

# Bugle Call Echoes

San Joaquin Valley Civil War Round Table

June/July 2006

Vol. 14 Issue 6

## 2006 San Joaquin Valley Civil War Round Table Board of Directors

**President: Brian Clague, MD (Linda)**  
PO Box 116 Shaver Lake CA 93664  
559-841-7161 bclague@netptc.net

**Vice President: Dr. Dave Davenport**  
6156 N Mitre Ave Fresno CA 93705  
559-277-3283 davidpauldavenport@yahoo.com

**Treasurer: Pattie Spencer**  
1548 W Vasser Ave Fresno CA 93705  
559-233-1059 cell: 304-8170 pds8919@yahoo.com

**Secretary: Phyllis Mann**  
4880 N Hulbert Ave #102 Fresno CA 93705  
559-229-3778 pfm02@cvip.net

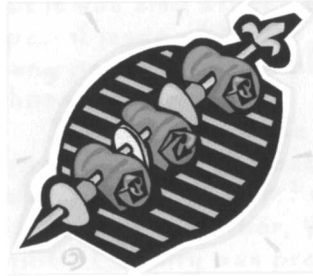
**Publicity: Shaun Ardemagni**  
2580 E. Los Altos Fresno CA 93710  
559-299-7433 rampchamp@aol.com

**Newsletter Editor Bob Quist (Judy)**  
504 E Magnolia Ave Hanford CA 93230  
559-582-9520 bquist1@sbcglobal.net

**Contributing Editor: Ron Vaughan**  
730 E Tulare Ave Tulare, CA 93274  
ronvaughan@prodigy.net

**Directors: Mike & Gloria Carter**  
1576 E Cornwall Fresno CA 93720  
559-322-9474 mikecarter@paula.com  
gloria.carter@cvcb.com

**Past President and Membership:**  
**Tom Carr (Kathy)**  
2577 S. Argyle Avenue  
Fresno CA 93727 559-268-4828 carrt@yahoo.com



## Annual SJVCW Round Table Picnic July 15 at Clague's Shaver Lake Home

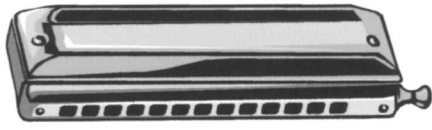
All members are invited to a summer picnic/  
barbecue at the home of Brian and Linda Clague at  
Shaver Lake on Saturday, July 15th. Time is 2PM to  
8PM. Arrive at Noon if you wish to hike the area .  
Bring a salad (A-L) or a dessert (M-Z) . Clagues will  
provide appetizers , tri-tip , and drinks.

Driving directions: Drive through the town of  
Shaver Lake. As you leave Shaver, the last business  
is Ken's Market. Our gate entrance to Rock Haven is  
one mile, by your odometer, after you pass Ken's  
Market. The entrance is on your left. Come through  
the opened gate and follow the balloon marked trail to  
the Clague's house.



If you get lost , call: 841-7161, or  
281-4953. See you then ... Please  
RSVP with Secretary Phyllis  
Mann.

*Brian Clague*  
Club President



## Harmonica Man Ray Silvia Retires

*Dr. Dave has been in contact with the talented Harmonica Ray. Here is what he had to say.*

*Hi, David,*

*It is very nice to hear from you. I much enjoyed doing the gig at the CWRT Conference in Clovis. I might be able to go down to Sacramento. All I would ask would be food and the ability to attend some of the presentations. When is it?*

*I am here taking care of a terminally ill older sister, up in Bandon, Oregon. My harmonica playing is as good as ever.*

*Sincerely,  
Ray*

## PICNIC RSVP

For Picnic Reservations and at the Clague's at Shaver Lake ... contact Secretary Phyllis Mann at 229-3778 [afternoons and evenings, please].



*Photo by Barbara Moats*

## AFTER ACTION REPORT

May 25, 2006

by Ron Vaughan

The Trans-Mississippi Civil War is scarcely mentioned in print and the battle of Prairie Grove is even less published. There is only one book on the battle- William Shea's "War in the West" and half of the book is devoted to Pea Ridge. Just before my talk, *North & South* subscribers received an article on Prairie Grove, but it was also written by Mr. Shea. Actually the best source is a special issue of "Blue & Gray" article by Scott Sallee including many period photos, plus a "General's Tour" with many battlefield photos.

