

THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA



News Letter

December 2008
Volume 58, Number 4

Monocacy

The July 9, 1864, Battle of Monocacy is one of the Civil War's most significant yet little-known, battles. What played out that day in the corn and wheat fields near Frederick, Maryland, was a full-field engagement between 12,000 battle-hardened Confederate troops led by the controversial Jubal Early, and 5,800 Union troops, many of them untested in battle, under the mercurial Lew Wallace. When the fighting ended, Early had won the northernmost Confederate victory of the war.

Two days later, Early sat astride his horse outside the gates of Fort Stevens in the upper

northwestern fringes of Washington, D.C. There was near panic in the streets when Washington learned of the impending Rebel attack. But Jubal Early did not pull the trigger, giving General Ulysses S. Grant just enough time to bring thousands of veteran troops up from Richmond.

Historian Marc Leepson uses memoirs, diaries, and other primary sources in an engaging retelling of the events surrounding what became known as "the Battle that Saved Washington."

December 2008 Meeting

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|----------------|--|---------------|---|
| Date: | Tuesday, December 9, 2008 | Place: | Officers' Club |
| Price: | Dinner \$29.00 per person Lecture only \$5.00 | | Fort Lesley J. McNair Washington, DC |
| Agenda: | 6:00 pm Social Hour: Cash Bar 6.45 pm Dinner: Mahi Mahi Vegetable of the Day (Vegetarian meals are available Rice Pilaf upon request in advance.) Vanilla Ice Cream with Chocolate Sauce | | |
| | 8:00 pm Speaker: Marc Leepson Topic: Monocacy | | |

Guests are always welcome to attend our meetings.

The deadline for reservations is Monday, December 8, 2008. Please send them to:

Mr. John Restall
3324 Glenmore Dr.
Falls Church, VA 22041-3317

Phone: 703-578-1942
Email: restall@joimail.com
If reserving a dinner by email, make
such you receive a confirmation email.

As the Round Table must pay for all meals ordered, members and guests
are obligated to pay for the meal in the event they do not attend.

PLEASE NOTE IMPORTANT SECURITY NOTICE ON PAGE 2

Officers and Board of Governors for 2008-2009

| | | |
|--|--|---|
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Membership in the Civil War Round Table of the District of Columbia is open to anyone interested in the study of the American Civil War or American history. Our program year runs from September through June of the following year. Dues are \$30.00 per year (\$15 if you join after January 31, 2009) and should be mailed with a membership application form (available on our web site or from the address below) to:

CWRT of DC Membership Committee
Kenneth R. Rice
4110 N. 17th Street
Arlington, VA 22207-3005

Checks should be made out to **The CWRT of DC**. Membership includes a subscription to the monthly newsletter which contains notice of dinner meeting dates, speakers, and topics; information on field trips, and various Civil War related articles. Dinner meetings are held from September through June on the second Tuesday of each month at the Fort Leslie J. McNair Officer's Club in Washington, DC. Guests are always welcome at our meetings.

For further information about the Round Table, to submit a newsletter article, or present a program to the Round Table, please contact the newsletter editor.

IMPORTANT SECURITY NOTICE

We have been entering and leaving through the P Street gate. Please be prepared for a short delay getting through the gate when you arrive. This is for both vehicles and pedestrians. They will ask for a picture ID, search bags, and cars without a current DOD sticker.

Newsletter by Email

This newsletter is now available by email as an alternative to US mail. All recipients of this newsletter are requested to choose the email version of the newsletter. This will reduce newsletter expenses and allow the money to be used for things like battlefield preservation. To receive this newsletter by email, please indicate so on your membership form, or email the newsletter editor. The newsletter is published on our web site listed below. The newsletter editor's address is:

Kenneth R. Rice
4110 N. 17th Street
Arlington, VA 22207-3005
Email: kennrice@erols.com
Phone: 703-527-0077

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Visit our web site at: <http://users.erols.com/kennrice/cwrtdc.htm>

Marc Leepson

Marc Leepson is a journalist, historian and author who specializes in writing about American history, the Vietnam War and Vietnam veterans.

