

# 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 visit our website [www.americancivilwar.asn.au](http://www.americancivilwar.asn.au)

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## A Message from the Chairman –

As you will see from this Newsletter, your Committee has finalised the program for the remainder of 2008 with a most interesting set of presentations. In all of the meetings for the remainder of this year we have varied the meeting format away from the straight lecture to involve members in the conduct of proceedings. I would welcome any feedback members might have to this change of format, particularly if it doesn't work!

Planning continues for next year's conference which is to coincide with the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's birth. I have spoken with staff from the United States Consulate, Sydney and they have provided some useful contacts that we are now following up. One of these contacts is the United States Studies Centre within the University of Sydney and I hope that this agency will be of assistance to us in identifying a high profile speaker for the conference.

Speaking of this United States Studies Centre, last Tuesday evening, the Centre sponsored the eminent historian Eric Foner, DeWitt Clinton Professor of History at Columbia University, to speak on "*The Idea of Freedom in the US, 1776 – 2008*". John Cook and I had the privilege of hearing this outstanding speaker, who is one of the US's most prominent historians, trace how Americans have thought about the concept of freedom from independence to the present. Whilst not focusing solely on the 1861 – 1865 period, Foner did highlight this seminal period of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. He had plenty to say about Lincoln, who is the subject of a book he is presently writing and argued most convincingly that freedom has never been a simple or single idea. This was a most interesting and informative lecture that left me to reflect on how great it would be if we could get somebody with Foner's political and historical insights as a keynote speaker for our conference next year. It may be just a pipe-dream but what a magnificent dream it is!

I urge you to make every effort to make the time to attend the forthcoming meeting this month – you will certainly not be disappointed.

*Paul Kensey*

## Our Next Meeting

Our next regular meeting will be held on **Monday, June 23** at the **Roseville Memorial RSL Club, Pacific Highway, Roseville**. The meeting will commence with a bistro-style dinner at the Club from 6pm with the proceedings of the meeting proper to commence at 7:15pm. At this meeting we will have the quiz-type presentation:

**"Will the Real George McClellan  
Please Stand Up"**

In this presentation, three men, each purporting to be George McClellan, will answer a series of questions on McClellan's life experiences. Only one of the three will be answering the questions all the time and the 4 or 5 teams from members present will have to determine which one of the George McClellans is the real one. A small set of prizes will be awarded to the winning team.

The second part of the meeting will involve a short presentation by John Cook entitled:

**George McClellan – Failed Battlefield  
Commander or Worse?**

The success of our meeting will depend very much on your participation in its proceedings. Please make a special effort to be at the meeting to support the members who will be featuring in the presentations.

## Help Wanted

From a later item in this Newsletter you will note that the subject and format of our Chapter's August and October meetings have been finalised. We do need, however, two members to act in the role as a chairman for these meetings to coordinate discussion amongst members. The papers on which discussion will be based are available and all that is needed is some one to develop a set of questions on which we will focus our discussions. If you are able to help please contact our Program Directors, John Cook or Bruce McLennan, as soon as possible.

## It Happened in May

### Hatches and Dispatches

May 10, 1863 – Thomas J (Stonewall) Jackson dies at Guinea Station, Virginia, aged 39 years;

May 11, 1864 – JEB Stuart is mortally wounded at the Battle of Yellow Tavern, Virginia;

May 23, 1824 – Ambrose Burnside (USA) is born in Liberty, Indiana;

May 28, 1818 – Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard (CSA) is born in St Bernard, Louisiana;

### Command Changes

May 2, 1863 – JEB Stuart assumes command of the Confederate cavalry after “Stonewall” Jackson is mortally wounded in the Battle of Chancellorsville;

### Battles

May 1, 1863 – Battle of Port Gibson, MS, which begins Grant’s Vicksburg Campaign;

May 1 - 4, 1863 – Battle of Chancellorsville, that results in stunning Confederate victory for Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia;

May 5, 1864 – Battle of the Wilderness begins;

May 8, 1864 – Fighting begins at Spotsylvania Court House, Virginia;

May 12, 1864 – Battle of Bloody Angle, Spotsylvania;

May 12, 1865 – The last land battle between large forces resulting in a Confederate victory takes place at Palmito Ranch, Texas;

May 16, 1863 – Battle of Champion Hill, Mississippi;

May 17, 1863 – Battle of Big Black River Bridge, MS;

May 18, 1863 – Siege of Vicksburg, MS, begins;

May 19, 1863 – Grant launches his first unsuccessful attack against the besieged Vicksburg;

May 23 – 26, 1864 – Battle of North Anna, Virginia;

May 25, 1862 – Jackson attacks the Federals in the First Battle of Winchester, VA and captures the town two days later;

May 27, 1862 – Battle of Slash Church (Hanover Court House);

May 31, 1862 – Battle of Seven Pines (Fair Oaks) where General Joseph Johnston (CSA) is severely wounded.

