



Sumter to Appomattox

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

Patron: Professor the Hon Bob Carr

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Please visit our website www.americancivilwar.asn.au

A Message from our Chairman

Thank you to Philip Shanahan for the comprehensive review of the role of cavalry in the civil war.

I am looking forward to the next session on 3 June with Rod Cooke focussing on coastal operations. The increasing denial to the South of the ability to use its coastline and its ports was an important strategic factor in the ultimate outcome.

I like the idea of using the larger room and ensuring that we have the numbers to justify it but we need to be careful not to place the presenter too far away from some of the audience. Regardless of which room we end up using, please take advantage of the ability to move around for conversation prior to the formal meeting start so that we can ensure that we are a group of friends who come together with different backgrounds but a common interest.

Again, I hope we have a large attendance on 3 June and a lively and fun atmosphere.

Introducing a friend to our unusual and interesting group is always a good idea.

Dan McIntyre

Our Next Meeting

Monday, June 3rd, 2019

The Roseville Club

Topic: Coastal Operations

Modern militaries have coordination at the highest level to incorporate all services. Australia has the Joint Operations Command. In the Civil War there were not such luxuries and coordination between naval, riverine and military forces ranged from the sublime to the ridiculous.

An area that is not widely studied are the operations around the coast of the USA and CSA. These were tied in with the grand strategy of the war - the Anaconda Plan. This session will look at how coastal operations began, how the Navy and the Army prepared for this facet of war and will look at some of the operations themselves.

Issues such as the change in naval power, the effectiveness of coastal fortifications and command and control will be examined.

Arrive before 6.15 and order a bistro meal (for delivery well before the meeting). The meeting will commence at 7.00.

On our website you will always find the date of our next meeting. Our Facebook page is also easily accessed from our website www.americancivilwar.asn.au

Our Last meeting

Cavalry in the Civil War

Our member, Philip Shanahan, gave an interesting and informative presentation on the role of the evolution of the cavalry through the war.

During the Civil War the mounted charge almost became obsolete. Early on, many recruits imagined that their experiences would mirror the exciting stirring tales they'd heard of the Napoleonic wars of 50 years earlier, of sabre-swinging charges across open countryside. However, reality rarely matched these images. The reason was the improvement in combat arms – for example, the minnie ball, and rifled barrel, which made a mounted cavalryman a very large target. As a result, in most cavalry engagements troops were dismounted!

Our speaker started with a reminder of the small arms used by each side:

Union

Sharps Carbine
Colt and Remington 6 shot revolvers
Sabre

Confederate

Captured sharps carbines – linen cartridge (brass cartridges) – could be manufactured in the south but were often defective
Revolvers – preferably the Le Matt
Sawn-off shot-guns
Sabres – which they mostly disliked

Differences between Confederates and Union

The South had the tradition of militias, whose “Court (Field) Days” were an important part of the southern way of life. These were usually casual social affairs, but the John Brown raid gave them a new seriousness.

Southerners had been taught from boyhood to ride and shoot. They knew how to train, manage and care for horses, all of which was a total mystery to most of their northern contemporaries in 1861.

On the eve of the war there were just five Cavalry regiments in the US Army. After the War started 104 of 176 officers deserted to the Confederacy. This meant that the Confederate Cavalry was ready-made and commanded by the better officers.

In the North, on the other hand, most people lived in cities. In the countryside, the roads were much better, so horses were used to pull buggies or ploughs on the farm. Many northern recruits not only had to learn how to ride a horse but also fight on one! There was also a scarcity of good horses as most were draught and working horses.

Reasons for the initial advantage of the South over the North

After Robert E Lee declined the offer to command the Union forces, General Winfield Scott took on the role to mould the personnel into a cohesive fighting force. He thought the war would be over before volunteer cavalry could be adequately trained. In fact, it was not until 1863 and the establishment of Cavalry Bureau that the cavalry was fully supplied. This was because of Scott's aversion to volunteer cavalry.

The Confederate Army had the initial advantage of better horsemanship and more daring and effective leadership. They also had general respect, which made them Top Dogs of the Southern forces. Very early on their Cavalry was organised under Jeb Stuart with six brigades. He was a Major General as early as September 1861. The Union Cavalry on the other hand was rarely organised into large formations.



Jeb Stuart

The Confederates were considered by both North and South to be superior horsemen and were mounted on better horses. For the first two years, they outperformed their Federal counterparts, which was no surprise considering what Colonel Charles H Smith had to say of his own men in the First Maine “The average Maine volunteer was less familiar with the use of firearms than with the use of theodolites or telescopes. With revolver in hand the trooper was more likely to shoot off his horse's ears or kill his next comrade than hit the enemy however near”.

