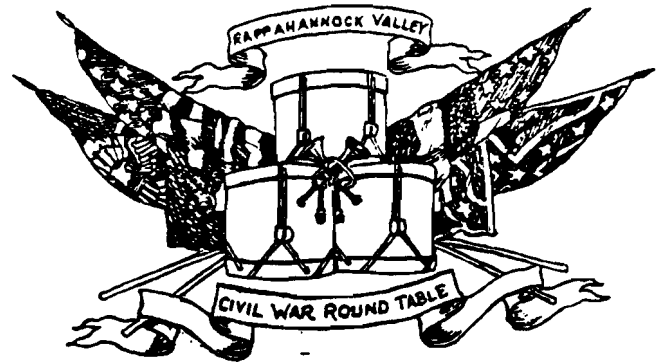


DRUM & BUGLE

Voice of the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table



December 1997

Vol. 8 No. 12

"Tactical Perfection: Forrest at Brice's Crossroads"

Speaker: Greg Biggs
When: **Monday, December 8, 1997.** Social at 6:30 p.m., dinner at 7:00 p.m., meeting at 7:45 p.m.
Location: **Holiday Inn North on Rt. 17 in Stafford near the I-95 interchange**
Dinner The cost for dinner is \$14.00. Reservations are required and must be made
Cost & by Thursday, November 4 by calling **Mac Wyckoff at (540) 786-2470 or**
Reservations: **Elsa Lohman at (540) 373-1672.** If you leave a message on an answering machine, please spell your last name for clarification. Please remember that there is no longer a sign-up sheet for the dinner. In order to have a reservation you must call Mac or Elsa by the deadline stated above. If you make a reservation and find that you will not be able to attend the dinner, please make any cancellations as soon as possible.

"Tactical Perfection: Forrest at Brice's Crossroads" will be a tactical analysis of the Civil War's most perfect battle. Greg will cover tactics, leadership, and other aspects of Forrest's most brilliant victory.

Greg Biggs was born in Illinois, raised in the South, and lived in South America for four years. He attended the University of Tampa and Stephen F. Austin State University in Texas where he majored in journalism. He served for a year as an on-line military history host for America On Line in charge of their History Channel Military History Forum.

He is currently on staff in the advertising department of Blue and Gray Magazine where he once served as associate editor. Greg is a member of the Dayton, Western Ohio, and Ft. Wayne CWRTs, is Vice President of the Ohio Civil War Association, and past program Chair of the Dayton and Western Ohio CWRTs. He has authored or co-authored two upcoming books: "Banners In the Breeze: The Book of Confederate Flags" and "Tattered Banners: The Civil War Flags of Alabama". Both will be published by Rank & File Publications. He is interested in many areas of military history including W.W.II, Napoleonic Wars, Frederick the Great, ancient Sparta, Zulu Wars, and others. He has a special interest in armored vehicles.

Drum and Bugle is published monthly by the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Roundtable, P.O. Box 7632, Fredericksburg, VA 22404. Dues are \$15 per year for individuals, \$25 for families, and \$7.50 for students. Membership is open to anyone interested in the study of the Civil War and the preservation of Civil War sites. Melanie Jordan (President); Mac Wyckoff (Vice President); Lou Allahut (Treasurer); Robert Williams (Secretary/Newsletter Editor); J. Dane Hartgrove (Immediate Past President); Steve Gambaro, John Graham, Elsa Lohman, Ann McCarthy, Tom Quigley, and Mike Stevens - Executive Committee.

November Program Reviewed by Mac Wyckoff

On September 20, 1863 Confederate General Braxton Bragg's army broke through the Union lines and sent thousands of Yankees fleeing north to Chattanooga, Tennessee. By nightfall, the rest of General William Rosecrans' army had headed north. Rosecrans notified Washington that Chickamauga was another Bull Run. Twenty-seven years later, Chickamauga became part of the world's first national military park when Union veterans successfully argued that this battle was a Federal success.

Bobby Housch, one of the leading authorities on the battle and current manager of the bookstore outlet in the National Park Service visitor center at Gettysburg, opened his talk at the November meeting by posing this question; was Chickamauga a Union success or defeat.

Mr. Housch began by discussing the importance of Chattanooga, Rosecrans' objective. It was a transportation center located in a gap in the mountains created by the Tennessee River. The key to the deep south lay through that gap. After splitting the Confederacy with the capture of Vicksburg, the Union could re-split the South by moving from Nashville through this gap to Chattanooga and on to Atlanta and the sea.

