



THE CIVIL WAR ROUND-TABLE

P. O. BOX 5028, CLEVELAND, OHIO 44101

SEPTEMBER, 1978

VOL. 22 No. 10

-----181st Meeting-----

DATE: Tuesday, September 12, 1978

SPEAKER: Albert P. Scheller

SUBJECT: "Unusual Incidents In The Vicksburg Campaign"

PLACE: G. A. R. Hall, Penninsula, Ohio

This will be a combined meeting with the Western Reserve
Civil War Round Table.

PRELIMINARIES: 6:00 p.m.

DINNER: 7:00 p.m.

NOTE: Reservations are absolutely necessary! Call Bill Bates at 579-6876
or Chuck Speigle at 464-5335

Al Scheller, our speaker, is an old friend of the Cleveland Civil War Round Table. Those troopers who went to Vicksburg in 1976 will recall his thorough and interesting guidance one whole day there. Three members in particular will welcome him. Bayless, Gill and Cramer, who formed the vanguard a day early recall with pleasure that Al spent his day off conducting them to places not on the regular field trip agenda: Chicksaw Bayou, Raymond, Big Black and Champion Hill, obtaining special permission from private owners to traverse these battlefields. He had them through cow pastures and bottomlands, and climbed to the summit of Champion Hill to look out over the area where the Union forces under General McClellan made their assault.

Al Scheller for the past few years has been and still is Park Technician, Vicksburg Military Park. He has served for ten years in the Park Service, and is an authority on the action in the Vicksburg vicinity. He retired as a fireboat pilot after 22 years service with the New York Fire Department. His Civil War Round Table speaking engagements have included New York, Chicago, Jackson, Baton Rouge and Little Rock.

BOOKS, BOOKS, BOOKS

Our Board of Directors has set the November meeting as the date of the resurrection of an annual book sale. Those having books to offer are asked to make a list of them, with a suggested selling price, and either turn it over to Chuck Speigle or Stu Cramer at the Penninsula meeting; or mail it to Box 5028, Cleveland, Ohio, 44101. You are then asked to BRING SAID BOOKS TO THE OCTOBER MEETING. We will store them, and if not priced, will look up current prices, and as has been the custom in the past, discount them 50%. You may bring books to the November meeting, but these must be priced ahead of time. This is a labor of love for the benefit of all members.

TAPS

Since our last meeting we have lost one of our stalwarts, good friend and loyal member Art Jordon. A Past President of the Civil War Round Table of Cleveland, and a regular on the field trips, Art had almost completed the arrangements for this year's visit to Columbia and Charleston. As a tribute to his industry and forethought, his plans are being carried out as closely as possible. He will be very much missed, and our sincere sympathies go out to his wife, Vivian and his three daughters.

C.C.W.R.T. INVASION OF S. CAROLINA

On October 5th, at 1:15 p.m., our troopers will rendezvous at the Palmetto Club, Columbia, South Carolina, through the good offices of Alderman Duncan, a close friend of the late Art Jordon, and a member of that club.

Following lunch, a visit to the S.C. State House, State Confederate Museum, and then to the First Baptist Church, scene of the South Carolina Secession Convention of 1860. The group will bivouac at the Host American Motel, and is invited to a cocktail party at the home of Arthur Langley, another friend of both Jordon and Duncan.

On Friday, October 6, the caravan will move south to Charleston, stopping en route to visit the ruins of the mansion of General Wade Hampton and the pre-Revolutionary War home of Confederate Lt. General Richard H. Anderson. Sightseeing in Charleston will be limited only by time, there is so much there to see. The dress parade ceremonies at the Citadel, the Military College of South Carolina can be attended. Overnight at the Heart of Charleston Motor Inn, with possibly the dinner being held at the Carolina Yacht Club.

Saturday, October 7 will be devoted to the exploration of Charleston, with Fort Sumter, Fort Moultrie, and dozens of interesting places to choose from. For the ladies (and this year we are being allowed the luxury of camp followers) there are many beautiful antebellum homes to visit, shops, the Old Market, etc. Ladies will not attend the stag bull-sessions. Return journey on Sunday.

It promises to be a most rewarding and fascinating field trip, even for those who may have been there before. PLEASE MAKE YOUR RESERVATIONS WITH CHUCK SPEIGLE JUST AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AT 464-5335 or 461-9096 (home). We already have over a dozen signed.

THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE OF CLEVELAND, OHIO

FOUNDED FEBRUARY 19, 1957

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SNOWSTORM OVER COLUMBIA

After the fall of Charleston, when Beauregard ordered Hardee to abandon that city, Sherman's army marched toward Columbia, the Capitol of South Carolina. He had already severed the railroad between the two cities, and everyone knew that it was inevitable that the Capitol would be taken. The question was, would Sherman allow it to be destroyed? There was much hate in the Union ranks for this city, where the first Southern delegates had voted to secede.

On the night of February 15 Hazen's Division, closest to Columbia, bivouaced on the west bank of the Congaree River. Confederate cavalry brought up some field pieces on the other side of the river and shelled the bivouac. This was a no no in Sherman's book and it made him spitting mad. Earlier that day he had issued orders that nothing in Columbia be burned except war materials and public buildings.

To add to the kindling anger of the bluecoats, some of their regiments camped in and around an abandoned prison site, where 13,000 Federal officer-prisoners had been crowded into a space meant for 500. During the night many of these ragged scarecrows, refugees from this "Camp Sorghum" wandered in and recited their sufferings to Hazen's men. They had been hastily moved into Charleston and many had made their escape. Their stories of mistreatment, bloodhounds and starvation riled the men.