Tom Carr gave me a copy of this magazine in exchange for my promise to visit the battlefield (which I did last summer) and do a talk. During my visit I was able to obtain information to verify that my great grandfather, William R. Vaughan, 13th Missouri State Militia Cavalry was present at the battle.

My presentation was a little different - I asked listeners to imagine it as a Hollywood action movie. The battle had all the elements for such a movie: aggressive young hero-generals (Blunt and Hindman), bumbling superiors who undermined our heroes' efforts, trusty sidekicks for our heroes (Herron and Marmduke), devious and cunning plans, dramatic cliff-hanger moments, and just when the situation seems hopeless for the Union, the cavalry comes to the rescue! Also, Frank James and Cole Younger were present, a perfect Hollywood subplot!

CSA General Hindman had a cunning plan to trap and destroy US general Blunt's isolated division at Cane Hill. It seemed that only a miracle would save Blunt, but US general Herron accomplished such a miracle, by force-marching over 100 miles in 3 1/2 days! Hindman came up with a new cunning plan- slip around Blunt and crush Herron, then turn and destroy Blunt. Herron was outnumbered 2 to 1, but decided to attack! When the first two regiments were bloodily repulsed, he ordered an attack by two more; he was a fighter, not a tactician! Herron's artillery saved him from being overrun, but the situation was grim as the Confederates massed for an enveloping attack. At this dramatic moment, Blunt arrived in the nick of time on the battlefield! A seesaw fight of attack and counterattack went on until darkness put an end to the struggle. 15% of those engaged had fallen. The battle ended with a parley between the two generals - one a fanatical secessionist and the other a rabid abolitionist. They refused to salute and shake hands with each other!

Dr. Davenport and I reenacted this meeting. The conclusion of my presentation was a dramatic reading by my wife Linda, from a diary description of a local lady searching the battlefield and finding, to her horror, not only her dead husband, but the bodies of her two brothers.

The battle was a tactical draw, but Hindman's retreat made it a Union strategic victory, giving control of MW Arkansas and securing Missouri. A Confederate victory at Prairie Grove would have poised a threat to Missouri, that would have necessitated withholding troops from Grant's Vicksburg Campaign.

*Last in Their Class: Custer, Pickett, and the Goats of West Point* by James Robbins

Dave Davenport supplied the following book review which appeared in *Army*, June 2006.

Robbins, James S. *Last in Their Class: Custer, Pickett and the Goats of West Point*. Encounter Books. Reviewed in *Army*, June 2006, by Col. Cole C. Kingseed, U.S. Army retired, Ph.D., a former professor of history at the U.S. Military Academy.

Does class ranking at the U. S. Military Academy determine future career success?

In *Last in Their Class*, author James S. Robbins brings a refreshingly new perspective to the question concentrating not on the cadets who ranked highest in class standing, but rather on those who graduated at or near the bottom of their respective classes. Robbins sees some remarkable similarities between the class "goat", the cadet who graduated last in his class, and "the Immortals section", the academic section that one future commandant of cadets noted "contains those who are hanging on at the ragged edge of deficiency." Included in the ranks of the Immortals were some of West Point's most colorful personalities: future Confederate president Jefferson Davis, Edgar Allen Poe and James McNeill Whistler, Henry Heth, James Longstreet, George Pickett and George Armstrong Custer to name but a few.

Telling the story of the Goats is necessarily telling the story of West Point's formative years. In examining the first century of West Point's existence, Robbins presents a glimpse of the lesser-known side of West Point — "of the mischief, the fraternization and other unofficial activities at which the Goats excelled. Notorious in their day, many of these events are now revered as folklore exemplifying West Point's gilded age." Robbins also explores the origins of many of West Point's most cherished traditions, including the reforms of Col. Sylvanus Thayer, the presentation of class rings, the tossing of hats following graduation and Gen. Winfield Scott's fixed opinion of the value of West Point graduates in the Mexican War.

Separate chapters concentrate on the legendary Benny Havens, who owned a tavern just outside the gates of West Point, and Flirtation Walk, the Revolutionary War sentry path along the Hudson River that became a favorite haunt of cadets escorting their ladies after hours. Robbins also examines the academic curriculum and the efforts of the cadets to seek what he terms temporary refuge from the Academy's rules and regulations.

