



THE COURIER



Northeast Ohio Civil War Round Table



Tuesday February 9th, 2010 Meeting #106

Dino's Restaurant at I90 & State Rt. 306 Willoughby, Ohio

Guest Speaker: Dr. Phillip Price

Topic: "God, Lincoln and Religion"

Canteen at 6:00 pm

Dinner at 7:00pm

Guests are welcome

Reservations required Please call Steve Abbey

Phone 440 255 8375 e-Mail: abbeysr@yahoo.com

Dr. Phillip Price has been the Superintendent of the Mayfield Schools since 1998. Prior to that, he served as superintendent of Glencoe, a north shore suburban Chicago school district. He has also served as superintendent in Dublin, Ohio, and worked as a teacher and elementary school principal in the Dayton, Ohio area. Dr. Price earned his PhD. from Miami University. He served as an adjunct professor, teaching graduate classes on curriculum, administration and school law.

Dr. Price has served on a number of state and national committees. He helped to develop the latest SAT revision at the Education Testing Center at Princeton and was a U.S. Department of Education representative to presidents.

Dr. Phillip Price has been a member of the Northeast Ohio Civil War Round Table since 2003 and he has always had a special passion for Lincoln and the history of the Civil War period. Dr. Price has presented talks to the NEOCWRT on Mary Todd Lincoln and most recently, John Hunt Morgan. We are honored to have this nationally recognized educator and the "Dean of Ohio School Administrators" as our speaker on [Tuesday February 9th, 2010](#).



God, Lincoln and Religion: How Lincoln sustained his faith during the Civil War.

Abraham Lincoln's religion and beliefs have always been a matter of controversy. He frequently referenced God and quoted the Bible yet he never joined a church. He was very private about his beliefs and respected the beliefs of others. There has been disagreement about whether he experienced a conversion to Christianity during the Civil War or remained basically a deist his whole life. What is ironic is this private man who never professed a faith is considered our most spiritual president and the man who most used Biblical sources during his tenure in office. The study of Lincoln and his relation to God and religion tells us much about the man and his actions as president. *----Dr. Phillip Price*

CIVIL WAR MINUTES by Franco M. Sperrazo

Special Events Coordinator/V.President

January 12th meeting: Third year pro **Carl Dodaro spoke** to 34 veterans and 3 future members. His talk was titled "Boredom, Entertainment and Punishment-Life for a Civil War Soldier." He was far from boring. The pre-talk Buster Keaton movie drew a lot of interest. Carl was well prepared, and shared a ton of information with his audience. We will hear much more from Carl in the future as he is a regular staff writer for our newsletter.

NEOCWRT Proposed 2010 Speakers & Programs:

February 9th: **Phillip Price "God, Lincoln & Religion: How Lincoln sustained his faith during the Civil War."**

March 9th: **Dick Fetzer "My Great Grandfather in the Civil War."** Good to see our fellow comrade Richard back in good health again.

April 13th: **Dan Frazier "The life and Times of Major General Jeb Stuart."** Our speaker will come dressed as General Stuart. **President Terry Reynolds will** introduce him

May 11th: **Ethan S. Refuse Dept. of Military History. U. S. Army Command & General Staff College.** "Lee, McClellan and the War in the East."

September 14th: **Scott Mingus The Louisiana Tigers in the Gettysburg Campaign."**

October 12th: **Bob Tribby "A History of the Cleveland Browns."** Bob is a true scholar regarding the Paul Brown Era when championships were a given and our beloved team was not considered one of the most tortured franchises in professional sports. This subject should spark a series of provoking comments.

November 9th: **Brian Kowell on a topic to be determined! His talks are always outstanding.**

December 14th: Open Now. Ladies Night & Xmas Holiday Party. Any ideas present them to **JET, or Captain Franco?**

Lincoln's Birthday: We will complete the 3rd part of the Abraham Lincoln Trivia Quiz. This will be the most difficult leg of the journey into the life of our most heralded 16th President. So study!

