

The Washington Volunteer PUGET SOUND CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE ... JUNE 2009

MEETING: Thursday, June 4, 2009

China Harbor, 2040 Westlake Avenue North, Seattle, Washington

MENU CHOICES: Mongolian Beef or Salmon

Dinner includes: salad, vegetable delight, General Tao's chicken, fried rice and fresh fruit. Cost is \$21, payable at the door. Social hour at 6 p.m.; dinner served at 7 p.m.; program at 8 p.m. Call **Charlie Ernst at 206-283-9469** or email him at **namchecharlie@yahoo.com** to make reservations. **Deadline for reservations is noon on June 2.** ☞

MARC LEEPSON DISCUSSES BATTLE OF MONOCACY

June 4, 2009. (NOTE THE EXTRA MEETING SPECIALLY SCHEDULED FOR THE FIRST THURSDAY IN JUNE.) Marc Leepson will discuss the July 1864 Battle of Monocacy, where Lew Wallace's outnumbered Federals faced Jubal Early's Confederates bearing down on Washington. Mr. Leepson, a college history teacher and free-lance writer from Virginia, is the author of *Desperate Engagement (The Battle of Monocacy)*, *Flag: An American Biography*, *Saving Monticello*, a *Dictionary of the Vietnam War*, and many other publications. He has appeared on The History Channel, NPR, CNN, Fox News, and many other stations.

NOTE: Remember to turn off cell phones before the meeting so there are no distractions for the speaker.

PRESIDENT'S CORNER: JUNE 2009 – A Good Year!

It's hard to believe we have come down to our last meeting of the 2008-2009 Civil War Round Table season. It has been a good year- really good speakers and presentations and also growth as new members have come on board. In my first year as president I have grown too. My thanks to you for all of your support- not only to me but to our organization as a whole. I've learned that the Round Table works because all of us use our energy, time and commitment to one another to make it work. Being president has not been as easy as I thought it would be, but at the same time the support I've gotten from the officers and board has been incredible. Without them, we would not be able to function. I have to mention member John Hinds who lives in Texas. Last fall, John initiated a fundraiser that you all participated in and which really has helped us to improve our budget. And then, John sent several items for our auction to help raise more funds. Speaking of our auction, we raised almost twice as much as last year- my thanks to all those who took part and bid on items. Pat Brady is enthusiastically working hard to put together an even better series of presentations for next year.

But don't forget that we have a June meeting. Remember it is one week earlier-Thursday, June 4th! It should be excellent. I'll see you there, and I wish you all a wonderful summer!

God bless you,

Mark Terry

Maps key to Union victories

Gordon Berg, SPECIAL TO THE WASHINGTON TIMES

During the first months of the Civil War, detailed topographical maps were in short supply for both Union and Confederate commanders.

What maps did exist often proved inaccurate, out of date or unsuitable for military purposes. Often as not, commanders found themselves in the predicament of Confederate Brig. Gen. Richard Taylor, who complained during the 1862 Peninsula Campaign in Virginia, "The Confederate commanders knew no more about the topography of the country than they did about Central Africa." Union Gens. William S. Rosecrans, George H. Thomas and William T. Sherman understood the importance of maps and used them extensively from their earliest campaigns. They integrated the work of topographical engineers into the total war-making capabilities of their commands, and the Army of the Cumberland would become known for the excellence of the men who mapped its way to victory after victory in the West.

Confronting Bragg

Maps played a role in one of the first Union victories of the war. After the battle of Mill Springs, Ky., on Jan. 19, 1862, Thomas learned that Union forces attempting to link up with him were operating with a map of the area that used place names different from his. This problem kept fresh troops from reaching Thomas in time to vigorously pursue the beaten Confederates.

Thomas' skill in drawing maps has largely gone unnoticed. He kept his own pocket map journal and recorded the topography of the countryside where he was fighting. He drew a map on one page; on the opposite page, he kept notes on road conditions, depth of fords, the height of hills and mountains and other information that might be useful for successful military campaigning. In the winter of 1862-63, Rosecrans assumed command of the newly created Army of the Cumberland. Before the war, he had spent 10 years with the Engineer Corps, and he knew the value of accurate maps.

When the Army set off from Nashville, Tenn., in December to confront Confederate Maj. Gen. Braxton Bragg's Army of Tennessee, encamped near Murfreesboro, Tenn., Col. Horace N. Fisher rode ahead of the Union columns to question farmers about local conditions and the whereabouts of the Confederate forces.

