

THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

Volume XLIV, Number 8

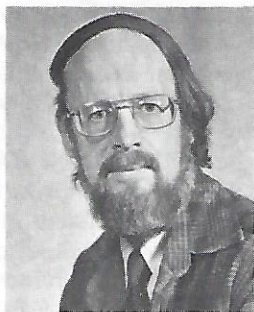
Chicago, Illinois

April, 1984

Richard M. McMurry on John Bell Hood

On July 17, 1864, while at Nelson's House on the Marietta Road three miles from Atlanta, Joseph E. Johnston received a message from President Jefferson Davis, signed by Adjutant General Samuel Cooper: "Lieutenant General Hood has been commissioned to the temporary rank of general, under the late law of Congress. I am directed by the Secretary of War to inform you that, as you have failed to arrest the advance of the enemy to the vicinity of Atlanta, far in the interior of Georgia, and express no confidence that you can defeat or repel him, you are hereby relieved from the Army and the Department of Tennessee, which you will immediately turn over to General Hood."

At the April 13 meeting of The Round Table, Professor Richard M. McMurry, adjunct professor of history at North Carolina State University, will explore the factors leading to Davis' decision to supplant Johnston with Hood. In his remarks Dr. McMurry will attempt to present a balanced view



Richard M. McMurry

of the problem that Davis faced and the possible solutions that he could have chosen. Dr. McMurry feels that the answer that he will develop in his address may well surprise those of us with a traditional view of the 1864 campaigns.

When Hood assumed command, he realized that he was expected to save Atlanta by driving Sherman's forces from the city's gates. He struck first at Thomas' Army of the Cumberland at Peachtree Creek on July 20th but was repulsed with 5,000 casualties. His next move pitted him against McPherson's troops in the battle of Atlanta, south and east of the city on July 22nd. Here again his troops failed to dislodge the Union forces (though McPherson himself was killed) and he suffered 7,500 casualties. The fighting now shifted to the west at Ezra Church Crossroads on July 28th where troops led by S. D. Lee and Stewart lost 5,000 men in a futile slugfest with Howard's Army of the Tennessee. The last battle for Atlanta occurred at Jonesboro on August 31st where Hood failed to prevent the encirclement of the city. He then evacuated Atlanta on September 1st. The news of Sherman's victory ruined the claims of the opposition party in the North that the war had become stalemated.

With his army reduced to 35,000, Hood retreated southward to concentrate at Palmetto. He knew that he lacked the strength to engage Sherman in pitched battle, but believed that by striking at Sherman's lines of communication he could lure the Union army northward and away



430th Regular Meeting

Richard M. McMurry
on
John Bell Hood

Friday, April 13, 1984

Hotel Continental
505 N. Michigan
Camelot Room, 3rd Floor
Cocktails at 5:30 p.m. Dinner at 6:30 p.m.
\$13.00 per person
Entree: Cantonese Combination Plate



In the past two months there has been a problem with members making reservations and not showing up (The Round Table must then pay for those meals) or showing up without reservations. Please remember to make a reservation by returning the postcard or calling the Book Shop. If you subsequently find that you will not be able to attend, notify the Book Shop. The cooperation of all will be appreciated.

from Atlanta. He struck at both Resaca and Dalton, and this caused Sherman to move out of Atlanta in pursuit. After trailing Hood's forces to Gaylesville, Alabama, Sherman realized that Hood was leading him on a wild-goose chase and returned to Atlanta. There, he ordered Thomas and Schofield to defend Tennessee and began planning operations that would take him on his march to the sea and the capture of Savannah.

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THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE



Founded December 3, 1940

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The only requirement for membership in The Round Table is a genuine interest in the Civil War and its era. For information, address Ward C. Smidl, 1104 Whippoorwill Lane, Palatine, Illinois 60007.



(continued from page 1)

Hood now developed a desperate plan of action in which he would strike north from Alabama through Tennessee into Kentucky, defeat any Union troops there, and then turn east along the Ohio River into Virginia. There he would unite with Lee and crush Grant. Never interested in detail or administration, Hood's plan ignored the realities of manpower and logistics, but reflected his hope that an aggressive spirit would restore success to Confederate fortunes. Without referring his plan to either Davis or the theatre commander, Beauregard, he started his troops westward to encamp for more than two weeks at Tusculumbia, Alabama. Hood's plan required speed for its ultimate success, but this delay permitted Schofield and Thomas time to prepare defensive arrangements.

