

The Dispatch

Newspaper of the

CAPITAL DISTRICT
CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

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Gen. Johnston Meets Gen. Sherman at Bennett Farm



Reports from Goldsboro indicate that Gen. Johnston communicated to Gen. Sherman that a meeting take place between the two officers. There is speculation that a surrender of the Confederate army is possible. Several days ago it was confirmed that Gen. Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia surrendered to Gen. Grant at Appomattox Court House on April 9th. The troops are hopeful that the long war has finally come to an end.

Gen. Sherman left by train for Durham Station after a delay of an hour at Raleigh. Observers stated that the military telegraph operator had received an urgent coded message from Washington. Undoubtedly these are orders from President Lincoln and the War Department as to how to proceed with the meeting. More details inside.

APRIL MEETING
FRIDAY, APRIL 10, 2015

WATERVLIET SENIOR CENTER
1541 BROADWAY
WATERVLIET, NY

THE HISTORY OF
AN ADIRONDACK REGIMENT
THE 118TH NYVI

SHARP SWAN

Social Hour	**6:00 – 7:00 p.m.**
Business Meeting	**7:00 – 7:15 p.m.**
Presentation	**7:15 – 7:45 p.m.**
Discussion	**7:45 - -8:15 p.m.**

CDCWRT MEETING

The April meeting of the CDCWRT will be held at the Watervliet Senior Center on March, Friday the 10th, 2015. Our special guest speaker is historian and author, Sharp Swan. His topic will be the history of one of our local regiments from the Adirondacks, the 118th New York Volunteer Infantry.

The 118th New York Volunteer Infantry Regiment was recruited for service in the Civil War from Clinton, Essex, and Warren counties in Northern New York. Known as "The Adirondack Regiment," the unit saw action is some of the bloodiest battles, including Drewry's Bluff, Cold Harbor, the Capture of Fort Harrison, and the Second Battle of Seven Oaks, where half the regiment was captured. By the time they mustered out at Plattsburgh at the end of the war, there were only 299 of the original 1000 men to answer the final roll call.

This is the story of their journey as they fought to try and keep the Union together, told mostly through original writings and stories of the men that were there.

Mr. Swan has been researching the Civil War for more than 30 years. He has spoken extensively about the 118th New York. He will share his research with the Round Table. One of the members of our round table had a relative in the 118th.

Swan is an owner of Cloudsplitter Carpentry and a board member of the Pok-O-MacCready Outdoor Education Center in Willsboro, New York. He is a contributing author of the book Heaven Up H'istedness: the History of the Adirondack Forty-Sixers and the High Peaks of the Adirondacks.



UP-COMING MEETING/ EVENTS

On April 11, 2015, Saturday, Siena History Day will take place on the campus of Siena College from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. There will be re-enactors from various periods and educational exhibits for children and adults. Since Matt George will be at Appomattox that weekend, the round table is seeking volunteers to man an information table at the event. Contact Matt George for information.

On May 3, 2015, Sunday, the Ten Broeck Mansion in Albany will sponsor their History Day open-house. Local history groups, including the CDCWRT, will have information tables. Volunteers should contact Matt George for details. This is the ideal opportunity to get involved with round table activities for the public.

On May 8, 2015, Friday, the regular meeting of the CDCWRT at the Watervliet Senior Center will feature Britt Isenberg, who will talk about the 11th Corps Field Hospital at the Spangler Farm during and after the Battle of Gettysburg.

On June 12, 2015, Friday, the regular meeting of the CDCWRT at the Watervliet Senior Center will feature John McTague, who will provide a tour of the National Cemetery at Gettysburg.

June 13-14, 2015, Saturday & Sunday. This marks the 23rd Annual Peterboro Civil War Weekend. Saturday starts with a Veterans procession led by A. Lincoln. Harold Holzer and Jan Reichard will be on hand for book signings and will exhibit their Lincoln funeral artifacts including a replica of the funeral casket. There will be exhibits, vendors, re-enactments and food. Patrick Schroeder will talk at 7 p.m. on the surrender at Appomattox. Adults $8.00. Check updates at civilwarweekend.sca-peterboro.org.

THE CIVIL WAR IN NORTH CAROLINA IN 1865

(Ed. Note)
Gen. Sherman's march to Goldsboro where he will resupply and re-outfit his army, has been upset by Johnston's attack on Slocum's Left Wing at Bentonville. Slocum sent 2 divisions against reinforced cavalry and reassured Sherman he would secure the road to Goldsboro. After the stunning turnaround on March 19th, Slocum realized Johnston was there in force and Sherman was asked to bring the Right Wing to Bentonville.

