

THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

Volume LII, Number 10

Chicago, Illinois

June 1992

Steven H. Newton on "Joseph E. Johnston: Politics, Ego, and Rationalization after the Battle of Seven Pines"

by Barbara Hughett

It was one hundred and thirty years ago (May 31-June 1, 1862) that movements by Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston and Union General George B. McClellan's Army of the Potomac resulted in an engagement about seven miles east of Richmond, Virginia, known in the South as the Battle of Seven Pines. (The Yankees called it Fair Oaks, the name of the area's railroad station.) Johnston's offensive was only marginally effective and what Douglas Southall Freeman termed "A Battle of Strange Errors" was, at best, a draw, with Confederate objectives not being realized. It was, however, as a result of Johnston's wounding at Seven Pines that Robert E. Lee was given command of the Army of Northern Virginia.



Steven H. Newton

The great irony of the Battle of Seven Pines was that such a phenomenally-mismanaged battle elevated the reputation of Johnston to such a point that the political opponents of President Jefferson Davis considered using him as the figurehead for a formal opposition party in the Confederate Congress. A loose association of unlikely individuals—including John Daniel of the *Richmond Examiner*, Tennessee Congressman Henry S. Foote, and Alabama fire-eater William L. Yancey—prodded the general in this direction during his convalescence in the summer of 1862, carefully fueling the twin fires of Johnston's ego and his professional ambition. The cabal flourished only briefly, the members drifting away in part because their personal differences were too great to be reconciled. The effects of Johnston's flirtation with the political opposition had a significant influence on his conduct of later military operations, not just his tempestuous relationship with President Davis. The mantle of the brilliant general wounded on the brink of victory rested uneasily on a foundation of rationalizations, half-truths, and factual distortions which kept Johnston from ever critically examining his own role in the Battle of Seven Pines.

"Joseph E. Johnston: Politics, Ego, and Rationalization after the Battle of Seven Pines" will be the topic of Steven H. Newton when he addresses The Civil War Round Table on June 12. Assistant professor of history and political science at Delaware State College, Newton received his



512th Regular Meeting

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Steven H. Newton on "Joseph E. Johnston: Politics, Ego, and Rationalization after the Battle of Seven Pines"

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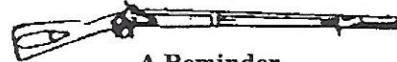
Friday, June 12, 1992

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Holiday Inn Mart Plaza
350 North Orleans Street
Buttons—15th floor

Cocktails at 5:30 p.m. Dinner at 6:30 p.m.
\$17.50 per person

Entree: Prime Rib of Beef, Orange Roughy,
or Fruit Plate



A Reminder

Please make your reservation by Wednesday, June 10. Mail the enclosed postcard or call the book shop at (312) 944-3085.

If you are driving and coming from the south, turn left into the Mart Plaza lot just after crossing the river on Orleans. From the north, turn right from Orleans on Hubbard, left on Kingsbury, right on Kinzie, and left into the Mart Plaza lot. Parking is free.

Ph.D. from The College of William and Mary and his M.A. from James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia. He is the author of *The Battle of Seven Pines* (1992) and *Joseph E. Johnston and the Defense of Richmond*, to be published in 1993 by the University of North Carolina Press.

Newton wrote "Yorktown" in the forthcoming book, *Jamestown, Yorktown, and Williamsburg During the Civil War*. He is also a platoon sergeant in a medical company in the Army National Guard in Virginia (in the "Stonewall Brigade"), and is engaged in research and writing on World War II and multi-cultural education.

THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE



Founded December 3, 1940
357 West Chicago Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60610
Phone: (312) 944-3085

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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 Dan Weinberg, 357 W. Chicago Ave., Chicago, IL 60610.



Mark E. Neely, Jr., The Round Table's 1989 Nevins-Freeman honoree and winner of the 1992 Pulitzer Prize in history, will become a professor of American studies and history in an endowed-chair position at St. Louis University this fall. For nearly twenty years, Neely has served as director of The Lincoln Museum in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

BATTLEFIELD PRESERVATION

☆ REPORT ☆

by Mary Abroe

As those of us who participated in the recent tour to Gettysburg are aware, the "national tower" remains a blight on the historic landscape. Legislation passed nearly two years ago (P.L. 101-377) enjoined the National Park Service to acquire specific properties within the borders of Gettysburg National Military Park; among these was the tower, which the Service has resolved to purchase and demolish. Unfortunately, P.L. 101-377 did not set aside monies for fulfilling its mandate; congressional appropriation of funds is required. Please write to Illinois Senators Alan Dixon and Paul Simon (Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510) and your congressman (House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515) and state your support for the provision of funding to carry out P.L. 101-377.

