

Sumter to Appomattox

The Official Newsletter of the New South Wales Chapter of
The American Civil War Round Table of Australia

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Please note, our new website www.americancivilwar.asn.au is now up and running

A Message from the Chairman –

As we draw closer to the end of our year's activities, I believe it is time to reflect on how successful we have been over the last twelve months and look ahead to 2006 to ensure that the next year continues to meet the needs of our members.

In this regard, there are two specific items that need to be resolved in the short term. First, there is the matter of the form that our last meeting for the year should take and if it is to involve a presentation, what should the topic be? This meeting is scheduled for Monday, December 5. The second matter relates to the form of our End of Year/Christmas function, which is scheduled for one day on the weekend of 26/27 November. In the absence of Roger and Elaine Dixon overseas our clay pigeon shooting expedition to the hunter vineyards is out!

Any member with a suggestion for either or both of these activities should contact me as soon as possible so that we can put plans in place for a successful conclusion to the year's activities.

One suggestion that has been made following the relatively poor attendance at last year's Xmas function, is that we combine these two activities and hold a Cocktail Party type function on an evening around that time where members and their friends might gather to socialise in an informal way. At this time, however, everything is negotiable.

In the longer term, we need suggestions for topics for our 2006 meeting presentations. All suggestions will be most favourably considered, so please let John Cook or myself know your ideas so that the 2006 program might be finalised by the end of this year.

I look forward to seeing you at our next meeting at the Roseville Memorial RSL Club.

Paul Kensey

Our Next Meeting

The next meeting is to be held at our normal venue, the **Roseville Memorial RSL Club, Pacific Highway, Roseville**, on the evening of **Monday, October 10, 2005**, with members, as usual, members being able to meet at the Club **from 6pm for a bistro style meal.**

The presentation at this meeting will be given by one of our members, **John Cook**, who will speak on the topic:

Homeward Bound – The Demobilisation of the Armies

Essentially this presentation takes up the story of the Civil War where most others conclude. This presentation will highlight the contrast in Union and Confederate efforts in the planning for and the implementation of demobilisation and will refer to the various Confederate surrenders from April to June 1865. The Grand Review through Washington D.C., which took one day each for Meade's Army of the Potomac and Sherman's Army of the West to march past the reviewing point and which served as the beginning of the Union's demobilisation process, will be discussed in detail.

This is a topic which has not received as much attention by historians as has over aspects of the War. It is, nevertheless, a most fascinating part of Civil War history and will likely be of considerable interest to our members.

As is our normal practice, a paper of the presentation will be available to members at the conclusion of the meeting. Members living outside the Sydney Metropolitan Area will have the paper mailed to them with the next Newsletter in November.

Also at this meeting the paper relating to Dr Alan Winkworth's presentation at our August meeting, '*Sex in the Civil War – A Medical Perspective*' will be available for members.

It Happened in October

HATCHES AND DESPATCHES

October 1, 1864 - Famed Confederate spy, Mrs Rose Greenhow drowns as she tries to avoid capture;

October 2, 1800 – Nat Turner, slave and leader of slave insurrection at Southampton, Virginia in 1831 is born in Southampton County;

October 26, 1864 – Confederate guerrilla Bloody Bill Anderson is killed in an ambush near Richmond, Missouri.

COMMAND AND POLITICAL APPOINTMENTS

October 8, 1864 –General William T Sherman is named to command the Union Department of the Cumberland, with headquarters at Louisville;

October 11, 1861 – Brigadier General William R Rosecrans assumes command of the Federal Department of Western Virginia;

October 28, 1862 – Brigadier General John C Breckinridge assumes command of the Army of Middle Tennessee

CRIMINAL ACTIVITY

October 16, 1859 – The abolitionist John Brown leads an unsuccessful raid on the government arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia;

October 19, 1831 – A small Confederate raiding party robs three Vermont banks of over \$200,000.

BATTLES / MILITARY ACTIONS

October 4, 1862 – The Battle of Corinth, Miss., ends with a Confederate withdrawal from this important rail and road centre;

October 5, 1863 – Confederate torpedo boat *David* with a four man crew, attacks Federal ironclad *New Ironsides* outside Charleston Harbour;

October 6, 1861 – Confederate blockade runner *Alert* is captured by the Federal Navy off Charleston, S.C.;

October 7, 1864 – *USS Wachusett* captures the raider *CSS Florida* in a controversial action at Bahia, Brazil;

October 9, 1864 – Union cavalry under Custer and Merritt engage and rout Confederates at Tom's Brook (Round Top Mountain), Virginia;