Crossing the Tennessee River on November 18th, he moved successively to Columbia and Spring Hill, where he hoped to cut off Schofield's retreat. Poor staff work and his own carelessness permitted Schofield's troops to escape up the Columbia Pike to Franklin. Hood, blaming everyone for this failure, but particularly Cheatham, moved to Franklin, where he found that Schofield had had time to set up breastworks for defense. With only two of his three corps on the field, Hood ordered an attack in the late afternoon on November 30th. In bitter fighting Hood lost 6200 men, including six generals.

With only 23,000 men left after his ill-advised assault at Franklin, Hood moved up to the outskirts of Nashville where he hoped to establish his army in a good defensive position and await Thomas' attack. His hope was that he could contain such an attack and deliver a crushing counterstroke. This was not to be. Thomas attacked on December 15th and 16th, routing Hood's troops and sending them in disarray to retreat from Tennessee and then concentrate at Tupelo, Mississippi. When the authorities in Richmond realized that responsibility for this total defeat lay with Hood, he was removed from command on January 23, 1865, and the war in the West was all but over.

A native of DeKalb County, Georgia, Dr. McMurry received his bachelor's degree from VMI in 1961, as well as M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from Emory University. His dissertation at Emory was under the guidance of Bell Irvin Wiley, who received our Nevins-Freeman award in 1978, and dealt with the Atlanta campaign. He has published articles in the *Confederate Historical Society Journal*, *Civil War Times Illustrated* and *Civil War History*. He wrote *The Road Past Kenesaw: The Atlanta Campaign of 1864* which appeared as a National Park Service Handbook in 1972, and he and James I. "Bud" Robertson, Jr. served as co-editors for *Rank and File: Civil War Essays in Honor of Bell Irvin Wiley*.

His book, *John Bell Hood and the War for Southern Independence*, published in 1982, was a History Book Club selection and received the 1982 U.D.C. award for the best book in the field of Southern history. Dr. McMurry is currently engaged in research for a detailed history of the Western theater of the Civil War, as well as a biography of Francis Stebbins Bartow, a prominent legal, political and military figure in antebellum Georgia.

The Seventeenth Annual Reenactment of the Battle of New Market will be held Sunday, May 13, 1984, at the New Market Battlefield Park. Participation will be limited to 600 Confederate and 600 Federal troops. For further information, write: New Market Battlefield Park, P.O. Box 1864, New Market, Virginia 22844.

March meeting

The bloody battle of Cold Harbor on June 3, 1864 was the centerpiece of the address given by Col. Roy K. Flint to 90 members and guests on March 9th. Col. Flint became interested in Cold Harbor through reading accounts of the battle in Freeman's *Lee's Lieutenants*, Maj. Gen. Martin T. McMahon's account in *Battles and Leaders*, and Shelby Foote's *The Civil War*. He asked "How could the Confederate force inflict such a costly defeat on the Army of the Potomac in such a short period of time?"

As Col. Flint explained, Grant's plan was to cross the Rapidan east of Lee's positions in order to have easy access to resupply by the sea, and to maintain the ability to cooperate with Butler operating against Richmond. Grant intended to attack at Cold Harbor early on the morning of June 2nd with the goal of turning Lee's right flank. Hancock's II Corps was moved to the extreme left flank, but due to staff errors, poor guides and extreme heat, he arrived later in the morning than expected. Grant therefore postponed the attack until 5:00 p.m. Hancock couldn't get to the necessary starting point but had to fight a skirmishing action. Grant then postponed the attack again until 4:30 a.m. the next morning.

Col. Flint then discussed the battle of June 3rd in terms of its essential components; first, terrain. The battlefield is located about 12 miles north of Richmond. This part of Virginia is somewhat hilly and Lee concentrated his army on the only rolling country in the area. The conclusion about the terrain is that it was an obstacle to movement and favored the defense. Federal commanders noted that the Confederate position was of great natural strength.

Orders and arrangements. It was Grant's intention that the main attack would be made by the corps of Hancock, Wright and Smith to turn the southern flank of the Confederate lines. The corps of Warren and Burnside were to conduct secondary attacks to the north as support of the attacks on Lee's left flank. Corps commanders were to select the points in their respective fronts where the assaults would take place. Hancock and Wright were to attack in a southwesterly direction, while Smith attacked relatively parallel to Wright. The divergence in the attacking units permitted those Confederates not directly engaged to fire into the flanks of Federal units attacking to their north and south. It was an important failure to permit the Union corps commanders to select their own objectives.

