

# The Outpost

The Newsletter of the Salt Creek Civil War Roundtable  
Vol. XLV No. 6 February 2008



## 408th Regular Meeting

DATE: 1<sup>st</sup> February 2008

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

TIME: 8:00 PM

SPEAKER: Bjorn Skaptason

TOPIC: "The History of the History of the Battle of Shiloh"

The Battle of Shiloh has generally been considered the first major "bloodbath" of the Civil War. With approximately 23,000 casualties over a period of two days, this was the battle that convinced the people -on both sides- that the war was going to be long, hard, bitter, and bloody. Margaret Mitchell wrote that after Shiloh, "The South never smiled again." This program will examine how our understanding of the Battle of Shiloh developed, and how that version of the story affects our understanding of the War. In particular, we will see how the enduring public understanding of a Civil War battlefield is influenced by the first historian to interpret the preserved battlefield. In the case of Shiloh, Major David W. Reed is the "father" of our understanding of the battle. The program also introduces an intriguing viewpoint of Shiloh, based on letters held in Chicago, which once competed with Reed's interpretation. One need not engage in fiction to consider "alternate" views of history.

Bjorn Skaptason works at the Abraham Lincoln Bookshop and studies at Loyola University in Chicago. He recently worked for three summers at the Shiloh National Military Park, two of them as a Park Ranger.

The Salt Creek Civil War Roundtable bids an enthusiastic welcome to this scholar and gentleman. We look forward to his presentation with great interest.



## JANUARY MEETING

BY

CINDY INTRAVARTOLO

On January 4<sup>th</sup>, current vice-president, Robert Girardi, presented, "General Impressions of the Civil War", before 57 members and guests at the 407<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Salt Creek Civil War Roundtable.

We all know what most historians had to say about various generals of the Civil War, and most of us have an occasional opinion or two ourselves, but tonight we learned what the generals thought of each other and it was not always nice.

At the beginning of the war the United States Army consisted of 16,367 soldiers and their officers. Of the 1,108 officers, there were only 4 generals, 1 major general and 3 brigadiers with an average age of 70. Girardi noted that the men who became commanders of Civil War armies were a mixed lot at the very least. Some came from the old army; while others came from the general populace and included former soldiers, politicians, teachers, lawyers, engineers, investors, businessmen, alcoholics, thieves, and some who failed in every other endeavor they tried. Some were promoted strictly for political purposes and some because of their nationality.

Girardi stated that many generals were not shy about evaluating their peers. Many times, when a new commander was appointed, commanders on both sides would seek out acquaintances of the new appointee to find out some of his characteristics.

Among those who were not well-liked was John G. Barnard of the U.S. Engineers. He was described by staff officer Theodore Lyman as extremely ill-bred, vastly book learned, thoroughly unreliable, and only fit to write depositions. U.S. Grant wrote to Lincoln that Napoleon B. Buford would scarcely make a respectable hospital nurse if put in petticoats and was certainly unfit for any other military position. Staff officer G. Moxley Sorrel CSA wrote that although Jubal Early was one of the ablest soldiers in the army, he lacked the ability to handle troops effectively in the field. US Gen. David Stanley said Henry Halleck was a mistake in the field who could not ride his horse out of a walk, while Lincoln referred to Halleck as a first-rate clerk. Alpheus Williams commented that Dan Sickles would beat Napoleon in winning glory not earned. General Samuel Sturgis said

he did not care a pinch of owl dung for John Pope.

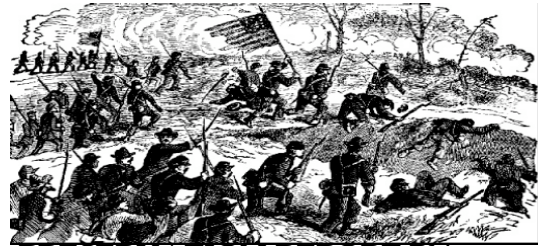
However, not all generals were disliked by their peers. Some were admired for their dedication to duty and their leadership qualities. U.S. Grant felt that Don Carlos Buell was a brave, intelligent officer with as much professional pride and ambition, of a commendable sort, that he ever knew. According to William S. Rosecrans, William P. Carlin was one of the most thoroughly reliable men he ever saw in the service. If there were a job to be done he would find a way to do it. Alpheus Williams noted that George H. Thomas was an officer of great purity and most devoted to his duties. In four years he never left the field. William J. Hardee said that when Cleburne's division defended no attack broke its lines and where it attacked, no numbers resisted its onslaught, "...save once, and there is the grave of Cleburne."