Another a major factor was that the Confederate system depended on the cavalymen to furnish their own horses. When a trooper lost his horse, he was entitled to a 30-day furlough to go home for another one. Some men simply wandered away from their regiment and returned when it suited them.

In April 1862, the Congress of the Confederate States of America passed the Partisan Ranger Act. The law was intended as a stimulus for recruitment of irregulars for service into the Confederate States Army. Our speaker said many of these were little more than bandits who became an embarrassment to the Confederate government and were ordered to disband in April 1864 and to join regular units. He said most of them ignored the order and continued to operate (including John S Mosby).

George B McClellan and the Cavalry

Although he designed the "McClellan saddle" and wrote a report on cavalry for Great Britain, Austria, Prussia and France, our speaker told us that he displayed a curious lack of vision and seemed not to know what to do with it. Under McClellan, the cavalry simply suffered from neglect and misuse. He curiously attached cavalry regiments singly to divisions who then sub-divided them into brigades. Anything that was left over was formed into the Cavalry Reserve under General Philip St George Cooke – Jeb Stuart's father-in-law (of whom Stuart said "He will regret it but once, and that will be continuously").

Jeb Stuart

Mid-1862 found Jeb Stuart at the peak of his fame, having ridden around the Army of the Potomac twice with the Union cavalry left completely helpless! Stuart's raids had embarrassed the Union army and demonstrated the perceived superiority of the Confederate horseman in the eyes of northern public.

Ambrose Burnside

In November 1862 Ambrose Burnside was assigned command of the Army of the Potomac. Cavalrymen remained attached to the grand divisions and there was no improvement to their capacity during his short period of command.

Joseph Hooker

In January 1863 Lincoln appointed Joseph Hooker as command of the Army of the Potomac. He improved rations to include fresh bread and vegetables and instituted a system of furloughs as well as frequent inspections and reviews.

In February Hooker reorganised the mounted unit into Cavalry corps under George Stoneman. Stoneman was a 40 year-old, West Point graduate (1846) and a Major General. He obtained breech-loading carbines, instituted daily drills, ordered the study of mounted tactics and replaced worn-out horses. Throughout this time, he was plagued by a severe case of haemorrhoids which made any time spent in the saddle excruciating.



George Stoneman

Under Stoneman, Union cavalry became the best armed branch of the army with three divisions of volunteers – 22 regiments, 1 brigade reserve, 4 regiments, 26 regiments total 9,000 under the following commanders:

Pleasanton – "no demonstrated skills" but relentless self-promotion
Averill "Career cavalry man very cautious"
Gregg – solid, modest, yet dashing
Buford "highest regarded of the 4"

There were a number of battles and campaigns in which the Union Cavalry were involved that demonstrated their improvement and eventual domination. These battles included Kell's Ford and the disastrous Stoneman's Raid, then the respectability at Brandy Station and the first featured battle at East Cavalry Field at Gettysburg where we learned that David Gregg and not George Custer was the hero of the day.

Following nine months of activity under Meade, Sheridan took command on 4 April 1864 and things started to heat up. At the battle of yellow tavern, Stuart was killed. The Confederate cavalry's best days were behind it. Union cavalry went to Shenandoah Valley and had victories at Winchester, Fishers Hill, Tom's Brook and Cedar Creek, before returning to the army of Potomac in March 1865 for the end game.

The Battle of Dinwiddie Court House (Virginia, 31 March 1865) was the second featured battle where Charles H Smith's Maine volunteers left their theodolites and telescopes behind to become the heroes of the battle. This Battle came after the Richmond-Petersburg Campaign and before the Appomattox Campaign. The northern Cavalry shadowed the Confederate Army for nine days before eventually cutting them off at Appomattox Court House on 9 April.

The Cavalry finished the war as Top Dogs of the Federal Army!

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 of the Chapter by telephone on 0411 745 704 or by e-mail at:

secretary@americancivilwar.asn.au

Snippets

Thanks again to Len Traynor

Not so holy

Chaplain John Cowan of the 6th New York Heavy Artillery faced a Court Martial 6th June 1865 charged with Conduct Unbecoming. It was alleged that at Nottoway Station, Virginia, he stole clothing, boots, blankets and a martingale. Although he pleaded Not Guilty because he was a religious man, he was found guilty and dismissed from the service.

