

# THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE



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Chicago, Illinois

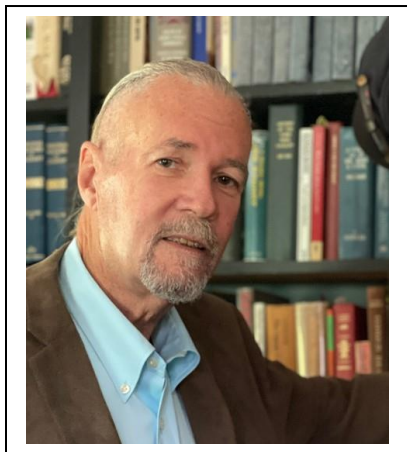
September 2023

820th REGULAR MEETING, Friday, September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2023

## Al Ovies on

# ***"The Boy Generals. George Custer, Wesley Merritt and the Cavalry of the Army of the Potomac"***

**Live/Zoom Meeting. Time: Sept. 8th, 2023, 07:30 PM CST.  
Zoom Option ID 845 3227 1496; No Passcode needed**



George Armstrong Custer's career has attracted its fair share of coverage, but most Custer-related studies focus on his decision-making and actions to the exclusion of other important factors, including his relationships with his fellow officers. Custer developed his tactical philosophy within the politically ridden atmosphere of the Army of the Potomac's Cavalry Corps. His relationship with his immediate superior, Wesley Merritt, was so acrimonious that even Custer's wife Libbie described him as her husband's "enemy."

*The Boy Generals* examines in detail the steadily deteriorating relationship of two cavalymen with opposing tactical philosophies, and how this relationship affected events in the field. Custer was a hussar, a firm believer in the shock power of the mounted saber charge, while Merritt was a dragoon, his tactics rooted in the belief that the purpose of the horse was to transport the trooper to the battlefield, where he could fight dismounted with his carbine. With these diametrically opposed belief systems, it was inevitable that these officers would clash. What has often been described as a spirited rivalry was in fact something much darker, an

association that moved from initial distaste to acrimony, and finally, outright insubordination on Custer's part.

Author Adolfo Ovies mined deeply Official Reports, regimental histories, and contemporary newspaper accounts, together with unpublished and little used primary sources of men who fought in their commands. This rich and satisfying study exposes the depths of one of the most dysfunctional and influential relationships in the Army of the Potomac and how it affected cavalry operations in the Eastern Theater. (from Amazon.com)

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## **Battlefield Preservation**

### **CWRT of Chicago 2022-23 Battlefield Preservation Report**

**Balance June 30, 2022** **\$4,709.04**

#### **Income**

Monthly Raffles	\$1,850.00*
Tour Raffle Proceeds	645.00
Tour Fundraising	2,120.00
Tour Book Sales	190.00
Book Sale (Sanderman legacy)	2,000.00
Donations	740.00
Interest on BPF Account	.59

**Total Income** **\$7,545.59**

\*(Includes \$400 Raffle proceeds from June 2022)

#### **Expenses/Donations**

Rich Mountain	\$1,500.00
Adams County Historical Society	500.00
Shenandoah Valley Battlefield Foundation	500.00
American Battlefield Trust	1,000.00

**Total Expenses/Donations** **\$3,500.00**

**Balance June 30, 2023** **\$8,754.63**

# June Presentation

By Mark Matranga

Mark Zimmerman presented The Civil War Round Table “*The Brutal Retreat from Nashville 1864*,” at its 819<sup>th</sup> Regular Meeting on June 9, 2023. This talk outlined the winter debacle suffered by John Bell Hood’s Army of Tennessee before Nashville in December 1864 and the retreat which followed it. After the capture of Atlanta in early September, Hood planned to interdict Sherman’s supply line by capturing Nashville and then marching to the Ohio River.