In late June of 1863, while the Vicksburg and Gettysburg campaigns approached their climax, General Rosecrans began a brilliant campaign which within six weeks had maneuvered Bragg's army out of middle Tennessee with almost no casualties. Bragg's army occupied Chattanooga which lies in a bowl shaped depression surrounded by high mountain ranges of the Southern Appalachians. Immediately west of the city and stretching to the southwest all the way to Alabama towered Lookout Mountain.

An over confident General Rosecrans now divided his force into three columns sending two of them on widely separated routes over Lookout Mountain while the third advanced on the city from the northwest. The left of Rosecrans' 57,000 man army was separated from his right by 40 miles of rugged mountain terrain. Outflanked and with his line of supplies, the Western and Atlantic Railroad, threatened, on September 8, Bragg withdrew about 30 miles to Lafayette, Georgia. Bragg's army had now been reinforced by troops from eastern Tennessee and Mississippi with more on the way from central Virginia. Bragg's army would eventually consist of 66,000 soldiers making Chickamauga the only major battle in which the Southerners had a larger force.

On September 10th, the leading elements of the Union 14th Corps under a Virginia general named George H. Thomas descended Lookout Mountain into McLemore's Cove. With their backs to the steep mountain walls, the Yankees were surrounded on three sides by Bragg's rejuvenated forces and outnumbered 5 to 1. Bragg ordered an attack, but his subordinates wasted the opportunity as each waited for someone else to begin the attack. The following day found more Union soldiers in the cove but still outnumbered 3 to 1. Bragg again ordered an attack, but his subordinates refused fearing that they were now outnumbered. On the 13th, Bragg turned his attention to the Union force which had been moving south from Chattanooga, but his subordinate refused to carry out his orders until he was reinforced.

An extremely mad and frustrated Braxton Bragg decided to wait until General James Longstreet's Corps arrived from Virginia. Meanwhile, Rosecrans finally realized his danger and hurriedly attempted to consolidate his divided forces. Both armies began to move north on opposite sides of Chickamauga Creek. Even though only a small part of Longstreet's command had arrived, on the 18th Bragg planned to open the battle by crossing the creek at four locations and moving south to strike the Yankees at Lee and Gordon's Mill. However, the Confederates met stiff resistance from Federal cavalry and Colonel John T. Wilder's Brigade which was equipped with the seven shot Spencer repeating rifle. The Rebels did not cross the creek until late in the afternoon.

Meanwhile, Thomas' 14th Corps marched all day on the 18th and during the night before reaching Kelly's Field. Bragg, unaware of Thomas' march, assumed the Union left still rested at Lee's and Gordon's Mill. Therefore on the 19th the Confederate commander planned to proceed south and strike the Union forces and cut them off from Chattanooga.

On the morning of the 19th, Thomas received a report that a lone Confederate brigade was trapped on the west side of the creek near Jay's Sawmill. Thomas sent a couple of brigades to round up this stray Confederate unit. Arriving at the mill, they found Nathan Bedford Forrest's Confederate horsemen which was soon reinforced by several infantry brigades. The Federal officer sent a message back to Thomas asking which of the 6 or 7 brigades he faced was the one he was suppose to capture.

The details of the fighting on the 19th compose one of the most complicated, but fascinating fights of the war. In a nutshell, both sides sent reinforcements which alternated in arriving on the scene. Each time a fresh unit arrived the balance temporarily swung to that side. The fighting gradually moved south as the troops fought each other facing east and west, not north and south as Bragg had planned.

During the night, more of Longstreet's men arrived including Longstreet himself. Bragg reorganized his army, in the middle of a battle, dividing his five corps into two wings under Longstreet and Leonidas Polk. Bragg again planned to turn Rosecrans' left and cut him off from Chattanooga. However, for reasons known only to Braxton Bragg, he placed the majority of his men opposite the Union center instead of the Union left.

Throughout the morning, Rosecrans sent reinforcements to General Thomas to strengthen the Union left. Shortly before 11:00 a.m., a courier reported to Rosecrans that a gap had appeared in his lines. Without verifying the report, Rosecrans pulled men out of the line to fill the hole. Unfortunately for Rosecrans, since the report was untrue he had created a gap to fill a non-existing hole. At the same time, Longstreet's command launched their attack straight into the void. While this has been traditionally viewed as a critical mistake that turned the course of the battle, Mr. Housch argued that Longstreet had massed so many troops that it didn't matter because Longstreet was going to breakthrough anyway.

