

ECHOES

October 1993

Civil War Spies

Dr. Edward F. Emanuel, professor of Theater Arts and Humanities at California State University, Fresno, will be the featured speaker at the first annual Fund Raiser by the San Joaquin Valley Civil War Round Table Oct. 28. The dinner meeting will be held at the Remington, on Clovis Avenue just south of Kings Canyon at 7 p.m. A no-host cocktail hour will begin at 6 p.m.

Emanuel proved himself as an outstanding and dynamic speaker on Civil War subjects at the first dinner meeting of the Round Table in May. He is a polished stage performer and a knowledgeable Civil War buff, so his interpretations of the actions of Civil War Spies promises a memorable evening.

He is an internationally known playwright, director and actor and has traveled all over the world as a

lecturer, play producer and educational specialist.

Tickets for the event are \$25 each and, of course, include the dinner. Tickets are available from members. Each member is encouraged to bring guests, since the Round Table is attempting to raise \$500 to help pay the costs of hosting next year's West Coast Civil War Round Table conference which is planned for November.



To assure seating for the Fund Raiser dinner, members are asked to submit checks for the tickets as soon as possible to Tim Johnson, Treasurer, at 8665 North Cedar Avenue #112, Fresno, CA 93720. The checks should be made out to C.W.R.T.

The Battle at Fort Pillow

Part 2: The Confederate Viewpoint

By Rick Kubiak

That Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest and his men had a great deal of hatred towards the soldiers of the garrison at Fort Pillow, prior to the battle which Northerners called a massacre, is a well-authenticated statement.

There were reports that several of the families of Forrest's men had been victims of the actions of

some of the Fort Pillow soldiers, who were commanded by Major William F. Bradford, a Tennessean. It was also reported that many of Bradford's men were deserters from the Confederate army. Residents of West Tennessee declared Bradford's men had scoured West Tennessee stealing horses, mules, beef cattle, clothes, money and anything else of value.

Certainly worst of all, there were reports that Bradford's men had abused, molested and outraged wives and daughters of Forrest's men and some of those men had petitioned Forrest to return to their families to protect them. This Forrest refused to

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permit, but he decided to avenge the wrongs by capturing Fort Pillow. That Forrest had a second reason for attacking Fort Pillow besides its ability to control traffic on the Mississippi River, is apparent when examining the makeup of the garrison.

In addition to Bradford's 292 white Tennessean Union troops there were 262 Negro soldiers under the command of Major Lionel F. Booth. Some, if not many, were former slaves. Forrest was a former slave-trader, and his men shared a bitter resentment toward what they considered an inferior people taking up arms against them.

There is little doubt that they also were influenced by the May 1863 action of the Confederate Congress which declared that captured Negro troops would be returned to slavery or executed. This followed by four months Jefferson Davis' announcement of the policy.

Thus the animosity toward both the Negro soldiers and the white Tennessean troops whom For-

rest's Tennessee troops considered traitors, set the stage for the attack on Fort Pillow. The attack began at 5:30 a.m. April 12, 1864 and with the attack began a controversy that has continued through the years.

Gettysburg Revisited

A study group "Gettysburg Revisited" will meet on Mondays from 7-9 p.m. for six weeks beginning Oct. 11 at 1362 E. Barstow.

Facilitators will be Bill Head, 439-8261 and Tim Johnson, 431-4832. Either may be called for reservations. All are welcome.

The Congressional Committee on the Conduct of the War, stated that Forrest had used flags of truce to gain territory his troops had been unable to obtain in their attack -- that the rebels had moved down Coal Creek ravine and took positions from which they could more readily attack the Fort.

But Confederate participants and eyewitnesses to the battle said Forrest's men were in the ravines below the reach of the guns of the Fort and as close as 50 yards some four hours before the truce began.

Forrest was concerned about the approach of Union ships and sent 400 men to the river bank below to prevent the gunboats from landing troops or taking troops from the Fort. Either would have been a direct violation of the truce. Federal witnesses mistook the movement as a Confederate advance.

The Congressional Committee's report that aged, women and children and civilians were indiscriminately slaughtered was refuted by the Confederates. They declared that non-combatants, including most of the women and children, were placed on a coal barge early in the morning and towed by the gunboat New Era to an island upriver and were not at the Fort at the time of the battle.

