

THE COURIER

Northeast Ohio Civil War Round Table



Date: September 9th, 2008 Meeting # 92

Place: Dino's Restaurant 190 & Rte. 306 exit Mentor, Ohio

Canteen: 6PM Rations: 7PM

Speaker: Michael Gorman from the National Park Service

Topic: "General George McClellan and the Battles of the 7 days"

Reservations required Please Call Steve Abby

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Michael Gorman, American Civil War historian for the National Park Service in Richmond, Virginia will be our guest speaker for the Tuesday September 9th meeting of the NEOCWRT. Mr. Gorman will present a program on Major General George McClellan and the Battles of the Seven Days. He will also be our battlefield guide on September 20, 2008 when the NEOCWRT visits: Fair Oaks, Gains Mill, Glendale, Savage's Station and Malvern Hill. These were the crucial battles of the seven days and Mike Gorman will provide his expert analysis of the Army of Northern Virginia's struggle to defend Richmond from McClellan's Army of the Potomac.

Mike Gorman grew up in Richmond, Virginia and attended Virginia Commonwealth University and the Virginia Military Institute. He began working for the National Park Service as a seasonal ranger in 1999. Mr. Gorman helped create the Civil War Visitor Center at the Tredegar Iron Works, as well as the Chimborazo Medical Museum. He also researched and created a website on the Battle of New Market Heights which was recognized by the National Park Service for excellence. Mike Gorman developed and maintains a website titled Civil War Richmond at (www.mdgorman.com) Check it out!

Brent Morgan

Ups and Downs of a Confederate Solder

Part One of a two-part book review and perspective by John Krouse

It was a hot day in July 1861 at Manassas, Virginia. James Huffman was thirsty and tired after a long march from Winchester, where just a month earlier he had joined Company 1, 10th Virginia Infantry Regiment of the Confederate States Army. The 21-year-old son of a plantation owner, Huffman was born and raised on Naked Creek, a small stream in Page County, Virginia, in the heart of the Shenandoah Valley. His reasons for joining the army: defense of rights, home, loved ones and liberty.



Barely trained and weary, Huffman's regiment was sent to support a battery being cut to pieces, and he had to run the last five miles in shoe-deep dust to reach the fighting. Rebel troops were unseasoned and being beaten back, but much to the surprise of the US Government – and the many spectators from Washington who came to watch with picnic baskets – the tide of battle turned and Confederate forces prevailed that day.

“After firing a few rounds we charged, their lines began to waver and then they broke and ran. We were in close pursuit and pressed them across the stone bridge over Bull Run, and the Yanks ran like the dickens was after them!” The victory was won. President Davis, General Joe Johnson and P.G.T. Beauregard passed us on the field. After following some distance, we returned to Manassas where I dropped to the ground, exhausted.”

(Left James Huffman after the war from Huffman's book)



Ruins of stone bridge after battle at Bull Run

From The National Archives

So begins James Huffman's first-hand account of what was to be the first major land battle of the American Civil War. He was my Great, Great Uncle, and was part of the regiment that saw action in every major engagement in Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania. His book “Ups and Downs of a Confederate Soldier” is a fascinating chronology of battles, marches and hardships from the unique personal perspective of a Southern foot soldier.

He lay on the ground all night in the rain after the First Battle of Bull Run, and next day marched in the downpour and camped in a wheat field on the cold, wet ground all night. Then they marched to Fairfax station, where he said that he “suffered dreadful aches and pains in his back and head for more than a week.”

Hearing of the battle, his father Ambrose and brother-in-law Wilson Carrier – also from Naked Creek and a Confederate Captain – came to see who was left of the slaughter, saw that he had typhoid fever and took him by wagon over thirty miles back to Naked Creek. There he was treated by the family doctor, recuperated for three months and returned to his unit. Such support was common for Southern troops, and Huffman noted family from home would often come to camp with provisions and clothing, and stay for a week or more. Tragically, Huffman’s father contracted typhoid and died at the age of 57.

After Manassas, Huffman describes marching, shooting – and being shot at – in numerous skirmishes and encounters with the Federals. His firsthand accounts of the sights and sounds of the battles are riveting. “If you can form an idea of a hundred or more cannon and one hundred thousand or more small arms, and sometimes thousands of men – yelling at the top of their voices – then you can begin to understand the raging terror and the roaring, lumbering noise of this big battle that was going on,” he wrote of the heavy fighting in June 1862 at Gaines Mill and Cold Harbor during The Seven Days’ Battles around Richmond.

