



The Dispatch



Newsletter of the

Capital District Civil War Round Table

P.O. Box 8874, Albany, NY 12208

Volume 11 Number 9

May 1994

The Life of Major General John Gibbon

by
Mark Jordan

CDCWRT member Mark Jordan, co-author of *Iron Brigade General*, a biography of John Gibbon, will speak on "A Rebel in Blue." Mark is being brought back by popular demand. You may remember that Mark was the featured speaker at this past January's meeting. Unfortunately, the crowd was small due to the terrible weather. Those who were able to make the January meeting were treated to a great presentation. We wanted to bring Mark back as soon as possible so more of the membership could hear this outstanding program. Mark will be presenting a revised version of his January talk so the program should

prove interesting to everyone, even those who were able to attend Mark's earlier presentation.

Mark Jordan is a consulting engineer in Troy, New York. He was a career officer in the Seabees, the Navy Engineer Corps.

✍ Dues, Dues, Dues, Dues!!!

Don't forget to renew. Your membership expiration date is on the mailing label of each month's Dispatch. Membership is still only \$15. Send your renewal to: CDCWRT, PO Box 8874, Albany, NY 12208

MAY MEETING

Friday, May 13, 1994
Bethlehem Public Library
Delaware Avenue, Delmar, NY

Doors Open: 7:00 PM
Program Begins: 7:30 PM

CDCWRT CALENDAR

••• 1994 •••

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| MAY | 13 | The Life of Major General John Gibbon. Mark Jordan will present a somewhat different version of the program he presented at the January meeting. |
| JUNE | 24 | A Civil War Medical Re-Enactment. Alvan Jacques. |
| OCT | 8-9 | Fall Field Trip -- Gettysburg. |

NOTE: Please note the change in the date for the June meeting from the 10th to the 24th.



Monument Restoration Project Gets Underway

The 125th New York Regimental Association is spearheading an effort to restore the Civil War monument in Veteran's Park in Schenectady. The monument, erected in 1875 by the Ladies Monumental Association of the City of Schenectady and Post 12 of the Department of New York GAR, is in a state of disrepair. The monument needs its base repaired, the bronze refinished/sealed, and some of its lettering repaired (the G in Gettysburg has been damaged, for example).

An estimate of the restoration cost is \$4,500. The City of Schenectady and other organizations such as our round table, are being asked to contribute to the project. [The CDCWRT board voted to contribute \$200 to the restoration once the 125th NY makes the necessary accounting arrangements for the project]. Anyone interested in making a contribution or in finding out more about the project can contact Sue Knost or Richard Straight of the 125th.

Fall Trip to Gettysburg Taking Shape

Dan Lorello has been busy doing some advance work for our annual Fall field trip. Full details will be featured in an upcoming Dispatch. Here is what we know at this point. The trip will feature four different tour guides as we tour the Gettysburg battlefield on October 8th and 9th. On Saturday morning, October 8th, we

will be reviewing the battle's 1st day's action from with Jim Klans. Dave Richards will be our guide for the afternoon as we tour The Wheatfield and Devil's Den. On Sunday we will spend the morning touring Culp's Hill and Cemetery Hill with Dr. Fennell. Sunday afternoon will be spent with Wayne Motts looking at Pickett's charge. Mark your calendars!!

Albany's Talent Program Looking for Civil War Presenters

The **Talent** Program of the City School District of Albany is designed to bring enrichment activities and enhanced understanding of curriculum to the elementary school population (grades 4 through 6) throughout the city.

Study of the Civil War is part of the 5th grade social studies curriculum, and is an area for which the **Talent** Program is asked to provide presenters who would be able to offer an occasional class presentation in their area of interest or expertise.

If you would be able to present a program on some aspect of the Civil War to Albany elementary school students on an occasional basis, or if you would like further information about the Albany schools' **Talent** Program, please contact the Talent Coordinator, Barbara I. Quackenbush, at (518) 462-7133.

This Terrible Sound: The Battle of Chickamauga by Peter Cozzens

Illustrated, maps, notes, bibliography, index, 675 pp. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992.

A book review by Dan Lorello



The battle of Chickamauga was the largest battle fought in the western theater of the Civil War. Bitterly contested over a two day period in September 1863 between the Confederate Army of Tennessee and the Union Army of the Cumberland, Chickamauga ranks as one of the war's greatest struggles. It was also the Army of Tennessee's only decisive victory in its short and tempestuous existence. Despite its stature, Cozzens' study of the battle is surprisingly the first major study published since 1961 when Glenn Tucker's *Chickamauga: Bloody Battle in the West* was issued by Bobbs-Merrill.

Few battles, for example, could boast such an eclectic (some would say volatile) cast of commanding officers. The Confederate side featured not only the irascible Braxton Bragg but also the caustic Daniel Harvey Hill, Lee's warhorse James Longstreet, and the inept Leonidas Polk. Prominent participants on the Union side included not only the excitable William Rosecrans but also George H. Thomas, Phil Sheridan, James A. Garfield, John Wilder, and George Crook. Moreover, not many battles were as closely contested or highlighted by such a dramatic and fierce fight as that which occurred on Snodgrass Hill as Thomas sought to prevent the possible annihilation of the Army of the Cumberland.

