jump on the weekend's activities by beating all of us to the hotel

Dinner in a semi-private room at Crab Louis rounded off a rather full "on-your-own day." Eric Mink, a Richmond National Battlefield Park ranger, joined the group for dinner and an overview (including maps) of the eagerly awaited Saturday bus tour of the Richmond portion of the Peninsula Campaign of 1862 known as the Seven Days Battles.

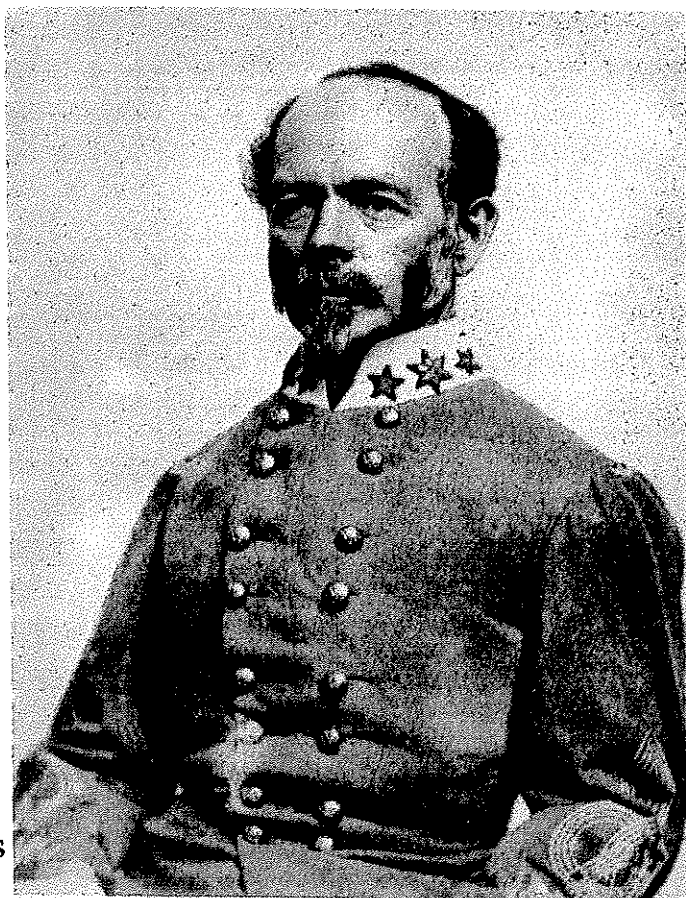
## **Day Two**

All were up early to enjoy a hearty complimentary continental breakfast in the Hotel lobby. As there was time until the tour of the Museum of the Confederacy and the White House, we decided to drive down to the Tredegar Ironworks to look around. As there are no longer internal tours, the group walked along the outside to look at the exterior exhibits. As luck would have it an employee who was leaving informed the group that the Park Service was going to be moved into the site hopefully in the next year. The group then returned to their vehicles for the drive downtown.

Curator Robert Hancock met the group in the lobby of the Museum at 10 a.m. After touring the exhibits the group was also given a tour of the beautifully refurbished White House of the Confederacy. Once the tour was done, Mr. Hancock ushered the group into the lower level of the Museum to view a selection of memorabilia not currently on exhibit. Among the items he selected to display for our viewing were an original by Robert E. Lee leather saddle, a very colorful and beautiful original confederate North Carolina colonel's uniform, and a 9-shot Lemat pistol which also fired shotgun shells. Somewhat speechless, our CCWRT members circled the table in awe.

Lunch was at the Tobacco Company Restaurant in the Schockoe Slip area in downtown Richmond. With a welcoming CWRT menu at each place, members dined on salads, sandwiches, and English Trifle or Mary Martin's cheese pie. Once fortified, the group moved on to the State Capital and a brief tour of the various chambers and marble foyer.

No one would realize how invigorating the ensuing two-hour double-time pace walking tour of historic Hollywood Cemetery would turn out to be! Our energetic and informative tour guide named Kathy led the group through the various attributes of the cemetery's famous and not-so-famous occupants and the impressive stone facades. Buried in this cemetery on the James are many of Richmond's past governors, Presidents of the United States James Monroe and John Tyler, and President of the Confederate States of America, Jefferson Davis. Additionally notable to our interests were the gravesites of George E. Pickett and James Ewell Brown Stuart. These last gravesites drew some members into lingering



*Joseph E. Johnston, fourth ranking officer of the Confederate Army. He faced McClellan at the beginning of the Peninsular Campaign.*

until the 6 p.m. closing while the rest of us exhausted but exhilarated, made our way back to the hotel. Some stopped off for a drink, others went shopping for books at the huge bookstore next door to the hotel, and others just went back to relax before dinner.