A former staff writer for Congressional Quarterly, he has been arts editor and columnist for **The VVA Veteran**, the magazine published by Vietnam Veterans of America, since March of 1986, when his “Arts of War” column began.

He has written for many newspapers and magazines, including the **Washington Post**, **Washington Post Magazine**, **Smithsonian**, **Military History**, **Civil War Times Illustrated**, **New York Times**, **New York Times Book Review**, **Baltimore Sun**, **Chicago Tribune**, **Arizona Republic**, **New York Newsday**, **Detroit News**, **Dallas Morning News**, **Christian Science Monitor**, **St. Petersburg Times**, and **USA Today**. He also was a long-time contributor to the **Encyclopedia Americana Yearbook**.

He is the author of six books, most recently, **Desperate Engagement: How a Little Known Civil War Battle Saved Washington, D.C., and Changed American History**. His well-received, **Flag: An American Biography** (Thomas Dunne Books/St. Martin's Press, 2005), a history of the American flag from the beginnings to today, was published in 2005. His previous book was **Saving Monticello: The Levy Family's Epic Quest to Rescue the House Jefferson Built** (Free Press/Simon & Schuster, 2001; University of Virginia Press, paperback, 2003). He is the editor of **Webster's New World Dictionary of the Vietnam War** and a contributor to **The Dictionary of Virginia Biography**.

An adjunct professor of history at Lord Fairfax Community College in Warrenton, Virginia, he earned a BA in history from George Washington University in 1967. After serving in the U.S. Army from 1967-69, including a year in the Vietnam War, he earned a Masters Degree in history from George Washington University in 1971. He lives in Middleburg, Virginia, with his wife and their two children.

Book Review

by Gordon Berg

Robert E. Lee and the Fall of the Confederacy 1863-1865

Ethan S. Rafuse

Rowman & Littlefield, 2008, 283pp. \$34.95

No Civil War military figure has had more written about him than Robert Edward Lee. Is there anything new to say? Ethan Rafuse clearly thinks so and in **Robert E. Lee and the Fall of the Confederacy 1863-1865**, he argues his case that “strategic and operational considerations properly led Lee to a preference for offensive operations throughout the war.” The question Rafuse seeks to answer, while simultaneously defending Lee’s military acumen from the slings and arrows thrown at it by some modern historians, is how the Gray Fox and the Army of Northern Virginia went from “that moment of triumph at Chancellorsville to complete defeat in 1865.”

Rafuse brings impeccable credentials to this quest. An associate professor of history at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College in Fort Leavenworth, KS, a disciple of the Herman Hattaway/Archer Jones school of Civil War military history, and a biographer of George B. McClellan and George G. Meade, two of Lee’s early opponents, Rafuse argues that, given the North’s overwhelming advantage in men and material, Lee’s only recourse was to pursue a “strategy of exhaustion.” This strategy, Rafuse writes, “seeks to destroy an enemy nation’s will or the resources that enable it wage

war over time.” Since the North’s resources were beyond Lee’s grasp, only the North’s will was “a viable target for Confederate military strategists.” That will, Rafuse concludes, could only be broken if the Confederacy made the restoration of the Union so costly in terms of Yankee lives as to be unacceptable to Northern society.

The heart of Rafuse’s book details how Lee sought to accomplish this task through a strategy of attack and maneuver in the open country of Northern Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania. While historians may well be correct that the war was ultimately won on the battlefields of the West, Rafuse convincingly argues that Virginia and Richmond, the Confederate capital, were the psychological and, to a large extent, the industrial underpinning of the would-be fledgling nation. Thus, he concludes, without Lee’s “consistently inspired, driving leadership and brilliance at the operational and tactical levels of war it is difficult to see how the war in Virginia could have lasted as long as it did.”

