

# 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 –

Although the evenings in Sydney at this time are extremely cold, I hope that you will brave the cold to come to our August meeting where we will be trying out a new more interactive format for our meetings. The meeting will take the form of a discussion focusing on a number of specific questions about the one of the major personalities or key events of the Civil War devised by one of our members. As can be seen from the adjoining column, Angus Hordern “kicks off” this new format for our meetings and I would like any feedback you have on your reaction to this type of meeting and any suggestions you might have on how we might make further changes to the meeting format.

Also at this meeting, we are having a visit from one of key people from the Melbourne component of our Round Table. Jeff Yuille, ACWTRA’s Treasurer and a died-in-the-wool Confederate, is leaving his beloved South to explore the some of the sights of the North. As with Lee’s invasion of the North culminating with Gettysburg, it seems a long way to come to see his AFL team Geelong beaten by the Sydney Swans! Please make Jeff welcome at our meeting.

I was deeply saddened by the sudden death of Roger Dixon in early July. Roger was one of the foundation members of our Round Table who joined us in our first meetings at the Gallic Club. I know that you will join with me in expressing our deepest sympathy to Elaine at this time. In lieu of flowers, I have arranged for a small donation to be made to the Cancer Council in memory of Roger, as requested by the family.

As I advised in our last Newsletter, planning continues for next year’s conference which is to coincide with the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Abraham Lincoln’s birth. I hope to be able to provide members with a substantial update on the progress of this planning at our next meeting including some proposals we are considering for a high profile speaker for the conference.

I urge you to make every effort to make the time to attend the meeting this month and look forward to seeing you there.

*Paul Kensey*

## Our Next Meeting

Our next regular meeting will be held on **Monday, August 18**, at the **Roseville Memorial RSL Club, Pacific Highway, Roseville**. The meeting will commence, as usual, 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 be trying a new format with **Angus Hordern** providing a short presentation and leading discussion with members on:

**“The Haunting Mystery of A P Hill”**

This presentation and the subsequent discussion will focus on some key questions devised by Angus on the life and career of one of the more interesting Civil War commanders.

This new format seeks to provide members with a chance to interact more with the speaker and we would appreciate your feedback on the success or otherwise of the new format.

## Vale: Roger Dixon

It is with great sadness that we report the death of Roger Dixon, one of the Chapter’s foundation members, who died in hospital following an operation in the early morning of July 7. Members will remember with great affection the magnificent Christmas Party Roger organised for us in the vineyard in the Hunter Valley, a function that has never been bettered! Although living in Hunter and more recently on the Central Coast, Roger and his wife Elaine attended many of our regular evening meetings in Sydney and their friendly manner over dinner always made us all feel welcome to be with them.

We will miss Roger greatly!

To Roger’s family and, Elaine, in particular, we would wish to extend our most sincere sympathy for their loss.

## It Happened in August

### HATCHES AND DESPATCHES

**August 6, 1811** – Judah Philip Benjamin, Attorney General and Secretary of State of the Confederacy is born in St Thomas, British West Indies;

**August 27, 1811** – Hannibal Hamlin, US Vice-President under Lincoln is born in Paris Hill Maine;

**August 31, 1822** – Fitz-John Porter (USA) is born in Portsmouth, New Hampshire;

### COMMAND AND POLITICAL APPOINTMENTS

**August 1, 1864** – Philip Sheridan is named Commander of the Army of the Shenandoah and charged with ridding the valley of Confederates especially Jubal Early

**August 17, 1862** – JEB Stuart is assigned command of all cavalry of the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia;

**August 20, 1861** – Major General George B McClellan assumes command of the newly organised Department and Army of the Potomac.

### WANTON KILLING AND DESTRUCTION

**August 7, 1861** – The village of Hampton, Va, near Fort Monroe, is burned by Confederate forces;

**August 13, 1831** – Nat Turner slave insurrection begins in Southampton County, Va, with 55 whites and about 100 blacks killed;

**August 21, 1863** – Confederate guerrillas under command of Quantrill sack Lawrence, Kansas, killing about 150 men and boys and destroying over \$1.5 million in property;

**August 25, 1863** – Following Quantrill's raid on Lawrence, Federals force some 20,000 people in Missouri from their homes which are then burned;

### BATTLES / MILITARY ACTIONS

**August 5, 1864** – Union forces under Admiral David Farragut defeat Confederates at the Battle of Mobile Bay;

**August 9, 1862** – The Federal Army of Virginia under John Pope clashes with Stonewall Jackson's corps at the Battle of Cedar Mountain;