Later that evening, some dined in on pizza and wine and made an early day of it and others treated themselves to the local color. Still others met at the home of one of Richmond's Civil War buffs, Randy Welch, to dine and view his original Civil War photographs and signatures of generals and cabinet members.

### **Day Three**

Sunday dawned another beautiful sunny, warm day. It was hard to believe that two days previously Richmond and rains and winds forcing many businesses and schools to close.

The group converged at the Richmond National Battlefield site at approximately 8:30 to join up with Eric Mink our tour guide and board the tour bus which would ferry us around among the five battle sites covering the seven days of the battle June 26 - July 1, 1862. Supplied with detailed maps marked with the five battle sites we would visit during the day --Beaver Dam, Gaines' Mills, Savage's Station, Glendale, and Malvern Hill. We sometimes just stopped to view an area and sometimes we walked a half mile to a mile or so. Good walking shoes and a sturdy heart were definitely prerequisites!

We took a lunch break in Mechanicsville at a barbecue place called Andy's. I think we startled the lone waitress when she returned to the small dining room to find all 14 of us waiting to be served. The food was delicious, service understandably slow, but cost worthy.

At the end of the day we said farewell to our driver and Eric and headed back to the hotel. Just enough time to clean up and carpool down to the Frog and the Red-neck for a pricey but delicious last supper before heading home to Cleveland on Sunday morning. Toasts were made and laughter resulted while rehashing some of the personalities the group had encountered while on tour.

*Joyce McGrath*

## *President's Letter: October, 1999*

Many thanks to Thomas Cartwright. His enthusiasm for history and his passion for the events that took place at Franklin, Tennessee in November of 1864 were clearly visible to all of us who had the privilege of witnessing his talk at our September meeting. After all the stories from my predecessors of first meeting cancellations I was greatly relieved when I picked Thomas up at his hotel prior to our meeting. The additional time I spent with Thomas traveling to and from the meeting was just as enjoyable as his presentation. His civil war knowledge extends far beyond the hills of Franklin.

Our October meeting will feature a talk by one of our own - William Vodrey. While it can be said that Bill has a tough act to follow, those of us who have heard him speak before know that he is one person who will be up to the task. Bill's last talk on the patriotism of Confederate Generals - Traitors All? - Was of the highest quality and certainly made me thinking about things in a different light - although I still think Robert E. Lee was a great American. Bill's talk will be on William B. Cushing and the Sinking of the Albemarle a Confederate iron clad. I personally am looking forward to Bill's talk as the naval activities of the Civil War have always fascinated me.

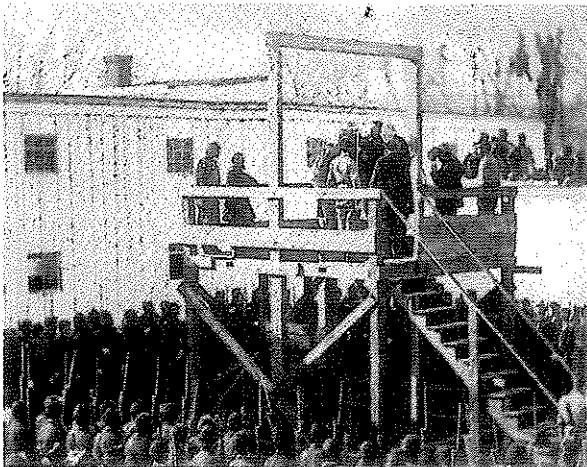
An additional aspect of the October meeting will be a report on the field trip. I trust that everyone who made the trip had a great time and I look forward to hearing of his or her experiences and adventures.

In closing I encourage everyone to take the opportunity to hear one our own. Please remember to make your reservations as early as possible. We are blessed with a wealth of talent in our own group. I am sure that Bill's talk will be a shining example of what the Cleveland Civil War Round Table has to offer.