But did Lee’s brilliance prolong the war long after any real chance for establishing a separate Confederate nation had evaporated? Rafuse doesn’t say, but given the political climate in Richmond, probably not. But he is too good a historian to argue that Lee alone was responsible for the Confederacy’s battlefield victories in the East. In the main, Lee used tactics that were neither novel nor unique. He followed traditional 19th century military doctrine of keeping a firm base, using interior lines of communication and supply, and seeking to achieve strategic turning maneuvers as advocated by the Swiss military strategist Baron Antoine Henri Jomini, tactics that were all taught at West Point. But it was Lee’s overwhelming confidence in the élan of the men he led and his seemingly instinctual understanding of the personalities of many of the Union generals he opposed that allowed him to time-and-again successfully break the dictum of another 19th century military theorist,

Germany’s Dietrich Von Clausewitz, that warned against splitting a numerically inferior force in the face of the enemy

Nor could Lee be solely responsible for the defeats suffered by the Army of Northern Virginia and the eventual fall of the Confederacy. As General George Pickett wryly observed after the war, “The Union Army had something to do with it.” Rafuse gives surprisingly high marks to the Union generals Lee faced early in the war, principally for not making any catastrophic blunders that could have destroyed their army. He also accuses the Lincoln administration of unwittingly aiding Lee, at least until March 1864 when Ulysses S. Grant took over as supreme commander of all Union forces. It would be interesting to hear Rafuse and James McPherson debate the merits of Lincoln as commander-in-chief because Rafuse argues that Lincoln hamstrung various commanders of the Army of the Potomac, in part by forcing them to adopt an overland route to Richmond that protected Washington, DC, a strategy played to Lee’s tactical strengths. But Rafuse contends that a Peninsula route along the James River, a strategy first proposed by McClellan and later modified and successfully employed by Grant, would enable the Union to bring to bear its overwhelming superiority in men, artillery, and material together, thus forcing Lee into a defensive posture of siege warfare to protect Richmond, a strategy Lee believed would ultimately lead to defeat.

Rafuse has chosen only to examine Lee the tactician and does not investigate how the psychological makeup of Lee the warrior influenced his battlefield strategy. But if he had, Rafuse might have discovered that this aristocratic scion of Virginia’s slave holding planter class perhaps had reasons other than strategic necessity for holding the leash of the dogs of war so enthusiastically and for so long. After all, it was Lee who is quoted as saying "It is well that war is so terrible--we would grow too fond of it!" Perhaps, in the end, he had.

25 Years Ago

Dr. Richard J. Sommers spoke to the Round Table on December 13, 1983. His topic was "Grant and Lee at Petersburg." Dr. Sommers was the archivist/historian at the U. S. Army Military History Institute at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania. His most outstanding work was **Richmond Redeemed: The Siege at Petersburg**. It received the Bell I. Wiley Prize from the National Historical Society as the best book on the Civil War published in 1980-81.

**The CSS Alabama's Flag
In South Africa**

(From the November 1983 Newsletter.)

During July, August and September of 1863, the CSS Alabama visited Cape Town and cruised off the coast of South Africa. One of her officers was killed ashore in a hunting accident and buried in a Dutch family cemetery under a tombstone which still exists. The ship coaled and was repaired there and sold the cargo from at least one prize through an agent in Cape Town, William Anderson. She then made a long voyage in the Indian Ocean and returned to the Cape on March 20, 1864. Meanwhile her "Stars and Bars" had been

replaced by the new "Stainless Banner" adopted by the Confederate Navy, and Capt. Raphael Semmes gave one of the new flags to Confederate Agent Anderson in gratitude for his good work. On March 25 the CSS Alabama left for Europe and was sunk by the USS Kearsarge off Cherbourg on June 19, 1864.

The flag given to William Anderson is now in the South African Cultural History Museum in Cape Town. Another memento of the CSS Alabama's visits to the area is a song written in Afrikaans, "Daar kom die Alabama", which is still popular today.

50 Years Ago

On December 9, 1958, Col. Allen P. Julian, of Atlanta, Georgia, spoke to the Round Table about "The Atlanta Campaign." Colonel Julian was a much-sought CWRT speaker. He was Nebraska born, Indiana educated, and Georgia accepted. Atlanta accepted him so graciously that he was Director of the Atlanta Historical Society. **Gone With the Wind** author Margaret Mitchell once inscribed a book to "Colonel Allen P. Julian, commanding officer of the lone Federal post in Georgia."