Fisher was not a trained topographer, but he used his notes and personal observations to draw a preliminary or key map of the area around Stones River on Dec. 29. The map helped Rosecrans visualize the topography over which he would fight and defeat Bragg two days later.

William Emory Merrill

During the six months the Army of the Cumberland remained encamped around Murfreesboro, Rosecrans and Thomas fundamentally changed the process of military mapmaking. No longer would it be the occasional work of gifted amateurs. General Orders 124, issued May 31, 1863, announced that Capt. William Emory Merrill was then in charge of the topographical department.

Merrill was a West Point-trained engineer who had graduated first in the class of 1859. He immediately required each brigade and division topographer to report every week, providing "copies of all special maps and reconnaissance (complete or not) made by him or under his direction, including all verbal or written topographical information." This enabled Merrill to produce and distribute accurate maps.

All officers were required to assist the topographical engineers and not assign them to other duties while they carried out their mapmaking assignments.

Merrill left nothing to chance. He required that all maps be drawn on paper ruled with 1-inch squares. Transferring information from existing maps was to be done only in lead pencil, and new information and corrections were to be entered using colored pencils. He admonished his topographers to letter distinctly and required that the magnetic meridian and scale appear on every map.

Department headquarters produced the finished product, known as an information map. Merrill even issued a field sketchbook containing symbols for good wagon roads and bad, footpaths, rivers, creeks, marshes, towns, buildings and other items that should appear on a good military map.

Ambrose Bierce

About the time Merrill became chief topographical officer, a 20-year-old sergeant serving in the 9th Indiana Infantry traded in his musket for a sextant, compass and drawing pencils. Ambrose Gwinnett Bierce, who would become a famous short-story writer after the war, became acting topographical officer on the staff of Brig. Gen. William B. Hazen.

In an 1883 short story, Bierce described the duties of a typical topographical officer: "Whether in camps or on the march, in barracks, in tents, or in bivouac, my duties as topographical engineer kept me working like a beaver all day in the saddle and half the night at my drawing table, platting my surveys. It was hazardous work."

When Rosecrans finally began to maneuver Bragg out of middle Tennessee in June 1862, maps produced by his topographical engineers enabled commanders to study the roads leading to the Tennessee River, calculate their capacities and limitations, and pinpoint locations where they could find water and forage.

By the time Union forces reached Chattanooga, mapmaking for the Army of the Cumberland had become an integral part of its war-making capability. In his report of the campaign, Rosecrans paid tribute to "the ability of Capt. W.E. Merrill, engineer, whose successful collection and embodiment of topographical information, rapidly printed by Capt. William C. Margedant's quick process, and distributed to corps and division commanders, has already contributed very greatly to the ease and success of our movements over a country of difficult and hitherto unknown topography."

Old Rosy's days were numbered, however. After the humiliating defeat at Chickamauga, Ga., in September 1863, Rosecrans allowed the Confederates to trap his tired and hungry army in Chattanooga. Maj. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant arrived on the scene and relieved Rosecrans of his command.

Sherman's men

When Grant went east in March 1864 to assume command of all Union armies, his close friend, Sherman, took charge in the West. In his memoirs, Sherman wrote that his saddlebags always contained four essential items: "a change of underclothing, a flask of whiskey, cigars, and my maps." Sherman knew that the topographical engineers of the Army of the Cumberland were superior to those in any other army, and he used them in all his campaigns through the end of the

war.

Sherman came to rely upon an odd assortment of men to guide his army and keep a visual record of his campaigns. Capt. Robert McDowell of the 141st New York mapped the progress of the 20th Corps in northern Georgia. Gen. Oliver O. Howard, commanding the 14th Corps, commended Maj. Francis Mohrhardt, originally with the 15th Missouri Infantry, for mapping the countryside through which that corps marched. Margedant, of the 10th Ohio Infantry, developed a facsimile photo-printing light box containing several chemical baths that produced white-on-black maps when exposed to the sun.

Pvts. Lucius T. Stanley and Rodney T. Harris of the 107th New York were clerks in their regiment with an almost invisible record of service until they were detached to the topographical unit. Neither revealed an aptitude for mapmaking skills in civilian life, but their talents blossomed in the hard red clay of northern Georgia.

Stanley's job was to gather topographical information, sketch a map, copy it and distribute updated sketch maps to all commanders. Harris mapped the march of the 20th Corps from Atlanta to the sea on wallpaper-weight paper or heavy linen, using pencils, ink and watercolors.

