

# The Outpost

The Newsletter of the Salt Creek Civil War Roundtable  
Vol. XLVI No. 6 February 2009



## 418th Regular Meeting

DATE: 6<sup>th</sup> February 2009

PLACE: Fairview Village, 200 Village Dr., Downers Grove, Il.

TIME: 8:00 PM

SPEAKER: Brian Seiter

TOPIC: "Henry Hopkins Sibley, E.R.S. Canby, and the New Mexico Campaign of 1862"

The New Mexico Campaign is one of those campaigns that are usually considered as being on the "fringe" of the conflict, interesting in its way but, not really crucial in the conduct of the war. In his talk, Brian Seiter will attempt to dispel that mistaken impression. He will be discussing the lives and military careers of the two main actors, Messrs. Sibley and Canby. He will also enlighten us as to the goals of the CSA in this action. The Confederate government dreamed of expansion through the capture of New Mexico, Colorado, and California. This would result in possession of the gold mines of Colorado and a country that stretched from Atlantic to Pacific. Detailed analysis of the various battles, and the aftermath of the campaign for both Union and Confederacy will be included.

Brian Seiter is a 1986 graduate of Northern Illinois University with a History Major and Political Science Minor. He is a member of the Salt Creek Civil War Roundtable (Yay!-Ed.), the Civil War Roundtable of Chicago, the Civil War Preservation Trust, the Gettysburg Foundation, and the Carter House. He had seven (!) ancestors in the Union Army which started his life long interest in, and study of, the Civil War. The SCCWRT welcomes him to his debut at our podium and sincerely hope it is but the first of many appearances!



## JANUARY MEETING

BY

RICK BENSON

On January 2, 2009, past SCCWRT president, Rob Girardi, put on a most interesting presentation concerning the role General Leonidas Polk played in 1861 Kentucky. Was it pivotal in the decision of Kentucky to declare for the Union?

Leonidas Polk was born April 10, 1806 to a wealthy North Carolina family. His father was a hero in the Revolutionary War. He was educated at the University of North Carolina prior to his appointment to West Point in 1823. His aristocratic background and attitude tended to clash with Army regulations. In one case he admitted to tracing drawings, which most cadets did but only Polk admitted to. Therefore, he received a lower grade which he thought unfair and complained to the Secretary of War. He received no response and carried what he considered this "injustice" around for the rest of his life.

In his last year at the Point, Polk "got religion" and became an Episcopalian. He graduated 8<sup>th</sup> in a class of 38 and promptly resigned his commission to enter Virginia Theological Seminary. His father later stated that the government had; "taken a perfectly good soldier and

made a perfectly bad priest out of him!" By 1861 Polk was Bishop of Louisiana: well-respected, rich, and successful. He had also added self-righteousness to his aristocratic temperament.

During his time at West Point, Polk had become good friends with one Jefferson F. Davis. When the war broke out, Tennessee Gov. Isham Harris asked Polk to contact Davis and make sure the West wasn't forgotten. Polk went to Richmond and conferred with the President and several Confederate officers. At the end of two weeks, Davis offered him a Brigadier General's commission and command of the Mississippi Valley forces from the Red River north to the end of effective Confederate control. Polk initially demurred, but accepted when the commission was upped to Major General headquartered in Memphis Tenn. Prominent people began urging the occupation of Columbus, KY., the only militarily significant site on the Mississippi between Cairo, Il., and Memphis. However, this presented a problem.

The problem was the current political situation in Kentucky. Formally, Kentucky was holding itself "neutral" in the contest,

refusing to support either side. From the beginning, this so-called neutrality was shaky. Both sides needed Kentucky very badly. For the South, Ky. ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> in population, and was a great source of horses and mules. Strategically, its possession would establish the northern border at the Ohio River, which would shield Tennessee farmland and threaten Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and Missouri along a 700-mile front. For the North, Kentucky would provide easy invasion routes along the Tennessee, Cumberland, and Mississippi Rivers, secure its border, and threaten all of Tennessee, along with helping to secure border-state loyalty.

