



THE NORTHERN ILLINOIS CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

# THE drum roll

Volume 39

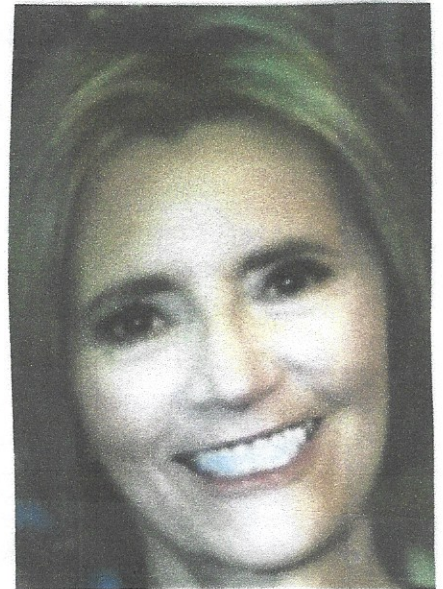
369<sup>th</sup> Meeting  
Number 1

September 4, 2020

**ZOOM BACK TO THE PAST WITH US ON SEPT. 4<sup>TH</sup>**

## ... AND THEN THEY WEREN'T

Paula Zalar will discuss how the Civil War jolted those living through it into a different view of life and death. The changes in perspective created new practices and Beliefs, and as these were adopted North and South our nation gradually healed. For generations, Americans held in common an entrenched view of "death" – how it should come, be received, and be mourned. North and South alike, the majority accepted death as a natural, expected occurrence...a spiritual deliverance not usually met suddenly, or with mass casualties through one, major event.



Then came the Civil War. As thousands of soldiers and civilians died, the weight of mass demise crushed time-honored beliefs and uprooted traditional ways of mourning. Immersed in death, people struggled to cope spiritually, emotionally and socially. The many who suffered psychological damage did so in silence because they did not yet live in an era when "psychology" could explain their invisible wounds. Fractured by war and loss, no one could imagine how survivors could heal...how our citizens could reunify.

St. Louis speaker/writer Paula Zalar has lectured on American death and mourning for numerous societies and history organizations, and has portrayed notable figures for an array of St. Louis historic sites, and the Missouri Humanities Council.

She is a DAR, the descendant of Union and Confederate soldiers, and is the current Vice-President of the St. Louis Civil War Round Table.

A huge thanks goes out to Bruce Allardice for offering to host the meeting. The meeting will begin at 7:30 PM on Friday, September 4<sup>th</sup> on Zoom.

NICWRT Zoom Meeting  
The meeting ID is 869 3408 3593  
The passcode is 647721

If you want to join the meeting with the link, just let me know and I will forward it to you.

Denise Limburg  
dlimburg@prodigy.net



## A LITTLE KNOWN, AND UNNECESSARY, BATTLE

By Pat McCormick

Bring the date of August 5 up to most Civil War buffs, and the first thing that comes to mind will be Admiral David G. Farragut's dramatic victory at Mobile Bay on that date in 1864. However, two years earlier to the day, a small but fierce battle was fought at Baton Rouge, Louisiana – and, while the Baton Rouge contest did have a naval aspect, it was first and foremost a land action.

By the summer of 1862, the Confederacy's hold on the Mississippi River had been severely restricted, both downriver from Cairo, Illinois and upriver from New Orleans. Memphis had fallen to Union forces in June, and initial (unsuccessful) forays had been made against the Vicksburg stronghold. The Confederate commander at Vicksburg, Major General Earl Van Dorn, intended to start re-taking the lost river territory, and his first attempt would be against Baton Rouge.

The Louisiana capital had been seized by the Federals in May, and some 3000 troops were on hand in early August, albeit reduced by disease. To take the city, Van Dorn assembled a small expeditionary force under Major General John C. Breckinridge. Although only 2,600 strong, due to command politics the force was divided into two divisions (each of two brigades), led by Charles Clark and Daniel Ruggles. Knowing that several Union gunboats were on the scene, Van Dorn ordered the powerful ironclad CSS *Arkansas* down from Vicksburg to join the operation.

Breckinridge intended a surprise attack, but Brigadier General Thomas Williams, in command at Baton Rouge, got wind of the enemy approach. By combing the hospitals of reasonably mobile sick men, Williams was able to scrape together 2,500 defenders. The only earthworks in town protected the arsenal (by the river, on the northwest side of town), so Williams spread his men in a loose arc around the town from north to south, with the arsenal available as a last-ditch position, supported by the gunboats.