Additionally, should you choose to write to your senators and congressman, the letter can do double duty. Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan recently announced his intention to request \$10 million for his American Battlefield Protection Plan (inaugurated in 1990) in the federal budget for FY93; this is \$7.9 million more than the current budgetary allotment for the program. The nearly \$8 million in additional funding would be used to acquire land and easements at the twenty-five battlefields designated "more threatened" by Lujan. Since the keystone of this program is the promotion of *public-private partnerships* in battlefield preservation, the monies sought by Lujan would *not* be used directly by the federal government for land purchases but would assist state and local governments and private groups (e.g., corporations, foundations) in preservation efforts.

Letters to our representatives concerning Secretary Lujan's budget request *must* encourage them to indicate support for that request to *their own Appropriations Committee chairman*. Appropriations Committees control the purse strings; a senator's or congressman's advocacy of additional preservation monies *does no good unless* the respective Appropriations Committee chairman is so advised. For additional information on the American Battlefield Protection Program, write to: American Battlefield Protection Program, National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior, Interagency Resources Division, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, D.C. 20013-7127.

Meanwhile, another preservation initiative in which Secretary Lujan has been involved is taking shape and should be activated in the near future. Modeled after the successful federal fundraiser that drew \$350 million in private funds for the restoration of Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty, the Civil War Battlefield Foundation (previously known as the American Battlefield Protection Foundation) will solicit monies from private-sector sources—corporations, foundations, the general populace—for the purchase of land and/or easements on threatened fields where there is no federal presence, although privately-owned plots within the borders of existing national reservations may also fall within the scope of the Foundation's interest. Subsequent to purchase, ownership probably would be assumed by state-local governments or private preservation organizations (see "Battlefield Preservation Report," June 1991 Newsletter).

The foundation has been in the process of formation
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☪ MAY MEETING ☪

by Barbara Hughett

Port Hudson, Louisiana, located approximately twenty-five miles north of Baton Rouge, was first occupied by the Confederate Army in August 1862. It was important because it was the southern anchor on the Mississippi River, Vicksburg being its northern counterpart. "Port Hudson: The Best Photographed Civil War Battlefield" was the topic of historian Lawrence L. Hewitt when he spoke before 94 members and guests at the 511th regular meeting of The Civil War Round Table. Hewitt's talk was accompanied by the presentation of over seventy slides.

In mid-May 1863, Union General Nathaniel P. Banks moved down the Red River to attack Port Hudson from the north, while additional Union columns attacked from the south and east. The siege, which began on May 27, did not end until the Confederate garrison grounded arms on July 9. About 7500 Confederates had tied up more than 40,000 Union soldiers for over six weeks.

Hewitt talked about the reasons for Port Hudson's significance in Civil War history. The claim made in the title of his address is based on the more than 200 Civil War-era photographs of the Port Hudson battlefield that he has uncovered since he began his search fourteen years ago. These include the only known photograph of Confederate soldiers during a surrender ceremony and the only Civil War photograph that can be documented as having been taken during combat.

Port Hudson is also distinguished for seeing the first use of wire as an entanglement on a battlefield and for being the site of Admiral David G. Farragut's only defeat as a commander in his entire career. The Confederates at Port Hudson endured the worse conditions of any Civil War soldiers outside of prisoner-of-war camps. They reportedly ate rats, wood rats, and mules in order to survive.

The siege of Port Hudson, which Hewitt contends was the longest true siege in American military history, brought the performance of black soldiers to the forefront of the war effort. Though the attack on Fort Wagner has been more publicized (in books, statuary, and the movie *Glory*), the role of blacks at Port Hudson "was every bit as important and it happened two months earlier." It is Hewitt's conclusion that it was "the Confederates' dogged resistance on May 27, 1863, that brought about the participation of African-Americans in the war and prevented Banks from superseding Grant—thereby hastening the downfall of the Confederacy."