Special Thanks: To all those who have been contributing to our book raffle. **Bob Baucher, Chick Beach,** new **Secretary George Grim, Ronald Doll** and **Dan Cudnik** recently made major donations.

Founder Frank Yannucci is in our thoughts and prayers. Frank had surgery the week of our January 9th meeting. We hope he is progressing well and will be able to get back on his feet and rejoin us soon.

Spring Field Trip: Several sites have been proposed from a visit to President Harding's home; the Underground Railroad in Oberlin, touring Historic **Cleveland Churches: St. James and St. Stephens on Cleveland's West side.**

2009 President Arlan Byrne: Arlan suggested to our executive committee a welcome packet to be issued to all new members The Class of 2010 so far includes Mike **Driscoll, Paul Posatiere** and **Bernard Taub.** Please get to know them via the social hour and make them feel at home. Arlan's idea should be extended to all active members. He should have volunteers come forward to help him implement this plan. See Arlan for more details. We are reunited with former member **James R. Donahue.** Jim works for the AAA Travel Agency. Due to evening work in the roadside emergency department and a school conflict He was not able to attend meetings last year.

Happy Birthday Mr. Washington: Dick Fetzer called to remind me the "Father of Our Country" turns 278 years old on February 22nd. The SAR ("Sons of the American Revolution") will celebrate this major event at the Shaker Heights Country Club on that day. Members that will be there include **Ron Morgan, Hudson Fowler, Bruce Beale, Frank Moore, Pat Norris, Chuck Richards & Steve Abbey.**

The Particulars: The doors open at 11:30 am. **The Shaker Heights Country Club is located at 3300 Courtland Blvd., Shaker Hts. OH 44122.** The keynote speaker will be Judge Richard Ambrose, who will present a talk entitled: "Teamwork-Lessons Learned from History, Sports & for Life." This is former Browns Football linebacker **Dick "Bam Bam" Ambrose.** Cost for the birthday luncheon is \$31.00. See our Richard for more details or call or call him at 330-562-5781, or email treeclimber123 @ yahoo.com. Our NEOCWRT will be recognized on the program. Can we fill up a table?

Membership Dues: 2nd Notice: Kindly bring your check to the February 9th meeting for \$55.00. Present it separately to **Steve Abbey,** or mail it to **Treasurer Bill Wilson** at 9772 Willow Lane, Concord, OH 44060. Make check payable to **NEOCWRT!**

The Courier is the monthly newsletter of the Northeast Ohio Civil War Round Table

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“The Battle of the Crater” by Arlan Byrne Part 2 “The Tunnel”

As soon as General Grant approved the plan for the tunnel, things started to move forward at high speed. Colonel Pleasants was put in charge of the project and he seemed to become obsessed with it. After all the mismanagement, poor planning and bad decisions resulting in the terrible number of casualties he had seen this spring; he was determined to do this job right. He drove himself nonstop 24 hours a day, pausing only to snatch a few hours of sleep at night.

His plan called for a simple, straight, horizontal tunnel 4 1/2' wide and 5' high. It was just like the tunnels the miner's of the 48th Pennsylvania had been digging all their lives. The tunnel would go under the Union main trench line, then under no man's land and end up under "Elliott's Salient." Two cross tunnels would be dug at the end of the tunnel making the tunnel into the shape of a 'T'. Pleasants estimated the tunnel would be 511 feet long with two 40 foot cross shafts at the end. The right cross shaft would be directly under those hated cannon, while the left cross shaft would be under the main Confederate trench line. Barring any delays or complications, Pleasants estimated it should be done in 14 days.



But there were plenty of delays and complications. Major Duane refused to let the miners have any of the Army Corps of Engineers tunneling equipment; so Colonel Pleasants had to find blacksmiths who could change standard army issue pickaxes and shovels into the special curved short handle pickaxes and shovels used in tunnel construction. Duane also refused to let Pleasants use the Army's brand new theodolite, a surveying tool used to calculate angles and distance. This instrument was necessary if the tunnel was to arrive at its correct destination. Burnside had to order an antiquated one from Washington; but it worked well enough for Pleasants' needs. To remove the dirt from the tunnel, Pleasants made special two man dirt carrying handbarrows out of army hardtack cases reinforced with straps of iron from army pork and beef barrels. One man would carry each end.