Some generals were known for their oddities. Lyman described Ben Butler as the strangest sight on a horse you ever saw, with his head sitting immediately on his stout shapeless body, "...you're not quite sure if it's a centaur or what it is." Gen. Meade was famously described as a "damned goggle-eyed old snapping turtle" but Girardi said no one would accept responsibility for the phrase. Gen. Scribner said Gen. Sherman had an extraordinary memory for seemingly unimportant events. Richard Taylor said Richard Ewell resembled a woodchuck.

Civil War generals were both good and bad, great and

incompetent, but they led men into battle often sacrificing their own bodies in the process. Ten percent of them were killed in combat and the number of wounded is unknown. In closing, Girardi quoted Gen. John B. Gordon, wounded five times at Antietam, "It is much easier to criticize a commander than to command an army."

The SCCWRT thanks Robert Girardi for a very informative, yet light hearted and entertaining presentation on what the generals thought of each other during the Civil War.

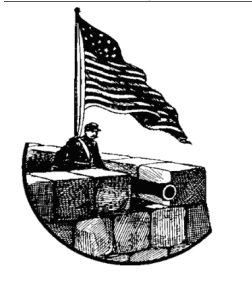


PRESERVATION REPORT BY  
LEN OVERCASH, SR.

VA- A Shenandoah County resident and a coalition of conservation groups working in the northern Shenandoah Valley filed in federal district court to prevent the Virginia Dept. of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration from implementing a plan to widen I-81 to eight or more lanes, an expansion to be funded by federal funds and tolls on cars and trucks. The plaintiffs are asking the court to prevent VDOT and FHWA from moving forward with the project until the agencies have corrected the plans fundamental flaws. The lawsuit also asserts that the plans' concept for I-81 "will result in significant, irreversible, adverse effects on natural scenic, cultural,

historic, and ecological resources, communities, and property owners." It notes that VDOT's plan would destroy 7,400 acres of developed land; 1,062 acres of prime farmland; between 1,600 and 2,400 residences; 662 businesses; 1,238 acres of Civil War battlefields; 33 acres of wetlands; 361 acres of floodplains; 23 miles of streams; and 13 threatened or endangered species.

Source: CWi Premium and Civil War Preservation Trust (more detailed exposition of an item from last month-Ed.)



## ALL FOR THE UNION

The Kankakee Valley CWRT is holding its 17<sup>th</sup> Annual Civil War Symposium on March 29, 2008. Cost is \$50 for adults, \$25 for students. Consult the flyer enclosed with this newsletter or sent to you by E-mail (Thanks, Bill), for all the juicy details.

There is still time to pay your dues so that they may enter the drawing for a free year of Salt Creek membership. Deadline is the 31<sup>st</sup>, so get them in and, possibly, win the best prize you have won in a long time!



## EDITOR'S NOTES

The next board meeting will be held at the home of Mary Lord, 200 Village Dr., Apt. 341, Downers Grove, IL. 7:30 PM, 1/29/08. Phone: 630-769-6182

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

March 7-Eric Girardi-69<sup>th</sup> New York State Volunteers of the Irish Brigade  
April 4 -Phil Angelo-Allan Pinkerton  
May 2- General Book Discussion  
June 20-Cricket Bauer Pohanka-TBA  
September 5-Stephen Munier-The Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858.  
October 3-Tony Cichantk-Civilians of Gettysburg  
November 7-Annual Battlefield Preservation Auction.  
December 5-'Show and Tell'-Memorabilia Night  
January 2-Maryann Oblack-Lt. Col. Arthur J. Fremantle: Coldstream Guards.

## THE SALT CREEK CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE

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

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