

# ECHOES

I've Recently Read:

## A Biography of Ruffin

By Rick Kubiak

Edmund Ruffin: A Biography," by Betty L. Mitchell, published by Indiana University Press, 1981. (The book can be obtained through the Fresno Central Library Interlibrary Loan Service.)

In this biography Betty L. Mitchell writes an in-depth portrayal of the flamboyant life of Southern sympathizer, fire-



eater, secessionist Edmund Ruffin, who fired the first shot at Fort Sumter. She makes extensive referrals to Ruffin's diary that he kept from 1856 until his death on June 15, 1865.

In the preface she wrote, "In no sense has it been my purpose or intention to write an apologia or justification of

Edmund Ruffin and what he stood for. Nor have I tried to psychoanalyze him. Instead I have endeavored to understand this complex human being, this complicated and essentially tragic figure, and to let my readers draw their own conclusions about him."

Ruffin was born at Evergreen Mansion, Prince George City, Virginia on Jan. 5, 1794. He was born into Virginia plantation society, a seventh generation

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## Peterson on John Buford

John S. Peterson, an author, editor and bookseller from Gettysburg, Pa., will speak on General John Buford at the March meeting of the San Joaquin Valley Civil War Round Table. The meeting will be held at the Remington restaurant on Clovis Avenue south of Kings Canyon Avenue  
Thursday March 28  
beginning with a  
social hour at 6 p.m.



Peterson is the editor of the Farnsworth House Civil War Commanders series, which includes "The Devil's To Pay: General John Buford, USA," which he co-authored with Michael Phipps. As a writer his essays have appeared in numerous publications including Harper's, the Chicago Tribune and the Los Angeles Times.

Buford was an obscure Union cavalry officer known only to Civil War military scholars and serious students of the Battle of Gettysburg. With the publication of Michael Shaara's novel "The Killer Angels," this began to change. By the time the movie "Gettysburg" was released, Buford was on his way to becoming one of the more popular "unsung" heroes of the war.

A feature of the meeting will be the auctioning of a Dan Gallon-signed framed, black and white print of Joshua Chamberlain and the 20th Maine as depicted at Gettysburg on July 2, 1863.

## Biography of Ruffin Continued)

of Ruffins in the "Old Dominion," and was part of the elite organization of F.F.V. or First Families of Virginia.

He was sickly and puny and his mother, like so many other young women at the time, died shortly after giving birth. His father, George Ruffin, feared the infant would soon follow his mother to the grave. Ruffin surprised his father by surviving childhood and himself by living to old age.

He was educated by private tutors and attended William and Mary College in 1810 for one term during which his father died. Now he became the owner of a modest mansion and extensive farmlands along the James River at Coggins Point in Prince George County. This proved a troubling inheritance. The soil had been robbed of its fertility by two centuries of tobacco crops.

Ruffin, intent on making the plantation profitable, immersed himself in a study of scientific farming, as well as practical farming. He soon decided that crop rotation and adding marl (an earthy deposit of clay

and calcium carbonate) as fertilizer would increase crop yields.

His success attracted a number of followers from among the Virginian plantation owners who initially had ridiculed him. By the 1840s Ruffin was recognized as one of the South's most progressive planters and a leader of Virginia agriculture. He retired from farming in 1856 at the age of 62 and began traveling to other Southern states and writing articles for various publications.

He urged and campaigned for the South's secession, and the formation of an independent country in the South. He became well known for his dogmatic defense of slavery. He wrote "Slavery and Free Labor Described and Compared," "African Colonization Unveiled," "The Influence of Slavery, or of Its Absence on Manners, Morals and Intellect," and "The Political Economy of Slavery."

In "African Colonization Unveiled," Ruffin wrote "that it was true that the Fathers of the Revolution, among them Southern slave owners, had admitted the legitimacy of that *indefensible passage* of the Declaration of Independence which proclaimed that all men are created equal. But at the time, they had understood this to mean the guarantee of equal rights for all free-born Englishmen, not for all mankind. Thus, the slave holding Southerners who wrote and signed the Declaration of Independence did so inadvertently, for they no more thought of legislating form, or producing the freedom and equal political rights of their Negro slaves, than they did of their horses and oxen."