Relying upon previously unpublished manuscript materials as well as little known or under utilized secondary sources such as the Medical and Surgical History of the War of the Rebellion, Cozzens has crafted a history of the battle of Chickamauga that easily supplants Tucker's work as the best single source on this bloody battle. The author's research is meticulous and exhaustive and his command of the subject matter is impressive.

Although *This Terrible Sound* deals with the entire Chickamauga campaign, Cozzens' main focus is upon the battle itself (approximately 80%) of the book. Cozzens is particularly adept at describing actual combat despite the fact that Chickamauga was a very fluid and dynamic battle that by its nature is somewhat difficult to

describe. Nevertheless, Cozzens has produced a multi-faceted study of the battle that provides rich detail not only on command level actions and decisions, but also at division, brigade, regiment, and occasionally company level. Cozzens also effectively utilizes diaries, letters, and other accounts to provide graphic detail of what combat must have been like for the individual soldier. Clearly, *This Terrible Sound* is tactical history on par with such works as Robert Krick's *Stonewall Jackson at Cedar Mountain*, John Hennessy's *Return to Bull Run*, or Harry Pfanz's two studies of the second day's actions at Gettysburg.

Another strength of the book is the biographical vignettes that Cozzens provides for characters as they are introduced to the reader. Not only are the biographies, which are skillfully woven into the narrative, interesting and informative, they also serve to place the person in overall context in the army in which he served. Cozzens also deals equally with the Union and Confederate armies with the result being the reader is provided with a well balanced account that allows one to see the battle from each side's perspective.

This Terrible Sound is not without its shortcomings, however. At times Cozzens tends to get mired in detail and the reader may feel temporarily overwhelmed by a torrent of minutiae that is simply too difficult to follow. Such detail may intimidate some readers, especially those with a general interest in the war. Also, although the book contains over twenty maps, many of which are detailed tactical maps, the book could have benefited from additional maps. On more than one occasion I found myself searching vainly for a map that might clarify Cozzens' combat narrative. I would also have appreciated photographs of the area as opposed to the sketches provided by Keith Rocco. Finally, Cozzens fails to offer any analysis as to what the battle actually meant in terms of the overall prosecution of the war. After concluding his brilliant narrative of the battle, Cozzens simply continues the story by describing the denunciations and recriminations surrounding the commanding officers that flew fast and furiously once the Union army settled

into Chattanooga. Was Chickamauga simply a botched opportunity to destroy a Union army or did it present the Confederacy with a chance to significantly prolong the war as James Lee McDonough asserts? Or does the fact that after Chickamauga the Union government sent over 30,000 men to Tennessee while the Confederacy sent Jeff Davis tell us something about the means and resources each side brought to its conduct of the war? Unfortunately, one is left to ponder what Chickamauga with its 35,000 casualties meant alone. By placing Chickamauga in some larger framework, Cozzens would have provided his audience with a more satisfying end to his exhaustive study.

A generation ago Shelby Foote and Bruce Catton proved that academic historians were not the only people capable of writing first rate history. Cozzens, who graduated from Knox College with a degree in international relations and is presently a foreign service officer with the Department of State, has proven the same to this generation. With his *No Better Place to Die: The Battle of Stones River* and now *This Terrible Sound: The Battle of Chickamauga*, Peter Cozzens has demonstrated that he is one of the more serious and astute Civil War historians dealing with the western theater despite the fact that he is not a trained historian. Cozzens is presently working on a history of the Chattanooga campaign that should, judging from his earlier efforts, provide those interested in the war in the west, with another first rate history for their collections. I for one, am eagerly anticipating Cozzens' forthcoming study.

Breaking the Peach Orchard Salient by Major Steve Hawley

Major Steve Hawley presented an excellent program at our April meeting. Hawley's topic was William Barksdale's generalship at the Sherry Peach Orchard on July 2nd at Gettysburg. Hawley, a 1982 graduate of the US Military Academy at West Point, teaches the history of Military Art and a colloquium on Civil War

generalship. He was an entertaining speaker who clearly was in command of his subject as well as his audience.