Longstreet's men poured through the gap forcing part of the Union army including Rosecrans and two of his top three subordinates to flee to Chattanooga. Two months before, Longstreet had advised General Lee to go around the high ground at Gettysburg. Now, with Bragg several miles away, Longstreet had full authority to conduct the battle as he wished. He chose not to pursue the fleeing Federals but rather attack a remnant that was making a determined stand under General Thomas on a series of hills and ridges known in history as Snodgrass Hill. Despite 26 separate charges up the wooded slopes, Thomas and his men held on and earned their leader the nickname of "The Rock of Chickamauga." Under cover of darkness, the Union army retreated toward Chattanooga.

Despite Bragg's success he had lost 18,000 men compared to 16,000 for Rosecrans. Bragg had lost touch and control of the battle and in its immediate aftermath believed that he had been defeated. Despite the Federal withdrawal to Chattanooga, Mr. Housch argued that Bragg was right. One means of determining success in battle is to examine whether each side had achieved their objective. Mr. Housch noted that ironically when Rosecrans withdrew to Chattanooga he accomplished his goal. Confederates surrounded the city on three sides, but two months later, the reinforced Union army pushed the Confederates back and the following Spring tens of thousands of Yankees headed south through the open gap at Chattanooga toward Atlanta and the Sea.



CWLM Opens New Special Exhibit: *African-Americans in the U.S. Military: 1863 to 1918*

The Civil War Library and Museum has opened a new special exhibit, *African-Americans in the U.S. Military: 1863 to 1918*, which will run through 6 September 1998. Noted African-American historian and collector John H. Motley, of Hartford, CT serves as Guest Curator, with Steven J. Wright as Exhibit Curator. This is the third special exhibit mounted by The CWLM focusing on the contributions African-Americans have made to United States military history.

"Although this subject has been treated before, by this and other institutions," noted Wright, "it is the first time that the content of an exhibit has extended from slavery through the Civil, Indian, and Spanish-American Wars to World War I." As most of the artifacts displayed in the exhibit are from private collections, this is likely to be the only time that they will be shown together.

"This is a story too large and too significant to be relegated to just one aspect of history," said CWLM Executive Director John Craft. "The contributions and sacrifices made by African-Americans should be studied by all Americans as this story is truly inspirational." By the end of the Civil War, nearly 10% of the Union Army was African-American, and black soldiers had fought in 449 engagements in every theater of the war. Twenty-five African-Americans were awarded the Medal of Honor for action during the Civil War. Following the Civil War the all-black 9th and 10th Cavalry, known as the "Buffalo Soldiers," and the all-black 24th and 25th Infantry were organized, although these units were still commanded by white officers.

Among the artifacts displayed in the exhibit are slave items, including a punishment collar and a receipt for a slave sale, and items related to the famed 54th Massachusetts Infantry, whose story was portrayed in the film *Glory*. Other artifacts include original uniforms worn by members of the "Buffalo Soldiers" and the 369th Infantry Regiment, known as "Harlem's Own," which had the distinction of serving in the front line during World War I longer than any other American regiment. In addition to the exhibit, The Civil War Library and Museum is planning a series of lectures on special topics related to the exhibit and its historical context.

The Civil War Library and Museum is open Wednesday through Sunday from 11 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and is located at 1805 Pine Street, Philadelphia. For information on directions or admission, please call: 215-735-8196.

Campaign '98

Just when you thought you had heard the last of politics for awhile, it's that time again. Elections for officers of the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table will take place at the January 1998 meeting. The slate of candidates for 1998 is listed below. If you would like to take a more active role in the Round Table, please consider filling one of the vacancies on the Executive Committee. We currently have two vacancies: a Secretary and an Executive Committee member. If you are interested in serving, please contact Melanie Jordan to let her know of your interest. The Committee would appreciate your help.

President: Melanie Jordan
Immediate Past President: Dane Hartgrove
Vice President: Mac Wyckoff
Treasurer: Lou Allahut
Secretary: vacant
Newsletter Editor: Dane Hartgrove

Additional Executive Committee Members: Steve Gambaro, John Graham, Elsa Lohman, Ann McCarthy, Tom Quigley, Mike Stevens, vacant.

Treasurer's Report:

As of October 20, 1997, we have \$3,493.57 in the RVCWRT Treasury. Of that total, \$1,100 has been committed to APCWS for site improvements at Harris Farm on the Spotsylvania Court House battlefield.

Please remember that RVCWRT dues should be paid by December 31. Please renew your membership at the December 8 dinner meeting or mail your check to the RVCWRT post office box. Thank you.

As we reported in the last newsletter, Marti Leicester has started her new job as the Associate Regional Director for Operations for the 54 national parks in the Pacific West Region. Her new duties include interpretive and educational programs, land acquisition, and maintenance.

