



THE NORTHERN ILLINOIS CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

THE drum roll

365th Regular Meeting

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The Fate of the Western Confederacy

Leonidas Polk and Kentucky in 1861



In the opening stages of the Civil War, control of the border states was of paramount importance to both sides. Kentucky was deemed indispensable for the defense of the Confederacy, as well as for the safety and success of the Union effort in the West. Command of the defenses in the West fell to Confederate general Leonidas Polk, a West Point graduate, and Episcopal bishop. His dual role made him unique; it gave him a protective shield against criticism and his friendship with Jefferson Davis gave him a decided advantage over his peers. Polk was placed in command of the Mississippi Valley Department during the summer of 1861. His decision to invade Kentucky and seize the heights at Columbus has earned him the blame for the violation of Kentucky's neutrality, a move which drove that state into the Union side, and according to some historians, sealed the fate of the Confederacy. Is this accurate or fair? A closer examination of the facts and events will answer the questions.

Rob Girardi earned his M.A. in Public History at Loyola University in 1991. He is a past president of the Civil War Round Table of Chicago, a fellow of the company of Military Historians and is an associate member of the Sons of Union Veterans. He is a member of the Board of Directors of the Illinois State Historical Society and has been on the editorial review board of the *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* since 2009. He has consulted for the Chicago Historical Society and the Bureau County Historical Society. In 2013 he joined the board of

Directors for the Camp Douglas Restoration Foundation. He was the keynote speaker at the rededication of the Illinois Monument in the National Cemetery at Andersonville and was awarded a research grant by the Friends of Andersonville. He was the 2010 recipient of the Chicago CWRT's Nevins-Freeman Award for service and scholarship. In 2014, he was awarded the Iron Brigade Association Award for Civil War Scholarship by the Milwaukee CWRT.

Rob has written numerous essays and book reviews and was the guest editor for the 2011-2014 Sesquicentennial of the Civil War issues of the *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*. His most recent essay appeared in *North & South Magazine*. He has authored or edited ten books.

He has recently retired after thirty-one years from the Chicago Police Department, twenty-five of which he spent in homicide.

If you would like to join us for dinner with Rob Girardi at 5:30 p.m. before the meeting on December 6 at Sam's of Arlington restaurant, 1863 West Central Road, Arlington Heights, please contact Wayne Rhine at (847)363-0875 or waynerhine@gmail.com by Wed., Dec. 4.

**PLEASE NOTE THAT THE
DECEMBER 6 MEETING IS
AT THE ARLINGTON
HEIGHTS MEMORIAL LIBRARY
500 N. DUNTON - 7:30 PM**

The Sand Creek Massacre
by Pat McCormick

The Sand Creek Massacre of November 1864 is usually cited as a wanton slaughter of innocent Indians, led by a bloodthirsty maniac. However, as Don Sender presented to the Round Table on November 1, there is another side to the story.

Sender started out by giving a detailed background on John M. Chivington, the commander of the Colorado troopers that fought at Sand Creek. John Milton Chivington was one of three sons of Isaac Chivington, and was born in a cabin in northeastern Ohio in 1821. His father was a veteran of the War of 1812, serving in the invasion of Canada and at the battle of the Thames. The family business was woodcutting, in which timber was felled and cut into specific lengths, to be floated downriver for sale. John took great pains to cut his timber at precisely 8 feet, resulting in his being the most successful of the brothers. Given the nature of the business, John received little formal education, depending upon books instead of teachers to advance his knowledge.

Chivington grew to be a mountain of a man, some 6-feet 4 inches tall and 260 pounds (none of it fat, Sender pointed out.) This fearsome specimen converted to religion, becoming an ordained Methodist minister in 1844 (and also a Mason in 1846.) As a preacher, Chivington moved about quite a bit. While living in Quincy, Illinois, he hid an escaped slave, then faced down authorities who came to claim the man. This led him to embrace abolitionism; perhaps inevitably, he rode the circuit in Missouri for 8 years, in the midst of the growing conflict over neighboring Kansas. When threatened, he trusted in "the grace of God, and two revolvers." Chivington became known as the "Fighting Parson;" as war clouds darkened, John became an elder in the Rocky Mountain

district, which included Denver.

It would be from Denver that Chivington would enter the Civil War, joining the First Colorado Volunteers and rising quickly to the rank of Major. (One of his brothers joined the Confederacy, and was killed at Wilson's Creek.) In early 1862, Confederate forces invaded New Mexico, and as the campaign progressed, the 1st Colorado was called into it. Chivington played a key role in the climax of the New Mexico operation. In late March, as the main bodies of both sides sparred at Apache Canyon, Chivington's command came upon the Rebel supply train at Glorieta Pass and destroyed it. Forcing the Southerners into a disastrous retreat back to Texas.

