

January 27, 2005

Show and tell:

an After-Action Report by Ron Vaughn

Twenty-eight adults and a baby (Thomas Murray) were present for the dinner meeting. President Clague presided over our annual show and tell night. Bill Head proudly displayed his "Jerry Russell Memorial Award" awarded to him at the last West Coast CWRT Conference. Brian and Tanya Murray entertained us with a couple of fife and drum tunes. Phyllis Mann shared information about a recent article in Smithsonian about the CSS Alabama (contact her if you would like a photocopy). Walter Russel and Joe Summers passed around their great grandfather's (one Union and one Confederate) 51 and 56 cal. Colt revolvers. Fortunately no blood was spilled this time! Cal 100 reenactor Allen Croft passed around a copy of the Official Atlas of the CW available at low price at Barnes and Noble, and also available on CD. Lincoln presenter Wayne Scott shared some of his experiences playing this role. He is actually the same height as Lincoln - 6'4", with a real beard! He shared some remarks by Lincoln "You cannot strengthen the weak by weakening the strong!" My contribution was to display my C.W. chess set, which I have spent years collecting or hand casting the figures, then painting them. Unlike commercially available sets, each figure represents a different US of CS regiment.

February 24, 2005

Old Abe the Battle Eagle with Phyllis Mann:

an After-Action Report by Ron Vaughn

The 16 members present enjoyed a great meal and an entertaining talk by Phyllis Mann. Her topic was "Old Abe the Battle Eagle". If you think a talk about an eagle is unimportant, or a "bird brain idea", Confederate General Sterling Price did not. At the Battle of Corinth, he saw the bird circling in the air over the battlefield, and offered a bounty to anyone who could shoot him down. Price must have had a notion that Old Abe provided a morale boost to the 8th Wisconsin Regiment. There is a monument with a statue of Old Abe at the Vicksburg Battlefield Park.

The story began when Chief Blue Sky captured the eaglet and traded him to Mr. Daniel McCann. The family loved to play music and taught the eagle to dance. When the 8th Wisc. Regt. was organized at Fond du Lac on 13 September 1861, McCann offered him as mascot. Capt. Perkins of "C" Co. paid \$2.50 for the bald eagle, had a 5 ft. high perch constructed, and created a new rank of "Eagle Bearer". To the delight of the soldiers, when the regimental band would play, he would strut and flap his wings, and he would spread his wings whenever the men cheered. Old Abe understood bugle calls and would lay down when the soldiers went prone under fire. He would become agitated at the sight of Confederate uniforms, and thus helped discover a Rebel messenger attempting infiltrate through the lines. Old Abe provided amusement for the soldiers in camp, and sometimes irritation when he tripped over water buckets, bit through shoe laces, and pilfered things - like an officer's chicken dinner!

After the war, Old Abe was kept in the basement of the Wisconsin capitol building, and shown off at veteran's fund raisers, displayed at the 1876 Centennial, and appeared with Grant at the Republican presidential Convention. This noble bird is today the symbol of the 101st airborne division of the United States Army.

March 31, 2005

The 79th New York Regt with David Davenport

an After-Action Report by Ron Vaughn

Twenty members of our "clan" gathered to hear David Davenport, Ph.D. retell the exploits of the 79th New York Volunteer Infantry Regiment.

The New York "Cameron Highlanders" were a pre-war State Militia unit composed of about 300 Scottish immigrants, many of them Crimean War veterans. [Incidentally, the term is Scots, Scotsmen, or Scottish, not "Scotch"]. When Lincoln called for volunteers they responded immediately and chose as their regimental number 79, in honor of the British 79th Cameron Highland Regt. Based on when they joined they would have

been the 4th or 5th New York Infantry. They were then told that they were understrength. Additional men were needed since a regiment normally had 1000 men. So additional men were recruited and they were eventually mustered in as a 3 year regiment.

The original Highland Militiamen were uniformed with dark blue Highland jackets with red trim, glengarry caps, sporrans, and kilts of the Cameron tartan for ceremonial dress, and Cameron tartan trews (what are now called trousers) for other service. The Highland appearance was complete with a contingent of bagpipers.

The 79th served with distinction with Sherman at Bull Run, where their commander, Col. Cameron, the brother of Sec. of War Simon Cameron, was killed and 198 men taken prisoner. A Regular Army officer Isaac Stevens was given command. There was some resentment over this and also a misunderstanding of the terms of their enlistment, but what really made their Celtic blood heat up was when Gen. McClellan [despite his Scottish ancestry - he must have been a Campbell!] ordered the unit to discard its kilts, trews, and bagpipes. The men refused when Col. Stevens order them to march without these. As punishment for this Mutiny, the 79th Colors were taken away for a month.

Col. Stevens drill and strict discipline whipped the unit into shape, and it was selected to be part of the amphibious expedition to Port Royal, SC. The 79th took party in the battle of Ft. Secessionville, co-incidentally defended by the CSA Highland Battalion. The assault was a success, but the unit lost 110 of 474 men engaged. While serving in the southern swamps, the regiment lost only three men to disease. This was considered a medical miracle. Doctors decided that this was due to their hardy Highland stock and acquired immunities from living in New York City. However, I believe it was due to their consumption of Scotch.

