

THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

Volume LIX, Number 8

Chicago, Illinois

April 1999

Lance J. Herdegen on "How the Iron Brigade Won Its Name"

by Barbara Hughett

The "Iron Brigade of the West" is one of the most famous fighting organizations of the American Civil War. Union General George B. McClellan said its soldiers were "men of iron" as he watched them fight up the National Road at South Mountain in 1862. A fellow soldier in the Army of the Potomac saw them marching along a roadway "like giants in their tall black hats." At Gettysburg, the Confederates called them "those damn black hats of the Army of the Potomac."

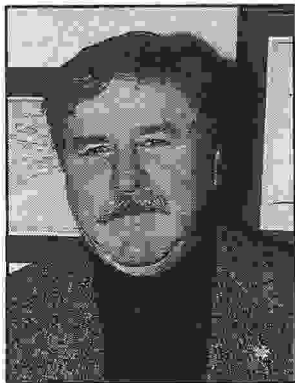
Formed in August of 1861, the brigade at first included the 2nd, 6th, and 7th Wisconsin; the 19th Indiana; and Battery B, 4th U.S. Artillery. This new organization was the only all-Western brigade of the Federal army gathered at Washington. It was attached to the city defenses and for a year the volunteers saw no action. The fighting did come in late 1862 and it was almost more than they could handle. In four battles in less than three weeks—Brawner Farm, Second Bull Run, South Mountain, and Antietam—the four regiments became famous. The 24th Michigan was added to the brigade after Antietam and it was at Gettysburg that the five regiments earned a place in American military history.

This reputation came at a terrible cost. The brigade suffered the highest percentage of loss of any brigade in the Federal armies. At Gettysburg, for example, the Iron Brigade went into the fight with 1,883 soldiers; by nightfall of the first day of that battle, only 671 were left in its ranks. The newest regiment—the 24th Michigan—lost 399 of its 496 men that day, finally winning the respect of the tough veterans of their brigade.

On April 9, award-winning author and journalist

Lance J. Herdegen will address The Round Table on the topic of "How the Iron Brigade Won Its Name." Herdegen, the founder and director of the Institute of Civil War Studies at Carroll College in Waukesha, Wisconsin, was previously a reporter, editor, and executive for United Press International (UPI). He is the author of *The Men Who Stood Like Iron: How the Iron Brigade Won Its Name* (1997); a contributing author

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Lance J. Herdegen

580th Regular Meeting

LANCE J. HERDEGEN ON "HOW THE IRON BRIGADE WON ITS NAME"

(WITH SPECIAL GUEST, WILLIAM UPHAM, SON OF PRIVATE WILLIE UPHAM, WHO FOUGHT WITH THE IRON BRIGADE)

Friday, April 9

UNION LEAGUE CLUB
65 WEST JACKSON BOULEVARD

Cocktails at 5:30 p.m. Dinner at 6:30 p.m.

\$25 - The Civil War Round Table of Chicago members
\$30 - Nonmembers

Entree: Grilled Chicken, with Roasted Red Pepper Sauce, or Catch of the Day



PLEASE NOTE

Make your reservation by Wednesday, April 7 by calling Registrar Carole Le Claire at 847-698-1438. People who attend without having made a reservation will pay a \$5 walk-in charge. If you make a reservation and then find you cannot attend, please call to cancel or you will be billed for a dinner. **No last-minute orders for the Catch of the Day can be honored. The chef must have at least twenty-four hours notice.**

The Union League Club is located at the corner of Jackson Boulevard and Federal Street. Federal Street runs north and south between Dearborn and Clark Streets.

Parking is available at the General Parking lot, just south of the Union League Club, at the rate of \$8 per car if you park between the hours of 4:30-10:30 p.m. If you do not get your ticket validated or park beyond the hours listed, you must pay the full amount.

THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE



Founded December 3, 1940
601 South La Salle Building, Suite C-817
Chicago Illinois 60605
Phone: 847-698-1438
www.thecwrt.org

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The only requirement for membership in The Round Table is a genuine interest in the Civil War and its era. For information, address Membership Committee, 601 South La Salle Building, Suite C-817, Chicago, Illinois 60605.

SILENT AUCTION

A silent auction is held at each monthly dinner meeting, for books donated by late Round Table founding member Ralph G. Newman. The minimum bid is \$5 per book, with a minimum rise of \$1 per bid. Write your name on the first available line, indicating your dollar bid. If you wish to raise the bid, place your name on the next available line along with the amount of your bid. Five minutes after the conclusion of the speaker's presentation, bidding will close and the last highest bid is the winner of each book. Proceeds go to benefit battlefield preservation.