In evaluating the importance of the two Union victories at Port Hudson and Vicksburg, Hewitt called Port Hudson "a partner with Vicksburg—as important as Vicksburg with two exceptions: its commander, Nathaniel Banks, did not go on to win the war and become president, and secondly, Jefferson Davis made more public statements about going all out for Vicksburg."

"And what," Hewitt asked, "of Banks?" Though Banks had been defeated by Stonewall Jackson in the Shenandoah Valley in 1862, "of the three other Union generals in that campaign, only James Shields had fared better." Banks fought Jackson at Cedar Mountain in August of 1862 and almost defeated him. "At this point, the only general in the East with a better record was John Pope, but Jackson would take care of him by the end of the month."

Hewitt concluded his talk with this observation: "Had

Banks taken Port Hudson on May 27, he would have stood alone as the preeminent Union commander. His closest rival would not have been Ulysses S. Grant, but William S. Rosecrans, who had received the thanks of Congress on March 3, 1863, for his having managed not to lose the Battle of Murfreesboro two months earlier. You have to remember to discount what happened after May 26, 1863. Historians have argued that what enabled Grant to achieve his military greatness was his learning experience from Belmont to Vicksburg. Was Bank's record much different prior to the Red River campaign?"



SUMMER EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

President-elect Mary Abroe has announced that the summer meeting of the Executive Committee will be held on Saturday, July 18, beginning at 9:30 a.m., at Buttons, on the 15th floor of the Holiday Inn Mart Plaza, 350 North Orleans Street. All 1992-93 officers, committee chairpersons, and past presidents are urged to attend.

1993 Battlefield Tour

The Round Table Executive Committee, at its meeting on May 8, selected Vicksburg as the site for the 1993 battlefield tour. Barbara Hughett will serve as chairperson; Don Anderson will be co-chairperson. Mark your calendars for April 29-May 2, 1993.

Southern Illinois University Press and the Abraham Lincoln Association have announced the establishment of an annual manuscript competition for book-length non-fiction works on Abraham Lincoln and his era. The winner of the annual Abraham Lincoln Association Prize will receive a \$1000 cash award and a publication contract from SIU Press. The award will be given each year at the Association's February 12 banquet in Springfield. The deadline for submitting a manuscript this year is September 1. For additional information, write to the Editorial Director, SIU Press, P.O. Box 3697, Carbondale, Illinois 62902-3697.

John Y. Simon, recipient of The Round Table's 1985 Nevins-Freeman Award, delivered the Anne S.K. Brown Military Lecture at Brown University on April 24. His topic was "Forging a Commander: Ulysses S. Grant in the First Year of the Civil War." Simon also delivered an address on April 27, commemorating the 170th anniversary of the birth of Grant, at a ceremony at Grant's Tomb in New York City. The title of that address was "Enduring Grant."

(continued from page 2)

for a year. Its board of directors includes Gary Gallagher, James McPherson, and Frances Kennedy of the Conservation Fund's Civil War Battlefield Campaign, as well as prominent figures from the arenas of business and finance. With its staff apparently now in place after some initial turnover, we anticipate effective and, hopefully, expedient action from the Foundation.

The New Books

Compiled by C. Robert Douglas



- Davis, William C. *Jefferson Davis: The Man and His Hour*. Harper Collins. 1991. \$35.00.
- Gallagher, Gary W., ed. *The First Day at Gettysburg: Essays on Confederate and Union Leadership*. Kent State University Press. 1992. \$24.00.
- Gibbon, John. *The Artillerist's Manual*. Illustrated reprint of the second edition, revised. Morningside Bookshop. 1991. \$75.00. Original of 1863.
- Gooding, James H. *On the Altar of Freedom: A Black Soldier's Civil War Letters From the Front*. (54th Massachusetts). University of Massachusetts Press. 1991. \$21.95.
- Goodrich, Thomas. *Bloody Dawn: The Story of the Lawrence Massacre*. Kent State University Press. 1991. \$26.00.
- Gottschalk, Phil. *In Deadly Earnest: The First Missouri Brigade*. Foreword by Edwin C. Bearss. Missouri River Press. 1991. \$29.95.
- Hague, Parthenia A. *A Blockaded Family: Life in Southern Alabama During the Civil War*. University of Nebraska Press. 1991. Pbk. \$7.95.
- Heidorf, Christian J. *Gettysburg: The 125th Anniversary—What They Did Here*. Published by author. 1990. \$23.95.

