

January 25, 2007

Civil War Music with Bob Summers

An After-Action report by Ron Vaughn.

There were 27 persons present for this first meeting of 2007. Bob Summers' presentation on Civil War Music was very entertaining. The discovery in the Salem Moravian Church Library of the preserved band books of the 26th North Carolina Regiment enables us to experience what Civil War music was like. Bands were one of the few entertainments available to soldiers. It was also important to army morale and recruiting.

Bob's talk focused on the song "Dixie". He played a tape of the original version of the song by Daniel Emmett. It was about Dan Weaver, "a gay deceiver" (of women). This was quite different than the very Southern patriotic version penned by General Albert Pike "To Arms for Dixie". The Union version was also played, "Way down South in the land of traitors, rattlesnakes, and alligators..." Needless to say, our Dr. Meux (aka Charles Baley) was quite upset by this rendition!

Incidentally, these last two songs were sung by a voice that seemed familiar to me, but I could not place it. However, Neil Kuykendall correctly identified the singer as Tennessee Ernie Ford --- a voice not heard in a long time. I had to leave before the end of the question and answer session, or I would have asked Bob if he had heard the World War I version of "Dixie", which goes in part: "In Kaiserland we'll take our stand, until we can the Kaiser."

February 22, 2007

A Party in Honor of George Washington

An After-Action Report by Ron Vaughn.

This George Washington Birthday Bash was "sold out - standing room" only! As the last person to arrive, I had no place to sit, until the waiters made arrangement. It was a great party - to bad the Clagues were snowed in at Shaver Lake.

Dr. Dave had a large Washington bust with party hat, along with a birthday cake. he read some excerpts from GW's letters and his Farewell Address to Congress.

Dave had asked me to show up in my Bicentennial outfit and read GW's Farewell Address to the Continental Army. At first I was reluctant to read such a wordy, very formal document, and a little weird because he spoke of himself in the third person. However, I realized the historical importance of the address - it forestalled a mutiny and takeover by the army of the Continental Government. Actually, it was not so much GW's words, but how human and sympathetic he became to the audience, when he had to struggle reading the address with spectacles. This brought many to tears, particularly when they thought of the sacrifices Washington had made for the country. Our nation could have gone the way of so many Latin American countries, with endless military dictatorships. Some wanted to make GW king. When King George III of England heard of Washington's retirement, he was amazed and declared George Washington to be the greatest man of their time.

Doris provided commentary of GW, relating to the Civil War, and Slavery; the Washington's owned over 300 slaves, but he came to view slavery as wrong. as President he declined to tackle the slavery issuer, however, for fear of disunion.

Robert shared more of GW's views on slavery: he would not sell off older, less useful slaves, because he did not want not break up their families.

Bill Head read an eulogy from a book by Joseph Ellis, in which were the immortal words, "He was first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his country."

March 29, 2007.

Religion in the Southern War Effort by Bill Head

An After-Action report by Ron Vaughn.

Twenty-four persons were present. It was reported that the 2007 Kearney Park Re-enactment will be

held October 27-28 and the annual CWRT conference will be held Nov. 7-9 in Las Vegas.

Tonight Bill head spoke about "The Effect of Religion on the Southern War Effort." It might have also been titled, religion Was One of the Causes of the War." Bill stated that although slavery existed in all 13 colonies (footnote: the Will of Rhode Islander Henry head, born 1642, bequeathed 4 Negro slaves to his wife and children), the Great Awakening, an evangelical revival in England and the Northeastern United States, an abolitionist sentiment developed. Decades before the Civil War there was serious dispute among the pastors of various denominations as to whether slavery was immoral or divinely ordained. Noted historian Sidney Ahlstrom wrote that "The pulpits resounded with increasing vehemence . . ." and James Woods, another scholar of the era, wrote, "At no time was organized religion more politically active than in the 20 years prior to the Civil War."

Also, religion, politics, and patriotism were intermixed. Many denominations split over the slavery issue in the years before the Civil War. In fact one might say that Southern churches seceded long before the Confederate States did so. In both North and South, there was widespread belief that God was on their side; whatever happened was the result of God's will. Early victories confirmed for Confederates that God was indeed assisting them, but the defeats at Vicksburg and Gettysburg shook this belief. Southern ministers explained this as punishment from a God that was judging the sins of the fighting man such as drunkenness and gambling. Many others said that God was holding the Confederacy accountable for the abuse of slaves by their owners.

There were many waves of revival that sweeps through the Union army, but it was felt more keenly among Confederates. The South used religion to keep morale up, so it can be argued that piety on both sides lengthened the war.