The main weakness in coordination was the failure to concentrate the 3 corps' assaults. The center of the Federal line was outflanked by the long Confederate line, at least in the south. Hancock stated that the division commanders found conditions generally unfavorable for an attack. The attacking lines formed in the first light, right behind the picket line, at 4:30 a.m. Lee's army formed a solid line from right to left. As one observer said, "Their works consisted of tiers of rifle pits, behind which were a continuous line of breastworks, solidly constructed of pine logs and earth, the top log raised in some instances so that the muskets could be fired under it."

Flint posed the question: What should officers do when they are ordered to attack in a situation that experience tells them is just murder? His answer: to attack. However, otherwise brave men such as Emory Upton decided not to because of the fate which they knew awaited them. Flint maintains that there was a general assessment by the soldiers that they had been in position too long and that there was no chance for success. This was a war in which the impact of technology far outstripped the progress in doc-

trine. The rifle had become the master of the battlefield and no well prepared position was carried except at Missionary Ridge. Had all units attacked, the effect would have been less damaging than it was, because by attacking on a continuous front in a coordinate in-contact movement, all Confederate troops would have been engaged in their front and the density of fire could have been spread more evenly across the whole front and perhaps minimized the casualties.

After the assaults, the lines were separated by 40 to 100 yards. Generally, the Federal troops held the ground that they had taken and began to throw up rifle pits and breastworks. Each side was waiting in silence, but neither was willing to take the initiative. At 1:30 p.m. Meade ordered that all offensive operations be suspended. The battle of Cold Harbor thus ended. True to Grant's planning, on the night of June 12th, the Army of the Potomac pushed to its left, crossing the James River on its way to Petersburg and the beginning of the end.

Back to the question, how could the Confederates inflict such a costly defeat on the Army of the Potomac in such a short period of time? First, Lee had good intelligence and was able to react quickly to whatever Grant tried to do. Second, he enjoyed the advantage of interior lines by occupying the central position which permitted his rapid movement to prevent Grant from turning his right flank. Third, the defensive line that Lee constructed was well-made, continuous and fully manned with three corps of the Army of Northern Virginia. Fortifications were well sited and Lee made effective use of crossfire.

To be successful, Grant had to move quickly. He had the greater distance to travel, but his army wasted valuable time by poor staff work, and this ruined his opportunity. After the postponement of further attack at 5:00 p.m. on the 2nd, there was little reason to expect that Lee would not be ready for a frontal attack. He might have turned Lee's southern flank on the morning of the 2nd, if all of his troops had gotten into position, but they didn't.

Grant and Meade failed to insure that the corps' assaults were coordinated. Also, the failure of Wright's VI Corps to carry the attack forward permitted the enemy to concentrate its fire. Spotty artillery support for assaulting infantry failed to suppress the defensive fire. The V and IX Corps and the cavalry corps were irrelevant to the outcome, but there were 37,000 infantry not involved in the attack, so there was misuse of available resources.

The answer to the rhetorical question is: Confederates inflicted a costly defeat on the Federal forces in a short period of time by concentrating the highly lethal fire of rifled muskets, fired from behind well-constructed fortifications against poorly supported and indifferently led infantry assaults, basically in the open.

The Third Annual National Forum on Lincoln and the Union will be held in Washington, D.C. May 3-5. Speakers will include John Schildt on "The Birth of the Gettysburg Address," Howard Westwood on "Lincoln, Secession and Sam Houston," and Gen. Richard Lee on "The Federal Military in Washington." The program will also include a tour of the Washington area.

The registration fee is \$140 for Civil War Round Table Associates and \$160 for nonmembers (\$10 discount for registration before April 15). The fee includes all meals, sessions and tours, but not lodging. For further information, contact Civil War Round Table Associates, P.O. Box 7388, Little Rock, Arkansas 72217.



THE NEW BOOKS

(compiled by Dick Clark)

Foner, Eric. *Nothing but Freedom: Emancipation and its Legacy*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, c1983. \$14.95. The Walter Lynwood Fleming Lectures in Southern History.

Gienapp, William E. et al. *Essays on American Antebellum Politics, 1840-1860*. Introduction by Thomas J. Pressly, edited by Stephen E. Mazlish and John J. Kushma. College Station: Published for the University of Texas at Arlington by Texas A & M University Press, 1982. \$19.50.

Kidd, James Harvey. *Personal Recollections of a Cavalryman: With Custer's Michigan Cavalry Brigade in the Civil War*. Alexandria, Va.: Time-Life Books, 1983. \$19.95. Original of 1908.

King, Katherine Gray. *The Seven Gray Brothers of the Confederate Cavalry, 1861-1865*. Research-compiled by... Rochester, N.Y.? 1983. 116 p. pbk \$20.00.

