



THE NORTHERN ILLINOIS CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

THE drum roll

Volume 38

Number 8

April 3, 2020

In accordance with COVID-19 guidance as to social distancing and the closing of public venues, the April 3rd meeting has been cancelled. Hopefully, the Round Table will reconvene in May, but we will keep you posted.

During this time, we hope you and your families remain safe and healthy.

This newsletter contains no upcoming events as the venues such as the libraries for Saturday discussions and the location of the Women's Book Club have not given projected re-opening dates, yet. The Kenosha Civil War Museum anticipates opening April 3rd, but has not updated their calendar. And, of course, that date could change. Those that attend other Round Tables will have to check on the status of their venues as the month goes on.

SAVE THE DATE

The annual banquet at the Concorde Banquets in Kildeer is still scheduled to take place.

Information will be sent out in late April or with the May newsletter. If it becomes necessary to make changes, you will be notified as soon as that information is received.

Our speaker will be President Abraham Lincoln (Max Daniels) presenting a presidential press conference.

Mysteries of the CSS Hunley by Denise Limburg

At the March 6th meeting, Bruce Allardice spoke about the CSS Hunley. His presentation began with video clips of the movie on the Hunley with demonstrated the cramped quarters in which the crews operated. Originally, it was envisioned that the submarine would be battery-powered. But the batteries could not produce the power needed. Bruce went on to talk about the three Hunley tragedies.

The first trial resulted in a pier side incident that drowned all the crew except John Payne. He had survived only because he was in the conning tower when the submarine filled with water.

The second trial had Horace Hunley at the controls. The sub dove and never resurfaced. It is believed that this incident was caused by pilot error.

The final tragedy occurred when Lt. George Dixon and his crew approached the USS Housatonic. The CSS Hunley fired its spar striking and sinking the Housatonic. This gave the Hunley the notoriety of being the first submarine to sink an enemy warship.

The CSS Hunley was raised from Charleston Harbor on 1995. The crewmen were all at their stations. This seems to prove the consensus that the men ran out of oxygen and fell into unconsciousness. There is a theory that the men died from the concussion of the explosion, but tests have not proved that. Bruce said that information on the tests that were done on the crew members can be found on the U.S. Navy website.

Bruce had several items on display from his trip to Charleston.

On behalf of the Round Table, thank you, Bruce, for another great program.

KELLY'S FORD by Pat McCormick

With St. Patrick's Day just having passed, I am reminded of a small but significant action fought on March 17, 1863: The cavalry clash at Kelly's Ford, on the Rappahannock River in Virginia.

The Eastern Theater would eventually see a great many significant cavalry encounters: Brandy Station, the Gettysburg campaign, Yellow Tavern, Trevilian Station, and a host of others. However, prior to March of 1863, the East saw no cavalry actions where so much as a brigade of troopers on each side clashed. This was due, in large part, to the early-war Union organization, which usually parceled cavalry out in dribbles. Meanwhile, the Confederates concentrated their riders under Jeb Stuart. These brigades operated separately when necessary, but often together. Combined with the generally superior quality of both leadership and rank-and-file in the Rebel cavalry, the gray horsemen had things pretty much their own way for the first two years of the war.

Things began to change when Joseph Hooker took command of the Army of the Potomac in the winter of 1863. One of his chief reforms, and probably the most needed one, was the concentration of the army's cavalry into a single corps under George Stoneman. One of the divisions in the new corps was commanded by William W. Averell; his old friend and West Point classmate, Fitzhugh Lee (one of Robert E. Lee's nephews), commanded one of Jeb Stuart's brigades.

In late February, Fitz Lee raided north of the Rappahannock; during the Federal pursuit, some 150 Union prisoners were taken from Averell's command. Hooker was outraged, and threatened to cashier Stoneman if such exploits could not be counteracted. Meanwhile, Lee was sending messages across the river, taunting his old classmate Averell. One such missive read: "I wish you would put up your sword, leave my state, and go home. You ride a good horse, I ride a better. If you won't go home, return my visit, and bring me a sack of coffee."