The 79th returned to Alexandria and there became part of Burnside's 9th Corp. While covering the Union retreat from Second Bull Run they counterattacked Stonewall Jackson regiments and Col. Stevens and 103 men were killed. They were in reserve at Antietam. Afterward, they received 500 new recruits and were transfered west by train and steamboat to Louisville to join Sherman in the capture of Vicksburg, They were then sent to join Burnside in defense of Knoxville. At Ft. Sanders they repelled Longstreet's assault in bloody hand-to-hand fighting.

The 120 survivors returned East, were reinforced by 300 recruits, and joined Grant's 1864 overland campaign. They fought for eight consecutive days before being mustered out on May 12, 1864, the day that other units were engaged at the Bloody Angle at Spotsylvania. The recent recruits were then assigned to provost duty for the duration. Those discharged returned to New York City where they were honored by the banquet at the Caledonian Club.

May 26, 2005

Civil War Music with Ray "Harmonica Man" Silvia.
an After-Action Report by Ron Vaughn

I was expecting Ray Silvia's presentation on Civil War Music to be the usual lecture highlighted with a few recordings from a boom box. No! Ray was a harmonica player! And a virtuoso one at that!~ He wore a belt with at least a dozen different harmonicas, which he utilized to entertain us with various toe tapping tunes.

Ray told us the harmonica came to the US in 1857 and became popular, especially in the South. Music flourished during the Civil War, especially among the soldiers who found that it helped to relieve boredom, raised spirits, and sometimes intimidated the enemy. Ray said a Confederate general remarked that they could have won the war if they had Yankee music and songs. The Southern songs were mostly jigs, which can't motivate soldiers.

The most popular song on both sides was Home Sweet Home, but General US Grant banned it, because it increased desertion. other songs among the top ten, although not in order were Shenandoah, Turkey in the Straw, Oh! Suzanna [the first coast to coast hit], Aura Lee, and Dixie, which was one of Lincoln's favorites.

June 25, 2005

Picnic

an After-Action Report by Barbara Moats and Ron Vaughn

Unfortunately, more members missed the barbecue at the Kuykendall's than were in attendance. However, re-enactors from the 6th Iowa and the 3rd Arkansas filled the ranks and provided interesting fellowship and another aspect of why people take an interest in the Civil War. Those who were present enjoyed marvelous appetizers, desserts, thick steaks, and other great potluck items while relaxing under the shade of hill top trees. Many thanks to the Bev and Neil for hosting such an enjoyable afternoon.

We saw evidence of ashes and soot still floating in their pool from the previous day when a grass fire broke out on two sides of their property and caused some damage. Fortunately, the blaze didn't touch the hose or shrubs immediately surrounding it. It took several air tankers and fire units to put out the several acre blaze. How they could so graciously host such a great afternoon after all that is a wonder. Thanks again!

September 17, 2005

A Virtual Tour of Antietam with Melissa Jourdine

An After-Action report by Bob Quist for the AWOL Ron Vaughn

FSU Professor Melissa Jourdine gave a virtual tour of the Bloodiest Day of the Civil War at the Battle of Antietam, or Sharpsburg, MD, on Sept 17th, 1862. She touched on how Robert E. Lee was taking the war to the North, hoping to recruit in Maryland during this invasion into this Border State.

She also made mention of the famous Special order 191 which was found prior to the battle wrapped around three cigars by couple of Northern soldiers. On this Lee had outlines his battle plans as he split his Army of Northern Virginia into four separate columns. Once Commanding General George B. McClellan received this information he said "I'll whip Bobby Lee, or I'll go home."

CSA Stonewall Jackson took over Harper's Ferry as his army marched northward into Maryland. Timid McClellan had a great opportunity to attack the seriously divided Confederate forces at Antietam on the 15th and 16th of September but chose not to. However, the Union attack was not meant to be the piecemeal movement that began when Gen. Joseph Hooker marched into the cornfield on Sept. 17th. Simultaneously Union forces should have moved against the area of the Sunken Road and across Burnside Bridge. Amazingly the Cornfield changed hands 15 times that day!

Once the fierce fighting began at the Sunken Road sector, it would become known as "Bloody Lane" in a matter of hours.

Four hours after the start of the Cornfield fighting Gen. Ambrose Burnside finally received his orders to go forward. he showed little initiative crossing what became "Burnside bridge" [the Union troops could have easily crossed the creek in mass as it was shallow]. Only 550 Confederates were present to drive back the first two Union bridge attacks. It wasn't until three hours later that the Union army finally crossed the bridge, but it would take another two hours to resupply, regroup and move forward. At this point AP Hill's Corps arrived after marching 17 miles in 8 hours to save the day for the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia.

Despite poorly managing his corps many historians believed McClellan could have beaten Lee at Antietam if he had used his ample reserves. Most members would probably agree with professor Jourdine's summary during Q and A: "There wasn't any effective coordination by McClellan as he missed a great opportunity to smash Lee's Army and end the war."

October 27, 2005.

Our meeting was a work night to finalize preparations for the 2005 Conference of West Coast Civil War Round Tables which we hosted November 4-6 at the Clovis Veterans Memorial Building.

November 2005.

No meeting

December 2005.

No Meeting.