Chaplain Alvah R Jones, a Methodist minister attached to the 10th US Coloured Troops, was charged with Conduct Unbecoming. Kept aloof from the enlisted men, he stated "I did not come here to mingle with niggers, or go into their dirty, lousy tents". He also failed to stop a noisy religious meeting. Also charged with cowardice at Wilson's Landing, Virginia. Found guilty he was Dismissed from the service.

Chaplain Paul Wald, Court martialled March 1865, was charged with Conduct Unbecoming, at Natchez, Mississippi. Drank with enlisted men in a saloon, influenced a hospital steward to visit a house of prostitution, was drunk on duty at a hospital, and used obscene language. He was found guilty and Dismissed from the Service.

Chaplain Herman Fehrman, 17th Missouri Regiment. Court-martialled November 1862. Charged with "Conduct Unbecoming". Punched Lt. Adolph Boettcher in the face "in a most brutal and rowdy manner without provocation while sober in an issue over a cigar". Found guilty and Dismissed from the Service.

Chaplain Elisha F. Watson. 11th Massachusetts Volunteers. Court-Martialled December 1863. Charged with Fraud. At Brandy Station, Virginia, failed to have paid his servant, and borrowed a horse from a local woman and neither paid for it and failed to return it. Found Guilty, and Severely reprimanded.

Soldiers' menus

Civil war soldiers were fed the bland diet of government issue rations, mainly salt pork or beef, beans, hardtack and coffee. Wherever possible, troops took the opportunity to vary the food, either by purchase from the regimental Sutler, or foraging which in many cases was just a polite word for stealing.

Of course many soldiers desired fresh meat, which was greatly prized throughout the war and local game such as rabbits, deer, turkeys, squirrels etc., when available often ended up in soldiers cooking pots. Here is a Civil War recipe for rabbit or squirrel stew:

One rabbit/squirrel skinned and cut into pieces
¼ cup of flour
Large spoon of butter or lard
Two onions
One cup of chopped carrots
One cup of chopped potatoes
Mix the flour with herbs [if available] and coat the rabbit pieces

Melt the butter of lard in a large pan and fry the rabbit pieces until brown, add the carrots, onion and potatoes, season with salt and pepper. Cover with water, and place a lid over the contents, and bake in a hot oven for about an hour. Serves four.

This meal would have been greatly appreciated by soldiers weary of the very boring diet of salt pork and hardtack.

Many officers, concerned about the wellbeing of their men, often turned blind eye to the troops foraging although it was often banned by army commanders. Officers had the privilege of purchasing their own supplies where the enlisted men could not. Many a local resident would often find his garden stripped of everything edible when troops were camped in his vicinity.

One meal so often appreciated by the soldier, courtesy of the willing or unwilling local farmer was tomato soup.

Twelve tomatoes skinned and finely chopped
Two small onions finely chopped
Place in a pot and cover with water add salt and pepper and bring to the boil.
Then simmer for 1 ½ hours.
Serves four.

A list of union vessels sunk or damaged by confederate torpedoes (floating mines) during the civil war:

Cairo. Ironclad 12TH December 1862. Yazoo River. Sunk [the first surface vessel in the history of naval warfare to be sunk by a floating mine]

Montauk. Monitor, 22nd February 1863, Ogeechee River. Damaged.

Baron De Kalb. Ironclad Gunboat, 13th July 1863, Yazoo River. Sunk

Commander Barney. Gunboat, 5th August 1863, James River. Damaged

John Farron. U.S. Army Transport, September 1863. Damaged

New Ironsides. Ironclad, 5th October 1863, Charleston. Damaged

Housatonic. Sloop of War, 17th February 1864. Charleston. Sunk.

Maple Leaf. U.S. Army Transport, 1st April 1864, St. John's River. Sunk

Minnesota. Frigate, 9th April 1864, Newport News. Damaged.