The history of The Round Table, *The Civil War Round Table: Fifty Years of Scholarship and Fellowship*, by Barbara Hughett, is available for \$30 per copy. You may purchase the book at the monthly meeting or order it from Morningside Bookshop, 260 Oak Street, Dayton, Ohio 45401 (1-800-648-9710). Add \$2.50 for postage and handling.

To commemorate the 134th anniversary of the Lincoln-Douglas Freeport Debate, a life-sized statue sculpted by artist Lily Tolpo will be unveiled on August 27 at the site where the famous debate took place. A program, which will feature musical selections and prominent speakers, is being planned. An address will be given by Round Table founder Ralph G. Newman. For further information, contact Mickey Martin, 547 West Empire Street, Freeport, Illinois 61032, (815) 235-7464.

A plaque will be dedicated at the tomb of Union General George H. Thomas at Oakwood Cemetery in Troy, New York, on July 4. An address will be given by Brigadier General Harold Nelson, chief of military history for the United States Army. Ceremonies will begin at 10:00 a.m.

Schimmelfennig Boutique

In addition to The Round Table history, the following items are available at each monthly meeting:

Lapel pins \$3.00 each, two for \$5.00

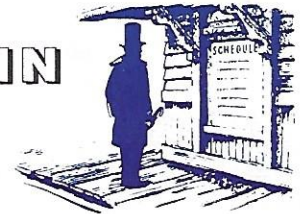
Mugs \$2.00 each, two for \$3.00

Meeting tapes \$7.00 each

Civil War Buff posters \$10.00 each

Proceeds from the sale of these items go to support the programs of The Civil War Round Table.

BULLETIN BOARD



FUTURE MEETINGS

Regular meetings are held at the Holiday Inn Mart Plaza, 350 N. Orleans (Buttons, 15th Floor), the second Friday in each month, except as noted.

June 12: Steven H. Newton on "Joseph E. Johnston: Rationalizations, Ego, and Politics After the Battle of Seven Pines."

July 18: Summer Executive Committee Meeting.

July 26: Annual Picnic.

September 11: Wiley Sword on "Who Speaks for the Dead? A Perspective on Franklin and Nashville."

October 9: Shelby Foote, Nevins-Freeman Address.

November 13: John Hennessy on "Second Manassas: Fresh Perspectives."

December 11: Peter Cozzens on "The Real Rock of Chickamauga: The Twenty-first Ohio on Horseshoe Ridge."

January 8: Brooks Davis on "Jefferson Davis and Abraham Lincoln as Commanders in Chief."

February 12: Brian Pohanka on "Digging into Custer's Last Stand: New Perspectives on the Little Big Horn."

March 12: Frank Byrne on "Civil War Prisons: Myths and Realities."

April 16: Frances Kennedy on "Community Benefits of Battlefield Preservation" (Please note: this is the **third** Friday of the month.)

April 29-May 2: Annual Battlefield Tour—Vicksburg.

May 14: William Piston on "Clio and the General: James Longstreet and the Writing of Southern History."

June 11: Carol Reardon on "The Image of Pickett's Charge in American History."

New Members

Frederick M. Bransfield, 850 N. Dewitt Place, #5-A, Chicago, IL 60611, (312) 787-4056

Angeline S. Higginson, 3750 N. Lake Shore Drive, Chicago, IL 60613, (312) 477-4166

Changes of Address

Teri Bentcover, 430 Skokie Road, Wilmette, IL 60091

Larry Selander, Keck, Mahin & Cate, 8300 Sears Tower, 233 S. Wacker Drive, Chicago, IL 60606

Jerry Warshaw, longtime Round Table member and sole proprietor of Gratis Arts, will receive the second annual Al Meyer Award, for outstanding service to The Civil War Round Table, at the June 12 meeting. The Executive Committee voted to bestow this award on Jerry at last summer's meeting.

The Round Table, at its May 8 Executive Committee meeting, voted to award Honorary Life memberships to two longtime members, Charles Wesselhoft and Gordon Whitney. The awards will be conferred at the June 12 meeting.