## Other Significant Events

May 4, 1865 – Lincoln is buried in Springfield, Illinois;

May 9, 1865 – The trial of the 8 accused Lincoln assassination conspirators begins;

March 4, 1865 – Lincoln is inaugurated for a second term as President;

May 10, 1865 – Jefferson Davis is captured near Irwinville, Georgia;

May 16, 1861 – Tennessee is officially admitted to the Confederacy

May 20, 1861 – North Carolina becomes the 11<sup>th</sup> state to join the Confederacy whilst Kentucky issues a proclamation of neutrality;

May 29, 1865 – President Johnson grants amnesty and pardon to all who participated in “the existing rebellion”, with a few exceptions.

## It Happened in June

### HATCHES AND DESPATCHES

**June 1, 1831** – John Bell Hood (CSA) is born in Owingsville, Bath County, Kentucky;

**June 3, 1808** – Confederate President Jefferson Davis is born in Christian County, Kentucky;

**June 5, 1864** – On Matagorda Island, Texas, 13 black members of the Union’s Corps de Afrique are hanged by Federal military authorities after convictions for mutiny;

**June 5, 1864** – Brigadier General William E (Grumble) Jones (CSA) is killed in action in the Shenandoah Valley;

**June 14, 1811** – Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is born in Litchfield, Conn;

**June 14, 1864** – General Leonidas Polk, (CSA) is killed at Pine Mountain, Georgia during the Atlanta Campaign.

### COMMAND AND POLITICAL APPOINTMENTS

**June 17, 1862** – Braxton Bragg succeeds General Beauregard as Commander of the Western Department of the Confederate Army

**April 22, 1861** – Robert E Lee is named commander of the forces of Virginia;

## It Happened in June (cont'd)

### BATTLES / MILITARY ACTIONS

- June 1 – 3, 1864** – Battle of Cold Harbor, Virginia;
- June 1, 1862** – Second day of fighting in the Battle of Seven Forks;
- June 6, 1862** – The Battle of Memphis, Tennessee;
- June 8, 1862** - Confederate forces under “Stonewall Jackson, successfully fight off Federal attacks and achieve victory at the Battle of Cross Keys, Virginia;
- June 9, 1863** – Battle of Brandy Station, Virginia, which is the largest cavalry battle ever fought on American soil. In this battle JEB Stuart was surprised by the Union forces commanded by Alfred Pleasanton and narrowly escapes defeat;
- June 10, 1861** – Battle of Big Bethel, Virginia, is the first major battle of the Civil War. Although outnumbering the Confederates by more than four to one, the Union attack failed disastrously;
- June 12 – 15, 1862** – JEB Stuart’s spectacular four-day reconnaissance that develops into a ride around McClellan’s army on the Virginia Peninsula;
- June 21, 1863** – Heavy skirmishing marks Lee’s advance north with engagements at several places in Virginia and in Frederick, Maryland;
- June 27, 1864** – Battle of Kennesaw Mountain, Georgia, results in a Confederate victory thus temporarily checking Sherman’s march on Atlanta.

### OTHER SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

- June 4, 1862** – Southern planters burn huge stocks of cotton on the Yazoo and the Mississippi to prevent their capture;
- June 19, 1862** – President Lincoln signs into law a measure prohibiting slavery in the territories of the United States;
- June 20, 1863** – By presidential proclamation West Virginia is admitted to the Union as the 35<sup>th</sup> State;
- June 23, 1861** – Federal balloonist Thaddeus Lowe observes and maps the Confederate lines over northern Virginia;
- June 25, 1864** – At Petersburg, Federal engineers begin digging a tunnel towards Confederate lines which they hope will enable them to blow apart the Southern earthworks;
- June 28, 1863** – Lee diverts Confederate forces from an intended drive to Harrisburg to march them towards Gettysburg;
- June 30, 1865** – All eight alleged conspirators in the Lincoln assassination are found guilty.

## Program for the Remainder of 2008

The program for our two regular meetings for the remainder of 2008 and will both comprise discussion of a particular topic/issue and will involve consideration of a number of focus questions developed by our members. The subjects for these meetings are as follows:

“The Tragedy of the Crater”

“The Haunting Mystery of A P Hill”

These two meetings will be held on the Monday evenings of August 18 and October 20, at our normal venue of the Roseville Memorial RSL Club, Pacific Highway, Roseville.

In addition to these regular meetings, we will be holding a Christmas/End-of-Year function at a date to be fixed sometime in late-November or early December. Your Committee would welcome any suggestions you might have as to the format and venue for this social evening.

## May I Quote You General Lee...

*“I tremble for my country when I hear of confidence expressed in me. I know too well my weakness, that our only hope is in God”*

- Robert E Lee to his wife, 1862

*“After it is all over, as stupid a fellow that I am can see that mistakes were made. I notice, however, that my mistakes are never told me until it is too late.”*

- Lee to his officers after Gettysburg, 1863

*“I am too old to command this army. We should never have permitted (the enemy) to get away”*

- Robert E Lee

*“Death in its silent sure march is fast gathering those whom I have longest loved, so that when he shall knock at my door, I will more willingly follow.”*

- Robert E Lee, 1869

“Strike the Tent!