On the 17th, Colonel George A. Stone, with a brigade of Iowans, received the mayor's surrender and marched into the city. Many accounts by the Iowans said that they found cotton bales piled in the streets, many cut open and some burning. Yet citizens later swore that no cotton had been

set on fire before the Confederates had left at daybreak. Back on the 14th, Confederate General Wade Hampton had issued an order directing all citizens to put their cotton where it could be easily burned rather than let it fall into the hands of the enemy. He claimed that he never ordered it to be fired. Beauregard and several citizens stated afterwards, that although there were huge piles in the center of the wide streets, it had not been the Confederates who started the conflagration.

Yet a Major Chambliss, Confederate ordinance officer, later said that at 3 a.m., hours before Stone's men arrived, the city was illuminated in spots where cotton was burning, and Union officers across the river confirmed his statement.

White citizens and black slaves met the incoming Iowans with buckets and bottles of whiskey. At noon Sherman and Howard rode in and found Union soldiers, their muskets stacked, helping to put out fires. They also noticed crowds of drunken civilians, Negroes, escaped prisoners and convicts, (who had been unaccountably freed) whooping it up in the streets.

Sherman assured Dr. F. J. Goodwin, the mayor, that because of the high wind, he would postpone the firing of the public buildings until the following day. He established his headquarters in a mansion and visited with former friends. The fires seemed to be under control, but the cotton was blowing through the air like a snowstorm. General Howard found Stone's men so stoned that he relieved them and ordered Col. Woods' brigade in to act as provost marshall.

At 9:00 p.m., when Woods arrived, he found several fires, mobs mingling with drunken soldiers. A melee resulted which lead to his men clapping 370 under guard, killing several and wounding a couple of dozen. As the fire raged, caught by the high wind, hundreds of bluecoats tried to hold it back, Generals Howard, Logan, Hazen, Woods and their staffs included, many singeing their whiskers. Muskets blazed as Woods' men fired at figures running about with flaming torches.

When finally the wind shifted, around 3:30 a.m., three quarters of the city was in ashes. This affair at Columbia was the most disputed chapter in Sherman's life, and it was an episode that has been argued about ever since. Sherman never revoked his order to burn only war materials and public buildings, but was it within his power to have stopped the vengeful among his troops? Perhaps when we visit Columbia next month some of us may be reminded of this longstanding controversy.

GIDEON'S FOLLY

Two days after the "Star of the West" tried to reinforce the Union garrison at Fort Sumter, four hulks loaded with stone were sunk in the main ship channel at Charleston in the hope of forestalling any more attempts. Since no Northern vessels tried to pass the obstructions, their effectiveness was never tested. A Captain Foster, of the U.S. Army Engineer Corps informed his superiors that pilots who knew where the hulks were located were finding it extremely difficult to navigate the channel. So, as has been the case so many times and in so many ways since, the Corps

impressed the higher-ups with its superior knowledge of all things great and small, wrong as it was.

On October 17, 1861, Secretary of Navy Gideon Welles sent out an agent to purchase twenty-five old vessels of no less than 250 tons each, to be used in blockading the bars at Savannah and Charleston. Within a month, 24 old whale boat ships were acquired at New Bedford, Fairhaven, Edgartown and Nantucket, Mass. and three from Connecticut and New York. "The Stone Fleet" as it was dubbed, was fitted out at New Bedford, New London, and New York. Crews were hired, 25 captains, 50 mates, 25 stewards and 239 seamen. For easy sinking, holes were drilled below the water line and fitted with tapered plugs held in position by bolts with heads on the outside and the nuts on the inside.

Teamsters gathered 7,500 tons of stone, rough, dressed blocks and even cobblestones. Since the government was paying 50¢ a ton, many New Englanders tore down their stone fences to cash in. The fleet set sail on November 20, 1861, but since in the meantime the Savannah River had been obstructed by the Confederates to protect Ft. Pulaski, the ships proceeded to Charleston. On December 18, most of them arrived at Charleston Harbour, a few were lost at Cape Hatteras, and a couple of others used as a breakwater to form a wharf to facilitate landing troops at Tybee Island.

The fleet was under command of Navy Commander Davis, who had surveyed the harbour in 1852. It was a disagreeable assignment to him, for, as he wrote to his wife, he didn't think the scheme would work. His knowledge of the harbour lead him to believe that the Cooper and Ashley Rivers, that empty into the harbour (to form the Atlantic Ocean as natives will have it) must have a channel to the sea, and if the usual one was artificially closed, another would naturally form.

So with a covering force of gunboats and dozens of small boats taking off the crews, the stone fleet was sunk in the main channel. Meantime Welles had sent 20 more old whaleboats laden with tons of rocks, and these were sunk in Maffit's Channel so that by January 25, 1862, some 35 hulks were settled in the channels of Charleston Harbour to make it impossible for any more blockade runners to ply their nefarious business in and out.

What actually happened was that the hulks became infested with teredos or marine worms which caused them to break up in less than three months, and the flow of water around the piles of stone left on the bottom scoured out a passage several feet deeper than had previously existed there!

Secretary Welles made no mention of the fiasco in his department report for 1862.

- With apologies to Howard P. Nash, librarian
of the Whaling Museum in New Bedford, Mass.

FIRST SHOT AT SUMTER

Edmund Ruffin is credited in many books as having fired the first shot of the Civil War. He even wrote a little biography (there will be more about this Englishman in a later Newsletter) giving himself credit for this honor. Volume I of the Rebellion Records clearly shows that he did not. Ruffin at the time was stationed at the Iron Battery at Cummings Point. The first shot was the signal shell from Johnson's Island. This set off the other batteries, and one historian figured out that Ruffin's would have been about the 80th.

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NOTE: Contributions, quips, clips and/or articles from members will be gratefully received. Send them to me at:

Mr. Stuart Cramer
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- S.C.

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