BATTLEFIELD PRESERVATION

☆ UPDATE ☆

by Roger E. Bohn

The National Tower at Gettysburg is still very much in the "news." The April issue of *Civil War News* reports that \$5.7 million of the \$22 million spending program in the Interior Department's fiscal year 2000 budget is planned for the acquisition and removal of the intrusive tower. Some folks feel that is too low a figure for the tower's real worth, while others feel that it's way too much. The money is part of President Clinton's new \$1 billion "Lands Legacy Initiative," but the catch is that the president's budget has not yet undergone review by Congress, and they have until September 30 to hammer out that budget.

F.R. Silbey's editorial in *Civil War News* indicates a climax may be near regarding the bitter four-year struggle over the fate of Gettysburg National Military Park. The question is whether or not a commercial developer, Robert Kinsley, will be allowed to build a large commercial mall within the park, one-half mile from the site of Lincoln's Address and from the area where Pickett's charge was repulsed.

The National Park Service (NPS) portrays the "largest commercial retail store, food service facility, and movie screen in the county" as *non-commercial presences*. The Association for Preservation of Civil War Sites (APCWS), Congress of Civil War Round Tables, and Gettysburg Battlefield Preservation Association have all taken strong stands *against* the mall, despite National Park Service's claim that "opposition is minimal and based purely on local business desire to prevent competition."

One side claims this could be the "potentially worst historical desecration of a national shrine since the 1990 Railroad Cut destruction at the same park," while Kinsley expects "the visitor center and museum to do a better job of educating the visitor about the battle of Gettysburg, and the causes and consequences of the battle." Jerry Russell, founder and chairman of Civil War Round Table Associates, suggests: Write Representative James Hansen of the National Parks Subcommittee of the House Resources Committee, c/o House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515 ... or call 1-800-985-8762, toll-free. Write and/or call *your own* congressman at the same address and/or number and ask for his/her office. If you don't do it (*now!*), who will?

Wilson's Creek National Battlefield Foundation is one of the oldest private sector support groups for the National Park Service. They are striving to raise matching-funds for the construction of a research library which they hope will serve as the "Trans-Mississippi Research Center." With nearly 4,000 volumes of books, diaries, maps and journals, their research library is one of the largest in the national park system. All this is housed in a small room in the visitor center, and I can personally attest to the fact that this space is not adequate for full use by researchers or even for necessary preservation work to be done on some of the collection. The new addition would include a multipurpose room that could be used by students, Civil War study groups, and seminars. This project deserves our attention and support.

❧ MARCH MEETING ❧

by Larry Gibbs

On March 11, historian and author Peter Cozzens addressed 111 members and guests at the 579th regular meeting of The Civil War Round Table. His informative and engaging speech was entitled "My Poor Little Ninth: The Ninth Illinois Infantry at Shiloh." In his presentation, Cozzens emphasized the importance of a regiment during crucial battle sequences.

In E.B. (Pete) Long's classic book, *The Civil War Day by Day*, he stated that "the regiment became a second home to soldiers of both sides. While there was pride in nation, army, corps, division, and brigade, it was the regiment which usually counted the most." There were 2,144 Union infantry regiments in the Civil War; one of the most heroic and important regiments was the Ninth Illinois Infantry Regiment, composed of six companies from Belleville, Illinois, and four other companies from nearby communities. A regiment at full strength had 1,000 soldiers, one hundred in each of ten companies.

August Mersy, a German immigrant, became the colonel of the Ninth in September of 1861. The regiment was sent to Paducah, Kentucky; long weeks of drill were put to the test at the Battle of Fort Donelson on February 15, 1862. "The Ninth Illinois had its first taste of combat and Mersy had prepared the men well," asserted Cozzens. The Ninth stood its ground for over two hours against several attacks by a superior Confederate force determined to break out of a Federal cordon around the fort. The regiment paid dearly—of 600 men engaged, the casualties numbered more than twenty-five percent.

The Ninth moved forward as Union General Ulysses S. Grant started to move up the Tennessee River. On March 19, the regiment disembarked at Pittsburg Landing. No one expected an attack from Confederate General Albert Sidney Johnston's Army of the Mississippi, located thirty miles to the south at Corinth, Mississippi.

At 5:30 a.m. on April 6, the boom of distant cannon shattered the quiet Sunday morning. At 8:30, the companies of the Ninth marched out of camp to assemble in Chalmers field. The Battle of Shiloh raged one and one-half miles to the south. Under the divisional command of General W.H.L. Wallace, the Ninth Illinois was located near the center of the Union line. As the right flank crumbled, fugitives from other divisions interfered with the forward progress of the Ninth. The men of the Ninth pressed on, marching through a mile of human wreckage.

