



THE NORTHERN ILLINOIS CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

THE drum roll

418th Regular Meeting Volume 42 Number 10 June 6, 2025



PLEASE NOTE!!!!!! PLEASE NOTE!!!!!!!!!!

The June meeting will be in person at the Arlington Hts. Library on Friday, June 6, 2025, and on ZOOM, at 7:00 P.M. The library is at the corner of W. Euclid Ave. and N. Dunton Ave. in Arlington Hts. Underground parking is available, and you can take the elevator to the second floor and be right at the meeting site.

The first item is the election of officers for the coming year. Bruce Allardice is moving on to be president of the Chicago Civil War Round Table. We are in need of volunteers with a modest amount of organizational and communication skills. Organizations like ours do not run by themselves, and we all need to contribute. Anyone interested, please contact Bruce or me, and we will see you get some attention. You will get lots of help from the membership. No one flies solo.

Our June Speaker

Bob Presman is a former News and Sports Director at WROK radio in Rockford, Illinois where he was also known as "Mr. Baseball," answering baseball trivia questions from callers to the station.

Bob is the immediate past President of the Rock River Valley Civil War Roundtable in Rockford. He has done presentations on various Civil War topics at several venues including his home Civil War Roundtable, the McHenry County Illinois Civil War Roundtable, the Salt Creek Civil War Roundtable in the Chicago suburbs, the Tucson, Arizona Civil War Roundtable, Rock Valley College, the Rockford Rotary Club, and the Kenosha, Wisconsin Civil War Museum.

Bob is retired and lives in Rockford with his wife Mary Ann, an accomplished short story writer.

Bob's topic for the June meeting will be "Could the South Have Won the Civil WAR." This should elicit some great discussion. Bob's presentation will give opposing views on this question from noted scholars and historians. He'll review the disadvantages and the advantages the South had in fighting the war and discuss varying opinions on why the Confederacy lost. He'll also point out certain times during the Civil War when the South might have prevailed. And he'll also ask those attending how they would answer this question.

TACTICS AT KENNESAW

The famously lopsided battle of Kennesaw Mountain seems simple at a basic level – Union troops attacking uphill against fortified lines, suffering heavy casualties to no gain. On May 2, Dave Powell demonstrated that, in truth, it was a much more complex affair.

Powell began by briefly summarizing the Atlanta campaign from early May to mid-June, with William T. Sherman flanking Joseph Johnston out of successive positions in northern Georgia, starting at Dalton and reaching the Marietta area by mid-June. In roughly six weeks, Sherman had advanced halfway to Atlanta.

To this point, Sherman had emphasized maneuver over battle to leverage Johnston continually south. Now, however, the Northern commander was growing increasingly frustrated. Among his biggest problems was the weather: it rained for 19 straight days, turning roads to quagmires and slowing progress to a crawl. Additionally, Sherman's initial advantage in numbers, which had been roughly 2 to 1, was reduced by detachments, battle losses, and Confederate reinforcements. By mid-June, Sherman's effective force of 85 to 90 thousand was facing 75 to 80 thousand Rebels. This combination of weather and force ratios worked against Sherman's usual wide flanking moves.

By late June, Johnston was in a powerful position, securely dug in. The primary line stretched from Big Kennesaw on the right to Little Kennesaw, Pigeon Hill, the heavily wooded valley of Noses Creek, and a low (but significant) eminence soon to be named Cheatham's Hill. Sherman reasoned that Johnston's nine-mile line must be thin somewhere, and he saw his options as limited (he had been probing at the flanks for days, with minimal progress.) On June 24, he issued Field Orders #28, implementing recon of the enemy position and preparation for an offensive to jump off at 8 AM on June 27. Sherman would later write that he had no other choice, and that his subordinates fully supported the decision. In truth, noted Powell, support was not universal.

The goal was to break Johnston's line with direct assaults. Fifteenth Corps (Army of the Tennessee),

under John Logan, would strike at Pigeon Hill. Further to the Union right, portions of Oliver Howard's 4th Corps and John Palmer's 14th Corps, both from the Army of the Cumberland, would strike in the vicinity of Cheatham's Hill. Significant casualties were expected, but cracking Johnston's line would be worth the loss.