Eastport. Ironclad Gunboat, 15th April 1864, Red River. Sunk

General Hunter. U.S. Army Transport, 16th April 1864, St. John's River. Sunk

Commander Jones. Gunboat Ferry, 6th May 1864, James River. Sunk

Harriet R. Weed. U.S. Army Transport, 9th May 1864, St. John's River. Sunk

Alice Price. U.S. Army Transport, 19th June 1864, St. John's River. Sunk

Tecumseh. Monitor, 5th August 1864, Mobile Bay. Sunk

Greyhound. U.S. Army Transport, 27th November 1864, Sunk

Narcissus. Tugboat. 7th December 1864, Mobile Bay. Sunk
Otsego. Gunboat. 9th December 1864, Roanoke River. Sunk
Bazely. Tugboat. 10th December 1864, Roanoke River. Sunk
Patapsco. Monitor. 15th January 1865, Charleston. Sunk
Osceola. Gunboat. 20th February 1865, Cape Fear River. Damaged
Shawmut. Navy Launch, 20th February 1865. Sunk
Harvest Moon. Army Steamer, 1st March 1865, Winyah Bay. Sunk
Thorne. Army Transport, 4th March 1865, Cape Fear River. Sunk
Jonquil. Navy Tug, 6th March 1865, Ashley River. Damaged
Althea. Navy Tug, 12th March 1865, Blakely River. Sunk
Bibb. Coastal Survey Steamer, 17th March 1865, Charleston. Damaged
Milwaukee. Monitor, 28th March 1865, Blakely River. Sunk
Osage. Monitor, 29th March 1865, Blakely River. Sunk
Rodolph. Tinclad Gunboat, 1st April 1865, Blakely River. Sunk
Ida. Navy Tugboat. 13th April 1865, Blakely River. Sunk
Sciota. Gunboat, 14th April 1865, Mobile Bay. Sunk
Cincinnati. Navy Launch, 14th April 1865, Blakely River. Sunk
R. B. Hamilton, Army Transport, 12th May 1865, Mobile Bay. Sunk

When the Confederate Raider, the C.S.S. Alabama was sunk off the coast of Cherbourg by the U.S.S. Kearsarge on the 19th of July 1864. Among the hundreds of French people watching the battle from the shore was Edouard Manet, then at the threshold of a distinguished career as a painter. He was so impressed that he painted the battle scene, which now hangs in the Philadelphia Art Gallery.

The Confederate Chief of Ordnance General Josiah Gorgas, his son Willie who in the absence of his father helped his Mother and younger sisters escape the fire of Richmond at war's end. Grew up to have a very distinguished career, as Dr. William Gorgas he became a public health hero who discovered the cause of Yellow fever, and so made possible the construction of the Panama Canal.

As a darkened Confederate Blockade runner sailed out of Wilmington in December 1863 on her journey to England to visit her artist son. She received a warm welcome from him on her arrival and is famous today because of his painting of her known today as "Whistler's Mother".

The Union Armies Balloon Corps, under the command of a civilian, Professor T. S. C. Lowe, operating during the Peninsula Campaign in 1862, created a lot of interest from a German observer named Count Von Zeppelin, who later invented the airship that bears his name.

Civil War Profile

Jefferson Davis - early years

Jefferson was born at the family homestead "Fairview" in Kentucky in June 1808 – the last of ten children of Jane (nee Cook) and Samuel Emory Davis. His father was an admirer of then President Thomas Jefferson. Coincidentally, Abraham Lincoln was also born in Kentucky only eight months later. As his family name suggests, his grandfather had migrated to the US from Wales. His maternal ancestors were from England. Jefferson's father – with his half-brothers – had served on the side of the rebels in the Revolutionary War. Three brothers served in the War of 1812.



"Rosemont" home near Woodville, Mississippi – where Jeff Davis lived as a boy

A few years after Jefferson was born, the family moved to Louisiana and, soon after, to Wilkinson County, in the south-west corner of Mississippi to "Rosemount" on the eastern side of the Mississippi River, near Woodville. Like others in the district, the family grew cotton on their plantation with slave labour – made viable by the invention of the modern cotton gin. The finished cotton was transported by rail to the River. Originally called Poplar Grove, the name of their home was changed by the family to honour Jane Cook Davis's rose gardens. Jefferson said of Rosemount: "It was here my memories began". It was owned by the Davis family until 1895. The Davis family cemetery is among the oak and poplar trees on the grounds. The home became a museum in 1971 and can be visited Tuesday to Saturday.

He began his education at Woodville but two years later transferred back to a Catholic School near Springfield, Kentucky – the only protestant student. In 1818 he returned to Mississippi to study at the Jefferson College in Adams County. In 1821 he was back again in Kentucky to study at the Transylvania University in Lexington. In 1824, when he was only 16, his father died.

In late 1824 his older brother Joseph arranged for Jefferson to attend the US Military Academy ("West Point"). He graduated 23rd (out of 33) in June 1828 and was assigned to the 1st Infantry Regiment based at Fort Crawford, Michigan Territory (now in Wisconsin) in upper Mississippi where it is met by the Wisconsin River. Future US President Zachary Taylor had recently taken up command of the Fort.