This next installment is based on Mark Bradley's articles in Blue & Gray Magazine, Volume XVII, Issue 1, October 1999.

Sherman immediately ordered the rear divisions of the Right Wing to countermarch to Slocum's assistance. **"Fortify and hold your position to the last, certain that all the army is coming to you as fast as possible."** Johnston had been alerted to Sherman's advance by his cavalry, and he positioned his force into an upturned horseshoe with the village of Bentonville and the bridge over Mill Creek to his rear.

Most of the fighting on March 20th was skirmishing. Despite the Federal's show of force, Sherman had no intention of bringing Johnston to battle. **"I don't want to fight now or here, and therefore won't object to his (Johnston's) drawing off to-night toward Smithfield as he should."** But Johnston stayed. He would later write Lee that he held his ground in the hope that the enemy's greatly superior numbers might have encouraged Sherman to attack in a costly frontal assault. Johnston knew that once Sherman combined with Gen. Schofield's army at Goldsboro, there would be no chance of stopping Sherman. Contrary to Johnston's hopes, Sherman was content to let March 20th pass.

At dawn on March 21st, the skies threatened rain and the two armies appeared to settle into a stalemate. Gen. "Fighting Joe" Mowers Division of 17th Corps arrived on the field and was placed on the extreme right of the Union line. **"I suppose, General (Blair – 17th Corps Commander), after I get into position, there will be no objection to my making a little reconnaissance," Mower asked. "None at all," Blair replied.**

At noon in a steady rain, Mower's two brigade reconnaissance in force started. Mower's front overlapped the Confederate cavalry force at this end of the horseshoe. Wade Hampton warned Johnston that if the Federals broke through near the Mill Creek Bridge, their only line of retreat would be cut off. Gen. Hardee was ordered to command forces that were being stripped from the west side of the horseshoe to defend the east side. But before that could occur, Johnston's headquarters was overrun and Federal skirmishers were within 200 yards of the bridge.

A mixed cavalry force led by Confederate "Fighting Joe" Wheeler charged Mower's force and stalled the attack, saving Johnston's army from possible destruction.

When Sherman heard of Mower's attack, he was furious. **"I don't like it at all. It might bring on a general engagement."** He ordered Mower to break off his assault. By now Johnston realized he must retreat from Bentonville. That night Johnston retreated northward toward Smithfield, and the next day Sherman marched to Goldsboro to combine with Schofield's army.

Official Casualty figures for the Battle of Bentonville stated the Federal losses at 1,527 and Confederate losses at 2,606 for a total of 4,133. Later Sherman remarked, **"I think I made a mistake there and should rapidly have followed Mower's lead with the whole of the right wing, and it could not have resulted other than successfully to us, by reason of our vastly superior numbers."**

(Editor's comments)
Most of the "what if" books deal with Lee winning at Gettysburg. But what if Sherman bagged Johnston's army at Bentonville, effectively ending the war in North Carolina and dashing any hope of Lee and Johnston's armies combining. Lee would have been trapped in the Petersburg trenches. With now no hope of escape, might Lee have prevailed on Davis to surrender on the best terms he could have obtained from Lincoln?

If the War ended in late March, Richmond might not have burned. A.P. Hill might not have been killed. Thousands of men on both sides might not have been killed or wounded in the battles that would NOT have been fought at Five Forks, the Petersburg Breakthrough, Sayler's Creek, the Appomattox campaign and the Battle at Appomattox Court House. The actor, John Wilkes Booth might not have had time to even recruit his followers for the kidnapping of Lincoln, let alone his assassination of Lincoln. He might just have been a disgruntled actor who fled to Canada or Europe after the War.

Lincoln might have completed his second term and a much different Reconstruction might have taken place. The great Civil Rights movement might have occurred in the late 19th Century instead of having to wait until the 1960's. Is that what Grant and Sherman and Sheridan might have talked about late some nights in a cigar smoke filled den? What if?

But let's continue with what DID happen in North Carolina.

While Sherman's army was getting food, new shoes and uniforms, and mail in Goldsboro, Johnston's army at Smithfield was melting away. The Confederate treasury announced that it was broke and the soldiers would not

be paid in the immediate future. Nearly 1000 men lacked rifled muskets, and more than a quarter of the Army of Tennessee contingent were without shoes. Morale was sinking and desertions were increasing. But in early April Gen. Stephen Lee arrived from Georgia with several thousand men. Johnston now had about 28,000 effective troops, and if combined with Lee, the combined force would be a still formidable 80,000 frontline troops.

