

Sumter to Appomattox

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

No. 43, November 2008

Please visit our website www.americancivilwar.asn.au

A Message from the Chairman –

In what will be my last message to members as your Chairman, I need to bring to your attention some good news and some bad news.

First, the good news - our End-of-Year/Christmas function is still on and all members and their partners are invited to attend. It has been necessary to change the venue and format of this function, however, because of the small numbers attending our meetings this year would result in the use of the Roseville RSL Club being not financially viable.

John Cook has offered his home and hospitality for this Christmas function and your Committee accepted his kind offer. Full details of the function are presented in the adjoining column of this Newsletter and I would draw your attention to the need to indicate you and your partner will be attending to ensure the catering provisions are adequate.

The bad news I bring relates to the proposed Conference we were to hold in February 2009 to coincide with the 200th Anniversary of Lincoln's birth. Given the small attendances at our meetings in 2008, your Committee has taken the view that it is not feasible to hold this conference and formal notice is given that it is cancelled.

I am personally sorry that this decision had to be taken but, given the circumstances of our falling attendances, I believe it is the only decision that could be taken.

Looking to the future, it will be necessary for us to elect a new Executive and Committee to meet the challenge of addressing our attendance levels for 2009 and guide our program in the New Year, possibly in a different direction. Obviously, new blood and thinking are required to ensure our Chapter of the ACWRTA remains a viable organisation.

I would wish to thank the many members of the Chapter for their continued support over my ten-year tenure as Chairman and wish those who will be leading the Chapter in coming years every success in providing us with a vision for the operation of the group.

Paul Kensey

Our Next Meeting

As foreshadowed by our present Chairman in his message in the adjoining column of this Newsletter, our next meeting will be our **End-of-Year/Christmas Function**. The function is to be held on **Saturday, November 29, commencing from 4pm**.

As is our custom, this function is one for the wives, husbands and partners as well as members of the Chapter, so please bring along your "better half", if only there are others who do not share with us a passion for matters Civil War.

This Christmas Function will take the form of a very short Annual General Meeting to elect the Executive and Committee for 2009 followed by **informal barbeque** for most of the time.

The venue for this function will be in John Cook's home at:

17 Range Street Chatswood

For catering purposes, members are asked to advise our Secretary/treasurer, Brendan O'Connell, of their likely attendance and the guests they will be bringing either by 'phone on 9449 3720 or by e-mail at secretary@americancivilwar.asn.au as soon as possible, but no later than Wednesday, November 26.

John has promised that, in addition to the normal barbeque fare, there will be plenty of the moist and somewhat alcoholic Christmas cake similar to that he made for last year's Christmas function and some interesting prizes will be available for members and their guests.

Most importantly, this function is the last one for Paul Kensey as our Chairman and it provides an ideal opportunity to pay tribute to him and show our thanks to him in an appropriate way for his ten years of outstanding leadership of the NSW Chapter of ACWRTA.

Furthermore, the function will be a great way to end our year's activities and it is hoped that there will be a large turn-out of members to celebrate together.

It Happened in November

HATCHES AND DISPATCHES

November 3, 1816 – Jubal Early, (CSA), is born in Franklin County, Virginia;

November 5, 1818 – Soldier-politician, Benjamin Franklin Butler, (USA), is born in Deerfield, NH;

November 9, 1825 – A P (Ambrose Powell) Hill, (CSA), is born in Culpepper, Virginia;

November 13, 1814 – Joseph (Fighting Joe) Hooker is born in Hadley, Mass:

COMMAND CHANGES

November 1, 1861 – Major General George B McClellan succeeds retiring Lieutenant General Winfield Scott as general-in-chief of the Union armies;

November 2, 1861 – Major General John C Frémont is relieved of command of the Union's Western Department;

November 5, 1862 – President Lincoln relieves General McClellan of command of the Army of the Potomac replacing him with Ambrose Burnside;

November 10, 1862 – McClellan takes an emotional, spectacular farewell of the Army of the Potomac;

November 24, 1862 – Confederate General Joseph E Johnston is assigned to the major command in the West comprising six states;

November 30, 1863 – Gathering his defeated army in north-west Georgia, Braxton Bragg learns that his resignation has been accepted by President Davis.

BATTLES / MILITARY ACTIONS

November 11, 1864 – Federals in Rome, Ga., destroy bridges, foundries, warehouses of use to the enemy and proceed towards Atlanta;

November 16, 1864 – General Sherman and 60,000 Union troops leave a burned out Atlanta and begin their march to the Sea;

November 17, 1863 – The Confederate siege of Knoxville, Tenn, gets underway and the partial siege of Chattanooga continues;

November 29, 1864 – The Federal army under command of John Schofield withdraws under Hood's nose without suffering attack in the "Spring Hill Affair" (in Tennessee).