April 26, 2007

Irish in the Civil War with Dennis Kohlman
an After-Action Report by Ron Vaughn

Seventeen persons were present for our meeting. It was a special night, being Bryce Kykendall's 14th Birthday! In 1775 the first Irish arrived. They were Presbyterians, who settled on the Southern frontier. Others followed, so that by the 1840s, half of the immigrants to the USA were Irish. In 1855, Irish represented 28% of the population of New York City. Many Irish were shipped to the USA in "coffin ships", under conditions similar to Negro slaves, except not in chains. They suffered a high death toll from disease, poor housing and food. In the Northern cities, anti-Irish sentiments grew, and eventually took root in the nativist "Know Nothing" Party. Many No Nothings joined the Republican Party, while Irish became Democrats. Irish disliked the Abolitionists, as they feared the competition for jobs by free African-Americans. There was little anti-Irish sentiment in the agricultural South.

In Nov. 1851, the 69th regt. of New York state Militia was organized from Irish volunteers. Irish activist, Michael Cochran was elected Colonel. The unit voted not to march in a parade to honor visiting British Royalty. After the firing on Ft. Sumpter, the unit volunteered for three months service. Many other Irish regiments were formed for Federal service, but the Irish were under-represented in the Union Army. In contrast, there was no hesitation among Irish to enlist in the South. The Irish were the largest immigrant group in the Confederate Army. Many Southern Irish saw a parallel between Southern independence and Irish efforts to be independent. In the North, Catholic priests were for peace, while Southern priests were pro-Confederate.

Stories of Irish valor at Antietam and Fredricksburg are legend, but less well known is the equally heroic service of the Irish Confederates. The most notable were the rowdy Louisiana Tigers. Of the 16,000 troops under Stonewall Jackson in the Valley Campaign, 2,000 were Irish, who fought well. There were few predominantly Irish CS regiments, but many Irish companies of Irish in most Southern States.

May 31, 2007

Stephen Foster with Fred Bohmfalk

An After-Action Report by Ron Vaughn

Oh! Susanna, My Old Kentuck Home, Nelly was a Lady, Ring Ring de Banjo, Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair, Camptown Races, are the titles of but a few of the songs written by Stephen Collins Foster, America's most prolific composer.

Stephen Foster, the 9th of ten children born to William and Eliza Foster, was born just outside Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on July 4, 1826. As a young boy in an era before tax-supported public education he was privately tutored and then schooled at private academies.

Eventually Foster decided to make a living as a professional composer. Since copyright law did not yet exist Foster's decision was a courageous one. His income came solely from royalties based on the sales figures provided by publishers, some honest and some otherwise, and on the outright sale of his work. For Oh! Susanna he was paid \$100.

In 1850 he married Jane Denny MacDowell, of Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair fame. A year later their only child, a daughter, was born. He wrote for minstrel shows but unlike other composers of the time he humanized Africa-Americans. For example, Nelly Was a Lady was the lament of a slave for his dead wife. And his reference to the deceased as a "Lady" was provocative; the term was usually reserved for well-born white women.

Stephen Foster died January 13, 1864, tragically at the age of 37.

June 30, 2007

Alexander Oden of Georgia by Charles Baley

An After-Action Report by Ron Vaughn

Our 2nd gathering at the Clague's cabin at Shaver Lake was an enjoyable day - good food, good company, great hospitality and environment.

It was pointed out that the date was the wedding anniversary of R. E. Lee and Mary Custis. It was also the 33rd anniversary for my Linda and me.

Our program was Charles Baley's story of his Civil War relative, Pvt. Alexander Oden. Alexander was born in 1841 in Cass County, Ga, which was later changed to Bartow County. Like many rural boys, he attended school age 9 and 10, then "was promoted to the cornfield" of the family farm.

He attended the Methodist Church - South (as Bill Head pointed out - some Southern churches seceded long before the Civil War began. Alexander became a licensed "Extorter", a form of preacher. When the war commenced, he thought he would be exempt from the draft.

However, President Davis vetoed the exemption, so Alexander joined the 40th GA infantry. The regiment wound up in Stevenson's Div., under Pemberton. You all know the end of that story! he was paroled and returned to GA, but Sherman's March to the Sea rounded him up and sent him north of the Ohio River to prisons until the war's end.

After the war, he returned to preaching, and eventually came to Fresno in the 1870s, preaching as a circuit rider. He died in 1916 and was buried in the Clovis cemetery.

July 2007.

No meeting.

August 30, 1007

The Gatling Gun with Dr. Joe Wagoner
An After-Action Report by Ron Vaughn

Our first ever (or first in a long time) August meeting had an attendance of 26 persons, including several first timers, some from Tulare County even! Advertising or getting a little PR actually works! Good job Shaun.

Our speaker was Dr. Joe Wagoner, a retired orthopedic MD from UCLA. His topic was The Gatling Gun. he gave a very interesting program, using Power Point with several movie clips. He said his presentation was based on the movie matinées of his youth - An Overture: "Dixie" with pictures of Lee's surrender. A Cartoon: 4 minute clip of the 3 Stooges in CSA uniforms. A Short Subject: Some pictures of the CSA Hunley. Then the Main feature: Dr. Richard Gatling and his invention.

However, it was not until 8:45 that he began to talk about Dr. Gatling. he was born on a farm in North Carolina. As a young man he enjoyed inventing farm machinery, such as a steam driven plow. He went to medical school, but soon abandoned his practice. He held strong Pacifist views, and invented his Gun for humanitarian reasons: He believed that his rapid fire weapon would supplant the need for large armies and make war impracticable.