Unbeknownst to Hood, Sherman determined to march on Savannah and entrusted Thomas to hold Nashville. Hood’s aggressive strategy at Atlanta had cost his army dearly, leaving him with a force of some 30,000 effectives. After a missed opportunity at Spring Hill, Hood needlessly sacrificed his army at Franklin on November 30 before besieging Nashville in early December.

The Battle of Nashville fought December 15-16, 1864, is considered by most historians the most decisive of the Civil War. Indeed, Stanley Horn’s classic title on the battle is “*The Decisive Battle of Nashville*.” After waiting for the appropriate time to attack – too long for General in Chief U.S. Grant - the Rock of Chickamauga unleashed assaults on the poorly entrenched and freezing confederates which decimated their ranks and broke the Army of Tennessee into headlong retreat.

As the army retreated along the Granny White Pike the night of December 16, a battle took place at the Barricade, named for the obstruction troops built across the road. From there, the armies moved toward Franklin on multiple fronts, James Wilson’s Union cavalry in pursuit. Early on December 17 they clashed north of Franklin at Hollow Tree Gap and squared off later that day on the West Harpeth River south of Franklin. During the retreat through the town, Confederate Lieutenant General Stephen Lee was wounded and was forced to relinquish command.

After this series of battles, the armies moved through Spring Hill to Columbia on December 18, where Frank Cheatham’s rearguard met attacks north of town at Rutherford Creek. Deteriorating weather conditions kept the armies in place, with union forces facing additional problems due to exhaustion, degradation of horseflesh and delays in bringing up rations and pontoon trains. Hood’s army was dispirited but received a boost when Nathan Bedford Forrest arrived and was placed in command of the rearguard.

Hood moved his forces over the Duck River and south of Columbia the night of December 19-20. Over the next two days, the army marched 28 miles in bitter cold toward Pulaski. The Federals, meanwhile, refitted and received their pontoons, crossing the Duck the night of December 22. The next day, Wood’s IV Corps

confronted Forrest's pickets at Warfield Plantation, some five miles out of Columbia, driving his force into a gap in the hills further south where after a sharp skirmish the Federals halted. A more severe encounter took place at Richland Creek north of Pulaski on December 24, one that took up a good portion of the day.

Hood moved closer to Alabama; on Christmas Eve the main force was near Shoal Creek and the Tennessee River. But the rearguard remained in Tennessee where Forrest met Union forces at Anthony Hill on December 26 in what was likely the most significant engagement of the retreat. The day after Christmas, Hood's forces began to cross the river. Also on that day, and still north of the Alabama line, Forrest's men smashed into Federal trains at Sugar Creek.

The last Confederate forces crossed the Tennessee on December 28. Citing impassible roads and the difficulty in supplying the army, General Thomas issued orders ending the campaign. His army having retreated to Tupelo, Mississippi in January, Hood resigned and was replaced by Richard Taylor. About forty percent of the Army of Tennessee had been lost in the campaign; of the remainder, some surrendered at Mobile, others in North Carolina in 1865.

Although routed at Nashville, Hood's army was not destroyed. Despite being demoralized and beaten down, the Army of Tennessee executed a successful rearguard action for ten days over rugged terrain in bitterly cold weather. Union forces were vastly superior in number and ordnance but were unable to capture their foe. Yankee overconfidence was a possible cause, but weather, terrain, and superior confederate tactics were major factors.

Zimmerman delivered a thorough tactical review. But one is amazed at the persistence of the rebel soldier after the mauling at Nashville and the brutal conditions during the retreat. Tattered clothing, swollen frostbitten feet? The resiliency of these men just may be the heart of this story.



## **BULLETIN BOARD**

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*Our in-person meetings are currently held at:*

**Holiday Inn Oak Brook**

17W 350 22<sup>nd</sup> St., Oakbrook Terrace

*Parking at the Holiday Inn is FREE*

Dinner \$40.00 Members and Non- Members

Cocktails at 5:30, Dinner at 6:30

Presentation only is \$10 per person.