OTHER SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

November 6, 1860 – Lincoln is elected President of the United States;

November 8, 1864 – Lincoln is re-elected as US President with Andrew Johnson of Tennessee as his Vice President;

November 12, 1861 – The Confederate blockade runner *Fingal*, purchased in England, arrives in Savannah with military supplies;

November 15, 1861 – The YMCA organises the US Christian Commission for support to Federal soldiers;

November 19, 1863 – Lincoln delivers the *Gettysburg Address* at the dedication ceremony for the new national cemetery at Gettysburg;

November 25, 1864 – Confederate agents set fire to a number of New York hotels and Barnum's Museum without causing significant damage;

November 26, 1861 – A convention at Wheeling adopts a constitution for a new stateto be called West Virginia, created by secession from Virginia;

November 27, 1863 – General John Hunt Morgan and a number of his officers escape from the Ohio State Penitentiary and manage to reach Confederate territory;

November 28, 1861 – Southern Congress officially admits Missouri to the Confederate States of America.

The Proposed 2009 "Lincoln" Conference is Cancelled!

It is with considerable regret that your Committee has taken the decision to cancel the proposed Conference scheduled for February 2009 to coincide with the 200th Anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's birth.

We know that, in particular, a number of our interstate members were looking forward to this conference. The response to the various regular meetings from our Sydney members over this year, however, has been such that your Committee considered that a minimum attendance for this Conference of 50 – 60 participants was unlikely to be achieved. In such circumstances, holding the Conference would not only be a financial disaster, but in the planning for the conference, difficulty would be experienced in attracting the high-profile speakers needed to make the conference a success.

Christmas Holiday Traditions in the Civil War North and South ...

Many of the traditions associated with the Christmas holiday celebrations in the United States today began during its Civil War. Without a doubt it was the loneliness and insecurities of war that prompted citizens and soldiers alike to re-create the solace and comfort of the homes they had left behind. They did this by re-establishing familiar European traditions, thus creating the illusion of love and peace in a time when very little of that existed in their daily lives.

Christmas had always been celebrated in Europe with eating, drinking and dancing often to excess. It was the Puritans that sought to break from what they considered indulgent behaviour and were successful in this when they immigrated to America. With their arrival in their new land, Christmas became a serious occasion, the purpose of which was to introspectively ponder sin and religious commitment.

It took almost 200 years for the United States to move away from this Puritan ethic and begin to enjoy the Xmas holiday season once more. In 1830, Louisiana was the first state to declare Christmas as a public holiday and other states soon followed but it was not until 1870 that Congress legislated to make Christmas a federal holiday. The religious revivals of the mid-19th Century also added to the trend to celebrate and recognise Christmas.

Christmas cards, carols, special foods and the holding of winter dances all date back to the late 1850s. During the Civil War it was common to cut down small fir and pine trees and take them into the home for decorating often with mistletoe as a sign of bringing good fortune to the household. Letters from Union soldiers during the War mention decorating their camp Christmas trees with salt-pork and hard tack.

It was the development of the modern Santa Claus that embedded Christmas into the American way of life. In 1861, Thomas Nast, a German immigrant working as a writer and artist for *Harper's Weekly* was asked to provide a drawing to accompany Clement Clark Moore's poem, *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*. Nast called on his childhood memories of Bavaria. To create what is now the modern image of Santa Claus. His cherubic Santa, thin by today's standards, was depicted as bringing gifts of *Harper's* to the soldiers, thus, for the first time combining imagery (Santa Claus) and commercialism (selling *Harper's*) in the American marketplace.

Santa brought children gifts and these gifts were always hand-made. Children were satisfied to receive just small hand-carved toys, cakes oranges or apples. Many Southern diaries tell the story of Santa running the blockaded Southern ports to fill children's stockings with what little the parents could spare to make the day special for them. Even General Sherman's soldiers played Santa to the impoverished Southern children by attaching tree branch antlers to their horses and bringing food to the starving families in the war-ravaged Georgia countryside.

The most famous Christmas gift of the War was sent by telegram from William Tecumseh Sherman to Abraham Lincoln on December 22, 1864. It said:

'I beg to present to you as a Christmas gift, the city of Savannah, with 150 guns and plenty of ammunition, also about 25,000 bales of cotton'

The gift, of course, was not the guns, ammunition or the cotton, but the beginning of the end of the Civil War!

Notice of Annual General Meeting

In accordance with the relevant legislation, notice is hereby given that the annual general meeting of the American Civil War Round Table of Australia, NSW Chapter Incorporated will be held at 4pm on Saturday, 29 November 2008 at 17 Range Street Chatswood.