The centerpiece of Robbins' story revolves around Cadets Custer and Pickett, both of whom graduated last in their respective classes. Custer remains the most notorious of West Point's Goats. Over the course of his four years at West Point, Custer accrued 726 demerits, but during the Civil War, he became the Army's youngest division commander and one of the Union army's most dynamic cavalry commanders. Robbins dedicates several chapters to Custer's postwar career, culminating in his death at the Little Bighorn in June 1876.

Pickett, too, receives his share of the author's attention. Pickett's name will be forever immortalized by the futile attack on the third day at Gettysburg, but the future Confederate commander came within five demerits of expulsion from West Point in his final year. Robbins discusses Pickett's heroism at Chapultepec in the Mexican War and Pickett's role in the Pig War of 1859, when a dispute on San Juan Island in the Pacific Northwest created an international confrontation with the British governor of Vancouver Island. Robbins also disproves many of the myths surrounding Pickett's antebellum relationship with Illinois lawyer Abraham Lincoln.

...The Civil War became West Point's central defining event, and the war validated the Academy's value to the nation.

In addition to the return of West Point's most distinguished graduates to the Military Academy, the postwar decade also witnessed what Robbins calls "The Passing of the Greats". First to go was Gen. Joseph G. Swift, the first West Point graduate, who died on July 23, 1865. Gen. Winfield Scott, who played such an instrumental role in nurturing graduates Robert E. Lee, George McClellan and P.G.T. Beauregard, was next, dying quietly on May 29, 1866. Sylvanus Thayer, the father of the Academy, followed on September 7, 1872. Dennis Hart Mahan, West Point's most distinguished professor, committed suicide in 1871....

Robbins' final two chapters pay tribute to the Immortals and the Goats. In captivating detail, Robbins traces the post-Civil War legacy of the men who continued the tradition of the Goat. Here is the story of Clarence Ransom Edwards, the Goat of 1883, who received three Silver Stars in the Philippine Insurrection and later commanded the 26<sup>th</sup> (Yankee) Division in World War I. Powhattan Henry Clarke, the Goat of 1884, is the only Last Man to receive the Medal of Honor. And Charles Young, the Goat of 1889, was the third African American to graduate from West Point and the first African American to achieve the rank of colonel.

In 1978, West Point discontinued the General Order of Merit and announced "The Last of the Last Man." The official rationale for the change according to a West Point study group was "the Military Academy's intensification of the pursuit of excellence in academic ... to stress competition against a high standard of learning rather than to have the students compete against one another for class standing." Today's graduates are listed in the register in alphabetical order, except for the honor graduates, even though unpublished class rankings exist.

Robbins obviously rues the demise of the Goat tradition, emphatically stating that the institution "surrendered a part of its soul and turned its back on history." Unlike the reformers who viewed the "Goat syndrome" as "a synthesis of all negative attributes on academic excellence" Robbins views the drive toward standardization and the quest for conformity and political correctness as both harmful and wasteful. According to Robbins, a less than stellar academic record does not reflect a lack of honor, sense of duty, or physical and moral courage. In telling the story of the Goats, Robbins concludes that "some virtues are not learned in the classroom." He may have a point.

In the final analysis, Robbins provides a provocative insight into the early history of West Point. The tradition of the Goat and the Immortals clearly demonstrates that academic performance is not a prerequisite for military success. The crucible of West Point has produced men and women "of many and varied abilities, which were then tested in the arena of life, always at the whim of luck and circumstance" — which brings us back to Robbins' original question concerning whether class standing is an accurate determinant for future military success. Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, who graduated in the middle of his class and who ranked near the bottom of his class in discipline, gets the last word: "If anybody recognized greatness in me at West Point," stated the future 34<sup>th</sup> President, "he surely kept it to himself."

MEMBERSHIP FORM - The 2006 membership year is from January to December

Please begin/renew my membership in the San Joaquin Valley Civil War Round Table

\_\_\_ INDIVIDUAL/FAMILY membership - \$25.00\*

\_\_\_ STUDENT membership - \$12.50\*

\_\_\_ NEWSLETTER ONLY - \$12.50\*

\*\$5.00 of each membership goes toward Civil War Battlefield Preservation

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Bring this membership form and your check to our next monthly meeting, or mail it to our P.O. Box address listed below, in care of Tom Carr:

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

