

Bugle Call

Published by the
San Joaquin Valley
Civil War Round Table

ECHOES

March 1995

Pelham, Gallant Artillerist

By Rick Kubiak

If the maxim, "Don't judge a book by its cover," was converted to a human connotation and rewritten to read, "don't judge a person by outward appearance," it would be most apropos in describing Confederate artillerist John Pelham. This recognized genius of artillery tactics had a modest boyish appearance, and in truth was a very young man.



In *"War Years With JEB Stuart,"* the author W.W. Blackford, wrote, "There was Pelham, who commanded the horse artillery but who always lived at headquarters as a staff officer, as the General would not agree for him to do otherwise, for he loved him dearly. Only twenty-one or -two years old and so innocent looking, so 'child-like and bland,' in the expression of his sparkling blue eyes, but as grand a flirt as ever lived. Three girls put on mourning for him when he was killed. He was tall, slender, beautifully proportioned, very graceful, a superb rider, and as brave as Julius Cesar."

Philip Mercer, in *"The Gallant Pelham,"* describes him as possessing those gifts of personality and presence that captivate people.

Pelham was born Sept. 14, 1838 in Benton County, Alabama. On his father's 1,000 acre estate, he devel-

Continued on next page

Civil War Medicine Is Topic for March

Dr. Brian Clague, a Fresno neurosurgeon and a founding member of the San Joaquin Valley Civil War Round Table, will be the speaker at the Thursday, March 30, dinner meeting of the CWRT.

The meeting will be held in the Remington restaurant at Clovis and Kings Canyon Avenues beginning with a social hour at 6 p.m.

Reservations

Dr. Clague's interest in the Civil War stems from undergraduate days at the University of San Francisco. His emphasis is in collecting Civil War period tax stamps, but he has a keen interest in the pharmacy, medical and surgical procedures of the war.

He kept an audience spellbound at a CWRT luncheon three years ago, and also was one of the featured speakers at the West Coast CWRT conference last November in Fishcamp.

Reservations may be made by mailing checks for \$15 for each dinner (which includes tax and tip) to the San Joaquin Valley CWRT, P.O. Box 5695, Fresno, CA 93755. Reservations must be received by Tuesday, March 28. Seating will not be guaranteed without a reservation.

Dr. Clague was graduated from the University of California, San Francisco, Medical School in 1968. He completed a residency in neurosurgery at Chase Western Reserve University in Ohio in 1974. He then moved to Fresno. He and his wife, Linda, have seven children.

John Pelham, Gallant Artillerist of the Confederacy

oped a wiry athletic physique in a healthy outdoor environment. This later enabled him to endure strenuous battlefield conditions.

In 1856 Pelham entered West Point in an experimental 5-year curriculum. He was noted for his fondness for fencing and boxing and was considered the best athlete at West Point. He excelled in artillery studies under the tutelage of Major Henry J. Hunt. He later would use those skills against Hunt during the war.

He resigned from West Point on April 22, 1861, just



two weeks short of graduation. He felt he must leave immediately or risk being held as a prisoner of war.

He entered Confederate service as a lieutenant and ordnance officer in Lynchburg, Va., with General Joseph E. Johnston's Army of the Shenandoah. He was assigned to Captain Alburts' battery as drillmaster. Within a month Pelham's rugged daily routine had transformed the battery from an awkward squad into the most polished gunnery unit in Johnston's army. At the Battle of First Manassas (Bull Run) on July 21, 1861, Pelham demonstrated his superb gunnery skill on

The San Joaquin Valley Civil War Round Table Officers for 1994 are:



John Taylor, President
Bill Head, Vice President
Barbara Moats, Secretary
Wayne Bowen, Treasurer

Other board members are Linda Clague, Tim Johnson, Verne Cole, newsletter editor; Rick Kubiak, historian; and the immediate past president Charles Jorgensen.

Change of Address? Call Verne Cole, 435-8410 or Wayne Bowen, 291-4885.