**August 10, 1861** – Confederate troops are victorious at the Battle of Wilson's Creek, the major battle of the Civil War in Missouri;

**August 11, 1862** – In a daring raid, Confederate guerrillas capture Independence, Mo.

### BATTLES /MILITARY ACTIONS cont'd

**August 15, 1864** – Federals capture the English-built Confederate cruiser *Georgia* off Lisbon, Portugal;

**August 18, 1864** – The Battle of the Weldon Railroad in Virginia begins;

**August 22, 1862** - In a raid on Catlett's Station, Virginia, JEB Stuart captures Union General Pope's baggage train, including Pope's papers;

**August 26 – 30, 1862** – The Second Bull Run (or Manassas) Campaign ending in a Confederate victory;

### OTHER SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

**August 2, 1861** – Federal Congress passes the first national income tax measure calling for 3% of income over \$800:

**August 4, 1861** – a meeting is held in New York to combat intemperance in the Federal army;

**August 8, 1863** – In the wake of the Confederate defeat at Gettysburg, Lee offers to resign as Commander of the Army of Northern Virginia. Davis rejects the offer;

**August 14, 1861** – Major General John C Fremont declares martial law in St Louis city and county;

**August 19, 1861** - Confederate Congress agrees to an alliance with Missouri resulting in Missouri having two state governments, Federal and Confederate;

**August 29, 1863** - The Confederate *H L Hunley* sinks in Charleston Harbour, the five-man crew of the submarine are lost.

## Famous Last Words...

*"Forward! For God's sake forward"*

General John Reynolds before being mortally wounded, Gettysburg, July 1, 1863

*"I'm as dead as Julius Caesar"*

- General Stephen H Weed, mortally wounded at Little Round Top

*"Well if we are to die, let us die like men"*

Last reported words of Patrick Cleburne Battle of Franklin, 1864

## Varina Davis – The Hilary Clinton of her time?

*The article is based on an editorial appearing a Fredericksburg newspaper earlier this year around the time of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Jefferson Davis's birthday. The editorial uses the definitive biography "First Lady of the Confederacy: Varina Davis' Civil War" by Joan E Cashin as its primary reference.*

It was said that because of her many controversial opinions, she wasn't exactly cut out for the role of First Lady. Her marriage to the President was, at best, "rocky". Were it not for the political and social conventions of the day, they could very easily have split up.

No, we are not referring to Bill and Hilary Clinton but to Jefferson Davis and his second wife Varina, the first and only couple in the White House of the Confederacy.

In the year of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Jefferson Davis's birth, the spotlight returns to Davis but his legacy is only a faint glimmer of his adversary, Lincoln, whose 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth is celebrated next year.

In this article, however, the focus is not on these two leaders but the second wife of one them. Varina was the second wife of Jefferson Davis and it has been said that she lived most of her marriage in the shadow of Davis's first wife who died at a very young age.

Varina was considerably younger than her husband and was certainly no Southern Belle. Her family roots were in New Jersey and not part of the Southern aristocracy that included Jefferson Davis, the Kentucky-bred plantation owner from Mississippi. She was said to laugh at jokes that "proper" women didn't and she quoted the literacy masters, Shakespeare, Tennyson and Milton when few females had access to such education.

Varina Davis stood out among women of her time and this did not make her role as First Lady any easier. Indeed, as her biographer Cashin explains, Davis spent most of her post-war life trying to come to terms with the war years that had thrust her into unhappy and unwelcomed prominence.

During her tumultuous life which lasted until 1906, when she died in a New York apartment overlooking Central Park (her husband had died in 1889), Varina Davis managed to:

- Secretly correspond with friends and relatives in the North during the War;
- Move to Manhattan six months after the death of her husband in 1889 where she lived for the last 16 years of her life;
- Become friends with Julia Grant, the widow of Ulysses S Grant; and
- Write in 1901 that it was "...God's will" that the North won the War.

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Her post-war actions should not be misunderstood, however, Varina Davis was no traitor to the Confederate cause. Indeed, from the first time she met the considerably older Jefferson Davis at a Christmas party in Mississippi in 1843, she was said to have fallen deeply in love with him and defended his actions and cared for his needs.

Their relationship was not one of being "soul mates", however, as he wanted a submissive wife while she hoped for a partnership.