A few weeks later, Averell's scouts reported Lee in the vicinity of Culpeper Court House. It was time to "return the visit." On the morning of March 17, Averell's three brigades – under Alfred Duffie, John McIntosh and Marcus A. Reno (that last name sound familiar to anyone?) reached Kelly's Ford. Made cautious by the effective delaying action of about 60 well-situated Rebel troopers at the ford itself, Averell took a couple of hours to cross his 2,100 riders and six cannon. Once across, the Union commander moved about 2 miles inland and set up a defensive perimeter. Rather than boldly looking for the enemy, Averell would let Lee come to him.

And come he would. Concerned that Averell was targeting the Orange and Alexandria Railroad, Fitz Lee advanced his 800-man brigade to challenge the intruders. Coincidentally, Jeb Stuart happened to be at Culpeper Court House that morning, on court martial duty. He and his artillery chief, Major John Pelham, trailed Lee's departure, planning to observe the proceedings. (Pelham's previous exploits had earned him the nickname of "The Gallant Pelham;" his most impressive performance thus far was at Fredericksburg, where with just two artillery pieces he had held up the Union advance of Franklin's wing by a full hour.)

The initial Confederate advance did not go well, with the 2nd Virginia Cavalry being thrown back at the outset. Lee then attacked with all five of his regiments; when the 5th and 3rd Virginia confronted Yankees behind a stone wall, Pelham impulsively joined the charge. As the boyish major urged the Southern riders through a gate in the fence, he was felled by a shellburst just over his head. Stuart's horse artillery had lost its gallant leader.

As Lee pressed the attack, Averell's strict orders were to hold the defenses, but no more than that. Brigade commander Alfred Duffie, however – without authorization – counterattacked from his position on the left of the Union line. This threw Lee back in confusion, and a Confederate attempt at a counterstrike was hurled back. A general Union attack at this point might have completely crumpled the Rebel cavalymen, but the other two Federal brigade commanders held tight to their positions.

It had been more than 12 hours since Averell had forced his way across Kelly's Ford (much of that time was, of course, before the actual battle) and, although he had roughly handled his old friend's brigade, Averell felt that his force was too fatigued to press the issue further, and withdrew. (The presence of Stuart on the battlefield may also have given Averell pause; he had no idea where the rest of Stuart's corps was, and for all he knew they may have been nearby.) The Union commander left two wounded Confederate officers behind him, as well as a sack of coffee and this note: "Dear Fitz, Here's your coffee. Here's your visit. How do you like it?"

The blue troopers got the better of the actual fighting, inflicting 133 Confederate casualties to 78 of their own; of course, John Pelham was by far the most significant Southern loss. Since the Confederates eventually held the field, they could claim victory. But in this battle, victory was beside the point. For the first time, Union cavalymen in the East had held their own against Jeb Stuart's fabled legions. From this initial spark, the Union troopers' confidence would spread through the following spring and summer and continue to build through the remainder of the war – resulting first in parity with, and eventually superiority to, their Rebel counterparts.



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Appointed Positions

Book Raffle	Charles Banks
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March Book Raffle

The winners of the March book raffle were David Noe, who won *Antietam: The Soldier's Battle* by John Michael Priest; Susan Hirsch, who won *From Manassas to Appomattox* by General James Longstreet; Charlie Banks, who won *So Far From God* by John S.D. Eisenhower; Fred Reczkowicz, who won *From Winchester to Cedar Creek* by Jeffrey D. Wert; and Mike Brown, who won *Abraham Lincoln: An Illustrated Biography* by Alexander Eliot.

Congratulations to the winners and thank you To the donors.

2019-2020 SPEAKERS

May 1
June 5

Kathyrin Harris
Max Daniels

Harriet Tubman
President Lincoln: A Press Conference



To learn more about the Northern Illinois Civil War Round Table
visit our website at www.northernilcwr.org