The Confederates also declared that the slaughter was not as great as it could have been if there had been an order by Forrest to exterminate the entire garrison as implied by the Committee's report. About two-fifths of the garrison were killed and another one-fifth wounded. Southern sympathizers

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The San Joaquin Valley Civil War Round Table usually meets for lunch on the last Friday of the month in the Downtown Club, 2120 Kern St. Fresno.

Fred Holt, President

Charles Jorgensen, Vice President

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Verne Cole, Newsletter Editor

Rick Kubiak, Contributing Editor

Fort Pillow (continued)

said this was not an unusually high number for this type of heated battle.

Confederate participants said after the Fort fell, the garrison, instead of surrendering, retreated down the bluff to the riverbank where a large portion resisted until killed, wounded or captured. Some Union soldiers were drowned or shot while trying to escape while swimming out into the river.

Still more died when they refused to heed commands to halt while trying to flee. The Confederates agreed that the garrison retreated to the river, weapons in hand. Captain Charles W. Anderson, commander of one of the units Forrest had posted on the riverbank, wrote in 1895 that following the battle he supervised a detail which had picked up 269 Federal rifles along the river.

The Confederates declared there had been no surrender of the Fort nor had there been a halt to resistance until 20 minutes after the storming of the parapet. Had there been, the loss of life would have been less.

In Thomas Jordan's *The Campaigns of Lieut.-Gen N.B. Forest*, he states "In the meantime, or as soon as he could reach the scene, Forrest riding into the work, assisted by Captain John Overton, lowered the flag; and immediately he, General Chalmers and other officers interfered so energetically to stop the firing that it ceased speedily; ceased within 15 minutes from the time that the signal for the termination of the truce was given, and all allegations to the contrary are malicious inventions started, nurtured, and accredited at a time and through a sentiment of

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strong sectional animosity. The first order, indeed, now issued by General Forrest, was to collect and secure the prisoners from possible injury while details were made from them for the burial of the Federal dead."

A principal point in the Congressional Committee's report was that wounded men were burned to death in the huts and tents about the Fort. That burned bodies were found by the burial parties from the Federal steamboats was not denied.

The explanation given by General Chalmers was that when the gunboat Silver Cloud began to shell the position that m morning, he ordered the tents which were still standing to be burned with the intention of abandoning the battle site. In doing so, some bodies of Negroes who had been killed in the

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tents the day before were burned. He said this gave rise to the stories about burning wounded prisoners.

The Congressional Committee also reported that the Confederates buried some of the living with the dead. The Confederates replied that if living were buried with the dead, it was done by Union soldiers who had been assigned to burial detail. The Confederates acknowledge that some of the Negroes had been feigning death and when rolled into the burial trenches they suddenly came to life.

Prior to the Congressional Committee's investigation, Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton had ordered General William T. Sherman to perform a military investigation of the alleged "butchery of Union troops at Fort Pillow" and report back to him. Sherman concluded an investigation and sent a copy to Stanton as ordered.

In Robert Selph Henry's book, *First With The Most: Forrest*, he concludes his chapter on Fort Pillow by quoting General Ulysses S. Grant's telegraph to General Sherman, "' If our men have

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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 C.W.R.T. and mailed to Tim Johnson, 8665 N. Cedar Ave. #112, Fresno, Ca. 93720, or handed to him at the meeting.

been murdered after capture, retaliation must be resorted to promptly.' Sherman made his own investigation and had an opportunity to study that made by the Committee of Congress – but there was no retaliation, and General Sherman was not a man to shrink from ordering retaliation had he felt that it was justified."

Sources used: *The Campaigns of Lieut.-Gen. N. B. Forrest*, by Thomas Jordan; *American History Illustrated*, April 1974, Vol. 9; *Civil War History*, March 1958, Vol. 4, No. 1 and December 1982, Vol. 28, No. 4; *First With the Most: Forrest*, by Robert Selph Henry; *House Reports*, No. 65, 38th Congress; 1st Session, Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, Fort Pillow Massacre, May 5, 1864; *The American Conflict*, by Horace Greeley, Vol. 2, page 620.