Sherman designated the points of attack, but the details were left to his subordinates. Powell explained that the lore of the battle, in which all attacks were made in heavy columns, was not the case at all. Part of the general misunderstanding comes from the term "column of division." This formation is not division level, but rather regimental level. A 10-company regiment would form in two columns ("divisions") of five companies each. A "right in front" column would have the front companies become the right flank when the unit eventually spread out, with the following companies shifting out to the left; a "left in front" column was the reverse, with the following companies shaking out to the right.

Only some of the attackers used this formation. Logan's 15th Corps put three brigades into the assault on Pigeon Hill. Each of these brigades put two to three regiments in their first lines and two to three regiments behind those, in no way resembling a column. Their skirmishers saw initial success (which was a tendency throughout the campaign; the boys in blue routinely dominated the skirmish lines.) But once partially up the steep and heavily wooded slope, the attack was halted.

John Newton's 4th Corps division of three brigades, plus two brigades from Jefferson Davis's 14th Corps division, constituted the other main assault (at Cheatham's Hill). Two of Newton's three brigades, Harker and Wagner, did indeed form their regiments in column of division; there was no room for the other brigade, Kimball, to do so. To the right of Newton, Davis's two brigades placed their regiments in successive dense lines rather than columns. McCook's brigade charged toward a salient that became known as the Dead Angle, while Mitchell's swung further to the right.

None of these assaults was successful, a point made all the clearer by numerous soldier accounts. Two brigade commanders fell in the Cumberlanders' attack. Brigadier General Charles Harker of Newton's division, who entered the attack mounted on a white horse, was mortally wounded while urging his men

forward, and was carried from the field. Colonel Dan McCook of Davis's command (one of the "Fighting McCooks" of Ohio, and Sherman's former law partner) badly wanted promotion to brigadier general; he made it to the glaxis of the Dead Angle, with a flag in one hand and his saber in the other but was also mortally wounded.

The survivors in many cases did not fall back but scraped out cover in defilade from the opposing trenches; at the Dead Angle, they began undermining the enemy works. Before this effort came to fruition, renewed pressure further to the right turned Johnston out of the position, perhaps emphasizing the needlessness of the Kennesaw assaults (of which George Thomas famously said, "one or two more such assaults would use up this army."). Sherman's losses on June 27 were approximately 2700, to about 540 Confederate (of which 300 were captured, mostly on the skirmish lines.)

On behalf of the Round Table I would like to thank Dave Powell for his enlightening (and well-illustrated) dive into the tactics at Kennesaw Mountain.

Pat McCormick

In May we discussed the roll of Chicago in the Civil War. We will move on in June and talk about St. Louis in the Civil War. Our June discussion will be on Wednesday, June 11, 2025. Please join us for the last discussion before our summer break.

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81433758155?pwd=S1FqVjJ1WmZsTTd1VlJNRCTLcjJLdz09>

[This link works for the regular meeting and discussions.](#)

- Speakers
- Sept. 6, 2024, Leslie Goddard: Clara Barton, Civil War Nurse
- Oct. 4, 2024, Charlie Banks: General Herman Haupt
- Nov. 1, 2024, Doug Stiles: Lincoln's Watch
- Dec. 6, 2024, Dave Oberg: The First Illinois Light Artillery
- Jan. 3, 2025, Gordon Ramsey: Music of the Civil War
- Feb. 7, 2025, Father Bob Miller: Civilian Life in Vicksburg
- Mar. 7, 2025, Jan Rasmussen: The Dakota War
- Apr. 4, 2025, Brian Conroy: 4TH Illinois Cavalry
- May 2, 2025, Dave Powell: The Union assault on Kennesaw Mountain, June 27, 1864.
- June 6, 2025, Bob Presman: Could the South Have Won the Civil War?



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Appointed Positions

Newsletter Editor	Jerry Rodosky
gjrodosky@gmail.com	
847-420-1639	

Upcoming Events

Join Zoom Meeting on Friday, June 6, 2025, at 7 PM.

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81433758155?pwd=S1FqViJ1WmZsTTd1VlJNRCTLcjJLdz09>

This link works for the discussion group also.

During the summer, I may contact some of the membership in order to update our membership roster for future leaders. All I ask for is a timely, simple response. Thanks.

Questions? Comments? Email me or call.

Jerry Rodosky

847-420-1639

gjrodosky@gmail.com

I will forward your questions or comments to the appropriate person.

Remember: The Board has decided not to charge dues for the 2024-2025 year. Let's use this to invite new members. What a way to try us out!

Have a great summer!