(Scene of the explosion on Saturday July 30, 1864 by Alfred R. Waud)

For the tunnel digging, he divided his men into 2 man crews working two and one half hour shifts each. One man would pick dirt from the tunnel face while the other man shoveled the dirt into the handbarrow boxes. At first the dirt excavated from the mine was used to fill sandbags and strengthen the defensive works. But when there was no more need for sandbags, the dirt had to be carried to nearby woods where the piles were covered with brush so that the Confederates wouldn't see it and guess that a tunnel was being dug. Secrecy was vitally important. The Confederates must not discover the tunnel before it was finished. At first each two man crew was rewarded with a shot of whiskey at the end of their shift; but after a week this was discontinued because some of the men saved up their shots, went on a binge, and got too drunk to work their next regular shift.

Timber supports were required to shore up the walls of the mine and prevent a cave-in. Two side props and a heavy crossbeam along with a mudsill for the base were fashioned outside the tunnel and then carried inside and fitted together. The props were angled outward at the bottom giving the mine a sloped appearance. This solved Major Duane's cave-in objection. At first wood from a nearby abandoned bridge was used, but it was soon used up. Then General Potter heard of an abandoned sawmill nearby. When he asked Meade's headquarters for help with the sawmill, it was refused. So he simply used off duty men from his 2nd Division to run the sawmill and make the wooden mine supports.

Every construction project needs a foreman to supervise the job; and Pleasants choose Sergeant Harry 'Snapper' Reese, an emigrant from South Wales England. When Reese was 8 years old he followed the family tradition and entered the local coal mines. Coming to America as a young man he naturally ended up in the coal country of Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania where he enlisted in the 48th at the beginning of the war. The brawny Englishman with the pleasant face was a natural born leader of men and when he was chosen as foreman by Pleasants, he set up camp at the entrance to the tunnel and rarely left.

The ground the tunnel went through was a combination of marine clay, sand and silt that geologists later named the Eastover Formation. The digging was much easier and safer than digging in the rocky Pennsylvania hillsides. There were no pockets of hidden explosive methane gas or poisonous carbon dioxide here. The deadly coal dust which caused what was later called Black Lung Disease, was also absent from this mine tunnel. And no matter how hard the digging was, the men preferred it to sitting in the trenches over head and being shot at by snipers and mortars.

With Reese pushing the men, Potter supplying the wood and Pleasants coordinating the whole thing, the tunnel progressed rapidly. In three days it was 140 feet long. But then on July 2nd at 250 feet, 'Snapper' Reese and his boys ran into trouble. They hit a layer of heavy clay. General Potter told IX Corps headquarters that the mine had run into quicksand, but Pleasants called it marl. It was thick and wet, with the consistency of putty. Progress ground to a halt as Reese and his boys tried to cut through it. Then the mine almost collapsed under the weight of the marl. Pleasants reported "the timbers gave way and the gallery nearly closed the roof and floor of the mine nearly meeting." After retimbering the area, and starting again, Pleasants had his men dig upward on an incline. He reasoned this might enable the tunnel to break through the layer of marl quickly, drain away the excess water that was accumulating and help harden the marl on the tunnels sides. He was right on all counts. The miners eventually broke free of the marl and were back in the original sandy soil.

Another of Major Duane's objections to the tunnel was that as the tunnel lengthened it would be impossible to supply fresh air to the miners at the tunnel's working face. Usually ventilation shafts were drilled from the top of the ground to provide fresh air for the working miners; but this was obviously not possible here. So Pleasants adopted a technique he had used in the "Sand Patch" project. A few feet inside the mine he dug a ventilation shaft upward to the outside air. Then a fire was built under the ventilation shaft that heated the inside used air and caused the heated air to rise up the ventilation shaft to the outside. The fire was kept burning 24 hours a day. A square wooden tube with an inside area of about 60 square inches was laid along the tunnel from the outside air to the working tunnel face. As the hot inside stale air rose up the ventilation shaft, a vacuum was created which drew fresh outside air to the working area through the wooden ductwork. As the tunnel lengthened, the wooden tube was lengthened. It worked perfectly and another of Duane's objections was solved.