In "The Influence of Slavery, or its Absence on Manners, Morals, and Intellect," Ruffin asked his readers to, "suppose for a moment, that slavery was less profitable than free labor. Even if this were true," he argued, "slavery's moral advantages would far outweigh any economic disadvantages. For in the South, the presence of slavery confined the drudgery and brutalizing effects of continuous toil to the inferior black race, thus affording the superior white race the leisure time to develop its manners, morals and intellect to their fullest.

"In the North, though, the absence of slavery  
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### The San Joaquin Valley Civil War Round Table officers for 1996 are:

President Bill Head  
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Secretary Carol Berry  
Treasurer Wayne Bowen

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



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

# The Reenactors

By Carol Berry

"The Reenactors," a Media Magic Productions video, examines Civil War reenacting and what it means to the men and women who study and live history in this manner. Reenacting is described as a "way of remembering, honoring, healing . . ." One man sees it as a means to learn history, to uphold the honor of an ancestor. Another says that the soldiers "you're portraying aren't really dead . . . they come alive when you come alive on the field." And then there is an "urge to teach others, especially the young."

Soldiers from a variety of units, including Diane "David" Johns of the 21st Georgia, are interviewed. The focus of the film, however, is on Kyth (pronounced Keith) Banks of the 37th Virginia and Dave Roberts, a sergeant with the 3rd Maine. Both are seen with family, at work, at unit meetings, teaching students, and reenacting. They discuss what the Civil War means to them, why they are so involved in the study of it, and how it is such an important part of their lives. Quotes from Civil War soldiers, interspersed with photographs and details of the war, and a reenactment at Gettysburg featuring Dave and Kyth in the roles of their Civil War counterparts, constitute the remainder of the film.

One of the most interesting segments of the movie is a meeting of a Civil War Round Table at Wise County Correctional Unit 18 in Virginia. Kyth not only leads the roundtable but is a correctional officer at the prison. The Round Table started with 12 inmates and now has a membership of 27.

Narrated by Gerald McRaney of television's "Major Dad," The Reenactors succeeds in telling the story of what reenacting is and why people are so committed to it. As the film explains, "Why adults would die for such a thing is difficult to explain. It's easier to show history . . . the grave of a soldier/citizen and distant relative . . . a Springfield musket circa 1859. Let youth see history, touch it, hold it in their hands . . . an understanding of the ideal will come later."

## Important Dues Reminder

Annual dues, which include the newsletter, are \$25 of which \$5 goes to battlefield preservation. Newsletter subscriptions are \$10. Checks should be made out to SJVCWRT and mailed to P.O. Box 5695, Fresno, CA 93755.

In an effort to decrease mailing costs, those who have not paid dues, nor subscribed this year will no longer receive the newsletter

## Ruffin Biography (Continued)

forced white yeomen and often their wives and children to do the work of slaves, including degrading menial tasks. Thus, with so little time for self-improvement, these people became rude, ignorant, and brutish. "

In December of 1860 Ruffin attended the secession conventions in three Southern states. Disgusted with Virginia's failure to follow South Carolina out of the Union, Ruffin moved to the Palmetto State and, in anticipation of hostilities, joined the Palmetto Guard.

When Confederate President Jefferson Davis issued the order to take Fort Sumter, the order was given by General P.T.G. Beauregard for the Palmetto Guard to fire the first shot. The men unanimously agreed that the honor should go to their oldest recruit, 67-year-old Edmund Ruffin.

Ruffin was gratified by the compliment and accepted the honor without hesitation saying that he "was only too delighted to perform the service."

The biography describes the scene: "Ruffin, standing proud and erect next to his loaded cannon, a heavy duty sixty-four pound Columbiad, recognized the attack signal. Without a qualm, he jerked the lanyard, stepped back and watched as his shell speeded toward its target, plunging deep into Sumter's northeast parapet."

Fort Sumter made Ruffin famous throughout the South. In April, when Virginia finally seceded from

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# Ruffin Biography (continued)

the Union, he left South Carolina and returned to his home state. Cheering crowds gathered at train stations along the way to chant his name and call for a speech. He was finally a prophet with honor in his own country. For the first time, he was the champion of a political cause, he was at last an insider.