Despite being criticised for her lack of support for the Confederate cause, her pessimism during the War and, in a race-sensitive time even her dark complexion, Varina Davis was able to carve out her own legacy. She was an excellent writer who regularly contributed articles to newspapers after the War and a brilliant conversationalist.

Before the War, Varina was reconciled with slavery but wary of secession. After the War, she appeared at reunions of soldiers from both the North and South and, unlike her husband perceived the War more as an unfortunate struggle than a holy cause.

Varina Davis finally returned to the South when, after her death, she was buried next to her husband in Hollywood Cemetery, Richmond – partners for eternity, if not soul mates.

## Who Am I?

On June 30, 1862, near Glendale, Virginia, I saw General Robert E Lee and President Jefferson Davis observing the start of the Battle of Glendale.

As Federal artillery fire began to fall on the area, I rode up to them and said:

*"As Commander of this part of the field, I order you both to the rear! A single Yankee shell could deprive the Confederacy of its President and the Army of Northern Virginia of its Commander"*

General Lee and President Davis then rode beyond the range of the Federal guns and away from the front line.

## Who am I?

*(The answer to this question is at the bottom of the next page of this Newsletter)*

## Ambrose Powell Hill, CSA

*As the subject of the next meeting's presentation is about the career of one of the senior Confederate commanders, Major General A P Hill, it was considered appropriate to provide some background on this officer.*

Ambrose Powell Hill, whose photograph appears below, was a native of Virginia, born in Culpepper in 1825. Robert E Lee was to say of him:

*"Next to Longstreet and Jackson, I consider A.P. Hill the best commander with me. He fights his troops well and takes good care of them."*

What a great compliment Lee has made of one of his subordinate commanders!



A graduate of West Point, A.P. Hill served in the U.S. Army in the antebellum period, fighting in the Mexican War and in the Seminole Wars. On the eve of the Civil War, Hill resigned his commission to fight for his home state of Virginia. Known as "Little Powell," Hill rose through the ranks to command of the famous "Light Division." He rescued Lee's Army at Antietam, resplendent in a red battle shirt. Among the most promising of Lee's commanders, serious illness prevented him from reaching his full potential. Nevertheless, Powell was killed a week before Appomattox, in command of one-third of Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. Both Lee and Jackson called for A.P. Hill with their dying breaths.

## Did You Know?

For the first two years at the U.S. Military Academy, West Point, A P Hill's room-mate was George B McClellan.

## A Letter Home from West Point

In the spring of his plebe year at West Point, Staff Cadet A P Hill wrote the following home to his parents in Culpeper, a somewhat pathetic letter complaining about a lack of letters from home and asking his parents to visit:

April 3, 1843

"...though if you never wrote to me, that should not deter me from expressing my tender and filial respect for such kind parents ...I expected, at least, to be remembered with a feeling of some sort for one short year, but alas! for the frailty of human hopes have been living on vain expectancy, which they say like love, is rather a poor sustenance ...Letters from home are somewhat like an Angel's visits, few and far between ... Spring has just begun to put forth its budding beauties. Old heavy winter has taken his departure at last, though he has prolonged his visit to a greater length than was agreeable. The cheerful singing of the birds, the cloudless days and cool bracing air causes the blood to leap through the veins with exhilarating warmth... Our surgeon hardly ever has his services put in requisition, except when some poor fellow has studied himself in a headache and then the invariable remedy is a bread pill. Thank God! that so far I have kept clear of his skirt...It might be the healthiest institution in the world; there is generally about one death in two or three years, and even proceeding from the bursting of a cannon, false stroke of a sword or some other casualty. A great many die away at the examinations, but revive again in some distant corner of the union where they live ex-cadets, something like ex-presidents. Do you intend visiting the Point this spring? Let me beg of you to muster up courage enough to undertake a two days journey. You cannot tell how happy I would be to see you. Do come! Tell Pa I shall consider this letter for him also, as he has not answered.

Your affectionate son,

A.P. Hill.

## The Answer to the 'Who am I?'

The officer referred to in the "Who am I?" question on the previous page of this Newsletter is none other than the subject of our next meeting's presentation:

**Major General A P Hill, CSA**

At this time, General Hill was a divisional commander involved in heavy fighting as part of the Seven Days Campaign. The Confederates did not have a tactical victory in this battle, due, at least in part, to their assaults being uncoordinated. The Federals fought as valiantly as their Confederate enemies, but McClellan continued his retreat to the south.