They marched into battle with Bloody Pond to their right, then on to the Peach Orchard. At 11:00 a.m., the Ninth caught a glimpse of butternut uniforms and commenced firing. Colonel Mersy at first ordered his men to lie down to avoid the heavy fire from Rebel guns. Then he ordered the regiment to dash for a ravine, outracing a Confederate regiment. Arriving at the ravine, the Ninth leveled a volley of fire at the charging Rebels. The ravine offered relative safety after each volley.

By noon, almost 8,000 Confederates faced 4,000 Federals; these Union troops were the only obstacle between the Rebel army and the Tennessee River. The Ninth Illinois was one of eight regiments stubbornly resisting the Confederate charge. Greatly aided by its position in the ravine, the Ninth persevered for 90 minutes. At 2:00 p.m., Colonel Mersy bowed to the inevitable and ordered a withdrawal. In the tremendous din of the battle, two companies did not receive these orders, thereby suffering severe casualties. The rest of the regiment was driven 500 yards before lack of

ammunition and exhaustion forced them to stop. After a break of an hour, the 300 survivors of the Ninth continued to fight on General Sherman's right flank. They fought for another hour, "disputing the ground inch by inch," according to Mersy.

The surprise Rebel attack at Shiloh almost succeeded in a rout and capture of Grant's army. The heroism and resilience of regiments such as the Ninth Illinois saved the Union army. The Ninth remained in reserve for the following day, which proved to be a Union victory. The Ninth had suffered more casualties than any other regiment at Shiloh. Mersy led 600 men into battle—61 were killed, 300 were wounded, and only five were missing or captured. "Combined with the losses suffered at Fort Donelson, the Ninth Illinois lost 577 men in fifty days, one of the most remarkable events in the annals of the war," Cozzens concluded.

WEB SITE READY

The long-awaited web-site of The Civil War Round Table of Chicago is up and ready. Former President Bill Sullivan is our webmaster. You may reach it by going to:

www.thecwrt.org

LANCE J. HERDEGEN (continued from page 1)

of *Like Giants in Tall Black Hats: Essays on the Iron Brigade* (1998); and co-author of *An Irishman in the Iron Brigade* (1993) and the award-winning *In the Bloody Railroad Cut at Gettysburg* (1990), which was a History Book Club alternate selection.

Included among his honors are: the Service Award of The Civil War Round Table of Milwaukee (1995, 1999), Harry S. Truman Award of the Civil War Round Table of Kansas City (1998), Award of Merit of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin (1991), and Gambrinus Prize of the Milwaukee County Historical Society (1991). Mr. Herdegen recently presented a paper at Sydney Sussex College at Cambridge University in England. He has appeared on the History Channel's "Civil War Journal" and various network and local television and radio programs.

Lance Herdegen is a past president of the Civil War Round Table of Milwaukee and for many years served as the editor of its newsletter, *General Orders*. He has also served as a Governor's appointee to the Wisconsin Humanities Council and on the Wisconsin Freedom of Information Council. He last addressed our Round Table in October of 1988, when he and his co-author William J.K. Beaudot spoke on "The Charge on the Railroad Cut at Gettysburg."

As a special surprise at the April 9 meeting, Herdegen will be accompanied by Bill Upham, the son of a Civil War veteran, who will honor us with a few brief remarks prior to the main address. Upham's father was Private Willie Upham, who served with the Belle City Rifles, Company F, of the 2nd Wisconsin Infantry. Young Upham was wounded severely in the throat on Henry House Hill at Bull Run and was subsequently discharged. But he was later appointed to the U.S. Military Academy by President Abraham Lincoln. One of his first duties as a young officer was to guard Confederate President Jefferson Davis.

The New Books

Compiled by C. Robert Douglas



- Trefousse, Hans L. *Thaddeus Stevens: Nineteenth Century Egalitarian*. U. of N. Carolina Press. 1997. \$39.95.
 Tucker, Spencer. *Raphael Semmes and the Alabama*. Ryan Place Publishers. 1996. Pbk. \$11.95.
 Welsh, Jack D., M.D. *Medical Histories of Union Generals*. Kent State U. Press. 1996. \$35.00.
 White, Gregory C. *"This Most Bloody & Cruel Drama" — A History of the 31st Georgia Volunteer Infantry*. Butternut and Blue. 1997. \$35.00.
 Woodward, Harold R., Jr. *Defender of the Valley: Brig. Gen. John D. Imboden, CSA*. Rockbridge Publ. Co. 1996. \$25.00.