Moore, Edward Alexander. *The Story of a Cannoneer under Stonewall Jackson*, in which is told the part taken by the Rockbridge Artillery in the Army of Northern Virginia. With introduction by Robert E. Lee, Jr., and Henry St. George Tucker. Alexandria, Va.: Time-Life Books, 1983. \$19.95. Original of 1907.

Owens, Harry P. and James J. Cooke, editors. *The Old South in the Crucible of War*. Essays by Emory M. Thomas... (et al.). Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1983. pbk \$7.50. Papers from the Seventh Annual Chancellor's Symposium on Southern History.

Tickets are still available for the concert of Civil War music which will be presented by the 1st Brigade Band of Milwaukee on April 14 from 2-5 p.m. at the Chicago Public Library Cultural Center. Tickets, \$4 for adults and \$2 for children, will be available at the April meeting or at the Abraham Lincoln Book Shop. They will not be available at the door.

The following cassette tapes of previous talks to The Round Table have been added to the list of those available published in previous newsletters.

30. "Senate Confrontation, November-December, 1860," (2/17/84) \$10.

31. Otto Eisenschiml, "An Unorthodox View of the Civil War," (6//16/55). This is a two-hour tape—\$10.

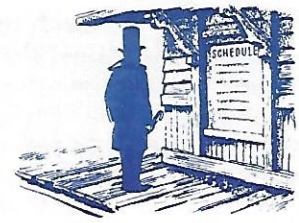
32. Otto Eisenschiml, "Ethics and the Civil War Historian," (9/15/61).

33. Glenn Tucker, "Chickamauga," (5/14/65).

Tapes are \$5 each (except as noted) and may be ordered at meetings or by mail from Research Center Committee Chairman Leslie MacDonald, 2744 W. Rascher Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60625. When ordering by mail, please include \$2 per order for postage and handing. Make checks payable to The Civil War Round Table.

As of September 1 the cost of tapes will increase to \$7 each (due to increased production costs). Buy now and save.

BULLETIN BOARD



Future meetings

Regular meetings are held at the Hotel Continental, 505 N. Michigan, the second Friday in each month, except as noted.

April 13: Richard McMurry on "John Bell Hood."

May 2-6: Battlefield Tour to Washington, D.C.

May 18: Walter N. Trenerry on "John Pope." **Note:** This is the third Friday of the month.

June 8: Dan Jordan on "John S. Mosby."

July 29: Picnic

New members

Thomas K. Chasteen, 1642 W. Greenleaf, Chicago, Illinois 60660 (312) 761-2321.

John C. Murphy, 1943 York Street, Blue Island, Illinois 60406 (312) 385-1388.

Patrick J. Ring, 67 Fenno Street, Revere, Massachusetts 02151.

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Changes of address

C. Robert Douglas, 2909 N. Sheridan Rd., Apt. 1401, Chicago, Illinois 60657 (312) 935-0631.

Richard J. Percy, 807 S. Adams, Westmont, Illinois 60559.

The publishers of *Civil War Times Illustrated* are offering five separate battlefield tours during 1984. The tour to Gettysburg, from May 9th through the 13th, will be guided by our own past president, Marshall Krolick. Also on the schedule are trips to Fredericksburg (April 26th-29th), a western battlefields tour (June 9th-16th), an eastern battlefields tour (October 13th-21st), and a review of the Peninsula Campaign (October 31st-November 4th). For additional information or to make reservations, contact Historical Times Travel, Box 8200, Harrisburg, PA 17105 or call 1-800-223-8907.

Charter memberships in The Friends of Virginia Civil War Parks are now being accepted; the cost is only \$10. The purpose of The Friends is to assist the present and future National Park Civil War Parks in Virginia, to protect and interpret their historical resources for the benefit of this and succeeding generations, and to promote the historical, scientific, educational and interpretive activities of the parks. The first formal meeting of the group will take place at 1 p.m. on Sunday, April 29 at the Fredericksburg Battlefield Visitor Center. At that time a board of directors and officers will be elected.

To become a member, send a check for \$10, payable to The Friends of Virginia Civil War Parks, to: Friends of Virginia Civil War Parks, c/o Dean F. Warner, Treasurer, P.O. Box 2358, Washington, D.C. 20013. For further information, contact Dean at (202) 275-1396 (business) or (703) 437-6284 (home). In you plan to attend the meeting on April 29, please contact Mrs. Cynthia Musselman, Route 7, Box 398, Stafford, Virginia 22554 by April 15.