As I look forward to the list of speakers I see a well-rounded spectrum of the war from east to west and north to south. We will have a mix of speakers who will join us from out of town and members of our own club. In the instances where a speaker has written a book I have asked them to bring along copies that we can buy with autographs from the authors. Anyone with books by these individuals is invited to bring their copies for signature.

*Bob Boyda*

*The execution of Andersonville prison commandant  
Henry Wirtz in November, 1865*



## **Fallen Eagles: The Courts-Martial of Fifty Union Colonels**

by **William F.B. Vodrey**

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*"Act well your part; there all the honor lies. He who does something at the head of one regiment will eclipse him who does nothing at the head of a hundred." –  
A. Lincoln*

It comes as no surprise to anyone who reads about the Civil War that not every regimental colonel was as heroic, wise or noble as Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain. For that matter, not even Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain always was, although he came pretty close. When the war broke out in 1861, armies were raised in a hurry on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line, and commanding officers were appointed with sometimes only the most meager qualifications. Many were political appointees in state-raised units, more skilled at maneuvering in smoke-filled back rooms than on the field of battle. In command of troops, some did well, most did adequately, but many failed.

It's reading just *why* they failed that makes Thomas P. Lowry's Tarnished Eagles: The Courts-Martial of Fifty Union Colonels and Lieutenant Colonels (Stackpole Books, Mechanicsburg, Pa. 1997) so interesting. Lowry has pored over every Union court-martial record in the National Archives (there are over 100,000 of them) and produced this representative sampling of military misadventure, misconduct and malfeasance at the highest regimental level. He begins with an interesting overview of the military justice system from Roman times to the American Revolution, then up to the outbreak of the Civil War. He then groups his courts-martial studies into five areas — cases involving insubordination; conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman; failure of leadership; cowardice; and miscellaneous.

Lowry emphasizes the constant tension between the freedom of a citizen in a democracy, and the unquestioning obedience (in that pre-Nuremberg and My Lai era) thought necessary for an army officer. "A command is an order," Lowry writes, "not a suggestion or a basis for discussion. But unquestioning obedience to a command is not a common trait in Americans. The regular-army men had some familiarity with obedient and authority.... The volunteer colonel, on the other hand, faced challenges from below, from within, and from above. Below him were roughly 900 enlisted men and junior officers, whose obedience he needed and to whose needs he must attend. Within, he had his own ambivalence about authority, mixed with various wishes for glory and admiration. Above him, he had commanders whose orders might or might not suit him."

Some interesting patterns emerge as one reads this fine book. New York and Pennsylvania were responsible for a disproportionate number of court-martialed colonels, perhaps because the strong political machines in those states produced more politicized and, presumably, less qualified colonels. In quite a few cases, criminal charges were concocted by ambitious or resentful junior officers seeking to rid themselves of unpopular commanders. Alcohol was a common theme in many courts-martial, with either the accused colonel or the accusing junior officer having overindulged. There were more courts-martial during winter months, when troops tended to be encamped, with more opportunities to get into trouble. Many of the most disputatious colonels, physician members of the Roundtable will not be surprised to learn, were lawyers before donning Union blue. Acquittal rates were over 50% throughout the war, with many an accused colonel being cleared of all charges and ordered to “resume his sword and his duties.”



**Dan Sickles,**  
a New York political general

One who was unexpectedly cleared of charges was Cot. David H. Williams of the 82nd Pennsylvania. During the Peninsula Campaign in June 1862, Williams failed to post pickets and, when Confederate troops infiltrated his lines, he allegedly “became so much frightened as to give several orders countermanding each other, and was so con-



**George B. McClellan,**  
enjoyed reviewing Courts-Martial.

fused as to be unfit for duty.” A week later, cowering behind a tree, he ordered his troops to open fire on soldiers they recognized to be comrades of the 61st Pennsylvania. His troops refused to fire. When Williams repeated his order, some of his men yelled, “Come out from behind that tree, you damned coward, and see for yourself!”

Every court-martial verdict was passed up the chain of command, and sometimes even all the way to President Lincoln himself. A general reviewing a court-martial verdict could confirm or reverse the verdict, or remand the case for a new court-martial. Some of the best writing by a general reviewing verdicts was by George B. McClellan when he led the Army of the Potomac. McClellan was, Lowry writes, “a man who relished the admonitory and uplifting possibilities of court-martial reviews. Whether it was the wisest use of his time may be questioned, but he was more than equal to the task of writing a court-martial review that would stand any degree of literary scrutiny.”