The **Kenosha Civil War Museum** is putting on the following in-person/virtual programs:

2nd Friday lecture, Sept. 8<sup>th</sup>, noon: Al Ottens (biographer of General Rawlins) on “The Grant-Rawlins Relationship: Some New and Surprising Revelations”

Sept 3<sup>rd</sup>: Opening day for the Civil War Museum's "Faith in the Fight" exhibit, running through June 30, 2024.

Sept. 23<sup>rd</sup>: Annual Great Lakes Civil War Forum. This year’s theme will be “Vicksburg is the Key.” Speakers include Tim Smith, Andrew Miller, Dr. Xukai Zou and our own **Rev. Bob Miller**.

For more on programs at the museum, visit <https://museums.kenosha.org/civilwar/events/>

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**Bruce Allardice** will speak on “The Vote to Win the War: The Election of 1864” September 10th at the Crown Point (IN) Public Library, to the new Northwest Indiana CWRT. See [www.civilwarbruce.com](http://www.civilwarbruce.com) for more.

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**Rob Girardi** will be speaking on September 6 to the Kankakee Valley CWRT (topic to be announced), September 19 to the Patty Turner Center on “The Civil War Generals,” and September 26<sup>th</sup> to the Woodstock Public Library on “The Murder of General William Nelson.” For more, visit [www. https://www.robtegirardi.com/](http://www.robtegirardi.com/).

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## More Upcoming Local Civil War Events

Check the **Announcements** section of the CWRT’s website for additional coming events.

Sept. 1st, Northern Illinois CWRT: **Jerry Allen** on "Old Abe, the War Eagle"

Sept. 7th, Milwaukee CWRT: Al Ovies on "The Boy Generals. George Custer, Wesley Merritt and the Cavalry of the Army of the Potomac"

Sept. 10th, Northwest Indiana CWRT: **Bruce Allardice** on "The Election of 1864"

Sept. 11th, Rock Valley CWRT: General George Meade Impersonator David Eiselle, "General Meade: Decision at Gettysburg"

Sept. 12th, McHenry County CWRT: Pat McCormick on "The North Anna"

Sept. 12th, Southwest Michigan CWRT: Curt Fields on "After Appomattox"

Sept. 16th, Salt Creek CWRT: **Jerry Allen** on "The 1st and 8th Wisconsin: Shadowy Secrets"

Sept. 19th, Lincoln-Davis CWRT: **Rob Girardi** on "General John E. Smith"

Sept. 23rd, Kenosha Civil War Museum: Annual Civil War Forum

Sept. 23rd: DuPage County Civil War and Militaria Show  
Sept. 28th, South Suburban CWRT: **Jon Sebastian** on "1864 Shenandoah"

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## **Future Chicago CWRT Meetings**

**Oct. 13th:** Carleton Young on "Two Vermont Brothers in the Army of the Potomac"

**Nov. 10th:** Ernest Dollar on "Hearts Torn Asunder: Trauma in the Civil War"

**Dec. 8th:** Scott Mingus on "Texans at Chickamauga"

**Jan. 12th, 2024:** Pat and Dylan Brennan on "Gettysburg in Color"

**Feb. 9th:** Harold Knudsen on "James Longstreet and the American Civil War"

**March 8th:** Chris Bryan on "The Union XII Corps"

**April 12th:** TBD

**May 10th:** Lynn and Julianne Herman on "The Allegheny Arsenal Explosion"

**June 14th:** Tim Smith (Nevins-Freeman Award) on "Vicksburg"

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The **Abraham Lincoln Book Shop's** facebook page airs "Take a Break with History", every first and third Friday of the month at 1 pm CST. Their next "House Divided" author interview is October 5<sup>th</sup>, 3:30 CST, with Steve Inskeep discussing his new book, Differ We Must: How Abraham Lincoln Succeeded in a Divided America. For more, visit <https://alincolinbookshop.com/>

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