



THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE



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Chicago, Illinois

May 2024

827th REGULAR MEETING, Friday, May 10th, 2024

Lynn and Julianne Herman on "The Allegheny Arsenal Explosion"

**Live/Zoom Meeting. Time: May 10th, 2024, 07:30 PM CST.
Zoom Option ID 845 3227 1496; No Passcode needed**



The Allegheny Arsenal, near Pittsburgh, produced ammunition for the Union army. By 1862 the workers turned out some 128,000 cartridges daily by working six days a week, twelve hours a day. The arsenal employed one hundred fifty-six ladies and girls. In the summer of 1861, the arsenal had dismissed over one hundred young boys when they discovered their careless behavior with matches and tobacco. They discovered replacing the boys with girls was just as efficient and by 1862 had employed many young girls and women using their small hands and fingers to pack the cartridges at a rapid rate. Although they all are aware of the danger working with black powder,

the chief ingredient in making the ammunition, they continue on filling the cartridges as fast as possible depending on the supervisors to keep them safe.

On September 17, 1862 (the day of the Battle of Antietam), a spark from a horse's shoe ignited that powder. The resulting explosion and fire saw 78 workers lose their lives, 72 of whom were women. The Allegheny Arsenal explosion was the worst civilian disaster during the Civil War.

Julianne Herman worked for 45 years as a Registered Nurse in the operating room. She has long been drawn to the study of historical events, both nationally and

worldwide. Her interest in the Civil War increased during the 125th Anniversary commemorations, and she began reenacting and studying various aspects of the war. As a civilian reenactor (with her husband Lynn), she became increasingly interested in women's roles during that time period, including the seemingly unlikely role of women working in a military arsenal. She is secretary of the Central PA CWRT.

Battlefield Preservation

At Gettysburg, at Chancellorsville, at Seven Pines, and two other hallowed battlefields of the Civil War, vacant buildings now stand on the lands where men fought and died. Most of them are eyesores, and none of them belong where history like this unfolded.

Help secure the \$213,800 needed to tear down six non-historic structures and restore these battlefield sites to their wartime appearance.

These structures need to be removed so our country's historic lands can be restored as nearly as possible to their Civil War-era condition, and so we can tell the full story of what transpired there and why they matter.

David Duncan, President
American Battlefield Trust

See <https://www.battlefields.org/give/save-battlefields/help-restore-six-sacred-battlefield-sites> for more.

March Presentation

By Mark Matranga

The Civil War Round Table 826th Regular Meeting on April 12, 2024, featured **Will Greene** who gave a convincing interpretation of two unheralded but instrumental actions which he argued secured the ultimate Federal victory at Chattanooga in November 1863. In *“Opening the Cracker Line and Keeping it Open: The Decisive Battles of the Chattanooga Campaign”* Greene described the decisive actions at Brown's Ferry and the Lookout Creek in October of that year, well before the dramatic charge up Missionary Ridge.

Following the debacle at Chickamauga in September, the Army of the Cumberland was penned up in Chattanooga, surrounded on three sides by Braxton Bragg's army and hemmed in by mountainous terrain to the north. Supplying the army was a logistical nightmare. A dry summer had left Tennessee River levels too low for barge traffic and

bridges destroyed at Bridgeport and Running Water Creek required a 60-mile detour via the Sequatchie Valley and across Walden's Ridge before provisions and ordnance could reach the besieged city. Cavalry raids led by Joe Wheeler exacerbated this problem. The army was nearly starving and running out of ammunition.

Making matters worse, the army's commander, William Rosecrans, was demoralized and the army had lost confidence in him: Chickamauga had a negative effect on the morale of northern troops. General Grant, now in command of the Western Theater, replaced Rosecrans with George Thomas. Confederate morale was at a low ebb as well. Sam Watkins described his situation as "starved and naked" and being "heartbroken" at the condition of his army. And there was turmoil in Bragg's command. The general was able to rid himself of certain troublesome commanders – Buckner, D.H. Hill, Polk – but was unable to harness his chief subordinate, James Longstreet, whose intransigence arguably cost Bragg the battle.

But rising river levels in late October allowed boats to navigate upstream to Kelley's Ford, a mere six miles below Brown's Ferry from where supplies could be carried three miles to the city out of range of Confederate guns. Rosecrans' chief engineer, W.F. 'Baldy' Smith, devised a plan to secure a 'Cracker Line' to relieve the city. Smith had reconnoitered the site and determined to seize the Confederate position on the west bank and bridge the river; Generals Grant and Thomas approved. Smith chose Brig. Gen. William Hazen to lead the expedition which was executed on October 27, 1863. Early that day under foggy conditions, Hazen and Col. Stanley's engineers, 1,400 strong, ferried downriver in pontoon boats around Moccasin Point to the ferry, overwhelming the pickets at the site. Col. Oates ordered a counterattack and Brig. Gen. Evander Law arrived with reserve regiments, but they were outnumbered by union reinforcements. With that the bridgehead was secured.