For those of you who may wish to send a greeting to Marti, her new address is:

National Park Service
Pacific West Regional Office
600 Harrison Street
San Francisco, CA 94107

A Review by

Frank Edward Bourne

Chattanooga--A Death Grip on the Confederacy, by James Lee McDonough, University of Tennessee Press. 298 pp. Knoxville. #31.95 cloth; \$16.95 paper. Telephone: 423-974-3321.

The physical location of Chattanooga is startling to the visitor, whether coming in from Atlanta or Knoxville on the Interstates, his descending the three-hundred-foot slope of Missionary Ridge and seeing the town laid out below and in the shadow of the towering and encircling mountains, Lookout, Raccoon, and Waldens Ridge, or to come in from Birmingham, Huntsville, or Nashville, this approach being by the Tennessee River pass, winding along Moccasin Bend and into town. To the traveler, such a sight is awe-inspiring; to the warrior it is an area fraught with all kinds of possibilities, defensive and offensive. The town's importance during the Civil War was not its population, which numbered less than 3,000, but its railroad connections, with lines running to Memphis, Nashville, Atlanta, Knoxville, and subsequently to Virginia. The Union Army of the Cumberland, having outflanked and dislodged the Confederate Army of Tennessee from the middle of the state, where it was in winter-quarters at Shelbyville, Manchester, and Tullahoma, conquered the Cumberland Mountains as well, passed Chattanooga, but overrunning its mark, suffered a stunning defeat at South Chickamauga Creek in Georgia, and had literally fled pell-mell to nearby Chattanooga, where it was holed up defensively and starving in the twenty-three square mile valley; the Confederate Army now looked down upon it from the three-mile long Missionary Ridge in the east, and from the promontory of Lookout Mountain, sixteen-hundred feet above the river in the south, and they held the river pass in the west; the only way out for the Federals was the treacherous, muddy, rock-strewn, and steep trail over twelve-hundred foot high Waldens Ridge (Signal Mountain) to the northwest, which then led to the circuitous route narrow Sequatchie Valley to the railhead at Bridgeport, Alabama. The situation was desperate.

This is where James Lee McDonough enters with his study, Chattanooga, A Grip on the Confederacy, on how, with new leadership, the Union forces resupplied themselves and broke out of their mountainous stalemate, to cut the Confederacy in half. President Lincoln's letter to the soon-to-be deposed Union General Rosecrans is quoted, "If we can hold Chattanooga...I think the rebellion must dwindle and die."

As usual with the Army of Tennessee, the student of war must contend with the erratic personalities of its commanders, in this case, General Braxton Bragg. And the general, at this stage, was engaged in a vendetta with his subordinate generals, Buckner, Hardee, Polk, among others--Forrest threatened to kill him if he ever crossed his path again--who criticized the commanding general for his failure to exploit the great victory at Chickamauga by pursuing the routed and demoralized Federals into Chattanooga when it was still possible and capturing them. But to this Knoxvilleian, the most revealing part of this book is the roll, and non-roll, of General James Longstreet. The besieged Union Army's only supply line, which traversed Waldens Ridge, was littered with the carcasses of mules terminated by exhaustion from hauling the very necessary rations; the only route available was dismal. Yet, in a daring raid, Union forces were able to take Browns Ferry, which is on the Tennessee River, west of the city, and Wauhatchie in Lookout Valley, this action allowing the Federals, instead of having to rely on the Waldens Ridge route, to open a direct and accessible supply line to the railroad at Bridgeport. This area was Longstreet's responsibility, and once lost, he did not make an effort to retake this crucial river pass between Lookout Mountain and Raccoon Mountain (this latter sometimes called Elder Mountain).

It was Jefferson Davis's idea to send General Longstreet up the Tennessee Valley one-hundred-ten miles to retake Knoxville for the Confederacy. Bragg pounced on it. We had been under the impression that this ill-fated venture was Ol'Pete's desire to get away from Bragg and to exercise an independent command. What is so surprising, from McDonough's narrative, is that there was already a Confederate force in the valley, General Carter Stevenson's division, with Sweetwater, equidistant to the two cities, as its supply depot. Longstreet was sent instead.

General Bragg also dispatched Generals Buckner and Polk to oblivion.