“Tons of iron was hurled across that field of oats where we lay that day in support of our battery,” he wrote about a battle at Malvern Hill during this campaign. “The shells exploding over us made iron hail in the oats. One round ball – about a four inch ball – came in low, struck the ground in front of us, bounded over the line, and with another bound went clear – not touching anyone. But Joe Monger lay in a little gully and the concussion of one of the exploding shells caused his face and side to swell almost beyond recognition.” Huffman wrote of several occasions in such battles where he himself was shot, with his clothing and pack being torn in many places by bullets and shrapnel that generally failed to break the skin and instead produced bruises “that turned black and was as large as the palm of my hand.”

During the battle of Antietam, Huffman’s regiment was in a support position to prevent a flank movement of Federal forces across the river. “We had one large four-horse cannon planted on a high hill which was in almost constant service. They fired over our heads, a mile and a half or two miles, and as they were shooting shells with fuses and fire to them we could see them from the time they left the cannon’s mouth, coming straight to us as if they would strike us between the eyes, but they always passed over. After

night, it was still more beautiful to see those shells sailing, apparently slowly, through the air. It was a sight not be forgotten.”

He also described becoming numb too much of the noise and killing. “It seems unreasonable, yet one can get so hardened as to lie down and sleep during the noise of these big battles. During one day of the heaviest fighting, while shells were exploding in all directions and while we were in reserve for a few hours, I lay against a tree and slept. Hard marching, loss of sleep and becoming accustomed to the noise enabled one to sleep in time of battle or among the dead and wounded at night.”

(Regimental Battle flag showing major engagements from the 16th Virginia Volunteer Regiment Archives)



During the summer and early fall of 1862, the regiment marched up and down the Shenandoah valley and through mountains between towns such as Harpers Ferry, Port Republic, Richmond, Culpepper and down to Leesburg and then back up into Maryland, Frederick, Boonesboro, Sharpsburg and then back to

Virginia. “Marching over 1,000 miles – a portion of the time marching in almost daily rains, in hub-deep mud, no tents to cover our heads at night, eighteen day’s hard fighting besides small fights and skirmishes, often on short rations and sometimes none at all. Companies were reduced to 10 or 20 men, regiments to 200 to 300 and Lee’s army to 35,000.”

At the battle of Chancellorsville in 1863, Huffman wrote about the mortal wounding of Stonewall Jackson, revered by his men for an uncanny ability to confuse and defeat an enemy having far greater troop strength and equipment. Huffman and others in his regiment idolized their commander, referring to him as “The Great Chief” and “our noble General Jackson.” Huffman noted with sadness “His death was the defeat of the Confederate cause.”

Some of the most intense fighting Huffman encountered was in May of 1864 during the ferocious battle of Spotsylvania. A Federal assault on what was called “the bloody angle” – a five-mile long system of Confederate entrenchments in the shape of an inverted U – included some of the most savage and desperate hand-to-hand fighting of the war, with firepower so intense that the entire landscape was flattened and all the foliage destroyed.

“Above the angle they were pouring mortar volleys into us and at the same time several new lines charged up our front. I was loading and firing with my eyes on the front by the side of our flag,” Huffman wrote. “After these lines of Yanks charged, I found myself and five others entirely surrounded. The Yanks above the angle had crossed and were as thick as bees in the woods behind us.” In this assault, Huffman was severely wounded in the left leg, surrounded by Federals and captured. “On the 10th of May, 1864, I ended my days of soldiering, and lying on the wet ground with a wounded leg, became a prisoner of war.”

The second of this two-part series will cover Huffman’s experiences as a prisoner of war and his return home to the challenges of reconstruction.

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

John Sandy Editor feature writer: John Krouse

Staff writers: Ted Karle Franco Sperrazzo Joe Tirpak Tom Horvath

Brent Morgan Norty London

Cavalry Crossing a Ford poem by Walt Whitman

A line in long array where they wind betwixt green islands,

They take a serpentine course, their arms flash in the sun – hark to the musical clank,

Behold the silvery river, in it the splashing horses loitering stop to drink,

Behold the brown-faced men, each group, each person a picture, the negligent rest on the saddles,

Some emerge on the opposite bank, others are just entering the ford – while,

Scarlet and blue and snowy white,

The guidon flags flutter galy in in the wind.