The Union League Club Civil War Round Table's luncheon meeting will be held on Monday, April 26. Norman Stevens, director of operations at the First Division Museum, will discuss entrenchments during the Petersburg campaign. A reception begins at 11:30 a.m.; lunch is served at noon. The cost is \$15 per person. For reservations, call 312-435-5000.

The 18th Annual Midwest Civil War Conference will be held on April 23-24 in Farmington Hills, Michigan; the theme is "Triumph and Tragedy: The Final Year." For information, contact Liz Stringer, 23959 Brookplace Court, Farmington Hills, Michigan 48336.

A Conference on Women and the Civil War will be held on June 25-27 in Winchester, Virginia, presented in partnership with the McCormick Civil War Institute at Shenandoah University. For more information, write: Conference on Women and the Civil War, 12728 Martin Road, Smithsburg, Maryland 21783.

The Stephen A. Douglas History Symposium, sponsored by the Macon County Conservation District, will be held on April 17 at the Rock Springs Center for Environmental Discovery in Decatur, Illinois. The theme is "Stephen A. Douglas, Manifest Destiny, and the Settlement of Illinois"; speakers include Robert W. Johannsen, Thomas F. Schwartz, Stacy Pratt McDermott, Susan Nordmeyer-Gordy, and Mark A. Plummer. For information, call R. Lee Slider at 217-423-4913.

Gary Gallagher, our 1991 Nevins-Freeman Award honoree, has won the Fletcher Pratt Award of The Civil War Round Table of New York for his book *Lee and His Generals in War and Memory*.

Schimmelfennig Boutique

The history of The Round Table, *The Civil War Round Table: Fifty Years of Scholarship and Fellowship*, by Barbara Hughett, is available for \$30 per copy. You may purchase the book at the monthly meeting or order it from Morningside Bookshop, 260 Oak Street, Dayton, Ohio 45401 (1-800-648-9710). Add \$2.50 for postage and handling.

In addition to The Round Table history and *The Continuing Civil War*, the essays from the Fiftieth Anniversary Proceedings, the following items are available at each monthly meeting: Lapel pins, Mugs, Meeting Tapes, Civil War Buff posters and T-Shirts, CWRT T-shirts, polos, and sweatshirts.

Proceeds from the sale of these items go to support the programs of The Civil War Round Table.

BULLETIN BOARD



FUTURE MEETINGS

Regular meetings are held at the Union League Club, 65 West Jackson Boulevard, the second Friday in each month, except as noted.

April 9: Lance J. Herdegen on "How the Iron Brigade Won Its Name" (plus a few words from William Upham, son of Private Willie Upham of the Iron Brigade)

April 29-May 2: Annual Battlefield Tour, Fredericksburg

May 14: Michael Andrus on "The Confederate Cover-up at Seven Pines"

June 11: Thomas P. Sweeney on "General 'Fightin' Tom' Sweeney"

September 17: Kenneth J. Winkle on "The Village on the Bluff: New Salem's Role in the Rise of Abraham Lincoln"

October 8: David Herbert Donald, Nevins-Freeman Address

October 22-24: Fall Tour to Springfield, Illinois

November 12: Former Senator Paul Simon, topic to be announced

December 10: To be announced

January 14, 2000: Herbert Mitgang, topic to be announced

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

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E-mail Corrections

Mary Abroe, drmjmabroe@compuserve.com

Barbara Hughett, linbarb@aol.com

The Civil War Round Table of Chicago has begun making plans for a 60th Anniversary Celebration. An all-day symposium and gala evening banquet will be held on Saturday, November 11, 2000. At the January Executive Committee meeting, a 60th Anniversary Committee was formed, with Marvin Sanderman as its chairman. An all-star cast of speakers and other special events are being planned. Look for further announcements in upcoming issues of this newsletter.

The Pamplin Historical Park in Petersburg, Virginia, will hold its Third Annual Symposium on "The Common Soldier" on October 16-17. Among the speakers are James I. (Bud) Robertson, Jr., and James M. McPherson. For information, write the Pamplin Historical Park & The National Museum of the Civil War Soldier, 6125 Boydton Plank Road, Petersburg, Virginia 23803, or send a fax to 804-861-2820.

Former President Brooks Davis will address the Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture on "Abraham Lincoln: Man of Faith" on May 5. For information on this program, call Brooks at 312-944-5082.

Former President Jerry Warshaw will present a program at the Evanston Public Library on Wednesday, May 12, at 7:30 p.m. "The Specials of the Civil War" is a talk, with slides and music, about the special artists/correspondents for the weekly newspapers and how they pictured the war before newspapers were able to reproduce photographs. For more information on the program, call Jerry at 847-866-6667.