General Ambrose Burnside Library of Congress photograph

But the one big worry the Union commanders had was secrecy. If the Confederates found out a tunnel was being dug under "Elliott's Salient", they would either dig counter tunnels or try to find the Union tunnel and blow it up; or they would simply abandon "Elliott's Salient" and rebuild their trench lines several hundred feet farther back. Then the whole tunnel – breakthrough - win the war project would be wasted effort. Burnside even worried about the single column of smoke coming from the ventilating fire; so in order to confuse the Confederates, he ordered fires to be kept burning all day all along his line. This probably did confuse the Southerners who wondered why the Yankees would want to keep all those fires burning in the hot July afternoons. But the secret was hard to keep. Officers and men from other units often dropped by the tunnel to see how the work was progressing. Eventually rumors of a tunnel reached the Confederate lines, and although the rumor didn't say where the tunnel was being built; Lee deduced that "Elliott's Salient" was the obvious place. So he ordered Captain Hugh Douglas of his Engineer's Corps to dig counter tunnels.

Counter tunnels were large holes dug straight into the ground. Then the diggers would put their ear against the dirt wall and listen. Since earth is a fairly good conductor of sound; if the listeners heard any sounds of digging, they would start a tunnel and head toward the sound. Eventually Captain Douglas dug seven pits on top of Elliott's Salient without hearing anything.

Finally, after all its problems; the 48th Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry Regiment's tunnel was completed on July 24th, 1864. Partly because of lack of co-operation by General Meade's headquarters and Major Duane; it had taken 33 days instead of the original estimate of 14 days to dig the tunnel. The Pennsylvania miners had removed 18,000 cubic feet of Virginia soil. Then Pleasants built wooden powder magazines in each arm of the 'T' and waited for the gunpowder to arrive.

The army manual said 8,000 pounds, or 4 tons, of gunpowder should be used in a situation like this. But Burnside disagreed. He had done experiments with blasting powder before the war and he said a charge of 12,000 pounds, or 6 tons would create a larger but shallower pit with gentler sloping sides than the 8,000 pound charge. This would allow the attacking troops to run down one side of the pit, across the bottom and out the other side without stopping. He said the smaller charge would create a deeper pit with sides too steep to climb. Finally, after much heated discussion with General Meade and Major Duane; Burnside lost. 8,000 pounds of gunpowder in 320 twenty five pound kegs, along with crates of fuses, were delivered to the tunnel on the morning of July 27th. The miners carefully filled the powder magazines, but when they opened the crates of fusing they got a rude shock. Instead of the 1,000 continuous feet of safety fuse which had been ordered; Duane had sent 1,000 feet of blasting fuse in various lengths, some as short as ten feet. There were three things wrong with this:

First, each section of fuse would have to be spliced to the next section and this was very time consuming.

Second, Blasting fuse is much more susceptible to moisture than safety fuse, so the troops would have to be ready to attack as soon as the fuse was completed.

Three, despite best efforts, fuses were often known to sputter out at a splice.

Finally, on the morning of July 29th, Pleasants and his miners spliced the fuses together from the powder magazines to the mouth of the tunnel. Then they filled the main tunnel from "Elliott's Salient" for 30 feet with sandbags and dirt. This was called tamping and it guaranteed the blast would go upward instead of back down the tunnel. By this time it was 6:30 PM, and the blast was scheduled to go off at 3:30 A.M. the next morning.