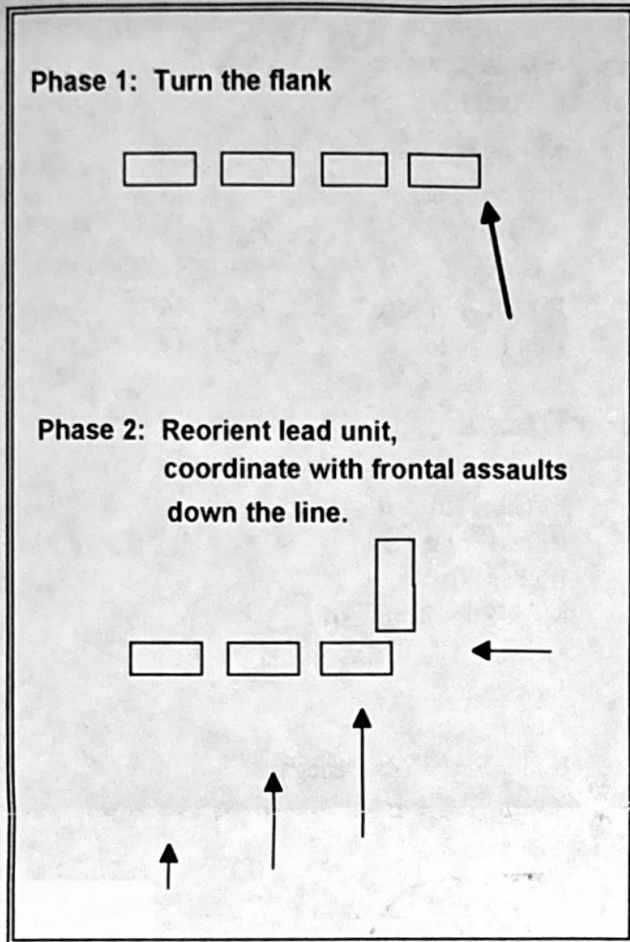
Barksdale is the measuring stick by which the volunteer soldier is measured. Barksdale spent time before the war as a congressman, providing spice to legislative proceedings by his involvement in several fights on the floor with fellow legislators. Hawley entertained the crowd by recounting how, in one of Barksdale's scuffles, the Mississippian lost his hairpiece to an adversary struggling for something to grab. Innocent bystanders, like a Three Stooges routine, were inadvertent casualties of the floor fights as the Congressmen decided Robert's Rules of Order were clearly inadequate for settling all of their disputes. Barksdale's fiery personality was firmly established before the war and this characteristic was a major factor in his excellent battlefield leadership.

On July 2, 1863, a two hour artillery duel preceded Barksdale's attack. Barksdale is anxious to move, probably remembering the awful beating his men withstood from the Federal artillery at Fredericksburg. Barksdale is later criticized by Kershaw for not following on Kershaw's left. Hawley felt the criticism was unjustified given that Barksdale was clearly itching to move on the enemy.

Before advancing, Barksdale gives a speech to his men. He asks for his men's full support; those who don't want to participate are asked to go the rear -- now! Barksdale leads his 1,400 men across about 800 yards of open fields against approximately 1,300 Union infantry supported by an additional 1,000 artillerymen.

As Barksdale advances, the Union infantry, leave their protected positions and move forward to try and protect the withdrawal of their artillery. Computer simulations done at West Point show that Barksdale should not have even lasted their march across the 800 yards of open fields, much less engage the Federal lines. What the simulations cannot fully account for is battlefield leadership and desire. Barksdale's men make it across

the field and slam into the end of the Federal line and, following the "en echelon" plan laid out by Lee, reorient themselves left to rollup the Federal line.



The critical piece to such an attack is that the lead unit must be successful in gaining the advantage on the enemy's flank. Otherwise the "en echelon" attack is doomed. Because the success of the maneuver depends so much on the lead unit, it is usually an elite outfit or one who has been given some special training and/or weaponry. The Spartans, for example, hand-picked gay warriors who would go into battle naked and strapped to their partners. [Someone in the audience suggested this would make an interesting subject for a reenactment].

The remaining Confederate forces followed Barksdale's lead and continued to engage the enemy from the front. Barksdale actually reoriented his men twice, reorienting his forces a second time after turning the Federal's left. The

120th NY stood tough for a while against Barksdale's onslaught, even after losing 17 officers. Barksdale's success in reorienting his men twice in the middle of the battle -- shouting orders, using runners, and using bugle calls -- is a testament to his leadership abilities and the courage and determination of his men under fire.

Willard's Brigade changes the direction of the fight. Barksdale has his foot shot off and receives a "frothing" chest wound. He hangs on until about 1 or 2 AM the next morning. Barksdale's Brigade suffered 53% casualties (747 out of 1420) and pushed 14 Federal regiments.



An interesting sidelight of Major Hawley's talk was a discussion of whether Sickles' advanced position was a blunder or an advantage for the Federals. Hawley felt that Sickles' position gave the Federal line added depth that worked to their advantage. Hawley felt that Sickles was wrong, however, in not telling his superior of his advanced position and in not having enough men to adequately cover the ground he held -- he should have asked for more men.



Created in 1984, the Capital District Civil War Round Table is an incorporated non-profit educational organization. Meetings are held monthly at the Bethlehem Public Library in Delmar, New York. This newsletter is published ten times per year. Annual dues are \$15. The purpose of the organization is to promote, educate, and further stimulate interest in, and discussion of, all aspects of the Civil War period.



To join or renew membership, send \$15 to the CDCWRT address below.

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