Sgt. Nathan Finegan of the 1st Ohio Cavalry painted signs, frescoes and portraits before the war. He excelled in gathering information. Sherman actually delayed the start of his campaign to give Finegan sufficient time to question the spies, scouts, refugees, travelers, prisoners, doctors, itinerant preachers, peddlers and others who often supplied the critical tidbits of information that could mean the difference between a poor military map and a good one.

Sherman, like Rosecrans, emphasized the importance of maps to all his commanders. Special Field Orders 15 of May 31, 1864, listed guidelines "to secure the rapid and efficient co-working of the topographical engineer departments of the army in the field."

According to Sherman's order, the duty of topographical engineers was "making purely military surveys." When on the move, they would survey the route of their commands. When the army halted, these surveys would be consolidated and new maps issued. Finally, Sherman ordered all commanders to assist their topographical engineers in order to "secure the data from which to compile, at the earliest moment, maps which are indispensably necessary in military movements."

Atlanta campaign

Behind the success of all of the Army's mapmakers loomed Merrill's commanding figure. The map he drew of northern Georgia in the winter of 1863-64, using James R. Butt's Map of the State of Georgia as a guide, became the base map for the entire Atlanta campaign.

Sherman insisted that all of his commanders have the same map, and he gave Merrill just two days to make 200 copies of the huge original. Merrill immediately cut the map into 16 sections and divided them among the draftsmen, who worked night and day until all 16 sections had been traced on thin paper in autographic ink.

When four adjacent sections were finished, they were transferred to lithographic stones and printed. Then the map-mounters took over and transferred the drawings onto cloth that could be folded. Cavalry officers received maps printed directly on muslin that could be folded easily into saddlebags and washed when dirty. After the war, Merrill proudly boasted "that the army that General Sherman led to Atlanta was the best supplied with maps of any that fought in the Civil War."

As the Union juggernaut moved on to the critical battle for Atlanta, Merrill issued orders for troops to seize maps in county clerks' offices and for cavalry patrols to round up local surveyors and engineers to get their maps.

Advancing troopers stopped at local residences to ask for their township and section number. This enabled the new area maps to be drawn on a grid pattern. For the first time, commanders could use map coordinates and refer to positions using a system of numbers. Merrill knew that "in this manner we can obtain fixed points and thus obviate one of the greatest difficulties in mapping a new country."

Battle of Nashville

While Sherman took the best mapmakers with him on his march to the sea and through the Carolinas, Merrill returned to Nashville. There, he prepared the maps Thomas would use at the decisive Battle of Nashville in December 1864. After the war, Merrill remained with the Army Corps of Engineers and was chief engineer on the construction of locks and canals on the Ohio River below Pittsburgh. He died in 1891 at the age of 54.

Perhaps Gen. Orlando Poe's report of the Atlanta Campaign best sums up the

contribution made by topographical engineers. "The topographical branch of the engineer department worked efficiently. ... I can only return my thanks to those officers and volunteers who did nearly all the topographical work. They did their duty and did it well."

Gordon Berg is former president of the Civil War Round Table of the District of Columbia.

The editor of *The Washington Volunteer* would like to thank three members for making the monthly publication of the newsletter a success. My predecessor, Sylva Coppock, "showed me the ropes" of putting together this publication. Whenever I ran into technical difficulties she was always accessible as a consultant and constantly had a "can do" attitude for fixing a problem. Other thanks goes to John Hinds who emailed me a monthly stream of interesting civil war related articles most of which I have used in the newsletter. Finally, our current president, Mark Terry, has made his monthly "President's Corner" a real treat to read.

If you have been receiving the newsletter by regular mail and now have an email address please let Charles Ernst know what is your email address so we can keep down the cost of postage. Thank you.

DEADLINE FOR THE SEPTEMBER NEWSLETTER

Send any news items for the September issue of The Washington Volunteer sent to Rick Solomon (ricksolo@integraonline.com) no later than August 28, 2009.

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Puget Sound Civil War Round Table meets on the second Thursday of each month, September through May. The PSCWRT is a 501c3 organization, and as such, donations you make to the organization are tax deductible.

Membership Dues

Dues are \$20 for an individual and \$25 for a couple. You can mail your dues to the PSCWRT, c/o Stephen Pierce, 8008 190th Street SW, Edmonds, WA 98026. **Questions**