After dark the first assault troops started to move into position and by 3:00 A.M. all the troops were in place and everything was ready to go. Colonel Pleasants had estimated that it would take 15 minutes for the fuse to burn to the powder magazines, so at 3:15 A.M. he, his assistant, Lieutenant Jacob Douty, and Snapper Reese entered the tunnel and lit the fuse. As 3:30 AM approached thousands of eyes were fixed on "Elliott's Salient", but nothing happened. However, nobody was concerned; time was not that accurate in 1864. But as 3:45 passed and 4:00 A.M. drew near, General Meade started to worry. So he sent his aide, Major Van Buren, to investigate. As 4:15 approached Meade wired Burnside and asked about the delay. Burnside did not reply. Meade immediately wired Burnside again but Burnside still did not reply. By 4:35 the sky was starting to turn from an inky blackness to a slate gray and Meade was beginning to get frantic. If the mine didn't go off, and dawn came before the attack began, all surprise would be lost. Those deadly cannon would be able to do their ghastly work. Finally he felt he could wait no longer. He wired Burnside that unless the mine went off in ten minutes; the attack must begin without it. Burnside immediately wired back that Major Van Buren had just returned from the tunnel. Two men, Lieutenant Douty and Snapper Reese had gone into the tunnel, found where the fuse had burned out at a splice, repaired it, started the fuse burning again and the explosion could be expected in ten minutes.

At 4:44 AM, July 30th, 1864, "Elliott's Salient" and all the cannon and men on it were blown sky high.

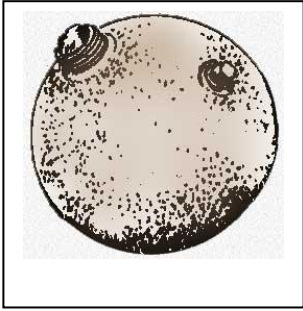
NUTS AND BOLTS OF THE CIVIL WAR – compiled by Carl Dodaro

LAND MINES USED IN THE CIVIL WAR

With I.E.D.s (improvised explosive devices) making the news from Iraq and Afghanistan very disturbing, Nuts and Bolts looked into the history of the land mine and found out that their origin started in the American Civil War.

Americans were the first nation to develop and use operational landmines (or torpedoes as they were called then) and this is attributed to Brigadier-General Gabriel J. Rains. Rains experimented with booby traps while leading his troops against Indians in Florida in 1840, but without a lot of success. Then in 1862 he ordered his troops to prepare artillery shells so that they could be exploded by pulling trip wires or by being stepped on. On 4 May 1862, while scouting along a road leading to Yorktown, a horse rider activated one of these landmines becoming the first person killed by a pressure-operated land-mine. During the winter of 1862-63 Rains worked on designing a primer that would '*explode from the slightest pressure*'. After losing the forefinger and thumb of his right hand, he decided to settle for a pressure of 7 pounds. By 1863 his mines were being widely and successfully used throughout that period. The Civil war experience demonstrated the longevity of mines in the ground. In 1960 five landmines with Rains fuses were recovered nearly one hundred years after they were laid – with the powder '*still quite dangerous*'

The Southerners first torpedoes were simple, powder-filled tin cans with trigger attachments. These offered little promise. But then Gabriel developed what came to be known as the "Rains Patent," a mine that could be used both on land and in water. These early torpedoes were made of sheet iron, and each had a fuse protected by a thin brass cap covered with a beeswax solution. If pressure were exerted on that cap, the torpedo would explode. Rains used these bombs with significant success both in the water and on the land. In the spring of 1862, while Gabriel was still leading a brigade, he turned his "Rains Patent" into the "sub-terra explosive shell," known



today as a landmine. In May, during the Peninsula Campaign, the Union Army of the Potomac was pressuring Confederate forces retreating from Yorktown in the outskirts of Richmond, Virginia, the Confederate capital. Rains brigade was part of the Rebel rearguard. Some of Rains men found loaded 8- and 10-inch Columbiad artillery shells equipped with sensitive fuse primers in a broken-down ammunition wagon near Richmond. Rains planted these shells inches beneath the sand of Richmond's beaches "simply as a desperate effort to distance our men from pursuing Union cavalry," he explained. Suddenly a series of shells exploded beneath the hooves of Federal horses. Pandemonium erupted as many whole Union companies bolted in panic. They were the victims of the first land mines ever used in battle.

