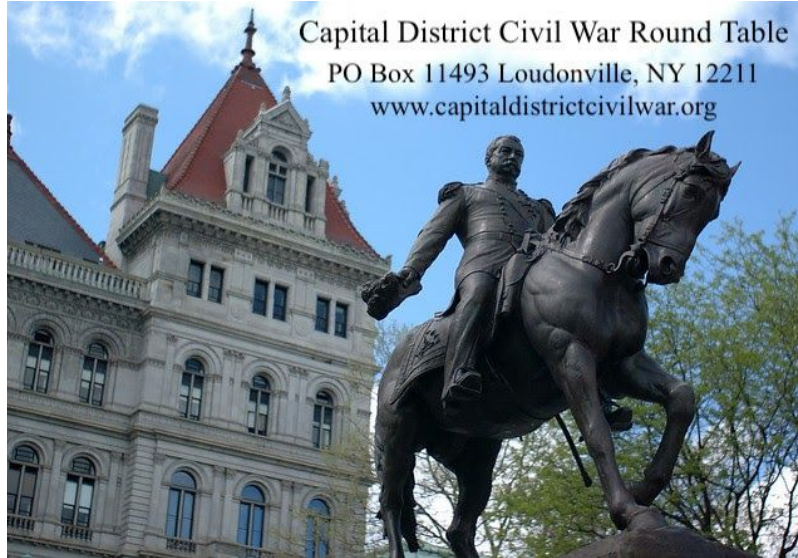


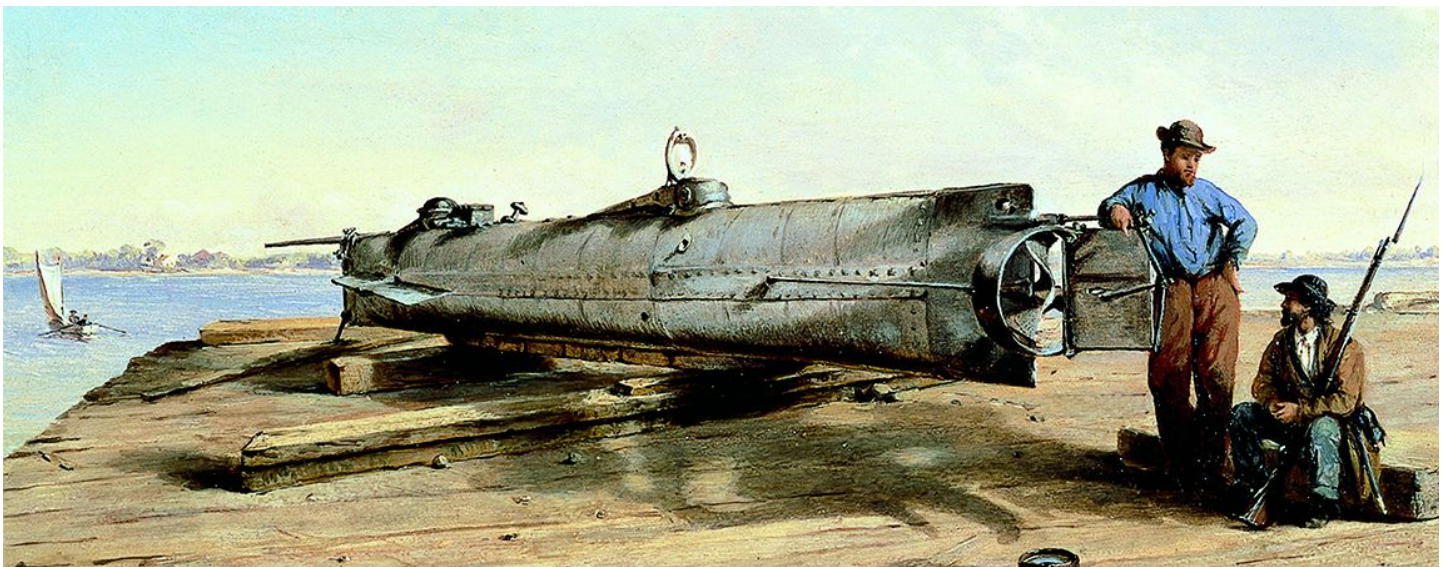
The Dispatch



Volume 37, Number 5

September 2020

A New Weapon of War: the *H. L. Hunley*



**“Submarine Torpedo Boat H. L. Hunley Dec. 6 1863” by Conrad Wise Chapman
The American Civil War Museum**

SEPTEMBER MEETING

Friday, September 11, 2020

VIRTUAL MEETING USING ZOOM

PHIL VITIELLO The *H.L. Hunley*: Confederate Submarine

Business Meeting	7:00 p.m.
Presentation	7:00 – 8:00 p.m.
Questions & Answers	8:00 – 8:30 p.m.