At dawn on August 5, Breckinridge struck in the midst of a heavy fog. A handful of cavalry led the Southern advance, but when they encountered Union pickets in the murky dawn, they stampeded back through the following infantry, resulting in a smattering of casualties and the smashing of two gun carriages. Nonetheless, Breckinridge pressed on, advancing from the east and north-northeast. As the battle became general, the fog played havoc with both sides, and friendly-fire incidents hampered Yankees and Rebels alike.

Soon the sun burned away the fog, and the Confederates pressed on against inconsistent resistance, with the death of General Williams weakening the Federal stand. As the combat progressed, portions of the city saw house-to-house urban warfare – a precursor to the far more famous city fighting later in the year at Fredericksburg. Eventually, the bulk of the Union defenders were pressed back towards the river – to the protection of the arsenal works and the gunboats. But where was *Arkansas*?

The ironclad behemoth had become a victim of her own balky engines. The limitations of Confederate construction prowess, and the hard use since her mid-July launch, had put *Arkansas'* machinery in bad shape, and she was unable to reach Baton Rouge. (The following day, she would be scuttled by her crew to avoid capture by Union naval forces.) Informed that *Arkansas* would not be able to help, and stymied by the arsenal defenses and the now worry-free Union gunboats, Breckinridge retreated. The effort had failed.

Casualties were around 15% on both sides, 383 Union to 456 Confederate. Oddly enough, after being the object of a pitched battle, Baton Rouge was soon abandoned, the garrison being recalled to New Orleans by Benjamin Butler. The Confederates passed up the chance to reoccupy, concentrating instead on fortifying a much more defensible upriver location (Port Hudson.) The sharp little engagement at Baton Rouge might as well not have been fought at all. Such is war sometimes.

## Upcoming Events

Sept. 8 – McHenry Count CWRT  
“Fort Sumter and other Civil War  
Forts” [resented by Scott Larimer

Sept. 11 – Chicago CWRT  
“Congress at War”  
Presented by Fergus Bordewich

Sept. 11 “Wounding of Oliver Wendell  
Holmes, Jr.” presented by  
Gordon Dammann

Sept. 12 – Kenosha Civil War Museum  
Great Lakes Civil War Forum  
In-person and on Zoom  
Register by Sept. 8<sup>th</sup>  
Speakers:  
“Battle of Perryville” Chris Kolakowski  
“Sir, I have no Division” Wayne Motts  
“Negley on Horseshoe Ridge” Dave Powell  
“Grant, Lee, Butler and Beauregard at  
Petersburg” Will Greene

Sept. 18 – Salt Creek CWRT  
“The Buzzaed Brigade: The  
Story of the 8<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin”  
Presented by Jerry Allen

Sept 26 – Du Page Civil War Sow  
CANCELLED

All presentations have gone virtual, so  
contact the hosting organization for details.

Both the Congress of Civil War Round  
Tables and the Kenosha Civil War Museum  
have many more programs available. Check  
out their websites for details.

## Saturday Discussion

At this time, meeting rooms at the  
Barrington Area Library are not  
available.

## Eisenhower Library Discussion

At this time, meeting rooms are not  
available.

## To Contribute to the Drum Roll

All members are welcome to contribute to the  
newsletter. Appropriate subjects include book re-  
views, family histories, travel reports, and recent  
research. If you have information to share, please  
send it to Denise Limburg, 451 Woodview Road,  
Lake Barrington, IL 60010, (847) 212-5313,  
[dlimburg@prodigy.net](mailto:dlimburg@prodigy.net)





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#### BOARD POSITIONS

Currently, there are several open board positions. If you are interested in finding out more about these positions and/or volunteering to become a board member, please contact Laurie Schiller at [lds307@northwestern.edu](mailto:lds307@northwestern.edu) or 847/209-2605

#### 2020-2021 SPEAKERS

Sept 4	Paula Zalar	Death and Mourning During the Civil War
Oct. 2	David Keller	Camp Douglas
Nov. 8	Laurie Schiller	David Stuart and the Burch divorce trial of 1861
Dec. 4		
Jan. 8	Doug Dammann	1 <sup>st</sup> Wisconsin
Feb. 5	Mike Powell	African Americans in the U.S. Navy
Mar. 5	Bruce Allardice	TBD
Apr. 2	Pamela Toler	Nursing in the Civil War
May 7	Eric Wittenberg	Tullahoma or Chickamauga
June 4	Curt Fields	Portrayal of General Grant