Of On April 6 both Sherman and Johnston received the news that Richmond had fallen and Davis was fleeing towards Greensboro. Sherman immediately scrapped plans to join Grant and planned to move on Johnston on April 10. But then on April 8 he heard from Grant that Lee was moving towards Danville and that the object of the Union armies was now the Confederate armies in the field. Now Sherman noted, **"It is to our interest to let Lee and Johnston come together."** Both armies could be finished at the same time.

On the 10th while cavalry skirmished, Johnston moved towards Raleigh while Sherman moved towards Smithfield. Among the Confederates the rumor began to spread that Lee had met with disaster. Then at 1:00am on the 11th a telegram arrived from Davis: **"A scout reports that General Lee surrendered the remnant of his army near Appomattox Court House yesterday."** Johnston just told his general staff of the message and warned that the troops should not be told. He wanted to keep his army intact and thus get the best terms for a surrender.

Sherman moved on towards Raleigh on the 11th. Before dawn on the 12th he received news of Lee's surrender to Grant. Sherman wrote Grant, **"The terms you have given Lee are magnanimous and liberal. Should Johnston follow Lee's example I shall of course grant the same."**

A civilian mission was sent to Sherman by Gov. Zebulon Vance, who also authorized the mayor of Raleigh to surrender the town to Sherman.

Sherman then made plans to cut off the southern route of retreat by Johnston via Charlotte. But Johnston had a substantial lead over Sherman, so the outcome now rested in Johnston's hands. He did not want to fight Sherman's army because he was vastly outnumbered. He chose not to escape southward. He chose not to disperse his army because he considered that cowardly. Instead he hoped to obtain fair terms for his men.

But to do this, he needed his army intact, and not surrounded by Sherman's army. He also had to convince President Davis of his intentions. The two men met in Greensboro on April 12th. Most of the cabinet and accompanying generals understood the situation, but Davis was not convinced the army should surrender. In spite of their animosity towards each other, Johnston briefly and decisively laid out the situation.

The Union army outnumbered the Confederate army 18:1; his men had only their arms at hand and the ammunition in their cartridge boxes because the Confederacy lacked the means of producing or purchasing more; continuation of fighting would devastate the South without significantly harming the enemy. **"In short, it would be the greatest of human crimes to continue the war. I therefore urge that the President should exercise at once the only function of government still in his possession, and open negotiations for peace."** Davis relented and agreed.

Johnston drafted a letter to open negotiations and ordered it delivered to Sherman under a flag of truce. On the morning of April 17th, Sherman and some staff boarded a train at Raleigh to go to Durham station. But just then the telegraph operator rushed to the train with an important coded message. It was decode and read:

President Lincoln was murdered about 10 o'clock last night in his private box at Ford's Theater in this city, by an assassin

who shot him through the head with a pistol ball …The assassin of the President leaped from the box, brandishing a dagger, exclaiming, "Sic temper tyrannis!" and that now Virginia was revenged…Mr. Lincoln fell senseless from his seat, and continued in that state until twenty-two minutes after 7 o'clock, at which time he breathed his last …

Edwin M. Stanton
Secretary of War

Sherman then left with some staff to meet Johnston. The two parties met near the farm of Nancy and James Bennett who let the generals use their home as a meeting place. Although both had served in the pre-war Regular Army, they had never met, but had formed a mutual respect for each other dating back to the Atlanta Campaign. Johnston wore a crisp gray dress uniform buttoned to the neck, while Sherman rumpled blue coat was unbuttoned and showed a matching blue vest. This was shades of Appomattox, quite unknowingly.

When the two men sat down alone, Sherman first showed Johnston the telegram. Sherman recalled, "**The perspiration came out in large drops on his forehead and he did not attempt to conceal his distress."** Johnston reportedly said, **"The event was the greatest possible calamity for the South."** Sherman then offered the terms that Grant had given Lee at Appomattox. Johnston said he regarded this meeting as a means of initiating negotiations between civilian authorities. Sherman objected to this. Johnston then suggested they make one job of it and negotiate the surrender of ALL remaining Confederate armies, but that he would need to secure Davis' approval. They agreed to meet the next day.