Greene pointed out that this dramatic riverine assault did not ensure the supply line: Confederate forces still held positions in Lookout Valley south of the ferry where they stood poised to interdict both men and supplies. But Longstreet dismissed reports of Federals moving down the valley, opining that they would move over the mountain instead. He ignored orders from Bragg to attack Hooker, and installed Micah Jenkins in command of Hood's division, infuriating Law, Hood's senior subordinate. Jenkins transferred the major portion of Law's command east of the mountain, leaving Law with only two regiments to defend the valley. Meanwhile, Hooker posted Howard's XI Corps near Brown's Ferry and detached Gen. John Geary's XII Corps division at Wauhatchie Station on the railroad line to the city.

Finally sensing danger, Longstreet ordered Law to attack Geary at night, an affair that began after midnight on October 29. Law eventually assembled a force of several brigades and surprised Geary. Artillerists in Geary's division suffered greatly; this

included Geary's son who was killed in action. Col. Orland Smith moved south to assist Geary and came under fire from the hill to the east that now bears his name. Other XI Corps units also veered east instead of reinforcing Geary, who ultimately held as the Confederates retreated.

With this, the Confederates' last chance to wrest Federal control of the Gateway City ended. Greene argues that once the Cracker Line was completed Bragg's 'siege' was a farce. Food, supplies, ammunition and men were now pouring into Chattanooga. Bragg could accomplish nothing more; he should have retreated.

Greene brings a wealth of knowledge to his subject, not only setting forth the salient facts of the Cracker Line enterprise but also in analyzing the all-important element of leadership: The selection of Hazen, for example, was brilliant as he possessed the loyalty of his men and could execute the plan with precision. Confederate commanders, on the other hand, did not possess these essential qualities.



BULLETIN BOARD

Our in-person meetings are currently held at:

Holiday Inn Oakbrook

350 W 22nd St., Oakbrook Terrace

Parking at the Holiday Inn is FREE

Dinner \$40.00 Members and Non- Members

Cocktails at 5:30, Dinner at 6:30

Presentation only is \$10 per person.

The **Kenosha Civil War Museum** is putting on the following in-person/virtual programs:

On May 6th, from 6:30-8:00 p.m., Rev. **Robert Miller** will give a behind-the-scenes tour of the new exhibit, "Faith in the Fight"

On Friday, May 10th at noon, William Grigg will present "The Soldier Boy from Lena"

For more on programs at the museum, visit
<https://museums.kenosha.org/civilwar/events/>

Leslie Goddard spoke to the Kankakee Valley CWRT April 30th on "Gone With the Wind and the Making of Civil War Memory"

Bruce Allardice is speaking May 30th at the Lake Villa Public Library in Lindenhurst on "Baseball During the Civil War"

More Upcoming Local Civil War Events

May 3rd, Northern Illinois CWRT: Jon Sebastian on "When Draftees Did Their Duty: Four Months in the 51st Illinois Infantry"

May 6th, Rock Valley CWRT: Dave Oberg on "Battery H, 1st Illinois Light Artillery"

May 9th, Milwaukee CWRT: Lynn and Julianne Herman on "The Allegheny Arsenal Explosion"

May 14th, McHenry County CWRT: Ed Urban on "Charles Rivers Ellet, the Queen of the West and the USS Indianola"

May 14th, Southwest Michigan CWRT: Mike Dumke on "Come on You Wolverines!"

May 16th, South Suburban CWRT: Bruce Allardice on "Loose Lips: Secrecy in the Civil War"

May 18th, Salt Creek CWRT: Bob Presman in "God is on Our Side: Religion in the Civil War"

May 19th, Northwest Indiana CWRT: Doug Dammann on "If a Collection Could Talk"

May 21st, Lincoln-Davis CWRT: Brian Conroy on "Little Egypt in The Civil War"

Check the **Announcements** section of the CWRT's website for additional coming events.

Future Chicago CWRT Meetings

June 14th: Tim Smith (Nevins-Freeman Award) on "Vicksburg"

Sept. 13th: Jim Hessler on "Dan Sickles"

Oct. 11th: Larry Hewitt on "The Birth of Combat Photography"

Nov. 8th: Kent Masterson Brown on TBA

Dec. 13th: Jon Sebastian on TBA

The **Abraham Lincoln Book Shop's** facebook page airs "Take a Break with History", every first and third Friday of the month at 1 pm CST.

On May 9th at 3:30 CST their "House Divided" series will feature Timothy B. Smith **speaking** on his new book, *The Inland Campaign for Vicksburg: Five Battles in Seventeen Days*.

For more, visit <https://alincolnbookshop.com/>

Reminder—CWRT officer elections in May.

Some Past CWRT Meetings

Seventy-Five Years ago, May 1, 1949: John G. Graef spoke on "Gettysburg and General George Gordon Meade"

Forty Years Ago, May 4, 1984: Edwin C. Bearss spoke on "John Pope"

Ten Years Ago, May 9, 2014: Dan Bastian spoke on "Grant's Canal"

For a list of presenters and presentations since 1940, visit https://chicagocwrt.org/Resources/Chicago_CWRT_Speakers_1940-2017.pdf and <https://chicagocwrt.org/Resources/Speakers2018-24.pdf>

Reminder: CWRT officer elections in May

Battlefield Tour

The CWRT's 73rd annual Battlefield Tour was a big success! Ably organized by VP Dennis "Den Dog" Doyle, we were given a tour of Gettysburg by two great guides, Eric Lindblade and Jim Hessler.

Remember: Next year, Shiloh/Corinth