With the war moving away from the environs of Colorado, the First was eventually disbanded, and the Second Colorado sent east to join the forces holding the Kansas-Missouri front. This paucity of troops became an issue when, in 1864, the Cheyennes in the area grew restive, in reaction to incursions into their territory. Colorado – in the midst of a debate over potential statehood – asked the Federal government for permission to call out the militia, but was repeatedly denied. The return of the 2nd Colorado was also sought, but was not forthcoming. So territorial governor John Evans ordered the formation of the 3rd Colorado Volunteers. The veteran "Fighting Parson" seemed to be the ideal choice to command the outfit, and thus Chivington was appointed Colonel of the 3rd.

It was the 3rd Colorado that, in November 1864, would make a surprise attack on the village of Black Kettle and White Antelope at Sand Creek, Colorado. Initially the reaction of the white population was positive, and patrons cheered when Indian scalps were displayed at a theater in Denver. However, soon the battle was revealed as a wanton massacre, perpetrated upon a band of peaceful tribesmen who were supposed to be under the protection of the

government.

But was that truly the case? Sender's source material introduces doubt into the standard story. For starters, were the Indians actually guilty of attacks upon settlers earlier in the year? Some sources reported the scalps of whites present in the village. Was it truly a massacre of defenseless tribesmen? The 3rd Colorado did suffer some casualties, 28 (out of about 600 soldiers), indicating that the villagers had at least some weaponry -- which was supposed to have been surrendered by the Indians when they moved into the neighborhood of Fort Lyon. Were the Indians actually under government protection? The Indians were a mixed group of Cheyenne and Arapaho, and the Cheyenne had not even arrived until after the supposed order of protection had been issued -- plus, the village had been ordered to move close to the fort, and instead had stopped about halfway there. Did Cheyenne leader Black Kettle fly a large United States flag as a sign of protection, only to have it ignored? Sender revealed that only one witness mentioned the banner.

Various military and government officials may have either contributed to the disaster or participated in characterizing it as a massacre after the fact. John Wynkoop, in command of Fort Lyon before Chivington arrived, issued the protection order, but may also have issued arms and ammunition to the Indians, undermining the supposition of a peaceful village. (Reportedly, William T. Sherman considered Wynkoop untrustworthy.) Samuel F. Tappan chaired a military council convened to investigate the action; he had been relieved of command by Chivington two years earlier, and thus may have had an axe to grind. Senator Benjamin Wade, chairman of the Joint Com-

mittee on the Conduct of the War, condemned the affair - apparently without having actually read the reports. Thus, the possibility was raised that Chivington and the 3rd Colorado may have been done an injustice by politicians and press.

On behalf of the Round Table, I would like to thank Don Sender for reminding us that history is rarely cut-and-dry, and that the standard accounts of Chivington and Sand Creek may in fact be inaccurate.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- Dec. 5 Kenosha Civil War Museum
Kenosha and Racine in the Civil War presented by Ron Larson
- Dec. 7 Kenosha Civil War Museum
Victorian Christmas 10AM-4PM
- Dec. 8 Kenosha Civil War Museum
"A Christmas Carol" presented by RG Radio Productions
- Dec. 8 McHenry County CWRT
Holiday Luncheon at Woodstock Country Club featuring Battlefield Balladeers
- Dec. 13 Chicago CWRT
Musings of a Collecting Voyeur program by Daniel Weinberg
- Dec. 13 Kenosha Civil War Museum
The Hospital Sites of Antietam presented by Dr. Gordon Daummann
- Dec. 20 Salt Creek CWRT
CSS Hunley program by Bruce Allardice



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Book Raffle	Charles Banks
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December Saturday Discussion

All members are invited to the Annual Trivia Contest to be held at the Barrington Area Library, 505 N. Northwest Highway, Barrington, IL on Saturday, December 21, from 10:00 until noon.

Bring a goody to share and your own beverage.

Discussions are generally held on the third Saturday of the month from September through June. They are held to generate and foster a free exchange of ideas on the Civil War.

Eisenhower Library Discussion

The Civil War discussion group at the Eisenhower Library, 4613 Oketo Avenue, Harwood Heights, meets the first Saturday of the month from 10:00 to 11:30 AM. On Dec. 7, the topic will be naval operations.

2019 – 2020 SPEAKERS

January 3	David Connon	Iowa Confederates
February 6	Wayne Rhine	Chicago Battery
March 6	Bruce Allardice	TBD
April 3	Jack Hudson	Telegraphs in the Civil War
May 1	Kathyrin Harris	Harriet Tubman
June 5	Max Daniels	President Lincoln: A Press Conference



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