Dinner Reservation Form For Tuesday, December 9, 2008.

The deadline for reservations is Monday, December 8, 2008.
The cost is \$29.00 per person. Please make your check payable to CWRT of DC.

Member's Name: _____ Number of people: _____

Guest's Name(s): _____ Cost of dinners: \$_____

Contribution to Edwin C. Bearss Award: \$_____
(Please see the description on the opposite side of this form.)

Phone Number: (____) _____ - _____
(Needed in case the meeting must be cancelled.)

Total enclosed: \$_____

Please mail this form and your check to: Mr. John Restall
3324 Glenmore Dr.
Falls Church, VA 22041-3317

Lincoln and the South

McPherson Will Keynote March 2009
Conference

As the nation commemorates the 200th birthday of President Abraham Lincoln in 2009, The American Civil War Center at Historic Tredegar, in partnership with the University of Richmond's Jepson School for Leadership Studies, will host **Lincoln and the South**, a two-day conference on March 12-14, 2009. Featuring a keynote address by Pulitzer Prize-winning author and historian, Dr. James McPherson, the conference will include nearly a dozen historians, a special session for educators, and a twilight reception at the Center.

Internationally recognized scholars from across the country will convene in Richmond to discuss the genesis of the region's antipathy for the "rail splitter," the evolution of his policy of the Emancipation Proclamation, his characterization by the South over the course of the war, and, perhaps most important, how Southerners have wrestled with Lincoln's legacy since his assassination.

For updates on the conference lineup and activities, please join the Center's mailing list at www.tredegar.org or call (804) 780-1865 x18.

The CWRT of Greater Boston 4 Days In May Tour

The Civil War Round Table of Greater Boston will once again visit the DC area for their "4 Days In May" tour on May 14-17. On May 15 they will visit the WW2, Vietnam, Korean, Iwo Jima, 9/11 Memorials, along with a "Special Tour of The National Archives", and, time permitting, will do some other "special" sites. May 16, they will visit the Battle of Antietam with South Mountain, Turner's Gap, and Fox Gap.

They have invited members of our Round Table, or other interested parties, to join them on this tour. As usual, they will price out to our members only for their direct costs of meals, rooms, and whatever is prorated. They will hold a room in Maryland if anyone is going to do the two days and wants to stay with them. If anyone just wants to meet them at the site visits and say hello or whatever, then there probably will be minimal or no costs that they can foresee.

Details are on their web site at www.cwrtgb.com or you may contact David L. Smith, 3 Waverly Oaks Rd. Apt. #202, Waltham, MA 02452-6274, email him at cwrtmass@comcast.net or call (781) 647-3332.

Get Serious about Preservation!

This past June, the DC Round Table awarded its annual Ed Bearss Preservation Award to the Friends of Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park. The award, totaling \$1000, was given to the group at the request of the man himself – Ed Bearss. As all of you know, this is something the Round Table does every year to honor Ed and to repay him, in some small way, for speaking to us and leading our field trip for free – yes, without compensation.

We're not alone. Ed donates his time to many groups in order to spark interest in the Civil War and to build momentum to preserve the Civil War landscape. This is an important time, because more of that landscape is disappearing every year. Therefore, now is the time to save it.

Your dinner reservation form has a spot to make a contribution. In addition, the Bearss' Bear, to collect money for the same purpose, is on the table at every meeting. Think what five or ten dollars from each of you every month would add up to at the end of the year. Added to the monies that we manage to set aside from book raffles, etc., we could contribute more than \$1000 to battlefield preservation.

There are many deserving Civil War preservation efforts out there, some large like the Civil War Preservation Trust, and some small like the Friends of Chickamauga and Chattanooga. Ed manages every year to choose those who are most deserving, so let's help him out and help out a good cause. Literally, we are the people who can help save history.