Neutrality was an insupportable sham. Both sides were recruiting men within the state, openly drilling and procuring arms, stopping river traffic, and confiscating property. By August 1861, it was, essentially, dead.

On Sept. 2<sup>nd</sup>, the Union occupied Belmont, MO., across the river from Columbus. It was now feared that they would occupy Columbus and Polk thought that justified quick action. On September 3, He occupied the towns of Columbus and Hickman KY. This was the straw that broke the camel's back and the Kentucky legislature, which had always been pro-Union, formally declared for it.

Initially, upon receiving dispatches, Pres. Davis advised Gov. Harris that Polk should withdraw as he had not received official sanction for the move. Polk, as we have noted was his wont, protested and,

according to the general, Davis said, "the necessity justifies the action." This statement is in the OR's. However, historian Steven Woodworth found the statement from Davis, "the necessity MUST justify the action" among Polk's papers. It appears Polk did what he wanted to do and heard what he wanted to hear, as usual. In the end his mistake may have been that he didn't occupy the town of Paducah too. Grant's move on that town essentially negated whatever Polk's occupation had gained. The occupation of Columbus is generally considered a mistake, although Polk never admitted it. In the end was he more responsible for Kentucky embracing the Union than anyone else? The answer would seem to be no. The legislature was in the hands of the Unionists and they would have found some other justification eventually. There were certainly plenty to choose from.

The SCCWRT tenders its deepest thanks to Rob Girardi for his most interesting illumination of a complex situation.



PRESERVATION REPORT

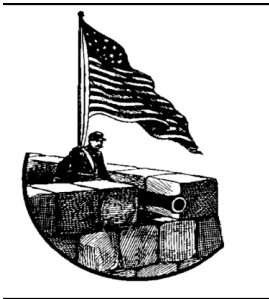
BY

LEN OVERCASH SR.

Franklin, TN.-Franklin's Lotz House will become a participating destination with Heritage Travel Inc., a new subsidiary of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The circa-1885 house in downtown Franklin was used as a hospital for wounded soldiers on both sides

during the Civil War. The historic home still has battle scars, including bloodstains in all the rooms, and a charred indentation in the floor where a cannon ball landed during the Battle of Franklin. The Lotz House opened Oct. 30 last year as a Civil War house museum.

Source: The Civil War Preservation Trust



ALL  
FOR  
THE  
UNION

On 2/19 at 7 PM, the Downers Grove Library will be hosting, "Lincoln's Springfield Images." Call the library at 630-960-1200 for more information.

It's dues time! Get them in (\$25 for E-mail, \$30 for snail) by the Feb. 6 meeting and win a free 1 year membership if your name is drawn!

Enclosed you will find the annual flyer touting the Kankakee RT Seminar. The cost is \$50 for adults and \$25 for students. It will be held at the Quality Inn in Kankakee on 3/21. Speakers include: Leslie Goddard, Kenneth W. Noe, Lance J. Herdegen, and Dr. Craig Symonds. Call Art Schumacher 815-939-1041 with any questions.



#### EDITOR'S NOTES

The next board meeting will be at the Fairview Village private dining room on 2/3/09 at 7:30 PM. Call Jan at 630-830-7614 with any questions.

Jim Soens: God Bless and Godspeed pard! Let those Gettysburg boys know they fought in the 4<sup>th</sup> most important battle of July 3, 1863!



#### CALENDAR OF EVENTS

March 6- Ron Carlson-The Significance of the Civil War Trans-Mississippi in American History.



#### THE SALT CREEK CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE

[www.saltcreekcwrt.org](http://www.saltcreekcwrt.org)

President: Jan Rasmussen

Vice-President: Robert Girardi

Treasurer: Paula Walker

Secretary: Rick Zarr

Historian: Cindy Intravartolo

Meeting Liaison: Mary Lord

Newsletter Editor; Dan McCarthy,

[macarthaig@aol.com](mailto:macarthaig@aol.com)

**Newsletter Staff: Rick Benson, Rick Zarr, Len Overcash Sr.**