Dr. Wagoner spoke of other doctors in history who have invented killing machines: Dr. Guillotine, and Dr. Kevorkian. Then he talked about General Custer and showed pictures of his memorials and also those of Chief Crazy Horse. he mentioned that Custer had two Gatlings available to him in 1876, but left them behind due to the difficulty of moving them over rough terrain. We then viewed a clip about guns that tamed the West: Most settlers and farmers used a shotgun for hunting and protection, rather than the more famous and glamorous Colt Peacemaker and the Winchester.

He returned to the subject of how General of the US ordinance Dept. Ripley, had old-fashioned ideas, and rejected Dr. Gatling's gun. However, General Ben Butler, who is often criticized for his poor generalship - was smart enough to recognize a good thing when he saw one - and purchased with his own money, 12 Gatlings for \$12,000. These guns were used during the Petersburg siege. At one point, Wagoner also told us that one can purchase a reproduction working Gatling for \$10,000! Some things are cheaper today!

Dr. Wagoner discussed other machine guns: the first being Leonardo daVinci's rapid fire design; the Vandenburg Volley gun; the Requa Battery, the Agar Gun; the Confederate Williams Gun; those used in the Spanish-American War; those on Black Hawk and Warthog helicopters as well as navy vessels and air craft carriers.

September 27, 2007

General Wade Hampton with Phil Avila
An After-Action Report by Ron Vaughn.

There were 20 persons present at the Ramada Inn to listen to Phil Avila's talk on General Wade Hampton. He reported that the first Hamptons arrived in Virginia in 1620. By the Civil War, the family had amassed wealth and estates stretching from South Carolina to the Mississippi River.

Future Confederate General Wade Hampton III was born March 28, 1818, in an historic Charleston House, into the wealthiest family in the South. Young Wade was no spoiled rich kid. He was tall and strong, and allegedly killed 80 bears with only a knife! He graduated from S. Carolina College. In 18521 he was elected to the South Carolina State Assembly and to the U.S. Senate in 1860. There he gave an impressive speech against renewing the importation of slaves.

Wade Hampton was also against secession, but when wear broke out, he resigned and joined his state's forces as a private. South Carolina's Governor insisted that he accept the rank of colonel and form a regiment. he did so, using his own money to raise and equip a unit known as Hampton's Legion --- 8 infantry companies, 4 of cavalry, and a battery of artillery. he paid for the importation from Britain of 6 cannons and 400 rifles.

At 1st Manassas, Hampton's Legion assisted Jackson on Henry House Hill and helped turn the tide.

After the Peninsula campaign, Lee set up two brigades of cavalry and appointed Hampton to command one of them. Wade told Lee he wanted to command infantry, but would "temporarily" take the cavalry assignment. After Stuart's death, he commanded the cavalry of the Army of Northern Virginia until the end of the war.

Hampton lost his entire fortune in the war. In the post-war years a collection was taken to buy a house for him to live in. He spoke out against the carpet baggers and entered the 1876 race for Governor of a still occupied South Carolina. Surprisingly, he defeated the Republican candidate because his ex-slaves said he had been a good master who treated them fairly. As a result thirty percent of the Freedmen in the state voted for him.

In 1880 he was elected to the U.S. Senate. Later he became president of a railroad. He passed away on April 11, 1902, at the age of eighty-four.

October 25, 2007.

The "Rashomon at Spring Hill" with Jim Stanbery

An After-Action Report by Ron Vaughn.

Twenty-two persons were present and the majority voted to continue meeting at Ramada. Professor Jim Stanbery of Los Angeles Harbor College gave another of his always great presentations, this time on "The Lost Opportunity at Spring Hill." He stated it is the common belief that CSA John Bell Hood bungled (partly due to overindulgence of alcohol and laudanum) the chance to cut off Gen. John M. Schofield's army, destroy it, and then race to Nashville. Jim dispelled many myths about this campaign.

First of all, there is no contemporary evidence or commentary that Hood abused substances on that night or any other.

Second, Hood did not have a master plan to win a race to Nashville. His objective was to defeat Union forces in detail if possible, or force them to make costly attacks on his army.

Third, the blame for failure to achieve success at Spring Hill seems to lie with generals other than Hood. Hood had personally led troops into position and given orders to have forces in place north and south of Spring Hill. However, there were no Confederate troops within stones throw of the pike when Schofield passed during the night because Gen. Cheatham did not comply and did not inform Hood of the true disposition of troops. Also, General Nathan Bedford Forrest was a great raider and fighter, but deficient in doing proper reconnaissance and sending intelligence reports to Hood. He did not send patrols on the road south of town, nor report enemy movements to the north.

Fourth, even if Hood had cut the roads to the west, Schofield would not be "cutoff." There were other roads to the west, which could take an army north. Also, even if trapped, he could have dug in and made a good defense.

November 29, 2007

No meeting.

December 27, 2007

No meeting.