Phil Vitiello is a member of the Civil War Round Table of South Central Connecticut, a charter member of the "Friends of the Hunley," a lifelong member of the Titanic Historical Society and charter member of TIGHAR — The International Group for Historical Aircraft Recovery. A lifelong resident of New Haven, he is a graduate of the University of New Haven, majoring in law enforcement administration.

The H.L. Hunley was a Confederate submarine that became the first successful combat submarine when it sank the USS Housatonic on February 17, 1864. But, shortly after completing its mission, it disappeared!

The Hunley was finally rediscovered in 1995 in the waters off Charleston, S.C. and raised in 2000.

For the health and safety of our members and speakers, the Executive Board has decided to hold **virtual meetings** for the foreseeable future.

ZOOM DIRECTIONS

- 1) **Download** Zoom program from Internet at: <https://zoom.us/download>
- 2) Once in Zoom, **create** a username and password **OR log in** through other methods such as your Facebook account username and password.
- 3) On the Zoom main page, you will see four icons. To join a scheduled meeting, click **"Join"** in the upper right side. Enter the meeting ID number and passcode. **Meeting ID: 826 5767 7224**
Passcode: 132048

4) Your computer **camera** will turn on. A pop-up box appears and asks if you want to join with **computer audio**. Click the blue **"Join"** icon.

5) Click the **"mute"** button seen on the left side of the bottom black bar so a slash appears across the microphone icon.

Please keep your microphone **MUTED** during the presentation to eliminate interruptions of background noise.

To Activate the Chat Feature:

1) Move your mouse cursor to the bottom black bar of the video screen. Click **"chat"** (comic word bubble) and the vertical chat box appears.

2) Type the question you wish to send to the speaker.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Oct. 9: Robert Girardi will speak on either Gouverneur K. Warren or Camp Douglas

Nov. 13: Bill Howard, who was scheduled to speak last December, has been tentatively rescheduled to speak on the battle of Ball's Bluff

A MESSAGE FROM THE TREASURER

by Steve Muller

As you know, due to the COVID-19 pandemic the Round Table has not been able to hold meetings or participate in outside events such as Civil War reenactments. Consequently our Preservation Fund has not realized any revenue from merchandise sales since last spring, while we continue to face ongoing expenses paid by the Preservation Fund, particularly insurance and storage unit rental. As a reminder, we use the Preservation Fund to contribute to the American Battlefield Trust's Civil War battlefield preservation campaigns.

We need to contribute \$1,000 per year to continue the "Regimental Color Bearer" status we have proudly maintained for several decades. The current balance in the Preservation Account is barely \$2,000.

I encourage any of our members in a position to do so to make a special contribution to the Preservation Fund. Checks can be sent to the Round Table at P.O. Box 11493, Loudonville, NY 12211-0493.

BOARD UPDATES

The Executive Board has kept in touch through emails over the course of the summer. Like you, we've been forced to take a "wait and see" approach to planning in advance. The Board will meet via Zoom on September 2, which is one week after this newsletter goes to print. We will give a detailed update at the start of the September speaker meeting.

At the conclusion of the September virtual meeting, please let us know what you think of the format. Send us an email at cdcwrt@hotmail.com to share your thoughts.

Our October speaker, Robert Girardi, has confirmed that he will give a virtual presentation. Program Chair Matt George will be in touch with Bill Howard and our other scheduled speakers to confirm virtual meetings or to reschedule them for a time when we can be together in person.

As Treasurer Steve Muller notes, we've held off on making donations for preservation since summer fundraising events have been canceled and we haven't held any book raffles.

We'd very much like to maintain our Regimental Color Bearer status in the American Battlefield Trust, but we cannot do so at the expense of being able to pay our bills.

You can mail a check to the Round Table, or donate directly using the PayPal link on our website (www.capitaldistrictcivilwar.org).

AN IMPROBABLE RISE TO GREATNESS: US GRANT HISTORY CHANNEL DOCUDRAMA

By Steve Muller and Mark Koziol

Following the demise of quality History Channel documentaries in the early 2000s, there seemed a time when the network would only show paranormal and reality T.V. programs. However, the recently acclaimed History Channel 6-hour George Washington docudrama successfully blended history with Hollywood quality production values to bring Washington's story to life. Now the 6-hour U.S. Grant docudrama program also succeeds in both informing and entertaining television viewers.