Tempers often flared in wartime, however, and the reader will find plenty of less-elevated discourse. There were insults aplenty flung about, with Union officers accusing colleagues of being anything from “a damned knave, a damned fool and an illiterate whelp,” to “a miserable reptile,” to having “a mouthful of tongue.” The reader will find taunts such as “General Logan can kiss my ass,” “You damned Hungarian humbug!” and “I’ll pull your nose on dress parade.” No less a personage than Gen. Henry W. Halleck wrote of one Bavarian-born officer, “I would rather trust my dinner to a hungry dog than give [a general’s star] to a foreign adventurer of this stamp. I have not the least doubt he would take pay on either side and fight on none.”

We all know about the best and brightest of the Civil War; here’s the bottom of the barrel. Here are examples of misconduct ranging from the most contemptible cowardice, to the colonel who liked to have obscene ditties sung to him, to another with a taste for “low and bawdy engravings,” to thieves, brigands, liars and drunkards with eagles on their shoulders. Not to mention the officer who confessed of a late-night civilian visitor to his tent, “I felt of her bosoms.”

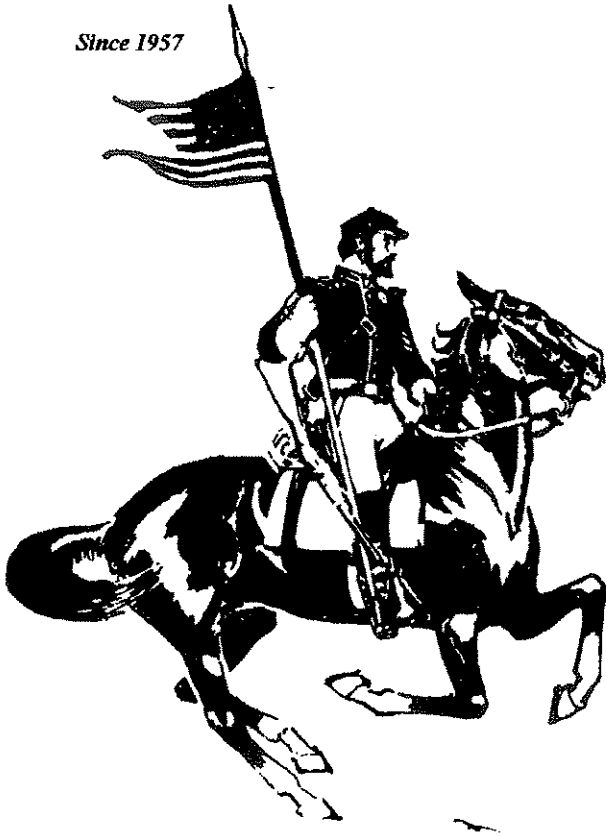
For a very readable and insightful overview of Civil War-era military justice and an entertaining glimpse into wartime folly and criminality, I highly recommend this book.

*William Vodrey*

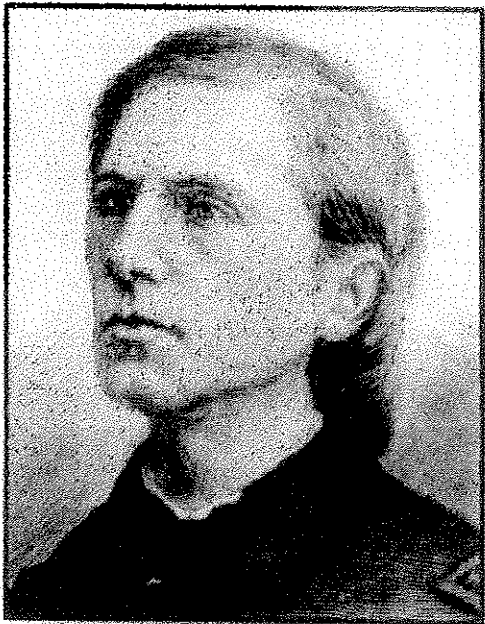


**John Alexander "Black Jack" Logan and his staff.**  
(Logan is fifth from the right)

Since 1957



Cleveland Civil War Roundtable PO Box 18960 Cleveland, OH 44118



**LT. WILLIAM B. CUSHING,  
U.S.N.,**

This painting hangs at the Naval Academy in Annapolis.

# Sinking of the Albemarle

**Wednesday  
October 13, 1999**