McDonough describes Confederate General Joe Wheeler's cavalry raids behind Union lines to disrupt the enemy's life-line, one time destroying a six-mile long Federal supply train of wagons and mules south of Dunlap in Sequatchie Valley, its intended destination being up over Waldens Ridge and into Chattanooga, rations the straitened Yankee army needed badly. All very successful and still talked about in South Central Tennessee. But Wheeler overplayed his hand by leaving Sequatchie Valley, traveling northwest, up, over and down the Cumberland Plateau, thirty miles to McMinnville, where he secured the surrender of the garrison, then another forty miles to

THE SIEGE AT CHATTANOOGA (conc.)

Murfreesboro, destroying the fort there. By this time the Federals were after him with running battles, to Farmington, down to Alabama, as they eventually crossed the Tennessee River at Decatur, losing all that they had gained, and, by an isosceles triangle, one-hundred miles from its base at Chattanooga. After this, Wheeler and his cavalry were sent to accompany Longstreet in the Knoxville campaign.

(Today, when one travels the Tennessee River Valley in Alabama, between Decatur and Tusculumbia, he will be on the "Fighting Joe Wheeler Highway. And, of course, there is the Wheeler Dam and Wheeler Lake on the Tennessee River. One, too, can find the Joe Wheeler house, although I must say that, when last seen, it was in dire need of some paint. After the war, Wheeler served in the United States Congress and in the Spanish-American War he was a general, seeing duty at San Juan Hill.)

In mid-October, Ulysses S. Grant, by then the successful commander at the Battles of Forts Henry and Donelson, Shiloh, and Vicksburg, was placed by President Lincoln as overall commander in the western theater, and Henry "Old Butts" Halleck, Lincoln's General-in-Chief, had moved General Joe Hooker and the 11th and 12th Corps from the Army of the Potomac to the Army of the Cumberland. After a preliminary survey, Grant replaced William S. Rosecrans with George H. Thomas as commander of the Army of the Cumberland. To beef this up further, General William T. Sherman's Army of the Tennessee, which had been literally marauding the Mississippi countryside--sort of a preparation for what followed later in Georgia and South Carolina--was brought in to Chattanooga. The first order of business was to open the "Cracker Line," as Grant called the route to Bridgeport.

Lest we forget, while the Union army was being replenished, General Bragg depleted Rebel forces by 12,000 troops, sending General Longstreet's corps to retake Knoxville. At Chattanooga, the troop ratio was now two-to-one in favor of the Federals, but the Confederates held the strategic high-ground, an enviable situation.

Then, as the narrative progresses, McDonough gets in the middle of the Grant-Sherman account of what happened next versus everyone else's account. It was Grant's plan to have Sherman's Army of the Tennessee attack Missionary Ridge on the north end, but Sherman, without proper knowledge of the terrain, stopped his forces a day too early, when he had an advantage, subsequently got bogged down by the opposing corps of General Hardee. To relieve the pressure on Sherman, Grant ordered Thomas's Army of the Cumberland, which occupied the center before the ridge, to advance to the base of the ridge, to wipe out the Confederate rifle-pits there, and a line two-and-a-half mile wide, three men deep, went forward, larger than Pickett's Charge at Gettysburg, or Hood before Franklin. But they did not stop at the base, as planned by the generals; the men were trapped in the Rebel gunfire emanating from atop the ridge; the choice was to stay and be killed, or rise the three-hundred feet and take the top. The middle part of Missionary Ridge, which neither general staff, Union or Confederate, had contemplated ever falling, was conquered.

At the beginning of the three day hostilities, General Hooker's troops successfully fought for the possession of Lookout Mountain in a fight that became known, because of fog at some elevations, as the "Battle Above the Clouds," a romantic title, if such an adjective can be applied to an appellation of war. Now, Hooker's victorious soldiers descended to Rossville Gap and proceeded from the south along Missionary Ridge as Thomas's army stormed the center of the ridge.

Thus, sixty-five days after being defeated, routed at Chickamauga, and trapped in Chattanooga, the Union army now restaffed, revictualized, and re-trooped, was again free.

Today, one can travel the avenues on Missionary Ridge, see the cannons still stationed on the front lawns of various houses, read the historical markers, and be at the Confederate command posts, but it is best to have a guided tour, such as offered by the staff of the Chickamauga-Chattanooga National Military Park, phone: 706-866-9241. I understand that the Chicago Civil War Round Table, the granddaddy of all Round Tables, is going to take the tour this spring, following General Hooker's trail up Lookout Mountain, duplicate the Army of the Cumberland's charge up Missionary Ridge, and visit the posts of the units of the Army of Tennessee. At first, read James Lee McDonough's Chattanooga--A Death Grip on the Confederacy.

Frank Edward Bourne

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Don't Forget Our Dinner Meeting On Monday, December 8.