By using classic black and white and colorized photos of U.S. Grant, interviews with historians like Ron Chernow and retired U.S. Army General David Petraeus, plus the quoting of Grant's well-written Memoirs, brought to life the stories of Grant's military career, life and times. The first part of the docudrama showcased Grant's hardscrabble childhood, exemplified by the time when a young Grant's naivety in buying a horse led him to overpay for it. Also, there were several examples of Grant's difficulty as an adult having a successful career outside the military. However, there is no mention of Grant's given name being Hiram Ulysses Grant until his West Point appointment in 1839.

Grant from West Point to Appomattox, an 1885 engraving by Thure de Thulstrup. Clockwise from lower left: Graduation from West Point (1843); In the tower at Chapultepec (1847); Drilling his Volunteers (1861); The Battle of Fort Donelson (1862); The Battle of Shiloh (1862); The Siege of Vicksburg (1863); The Battle of Chattanooga (1863); Appointment as Lieutenant General by Abraham Lincoln (1864); The Surrender of General Robert E. Lee at Appomattox Court House (1865)



The retelling of Grant's experiences in the Mexican War (1846-1848) could have been better. While junior officers such as Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, George McClellan, and William T. Sherman experienced their first taste of combat, the program failed to elaborate Grant's urban combat experience, as mentioned in his Memoirs. Also, it is not clear on the purpose of Grant's dramatic horseback ride featured in the episode, and the narrative omitted Grant's opinions about the injustices of the Mexican War.

While the docudrama often mentions how famous Grant was during his lifetime, the producers kept using the same photos over and over. Despite over 300 U.S. Grant images available for use according to www.granthomepage.com, the series failed to use the famous square bearded Grant portrait.

To bring to life Grant's battlefield successes and failures, the producers used computer-generated graphics to show the horrors of battlefield wounds and equipped actors with accurate replica uniforms, weapons, and accouterments. The animated battlefield maps showing troop movements clarified the tactical minutia and complimented the facts and interpretations presented by the historians. A good example of this is the detailed computer graphic recreation of the Union Naval armada traveling south on the Mississippi River close enough to the Vicksburg shoreline to avoid their lethal artillery fire. After he was transferred east, Grant's focused determination to pursue, fight and defeat General Lee's Army of Northern Virginia, no matter

how high the causality numbers, was exhibited in the bloody 1864 Battle of the Wilderness.

The brief, but enjoyable, accurate scenes of President Lincoln meeting General Grant came to life through good acting and precise sets of the White House. The Lincoln actor looked like the president and used a slight southern accent, too. The actor playing Grant looked the part and brought to life the joy Grant felt when spending time with his Julia and the painful incidents like when his misconduct out west led to his sudden resignation from the Army in 1854.

Part three of the program devoted itself to telling the significant events of Grant's last 20 years from 1865 to 1885. Historians did a good job discussing Grant's successes and failures during the Reconstruction era. Highlights included the federal government's efforts to enforce recently passed civil rights constitutional amendments and the controversial use of the U.S. Army to manage and control the white backlash against blacks, as highlighted by the vicious Ku Klux Klan (KKK) terrorism.

But, there should have been more discussion of the critical and powerful forces that pulled US Grant in different directions at this time, including:

- 1) How to best defend the freedmen's civil rights
- 2) Proper and careful judicial use of the U.S. Army as a domestic policing force
- 3) The pressure to reduce the size of the peacetime army, balance the federal budget and pay down the Civil War debt

4) The fact after that the release of the state militia regiments, U.S. Colored Troops made up a large part of the U.S. Army

5) Failure to mention the 1876 Corrupt Bargain resulting in the election of Rutherford B. Hayes to the presidency

6) End of Reconstruction – did it end too soon?

Momentous changes during President Grant's eight years in office, 1869 to 1877, challenged his leadership skills. Despite the U.S. Army infiltrating and weakening the KKK, oppression of black rights continued, and the end of the Reconstruction era. The wealth generated by the industrial revolution led to the rise of wealthy businessmen and Robber Barons, like Andrew Carnegie, whose power went almost unchecked for decades. The corrupt patronage system often led to graft and scandal, a trail that led directly back to Grant's cabinet. After leaving office, Grant and his family traveled on a world tour from 1877-1879, where citizens received Grant and his family with open arms and enthusiasm.