- Lee’s last words, October 12, 1870

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 [bpoconn@bigpond.com](mailto:bpoconn@bigpond.com)

## George McClellan's Achievements

In the eyes of many historians George B McClellan single-handedly did more damage to the Union war effort in the Civil War than any other individual, including Confederate commander Robert E Lee! Promoting his own ideas and career regardless of the consequences, McClellan eventually became such a thorn in the side of President Lincoln, that the President removed him from command on November 5, 1862. McClellan's legacy of excessive caution, however, continued to affect the performance of the Army of the Potomac until Grant took command of all Union armies in March 1864.

At our next meeting in June, we will be exploring the life and career of George Brinton McClellan. It is considered therefore, appropriate to present members of the Chapter with some of the achievements this controversial Union general and failed contender for the 1864 Presidential election as background to the presentations at this meeting.

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George McClellan was born in 1826, the son of a prominent Philadelphian surgical ophthalmologist. His mother was the daughter of a leading Pennsylvania family, a woman noted for her "...considerable grace and refinement." As a child he demonstrated his academic ability when at the age only 13 years he entered the University of Pennsylvania to study Law. Two years later he terminated these legal studies to enter the United States Military Academy, West Point, where it was necessary to have the normal minimum age for entry waived to allow his entry.

McClellan's academic record at West Point was outstanding and he graduated second in his class, the famous Class of 1846. His standing at graduation enabled him to be commissioned as a Brevet Second Lieutenant into the prestigious US Corps of Engineers. His first posting, which lasted only three months, was back to West Point where he trained enlisted men within his Corps as sappers, miners and pontoons. With the Mexican War now being fought, McClellan was posted to General Winfield Scott's command. His bravery under fire during the Mexican War led to his being brevetted to First Lieutenant following action at Contreras and Churubusco and to the rank of Captain after Chapultepec.

After the Mexican War, McClellan was posted again to West Point where he independent command of an engineering company. It was here that McClellan came into conflict with the Academy's Superintendent and the Army's Chief of Engineers, mostly over trivial matters but where these senior officers' views differed from McClellan's.

In 1855, McClellan was sent with two other officers as official observers to the European armies involved in the Crimean War. These three officers were to report on technical aspects of the new technology, especially rifled-muskets and rifled artillery. Whilst the other two observers reported on these terms of reference, McClellan was to focus on the organisation of European cavalry and the Russian Army's organisation and methods. Not surprisingly, McClellan's report did not have the impact in practical terms as the other two observers' reports.

Transferring in 1855 from the Corps of Engineers to the Cavalry Corps to gain promotion to the rank of substantive Captain, McClellan was assigned to the 1<sup>st</sup> US Cavalry Regiment. He wrote a handbook on cavalry tactics which was adopted by the US Army and designed a saddle based on that used by the Prussian and Hungarian Hussars that the US Army was to adopt as standard issue for its horse cavalry and which is still used today for ceremonial purposes.

In 1857, McClellan resigned his army commission to become Vice-President and Chief Engineer of the Illinois Central Railroad and later, in 1860, as President of the Ohio and Mississippi Railroad.

With the outbreak of war following the shelling of Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861, McClellan re-entered service with the Army, initially in accepting the position of Major General of Ohio Volunteers on April 23, 1861 and subsequently, on May 3, entering the federal service with being given command of the Department of the Ohio with a commission as major general in the regular army.

In what was later to become West Virginia, McClellan was victorious in engagements known as the Battle of Philippi Races and at Rich Mountain. Although not major battles, after the Union defeat and rout at Bull Run, any victory by Union forces was seen as significant. Lincoln called to McClellan to Washington to take command of all Union forces defending the capital. His engineering and his organisational skills shone brightly in the creation of what was to be the mighty Army of the Potomac but his reluctance to use his forces effectively limited success it was to have under his command. Even his strongest critics acknowledge that he was an exceptional planner and organiser and a skilled trainer of troops – but he turned out to be an absolute disaster as a battlefield commander!

The disastrous Peninsula Campaign and the Battle of Second Manassas proved how ineffective McClellan was in overestimating the enemy's strength and how over-cautious he was in using his own troops. At Antietam, in September 1862, McClellan gained a strategic victory over the Confederates, a victory which stopped France and Great Britain from entering the War. McClellan had Lee's plans for the battle fall into his hands but, again, allowed Lee to withdraw with his Army intact. This was the last straw for a patient ever-forgiving Lincoln and McClellan was relieved of his command.

Lincoln was to "cross swords" with McClellan again when was the Democratic Party's nomination for the 1864 Presidential election. Again, Lincoln won! This was not McClellan's last political foray and in 1878, he was elected Governor of New Jersey, a position he held until 1881.

There is no doubt that George McClellan had a full and successful career with many great achievements – but certainly not as a battlefield commander!