Rains had originally buried four of them and was so impressed by the contusion they caused that he buried more. Their use around Richmond grew proportionately. Rains estimated that the approaches to Richmond were laced with more than 1,300 land mines by 1864, most of them operated by trip cords that could be pulled by hidden Confederates.

Landmines were universally hated and not just by Federal troops (and commanders). At Ft. Blakely, Alabama, (April 9, 1865) on the night of Lee's surrender the last significant battle of the Civil War took place. There hundreds (maybe thousands) of these mines had over the course of months been planted outside the Confederate works. The days leading up to the assault witnessed numerous explosions and by the time the Federals attacked, they wanted revenge. During the assault even more landmines went off. Years before (1863) in response to Federal cavalry raids, Rains purposed that teams of landmine crews be formed in order to put down and take up subterra shells when a raid of the enemy is out, expected, or retired. The logic was simple in his mind: a raid of cavalry must confine themselves to roads, and the details above mentioned can plant in each road subterra shells, perfectly harmless to citizens, until the enemy approach, when the shell can be primed in a moment for their reception. I am confident that if the enemy are once or twice blown up by these means, raids ever thereafter will be prevented. Landmines were already proven to be fairly effective and fit the South's defensive strategy at the time. For example, at Fort McAllister, Georgia, according to Sherman, [landmines] killed more of our men than the heavy gun of the fort.

BIO: Gabriel J. Rains, the son of Gabriel M. Rains, graduated from West Point in 1827, assigned to the infantry, and served in garrison and against hostile Indians till the Mexican war. He was promoted to captain on 25 December, 1837, and brevetted major, 28 April, 1840, for gallantry in the action with the Seminoles near Fort King, Florida, where he routed a superior force, and was twice severely wounded. He entered the Confederate army in 1861, commissioned colonel, and was at once given the task of building and equipping a powder-mill. This he did under great difficulties, and created at Augusta, Georgia, the Confederate powder-works, which were, at the close of the war, among the best in the world. He was promoted brigadier-general before 1865. Rains saw action at Shiloh and Perryville, and after the battle of Seven Pines, where he was wounded; he was highly commended by General Daniel H. Hill for a rapid and successful flank movement that turned the tide of battle in favor of the Confederates. He was then placed in charge of the conscript and torpedo bureaus at Richmond, organized the system of torpedoes that protected the harbors of Charleston, Savannah, Mobile, and other places, and invented a sub-terra shell, which was successfully used. Since 1867 he has been professor of chemistry and pharmacy in the medical department of the University of Georgia, and he was dean of the faculty till 1884. General Rains has obtained three patents for improvements in steam portable engines. He has published a treatise on "Steam Portable Engines" (Newburg, New York, 1860) ; "Rudimentary Course of Analytical and Applied Chemistry" (Augusta, Georgia, 1872) ; "Chemical Qualitative Analysis" (New York, 1879); a pamphlet "History of the Confederate Powder-Works," which he read before the Confederate survivors' association (Augusta, 1882), and numerous essays.

TAKEN FROM AN ARTICLE ON THE WEBSITE OF THE "NATIONAL MINE ACTION CENTERS", ISSUE 6.1, APRIL 2002, AS "THE CONFEDERACY'S BOMB BROTHERS" WRITTEN BY PEGGY ROBBINS.



Union and Confederate Volunteers Needed

Purpose: Speakers for 2011 Programs

Dates Open: Feb. Mar. and Apr. Sept., Oct and Nov.

If any members would like to volunteer to be a speaker or can recommend a speaker please contact Joe Tirpak

This is a great opportunity for members to become involved in our Round Table. We have had a number of members volunteer in the last several years.

Please contact me at: joseph.tirpak@att.net or call me at 440.477.5781

J.E.T



Founder and Program Chair