October 14, 1863 – Confederates strike retreating Federals at Bristow Station, Va., in an inconclusive engagement;

BATTLES / MILITARY ACTIONS cont'd

October 18, 1862 – John Hunt Morgan and his Confederate raiders defeat Federal cavalry near Lexington, Kentucky;

October 21, 1861 – Federal forces suffer a dramatic defeat at the Battle of Ball's Bluff (Leesburg), Virginia;

October 22, 1862 – Confederate cavalry capture London, Kentucky;

October 23, 1864 – Last Confederate effort in Missouri ends in defeat at the Battle of Westport;

October 27 1864 – In a daring raid, Union Lieutenant William B Cushing and a 15-man crew sink the Confederate ironclad *Albemarle* at Plymouth N.C.;

October 29, 1861 – Largest combined land-sea expedition ever mounted by the United States leaves Hampton Roads, Va., for the Carolina coast and Port Royal.

OTHER SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

October 3, 1863 – Federal War Department orders enlistment of Negro troops in the slave states of Maryland, Missouri and Tennessee;

October 10, 1862 – President Davis asks Virginia for a draft of 4,500 Negroes to work on the completion of fortification of Richmond;

October 12, 1861 – The first ironclad of the Union navy , the gunboat *St Louis* is launches at Carondelet, Missouri;

October 13, 1864 – Maryland voters narrowly adopt a new state constitution abolishing slavery;

October 15, 1863 – In Charleston Harbour Confederate submersible *H L Hunley* sinks for a second time during a practice dive. Seven men, including Hunley, its inventor die;

October 17, 1863 – President Lincoln issues a proclamation calling for 300,000 more volunteers for Federal armies;

October 20, 1864 – President Lincoln proclaims the last Thursday in November "...a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to Almighty God";

October 24, 1861 – Western Union completes the first transcontinental telegraph;

October 25, 1861 – The keel of the ironclad *USS Monitor* is laid at Greenpoint, Long Island;

October 31, 1864 – Nevada becomes the 36th state of the Union.

Book Review

The book to be reviewed in this newsletter is not a new one but written by James McPherson of "Battle Cry of Freedom" fame, first published in 1996 and is a "must read" for all interested in Civil War study.

This book, "Drawn with a Sword" is sub-titled "Reflections on the American Civil War" and is a collection of essays that, with the exception of the last one, McPherson had previously published.

The essays are grouped into five major themes:

- Origins of the Civil War (3)
- The War and American Society (4)
- Why the North Won (4)
- The Enduring Lincoln (3)
- Historians and Their Audiences (a single essay not previously published)

This is a scholarly book but one that is not difficult to read. It is provocative but with disarming logic that readers will find very convincing. It is filled with fresh interpretations, it punctures old myths and challenges new ones. The book explores such questions as:

- Why the North won and why the South lost;
- Whether it was Northern or Southern aggression that began the War;
- Who really freed the slaves, Lincoln or the slaves themselves.

What makes the book different from many other books on the Civil War is that it is not narrative-based but focuses on major issues/questions relating to the War. Its presentation is in small "chunks", viz, 3-4 essays on a number of specific themes, which makes the book ideal for reading on the train or bus and in bed at night.

Interestingly, McPherson reveals the controversies amongst historians presenting all sides in a clear, balanced and lucid prose and concluding with his own considered opinions.

"Drawn with the Sword" is a book for anyone who wishes to go beyond what happened to consider why it happened. It is a book that this reviewer would give an unqualified recommendation for Round Table members to read.

This publication is the official newsletter of the New South Wales Chapter of the American Civil War Round Table of Australia. All inquiries regarding the Newsletter should be addressed to the Secretary/Treasurer of the Chapter by telephone on 9449 3720 or at PO Box 200, St Ives, NSW, 2075 or by e-mail to secretary@americancivilwar.asn.au

Son of a Gun!

This is an article circulated to some of our members by our Queensland member, Rhonda O'Dwyer, who has a penchant for sending out humorous e-mails to her friends from robelee@bigpond.net.au from something sent to her by John King, another one of the Queensland push. Thanks Rhonda and Kingy.

Claim: During the Civil War, a woman was impregnated by sperm carried on a bullet that passed through the scrotum of a soldier and penetrated her ovaries.

Status: *False.*

Origins: Sometimes touted as the origin of the phrase "son of a gun," the apocryphal tale of "the bullet through the balls" is a well-travelled legend, often reported by such infamous urban legend vectors as "Dear Abby," as in this example from her 6 November 1982 column:

It seems that during the Civil War (May 12, 1863, to be exact), a young Virginia farm girl was standing on her front porch while a battle was raging nearby. A stray bullet first passed through the scrotum of a young Union cavalryman, then lodged in the reproductive tract of the young woman, who thus became pregnant by a man she had not been within 100 feet of! And nine months later she gave birth to a healthy baby!