Dues reminder

Annual dues, which include the monthly newsletter, are \$25 of which \$5 goes to battlefield preservation. Newsletter subscriptions are \$10. All dues now are payable in January. Those who paid at other times of the year may have their dues pro-rated this year if they desire. Checks should be made out to C.W.R.T. and mailed to P.O. Box 5695, Fresno, CA 93755.

Henry House Hill. "Stonewall" Jackson undoubtedly had Pelham in mind when he wrote in his official report on the battle: "Nobly did the artillery maintain its position for hours against the enemy's advancing thousands." Pelham had passed through his baptism of fire with bravery and distinction.'

On General Johnston's recommendation, Pelham on November 29, 1861, was promoted to captain and assigned to J.E.B. Stuart's cavalry as the commander of an 8-gun battery of horse artillery. He organized a mobile artillery unit that was to become famous as the "Stuart Horse Artillery."

In a letter to his wife, Stuart wrote, "The Horse Battery under energetic management of Pelham is going ahead and will tell a tale in the next battle. In artillery tactics, Pelham refined the concept of the Flying Battery." This term referred to the light artillery tactics of keeping guns moving and fighting. It consisted of two or more horse-drawn cannon moving along the battlefield firing, loading and riding off to fire from another position.

Pelham fought in more than 60 engagements during his brief action-packed career. He was reported never to have lost a piece of artillery even though he often was required to maintain a fierce pace through fields, forests, streams and mountains to keep up with Stuart's cavalry.

William Woods Hassler, in his book, "Colonel John Pelham, Lee's Boy Artillerist," wrote "Around the evening campfires, sunburned veterans of the Seven Days Battles never tired of relating Captain Pelham's feats: how with a single Napoleon he checked the advance of

Continued on next page

Pelham (Continued)

eight enemy guns at Gaines Mill; how he routed the Yankees lying in ambush at Black Creek; how with a lone howitzer he outdueled the 11-inch guns on the USS Marblehead and sent the gunboat scurrying down the Pamunkey; how he blasted the bluecoats out of "Jeb" Stuart's path at Forge Bridge; how with one howitzer he boldly fired into the entire Federal army at Harrison's landing; and finally, how he scrappily attacked a flotilla of enemy transports, actually sinking one. "

In an official report to Lee, General Stuart wrote: "Captain John Pelham, of the Horse Artillery, displayed such signal ability as an artilleryist, such heroic example and devotion in danger, and indomitable energy under difficulties in the movement of his battery, that reluctant as I am at the chance of losing such a valuable limb from the brigade, I feel bound to ask for his promotion . . . "

Following the Battle of Second Manassas of August 29 and 30, 1862, Pelham was promoted to major and command of a battalion of horse artillery. He also received high praise from General "Stonewall" Jackson in his official report to Lee. He wrote: "Owing to the difficulty of getting artillery through the woods, I did not have as much use of that arm as I desired at the opening of the engagement, but this want was met by Major Pelham, with the Stuart Horse Artillery, who dashed forward on my right and opened upon the enemy at the

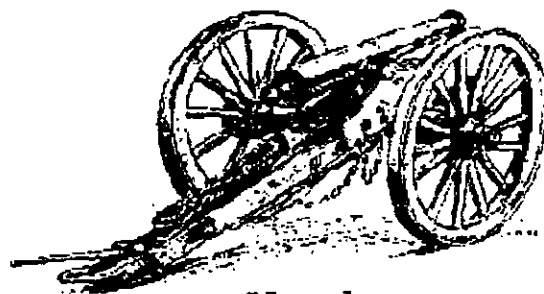
moment when his services were much needed." Stuart added, "Pelham is always at the right place at the right time."

At the Battle of Fredericksburg Pelham held up the advance of the Union division against the Confederate right with only two guns. With only one gun left, he continued to shift positions

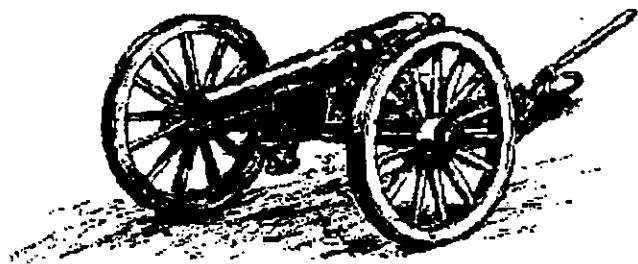
May Meeting

Jerry Russell of Little Rock, Ark., the National Chairman of the Civil War Round Table Associates, will be the May 25 dinner speaker at the Remington in a fundraiser for his Civil War battlefields preservation campaign. The dinner price for that meeting will be increased to \$20 with the extra \$5 going to Russell's campaign.