Ruffin rejoined the Palmetto Guard for the First Battle of Bull Run (Manassas) but age and his frail and worn body kept him from participating in the fighting. He spent the remainder of the war in the Richmond area. During the war, both of his plantations, Marlbourne and Beechwood, were ransacked and looted by Federal soldiers. This destruction of his property increased his hatred for the Yankees and the Union.

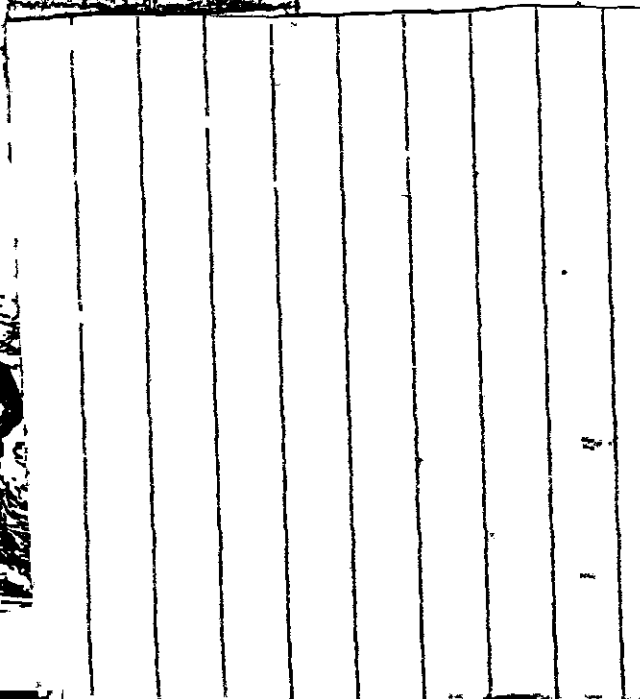
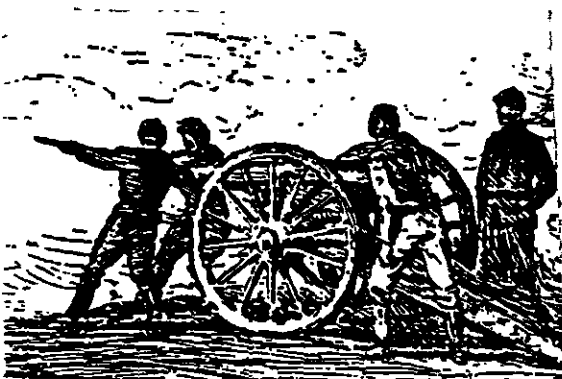
In April 1865, after Lee's surrender, Ruffin returned with his family to his estate at Marlbourne. His biographer, Mitchell, wrote that the surrender "broke Ruffin's heart but never his fighting spirit. When he learned that Jefferson Davis and his Cabinet had escaped Richmond, he hoped the government and what was left of the army could regroup somewhere in the Southwest and then eventually 'liberate' the Southeast. If he were younger and stronger, vowed the old fire-eater, there was nothing he would like better than to pack his musket and go

west to fight Yankees. But he was neither young nor strong so he decided to stay put."

Ruffin, after the Confederate defeat, was expecting to be arrested by Federal authorities and was disappointed when he was ignored by them. In the next few weeks Ruffin became increasingly despondent over the South's defeat and stated that he would never live under the Yankee government that he so bitterly hated.

On June 17, 1865, Ruffin had breakfast with his family and then returned to his room. He wrote the following in his diary: "I hereby declare my unmitigated hatred to Yankee rule, to all political, social and business connections with Yankees and to the Yankee race. Would that I could impress these sentiments, in their full force, on every living Southerner and bequeath them to everyone yet to be born! May such sentiments be held universally in the outraged and downtrodden South, although in silence and stillness, until the now far-distant day shall arrive for just retribution for Yankee usurpation, oppression, and atrocious outrages, and for deliverance and vengeance for the now ruined, subjugated and enslaved Southern states!"

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Ruffin then took down a handsome silver mounted rifle and committed suicide.