Courier Book Review

by Norton London

Over the past ten years several member of our Civil War Roundtable have met once a month to discuss books about the Civil War era. Because of the dwindling participation we will no longer be meeting. However, in a way to keep up with the many new books on this subject, the Courier will offer a book review several times a year. The latest book discussed by our group was a gripping portrait of **John Wilkes Booth** that we had not seen before.

“American Brutus”-John Wilkes Booth and the Lincoln Conspiracies, by Michael W. Kaufman

This book takes us deeper into the story of the Lincoln assassination. From older sources and new research the reader is treated to the motivation behind Booth’s plan to capture Lincoln whom he feels is a treacherous autocrat. Booth is described as captivating – one who travels in the highest social circles with notable friends – a lover of nature and a gentle poet who frolics with his niece and nephew.

John W. Booth was born May 19, 1838. His parents, Junius & Mary Booth, had 10 children in Baltimore, Maryland. John was his mother’s favorite. His father, Junius would die when John was 14 years old. The Booths did not own slaves but they would rent “servants” from slave owners. The children of the slaves were playmates to the Booth children. Junius Booth was a well known actor and three of his sons would follow him into that life. Junius Jr., Edwin, and John Wilkes all became well known stage actors. At the early age John W. Booth memorized an epic poem about an alienated man, inheriting his love of freedom and fighting against all odds to save his homeland from tyranny and oppression. Later in life John Wilkes would play Marc Anthony in the Shakespearean play **Julius Caesar**. Booth would be inspired **by** the scene in which the killing of the emperor Caesar was declared an act of heroism inspired by the most patriotic motives. Booth plays other parts where an assassination triumphs over tyranny.

Although these ideas are part of stage acting, they become very real in the mind of John W. Booth when Lincoln is elected president. As an actor John travels easily between North and South and looks for help in carrying out his plan to capture Lincoln and hold him for ransom or force the North to review the exchange of war prisoners. Is it a coincidence that Booth is in Manhattan, New York during the draft riots of 1863 or in Montreal Canada on October 19, 1864 after the St. Albans, Vermont raid where 22 men robbed 3 banks of \$200,000 and 14 are caught in Montreal? **Included in the cast of characters that Booth assembles are 4 that were executed:**

Mary Surratt – Widowed mother of conspirator **John H. Surratt Jr.** and the suspect of being the plot’s ringleader. Mary owned the **Surratt Tavern** a confederate safe house between Washington and Richmond. Mary also ran the **Surratt House**, a boarding house located at 541 H Street, Washington, D.C. She was 43 years old and the mother of 3 grown children: Isaac, Anna and John Jr.

David E. Herold – was a long time friend of John Wilkes Booth. Herold stayed with Booth throughout his 12 day flight from Washington. On April 11, 1865, Herold is with Booth on the White House lawn as the crowd hears Lincoln tell them his plan of voting rights for slaves! Booth says **“Now by God, I’ll put him through.”** Herold along with George Atzerodt was assigned the job of killing Vice President Johnson at the Kirkwood House. Herold went to the Kirkwood House but did not carry out his assignment.

Lewis Thornton Powell (Paine) – used 5 aliases during this time period. He was once described by the Baltimore Police as “a sullen, dumb looking, overgrown young person.” He was also described as “queer looking with the wild look in his eyes.” For a while Powell was one of Mosby’s Rangers. After all the kidnaping plots failed, Booth assigned Powell to assassinate Secretary of State William Seward. In his

wake Powell left one man cut in 3 places, another cut in the back and forehead, and a third stabbed in the back. Frederick Seward had 5 fractures of his skull and William Seward had a cut on his neck and face. (A metal neck brace from a carriage accident saved his life.).

George A. Atzerodt – was supposed to assist Herold in the killing of V. P. Johnson but Atzerodt told Booth he was not a killer and had no intention of becoming one. A stable hand puts David Herold and George Atzerodt together as part of Booth's associates in the evil plot. Other conspirators Booth assembled included: **John H. Surratt Jr, Michael O. Laughlin, Samuel Arnold, Edman Spangler, and Lewis Weichmann**

“**American Brutus**” is a compelling story of the kidnapping plot and the assassination of our sixteenth President.