The story, in fact, is completely false. The claim for the miraculous "bullet pregnancy" originated with an article that was printed as a joke in the journal *The American Medical Weekly* on 7 November 1874. Subsequent journals and books cited the article as fact without checking the original source or realizing that it was a put-on, and the story has been passed down through the years as an "actual case that appeared in a real medical journal many years ago." The long and tortuous history of this legend begins with an article entitled:

**"ATTENTION GYNAECOLOGISTS!
NOTES FROM THE DIARY OF A FIELD
AND HOSPITAL SURGEON, C.S.A."**

that appeared under the name of an "L.G. Capers, M.D., Vicksburg, Miss." in the 7 November 1874 issue of *The American Medical Weekly*. It recounts the now-familiar story of a Confederate field surgeon who dressed the wound of a soldier injured by a bullet that had entered the soldier's leg, ricocheted off the bone, and carried away his left testicle. Coincidentally, the same surgeon was then called upon a few moments later to administer aid to a young lady who had received a gunshot wound to the abdomen. Exactly 278 days later, the surgeon returned to the village and delivered a baby boy of the wounded woman, although she steadfastly maintained that she was still a virgin.

(PTO for the conclusion of the story)

The general tone and style of the article should have indicated to the astute reader that the whole thing was a gag. Even if they didn't, at least a few more obvious clues gave away the joke: The baby was said to have been born "with something wrong about the genitals," and upon examination the surgeon discovered that the ball which had wounded the soldier and impregnated the woman was lodged in the newborn infant's scrotum!

Even more implausibly, the soldier, when told of his astonishingly – achieved fatherhood, quickly wed the child's mother! For those who *still* didn't catch on to the article's facetiousness, a note from the editor explaining that the whole thing was a bit of "fun" (complete with a pun on the putative author's name) was printed in the same journal two weeks later.



The details of battle given in the original article do correspond to actual events. In May of 1863, Union troops under the command of Major General James B. McPherson set out for Raymond, Mississippi, a town about fifteen miles from Jackson, the state capital. On May 12 a unit led by Major General John A. Logan ran into a Confederate brigade under the command of General John Gregg, and the battle of Raymond ensued, with Gregg eventually withdrawing his outnumbered forces from Raymond and heading down the road to Jackson.)

Several months later, the British medical journal *The Lancet* reprinted (portions of) the 1874 article. Then, in 1896, George M. Gould and Walter L. Pyle cited (and quoted from) *The Lancet* as a footnote to a section about artificial impregnation in their book *Anomalies and Curiosities of Medicine*. Even Gould and Pyle seem to have recognized the original article's drollery, however, as they mention that it is included "not because it bears any semblance of possibility, but as a curious example from the realms of imagination in medicine." F. Donald Napolitani, M.D., evidently didn't catch the article's whimsicality, though, as he presented all the same details as an "authenticated case report" in his 1959 article about "Two Unusual Cases of Gunshot Wounds of the Uterus" for the *New York State Journal of Medicine*.

From then on, one or more of these sources has been cited as proof of an actual occurrence "carefully recorded for the annals of medicine" in everything from *American Heritage* magazine to "Dear Abby," with each source accepting the previous ones' references as accurate citations of a "real" medical journal article.

The links below include the original 1874 article from *The American Medical Weekly* that started it all, an editor's note from a subsequent issue of the same publication explaining the whole thing as a gag, an oft misinterpreted summation from the 1896 book *Anomalies and Curiosities of Medicine*, and a 1959 article from the *New York State Journal of Medicine* by a doctor who didn't quite get the joke (or do his homework).

Additional information:



Notes from the Diary of a Field and Hospital Surgeon (*The American Medical Weekly*, 7 November 1874)



Editor's Note (*The American Medical Weekly*, 21 November 1874)



Excerpt from *Anomalies and Curiosities of Medicine*



Two Unusual Cases of Gunshot Wounds of the Uterus (*New York State Journal of Medicine*, 1 February 1959)

Have You Noticed?

What with this article and the previous two presentations at our regular meetings by Paul Kensey and Alan Winkworth, the activities of our NSW Chapter are definitely taking a turn towards an 'R' rating or even some more extreme 'Adult' classification. Is this appropriate? Or should we be going back to the good "clean" gratuitous violence that characterises all warfare?

Famous Last Words...

"The South has lost its best friend"

- Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, on Lincoln's death, April 15, 1865.