When they parted and returned to their camps, the news of Lincoln's assassination was now known to the army and many Union soldiers shouted, "**Don't let the Rebels surrender!"** Some began to march on Raleigh with intent to burn the city, but Union Gen. John Logan ordered them to disperse under threat of canister from a battery behind him. Raleigh was spared. The next day, Sherman felt he must obtain Johnston's surrender without delay and he was prepared to grant the Confederate generous terms to secure that surrender.

Confederate Vice-President Breckinridge was allowed to join in negotiations because he was also a major general in the army. Johnston stated that his soldiers desired some guarantees concerning their political status. There were other terms they advanced, but finally Sherman said, **See here, gentlemen, just who is doing this surrendering, anyhow? If this thing goes on, you'll have me sending a letter of apology to Jeff Davis."**

Sherman then wrote out his "Memorandum or Basis of Agreement," which was remarkably similar to what the Confederates wanted. It allowed the Confederates to keep their arms and deposit them in state armories; it allowed the states to retain their incumbent governments; it allowed Southerners to retain their political and property rights; it granted all Southerners amnesty for their participation in the war. However, because he had exceeded his authority as a military commander, Sherman added that his offer need to be approved by the president. He was confident however that the terms would acceptable.

They weren't. While Johnston's army waited during the armistice, it shrank by at least 4000 men due to desertion. At dawn on April 24th, Grant arrived in Sherman's camp. Stanton had sent the general-in-chief to direct operations himself. Grant also showed Sherman an order from Lincoln dated March 3rd. Lincoln's dispatch had instructed Grant not to decide, discuss, or confer upon any political question. Such discussions were to be left to the President. Now Sherman's orders, under Grant's supervision, were to end the truce, and demand surrender of

Johnston's immediate command only. Sherman notified Johnston thusly.

Late that afternoon, Johnston received President Davis' approval of Sherman's terms. Initially Davis had assumed Johnston would disband his army and send its artillery and cavalry to the Trans-Mississippi. But a council of war felt that the troops would no longer fight, and Davis had to accept their opinion.

Sherman and Johnston met again at the Bennett Farm on April 26th. Johnston called the Appomattox term inadequate, and Sherman agreed. Gen. Schofield, who had accompanied Sherman, came up with a plan for two documents. The first resembled the Appomattox agreement. Then the two commanders agreed to supplemental terms that were placed in the second document.

The first document demanded Johnston's command to cease all acts of war. The Army would leave its arms and public property at Greensboro. Officers could retain their side arms, horses and all baggage. Men and officers could return to their homes in peace as long as they did not take up arms against the U.S. government.

On April 27th, 6 revised supplemental terms were agreed to:
First, field transportation would loaned to the Confederates for their march to their homes and for subsequent use in their industrial pursuits;
Second, each brigade or unit could retain one-seventh of its small arms which will be disposed of when the troops reached their state capitals;
Third, soldiers could retain their private horses or other private property;
Fourth, troops from the Trans-Mississippi would be transported by water from Mobile or New Orleans;
Fifth, commanding officers would sign the paroles of their men;
Sixth, naval forces under Johnston's command would be included in the agreements.

Similar to what transpired at Appomattox, Sherman offered Johnston a quarter million rations for his army. Johnston wrote that his former adversary's magnanimity **"reconciles me to what I had previously regarded as the misfortune of my life – that of having had you to encounter in the field."** The Bennett Place surrender of April 26th was the largest of the war and included almost 90,000 troops stationed in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Florida.

Sherman had been harshly rebuked in the newspapers by Stanton and Chief of Staff Gen. Henry Halleck. Stanton even claimed Sherman had let Davis escape with the Confederate gold. Sherman was furious with the smear campaign. He even rejected offers from his brother, Senator John Sherman, and Grant to arrange a rapprochement with the secretary of war.

Sherman got his revenge at the Grand Review of his army on May 24, 1865. Thousand lined Pennsylvania Avenue and cheered the commander and his four corps. As Sherman mounted the steps of the reviewing stand, the cheers and applause became deafening. He refused to shake Stanton's hand. The Grand Review had proved the outcry against Sherman was quickly forgotten by the public.

In 1866 Cornelia Spencer, a harsh critic of Sherman, wrote her history, ***The Last Ninety Days of the War in North Carolina.*** She acknowledged the conciliatory spirit Sherman manifested in his negotiations with Johnston. **"Perhaps a late remorse had touched him; but however that may be, in the civil policy he has always advocated for the South, he has shown himself at once generous and politic."**