Letter to the Editor of the Courier

Northeast Ohio Civil War Round Table

For those of you who may not know, we are pleased to advise that our long-time active member, Dr. Daniel B. Cudnik, M.D. is running for Lake County Coroner. The General Election will be held Tuesday, November 4, 2008. Dr. Cudnik is very well qualified to assume this position.

By way of background, Dan was educated at Cathedral Latin, John Carroll, and Marquette University School of Medicine where he attained various academic achievements. He did his general surgery and plastic Surgery residencies at The Ohio State University, The University of Kansas, and Akron Hospitals and received board certification in both general and plastic surgery. Upon coming to Lake County, Ohio in 1979, Dan served on the Medical Staff of the Lake Hospital System until his retirement in 2006.

While on the Lake Hospital System staff he championed various projects and served as President of the medical staff from 2001 to 2005 and in that capacity drove the adoption of electronic medical records, quality improvement measures, and mobilized physicians to become more politically active. Dan currently serves on the Boards of Trustees of the Northern Ohio Academy of Medicine. He is also a member of the Lake Hospital Foundation, and the Lake Hospital System. As Chairman of the Quality Committee for the Board of Trustees of the Lake Hospital System he has continued his passion for quality improvement.

For those of you who wish to support his candidacy, checks should be payable to: The Committee to Elect Dr. Dan Cudnik Lake County Coroner

Please send your checks to:

J. E. Tirpak, Treasurer

6148 Worthington Lane

Mentor, OH 44060-2269

DAN DESERVES OUR SUPPORT!

The Solitary Man on a Black Horse by John Sandy

Part one

Dark clouds gathered in the gray March sky and the wind rustled the branches of the leaf bare trees. The flags rippled in the breeze while the drummers pounded out the cadence for an army on review. One hundred thousand men marched in their dark blue uniforms, every line straight and true. Just then a bolt of lightning illuminated the afternoon sky while pillars of sunlight shown through the gray. A solitary man on a black horse galloped to the front of the assembly. There arose a roar from the throng that echoed through the heavens. The solitary man on the black horse was Major General George B. McClellan. "McClellan had created an army, The Army of the Potomac; together they would conquer the forces of the wayward Confederate States and restore the Union. Here was an army and here was a Young Napoleon,"so wrote



William Howard Russell, correspondent for the London Times in March 1862.

President Lincoln along with cabinet members Secretary of State, William Seward and Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase had championed McClellan's appointment as Commander of the Army of the Potomac and General and Chief of the Union armies but that all changed in the spring of 1862. The failure of the Ball's Bluff raid on October 21, 1861 resulted in the formation of the Committee on the Conduct of the War and the subsequent arrest of General Charles Stone, a close associate of McClellan.

General McClellan was an intelligent man who achieved much success while serving in the army before the Civil War. He graduated second in his class at West Point and served with distinction as an engineer with General Winfield Scott in the Mexican War. McClellan was part of a surveying expedition to plot a route for a transcontinental

railroad. In 1865 he was selected by then Secretary of War Jefferson Davis to travel to Europe and observe the military operations of the French and English armies during the Crimean War. McClellan resigned his commission in 1857 and accepted a position as chief construction engineer for the Illinois Central Railroad. In 1860 he accepted the job of president of the Ohio and Mississippi Railroad and resided in Cincinnati. In 1861 when the Civil War broke out he was appointed major general of Ohio volunteers by Governor William Dennison.

General McClellan was summoned to Washington in the late summer of 1861 after the Union defeat at First Bull Run. McClellan had achieved much fame after troops under his command defeated Confederate forces at Rich Mountain and Corrick's Ford in Western Virginia. McClellan became the toast of Washington and gladly accepted the admiration of both the government and the press. As the summer of 1861 turned into fall, the admiration for General McClellan turned into doubt and apprehension. It became common knowledge that he had

“close friends” in the Confederate Army. McClellan was content to allow Joseph Johnston and the Confederate forces under his command maintain a position at Manassas less than twenty miles from the Federal Capital. Despite frequent prodding by President Lincoln McClellan refused to take his army into action until he was ready. General McClellan believed that the war was being fought to preserve the Union and not to punish the South and free the slaves from bondage. The Radical Republicans led by Ohio Senator Benjamin Wade and Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner demanded that President Lincoln order McClellan to attack the Confederates at Manassas or remove him from command. General McClellan did little to improve his standing with the administration. He repeatedly displayed arrogance and contempt