Business:

- To receive the report from the Chairman;
- To receive and if thought fit adopt the financial statements for the year ended 30 June 2008;
- To elect office-bearers of the Association and ordinary members of the committee;
- To transact any other business in accordance with the rules of the Round Table.

Paul G Kensey
Chairman

Please Note: The financial statements for the Annual General Meeting are enclosed as an attachment to this Newsletter.

Thought for the Day:

Try to be positive all the time. It won't solve all your problems, but it will annoy enough people to make the effort worthwhile!

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

Lincoln as Commander-in-Chief

Abraham Lincoln, America's 16th President, is the only president in American history whose term of office was completely bounded by war. When he arrived at the White House in 1861, Lincoln had no military experience except for several months spent soldiering during the Blackhawk Wars in 1832, but quickly established himself as Commander-in-Chief defining this role for himself as neither the Constitution nor existing legislation specified how a president might declare war or dictate strategy. By assuming the powers that are now associated with the role of commander-in-chief, Lincoln often went outside the narrow parameters that had been granted the president at that time. By doing so, however, his strategic insight coupled with his will to fight changed the course of the War and saved the Union.

Although there has been literally thousands of books and papers written about Lincoln, the amount of attention paid to his role as Commander-in-Chief is disproportionately far less than the amount of time he spent in this role. This is why the latest book from the eminent Civil War historian, James M McPherson, is such a welcome addition to the extensive collection of books on America's 16th President. Titled *Tried by War – Abraham Lincoln as Commander-in-Chief*¹, McPherson explains that for most of the conflict, Lincoln constantly had to goad his reluctant generals toward battle and he oversaw the strategy and planning for major engagements with the enemy. Lincoln was a self-taught military strategist (as he was a self-taught lawyer), which makes his adroit conduct of the War seem almost miraculous. To be sure, the Union's campaigns often went wrong and sometimes horribly wrong, but as McPherson makes clear, these mistakes arose from the all-too-common moments when Lincoln could neither threaten nor cajole his commanders to follow his orders. Because Lincoln's war took place within America's borders, the relationship between the front lines and the home front was both especially close and volatile. Here again, Lincoln faced enormous challenges in exemplary fashion. He was a masterly moulder of public opinion, for instance, defining the war aims initially as preserving the Union and, only later, as ending slavery when he sensed the public was at last ready to bear such a "burden".

As the bicentennial of Lincoln's birth approaches in 2009, this book will be that rarest gift, a genuinely novel, even timely, view of the most written about figure in American history. *Tried by War* offers a revelatory portrait of leadership during the greatest crisis the nation has ever endured. How Lincoln overcame feckless generals, fickle public opinion, and his own paralysing fears is a story at once both suspenseful and inspiring.

¹ James M McPherson, *Tried by War - Abraham Lincoln as Commander-in-Chief*. New York, The Penguin Press, 2008.

(this book is available online through Amazon.com for \$US21:00 plus postage)

Some Quotes from Gettysburg...

"Hold that ground (Little Round Top) at all hazards"

- Union Colonel Strong Vincent to
Colonel Joshua L Chamberlain

"The heroic energy of my officers could avail us no more. Our gallant line writhed and shrunk before the fire it could not repel. It was too evident that we maintain the defensive no longer. As a last desperate resort, I ordered a charge."

- Union Colonel Joshua L Chamberlain
20th Maine, Little Round Top, July 2, 1863

"At times I saw around me more of the enemy than my own men. Gaps, openings, swelling, closing again with convulsive energy. In the midst of this struggle our ammunition utterly failed. Half my left wing already lay on the field...The words "Fix bayonets" flew from man to man. The click of the steel seemed to give new zeal to all. The men dashed forward with a shout...Our loss is terrible, but we are beating the Rebels as they have never been beaten before"

- Union Colonel Joshua L Chamberlain
20th Maine, Little Round Top, July 2, 1863

"An officer fired his pistol at my head with one hand while he handed me his sword with the other"

- Union Colonel Joshua L Chamberlain
20th Maine, Little Round Top, July 2, 1863

"My grand old division, which was so full of faith and courage then, is now almost extinguished. But for one field officer in the whole command escaped in that terrible third of July slaughter and alas! alas! for the men who fearlessly followed their lead on to certain death."

- Major General George Pickett, CSA.
Confederate divisional commander

"Come on boys! Give them cold steel! Who will follow me"

- General Lewis A Armistead, CSA, brigade
commander during Pickett's Charge

"I have been a soldier all my life. I have commanded companies. I have commanded regiments. And I have commanded even more. But there are no fifteen thousand men in the world that can go across that ground."

- General James Longstreet, CSA,
arguing with Lee against what became
known as Pickett's Charge