When Davis asked to marry Zachary's daughter, Sarah, he was refused, as the father did not want his daughter

to have the difficult life of an army wife on the frontier. After consulting his brother Joseph, Jefferson resigned from the army and married Sarah in Louisville, Kentucky on 17 June 1835. Joseph gave him the use of over 700 ha of land alongside his own, about 30 km south of Vicksburg. Known as "Brierfield" because it was covered with briars and brush, it was to be cleared for a plantation. The newly-weds travelled south to Louisiana to pass the hot summer but both contracted either malaria or yellow fever and Sarah died there, aged only 21, after only three months of marriage. Jefferson's life was also in the balance. After his slow recovery he became reclusive and returned to Brierfield, clearing the property as well as reading history and politics. By early 1836, he had bought 36 slaves and by 1845 he had 75.

In 1840 he first became involved in politics when he attended a Democratic Party meeting at Vicksburg. In 1842 he attended a Democratic Convention, and in 1843, became a Democratic candidate for the state House of Representatives (which he lost). In 1844 he again attended the Party convention and was selected as one of the six presidential electors – campaigning throughout Mississippi for the Democratic candidate James K Polk.



Wedding photo of Jefferson and Varnia

Also in 1844 he met Varnia Banks Howell, then 18. Joseph had invited her to spend the Christmas season with his family. She was the grand-daughter of a New Jersey Governor and her mother's family were from the South and included successful Scots-Irish planters. Soon Jefferson asked Varnia for her hand and they married in February 1845. He was 35. Also in 1845 Jefferson was elected to the 29th Congress as a Representative.

When the Mexican War began in 1846, Jefferson raised a volunteer regiment, the 1st Mississippi Rifles, becoming its Colonel under the command of his (former) father-in-law Zachary Taylor. They were armed with the new technology arms with rifling bores. He was in the Battle of Monterrey where he led a charge on Fort La Teneria. He resigned from the House of Representatives in October 1846 and in February 1847 fought bravely at the Battle of Buena Vista where he was shot in the foot. On 17 May, President Polk offered Davis a federal commission as a Brigadier General and command of a brigade of militia. Davis declined the appointment, arguing that the Constitution gave the power of appointing militia officers to the States, not the Federal government.

In May the Mississippi Governor appointed him to fill a Senate position made vacant by the death of a Democrat

Senator. The next year he was elected by the State legislature to continue serving. (In those times US Senators were not elected by the public.) He proposed amending the Treaty with Mexico to annex most of Mexico's north-east but the proposal failed. On Cuba, he declared it "must be ours". Mississippi elected him as Senator for a future six years in 1849 but in 1851 he resigned to contest the Governorship of Mississippi, which he lost by 999 votes. Now, without political office, Davis continued his political activity. He took part in a convention on States' rights, held at Jackson, Mississippi, in January 1852. In the weeks leading up to the presidential election of 1852, he campaigned in numerous Southern states for Democratic candidates Franklin Pierce and William R King.

After winning the presidential election, Franklin Pierce made Davis his Secretary of War. In this capacity, Davis began the Pacific Railroad Surveys to determine various possible routes for the proposed Transcontinental Railroad. Davis promoted the Gadsden Purchase from Mexico of today's southern Arizona partly because it would provide an easier southern route for the new railway. The Pierce administration agreed and the land was purchased in December 1853. At the same time, Davis saw the size of the regular army as insufficient to fulfil its mission and proposed that salaries would have to be increased, something which had not happened for 25 years. Congress agreed and increased the pay scale. It also added four regiments, which increased the army's size from about 11,000 to about 15,000. As a result, both the morale and capability of the army was improved. He also became involved in public works when Pierce gave him responsibility for construction of the Washington Aqueduct and an expansion of the US Capitol building – both of which he managed closely. His role as Secretary of War ended when James Buchanan became President. He ran again for the Senate and re-entered it in March 1857.

Davis experienced poor health for most of his life, including repeated bouts of malaria, battle wounds from fighting in the Mexican War and a chronic eye infection that made bright lights painful. He also had trigeminal neuralgia, a nerve disorder that causes severe pain in the face; it has been called one of the most painful known ailments. While resting in Maine in July 1858, he delivered an anti-secessionist speech on board a ship near Boston. He again urged the preservation of the Union on 11 October in Faneuil Hall, Boston.

As he explained in his memoir *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government*, Davis believed that each State was sovereign and had an unquestionable right to secede from the Union. At the same time, he counselled delay among his fellow Southerners because he did not think that the North would permit the peaceable exercise of the right to secession. Having served as Secretary of War under President Pierce, he also knew that the South lacked the military and naval resources necessary for defence in a war.