(McClellan photograph from the Brian Pohanka Collection)

for his critics. In one of the classic ironies of history, McClellan recommended Edwin Stanton to President Lincoln as an excellent candidate for Secretary of War when Simon Cameron left to become minister to Russia. Stanton had been an outspoken critic of Lincoln and called him “the original gorilla” in private conversations with McClellan. General McClellan had hoped to get a secretary of war who would be an advocate for his agenda as general in chief and commander of the Army of the Potomac.

McClellan was reluctant to take his army into battle before it was adequately trained and disciplined. McClellan studied Napoleonic battlefield tactics at West Point under Dennis Hart Mahan. McClellan always reminded President Lincoln that Napoleon spent three years training the grand army of France before taking it into battle and conquering Europe. Two weeks after being appointed Secretary of War Stanton became one of George McClellan’s biggest critics; all the while McClellan believed that Stanton was his friend and confidant

The Peninsula Campaign evolved after much debate and maneuvering by President Lincoln, Secretary of War Stanton and General McClellan. Lincoln wanted McClellan to attack Joseph Johnston at Manassas but McClellan’s intelligence service headed by Allan Pinkerton insisted that the Confederates greatly outnumbered the Army of the Potomac. Pinkerton worked for McClellan in railroad security before the war and so the general trusted him implicitly. It was a terrible embarrassment to McClellan when the Confederate troops under Joe Johnston slipped away from Manassas before McClellan could assault their works. The Federal forces found that the Rebel lines were defended with so called “Quaker guns,” i.e, logs painted black and mounted on earthworks and made to look like cannon.

In December 1861 McClellan confided in Treasury Secretary Chase his plans for an amphibious assault by way of Urbanna at the mouth of the Rappahannock River. McClellan hoped to land his army at Urbanna and quickly move north to cut off Joe Johnston’s lines of supply and communications with Richmond. McClellan had to change his plan when Johnston moved his

forces closer to Richmond. On March 11, 1862, the first transports loaded with troops set sail for Fortress Monroe on the Virginia Peninsula. Thus began the greatest military-naval operation of the Civil War. More than 400 vessels were needed to transport the 121,000 men, 400 cannon, 1,150 wagons, 15,000 horses and mules, pontoon bridging equipment, telegraph wire, food and medical supplies. In addition, McClellan ordered railroad equipment including box cars, rails and locomotives.

Besides battling the Radical Republicans and the behind the scenes maneuverings of Stanton, McClellan and his army had to endure one of the wettest springs in Virginia's history. Roads and bridges were washed out. Malaria and dysentery exacted a toll on the Army of the Potomac. Thousands of men were unfit for duty in the bottomless mud and swampy morass of the Peninsula.

In April 1862, Secretary Stanton closed all of the draft offices in the mistaken belief that after all the success in the West, they wouldn't be needed. Union victories at Shiloh, Forts Henry and Donelson, Island #10, along with the capture of New Orleans gave Lincoln and his supporters every hope that the war would soon be won. All that was needed was for the Young Napoleon to do his part and capture Richmond. However McClellan wasted a month trying to dislodge John Magruder and less than 15,000 Confederates from their positions between Yorktown and the Warwick River. McClellan brought up huge siege guns and spent weeks directing their placement. Later, Magruder and his men quietly slipped away and joined Joe Johnston and his forces in an effort to hold Williamsburg. On May 5, 1862 McClellan forces under General William F. Smith battled Joe Johnston's Confederates for possession of Williamsburg. After an all day battle Union troops led by Winfield Scott Hancock flanked the defenders. The Rebels again slipped away after nightfall. Both sides each sustained more than 2000 casualties.

General McClellan's slow progress on the Peninsula affected President Lincoln and the entire cabinet. "McClellan's got the slows," became the standing commentary of the day. This point of view prompted an obscure London correspondent for Horace Greeley's New York Herald Tribune to conclude, "A war has never been so wretchedly waged by a general, not to defeat his foe but rather not to be defeated by the foe." The correspondent would achieve greater fame after leaving Horace Greeley's employ. His name was Karl Marx.

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Photographs from the Brian Pohanka Collection