Grant's difficult retirement included the loss of his life savings to a corrupt Wall Street financier, his diagnosis of terminal throat cancer, and race against death to write and complete his memoirs. The story came full circle at the end of his life when Grant and his family spent the last six weeks of the general's life at the Adirondack Mountain home of Joseph William Drexel, a New York banker and friend of Grant. The Grant Cottage in Wilton, New York, is not an opulent, Manhattan brownstone but a modest summer home befitting a humble Ohio farm boy

who grew up to help save the Union during its darkest years.

The History Channel's U.S. Grant docudrama kept the viewer's attention through a balanced use of historic facts brought to life with visually rich reenactments. By no means should watching docudramas replace reading a well-researched and written history book. But, no doubt, watching docudramas, such as this one, will inspire viewers to learn more through the written word.

BUFORD'S VIEW

by Matt George

Recently there has been some new research concerning one of the major human interest mysteries of the Civil War. This new evidence seems to indicate a very close connection to our immediate area.

There has always been a question of who was General John Reynolds' fiancée and where did she ultimately end up after his death at Gettysburg. The generally accepted account is that her name was "Kate" Mary Hewitt. When General Reynolds last left her, she vowed she would enter a nunnery if he was killed. Based on a book in 1958 by Edward Nichols, the evidence seemed to indicate she did enter a convent and then later ended up in Stillwater, N.Y. where she quietly lived out the rest of her life. Well, according to researchers Jeff Harding (from Gettysburg) and Mary Sanford Pitkin (Connecticut), there were *two* Kate Hewitts). The Kate Hewitt from Stillwater was NOT the fiancée of Reynolds.

Based on a number of primary documents, there was also a “Kate” Mary Hewitt living in Albany. It seems this Kate Hewitt had done some overseas traveling (to Panama and San Francisco) in July, 1860 and was accompanied by a Major John Reynolds. During this time period, the census records indicate that the Kate Hewitt of Stillwater was living there as of June 25.

Five years later, in August, 1865 the records of the Daughters of Charity Convent in Emmitsburg, Maryland indicate that a Kate Hewitt was there on March 18, 1864. General Reynolds was killed about seven months previously. She stayed there as a resident until she was sent on a mission to teach at the St. Joseph’s School in Albany, N.Y.

Based on a series of letters between Ellie Reynolds (sister) and Charles Veil (a former orderly of John Reynolds) she was still in Emmitsburg in 1865 but had reached Albany by January 15, 1866. She was living with three other women teachers who taught at St. Joseph’s or other independent schools. By 1874 (now a former nun) she married Joseph Pfordt of Albany. The local obituary and the Albany County cemetery records list the death of Catherine “Kate” Hewitt Pfordt in 1876 (from consumption). She is buried in St. Agnes Catholic Cemetery in Menands, New York. The gravestone says Pfordt, not Hewitt. Reynolds and his once fiancée now rest very far

apart, one in Lancaster, Pa. and the other in Menands.

The state census of 1875 shows that the other Kate Hewitt was still living in Stillwater. This Kate did not pass away until 1902.

In October, I’ll be doing a Zoom presentation for the students of Dave Hochfelder, Director of the Public History Program at SUNY, Albany. The topic is the Role of Re-enactors and Living Historians in Public History. I suggested that Dave also invite Ben Kemp of Grant College to join us. Ben does a great portrayal of General Grant for students and other groups. Dave, you might recall, has spoken to our group several times.

All the Conferences and events I had planned to attend in September and October have been canceled. The Mosby Heritage Conference has been rescheduled in its entirety to Oct. 2021. So it looks like a long fall.

As I mentioned in previous columns, I do not know when we will ever get together again as a group. However, I do miss talking to all of you and discussing history and the Civil War in particular. Listening to and experiencing the visual presentations of good speakers and the subsequent personal interactions and questions that follow are something that cannot be completely replaced.

**CDCWRT
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Created in 1984, the Capital District Civil War Round Table is an incorporated non-profit educational organization. Meetings are held monthly in various locations in the Capital District. This newsletter is published eleven times per year. Annual dues are \$35. The purpose of the organization is to promote, educate, and further stimulate interest in, and discussion of, all aspects of the Civil War period.

Contact the Capital District Civil War Round Table through
our website: www.capitaldistrictcivilwar.org
or email: cdcwrt@hotmail.com

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