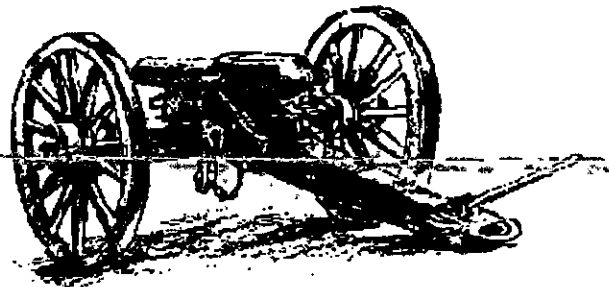
Types of cannon used by Pelham



Napoleon



Parrott



Blakely

despite the fact that 24 enemy guns were now concentrating their fire on him. He finally withdrew from the action upon running out of ammunition. General Lee, upon observing Pelham in the battle was said to have remarked, "It is glorious to see such courage in one so young."

John W. Thompson, in his book, "*JEB Stuart*," wrote of Pelham in the Battle of Fredericksburg: "Pelham lost men and horses and had guns knocked out, but he stayed. Once even Jackson ordered him back. The message relayed from Stuart, was 'Get back from destruction, you gallant fool,' but Pelham stayed. . . ."

"Lee, in his official dispatch, refers to 'the gallant Pelham,' the only mention of an officer so junior that you will find in his reports." It was widely predicted that Pelham would be a major general before another year passed.

Continued on next page.

Gallant Pelham

On March 17, 1863 at the Battle of Kelly's Ford, Pelham took part in a charge with the 3rd Virginia Cavalry. He was struck in the back of the head by a piece of exploding shell. Thought to be dead, his body was draped over his horse with his head hanging on one side and the legs on the other. The wound in his head was bleeding profusely. He was taken from the battle scene to the Culpepper, Virginia, home of his sweetheart, Bessie Shackelford, where, despite the best efforts of surgeons, he died the next day.

Mercer wrote about General Stuart, who, with tears streaming down his bearded cheeks, arrived at the scene moments after Pelham died. "Bending down, he pressed a tender kiss upon the noble brow of his dead comrade in arms, and shaking with profound and sobbing grief he departed uttering as he went the word, 'Farewell.' "

Pelham was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel posthumously, and thereafter was referred to as Colonel Pelham. He had become a hero to the South's cause and long after his death was held up an example of all the fine young men who fought so valiantly, who sacrificed so much, for a cause that eventually was defeated.

San Joaquin Valley
Civil War Round Table
P.O. Box 5695
Fresno, CA 93755



4th Annual

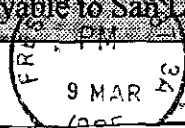
Civil War Conference

The San Diego Civil War Round Table will host the fourth annual Southern California Civil War Conference Saturday, April 22, in the Officers' Club at the El Toro Marine Corps Air Station.

The program is scheduled to begin at 9 a.m. with "Grant's Spy in Richmond," by Sara Hiler. Following will be "Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War Was Slavery the True Cause of the Secession" and "Civil War Photographers, Part II," by Dave Tooley.

After lunch the session will resume with "The Life of Nathan Bedford Forrest," by George Everman, followed by "The Court Martial of Lieutenant General Nathan Bedford Forrest for War Crimes At Fort Pillow," by Phil Arnold and Gordon Gidlund.

The cost for the conference is \$22 per person, which includes lunch. Reservations must be made by April 17, with the San Diego CWRT, P.O. Box 22369, San Diego, CA 92192-2369. Checks should be made payable to San Diego CWRT.



USE

