



# THE drum roll

419th Regular Meeting Volume 43 Number 1 September 5, 2025



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

The September meeting will be in person at the Arlington Hts. Historical Museum on Friday, September 5, 2025, and on ZOOM, at 7:00 P.M. The museum is one block West of the Arlington Hts. Library. in Arlington Hts. Outdoor public parking is available just across the street from the museum.

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Come to our first meeting of this new season and hear our guest speaker, Charles Rebesco, talk to us about Ward's Brigade at Gettysburg. Doctor Rebesco has an interesting background, as does General J. H. H. Ward who had an interesting career in the Army and was not rewarded as many thought he should be. A very interesting subject indeed.

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COULD THE SOUTH HAVE WON?

One of the age-old questions about the American Civil War is: could the Confederacy have won the war? On June 6, Bob Presman presented his take on the subject.

Presman began by polling those in attendance, with another poll to be taken at the close of the presentation. He noted that, after more than 150 years, there is still no consensus on whether the South had a reasonable chance to win. Was the "cause" truly lost, as the Lost Cause mythology holds – the Confederacy having been outmanned, outgunned, and probably out-led? Why did the North win and the South lose?

He enlisted opinions on the subject from all across the spectrum of Civil War historians. Some examples: Speaking in the classic Ken Burns Civil War documentary, Shelby Foote offered that the Rebels had no chance – that the North fought the war "with one hand tied behind its back." James

McPherson, on the other hand, summoned examples of wars that had been won against longer odds. Gary Gallagher opined that defeat was not inevitable, and that the Lost Cause mythology offered a convenient absolution for the defeated. Our own Bruce Allardice aligned with the “no chance” contingent, referring to the turning point of the war as the decision to fire on Fort Sumter.

The Confederates did have some advantages. They didn't necessarily have to win, but just needed to survive, outlasting the North. The Rebels were fighting mostly in their own territory, had the general advantage of the defense, had the incentive for fighting for their homes, and (at least early on) enjoyed an edge in the quality of military leadership. They also had the wealth of cotton, which pre-war was the nation's leading export.

Balancing these were disadvantages. The most obvious were a smaller population and much less of an industrial base. The Confederacy had inferior railroad mileage, had to invent a government and a military almost from scratch, and (thanks in large part to an extensive coastline) had a tremendous amount of territory to defend. The Rebels also had little hard currency, and a weaker central government. One of the key differences was at the top: Abraham Lincoln was far better fitted to his task than Jefferson Davis was to his. (Presman posed a rhetorical question: if the respective Presidents were switched, could the South have won?)

Nonetheless a sizable number of European observers believed the Rebels would outlast the North, based in part upon the American Revolution 80-plus years earlier. European recognition of, and aid to, the Confederacy would be a huge advantage; but in trying to bring that about, the South initially held back its bumper crop of cotton, hoping to force foreign aid. Instead, England first made do with recent imports, then augmented their own sources in areas such as Egypt and India. In addition, the gradually tightening Union blockade hampered further efforts to trade cotton for wartime supplies.

Another critical Confederate weak point was slavery itself. Initially the existence of slaves meant more white manpower on the front lines. But as the war progressed, especially after the

Emancipation Proclamation, much of the enslaved population defected to the North, even taking up arms against the Rebels. Black troops could have been a source of strength for the Confederacy, Presman noted, but they were presumed to be good laborers and poor soldiers. Enlistment of blacks was not allowed until as an 1865 desperation measure. Another key Confederate element that became a weakness was the doctrine of States Rights; in practice, at times, states overrode national needs with local ones, hampering the overall war effort.

Ultimately, it came down to the battlefield. The Rebels had a few options: standing on the defensive, taking the offensive, or combining the two in an offensive/defensive strategy (one espoused in retrospect by Southern artilleryist Porter Alexander post-war) By this method, the Confederates would wait for the enemy to attack at a disadvantage, then counterattack when the time was right. Another option was guerilla warfare -practiced in some locations, had it been used more extensively it may have allowed the South to outlast the North. President Davis preferred a defensive strategy, trying to defend everywhere at once. (There was a political cost for not doing so.)

Ultimately, Presman suggested three key point where the South might have won. The first was in the immediate aftermath of First Manassas, when Washington lay practically defenseless after the disastrous defeat; realistically, however, the victors were in no shape to press the offensive. The second point was late summer/early fall of 1862, with the Rebels on the offensive across the board. All of their efforts in Northern territory were ultimately thrown back, with Antietam being the most important battle of them all – not only did it send the Southerners in retreat, it allowed Lincoln to issue the Emancipation Proclamation, which (among other effects) made European intervention, which seemed to be imminent at the time, almost impossible. The third crisis point was summer 1864, when war-weariness was a genuine threat to Lincoln's re-election. Key Union victories (especially the capture of Atlanta) ensured Lincoln's victory, making Union victory virtually certain.

Presman noted that, while the Confederates were remarkably dedicated – that they lasted four years

seems incredible –the Union was equally so, which is not always as obvious. He finished up by re-polling the audience (there were at least a few changed votes, in either direction – but, as always, no consensus). On behalf of the Round Table, I thank Bob Presman for a thorough and thoughtful examination of the question.

Pat McCormick

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81433758155?pwd=S1FqVjJ1WmZsTTd1VlJNRCtLcjJLdz09>

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



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### \_Speakers

- Sept. 5, 2025, Charles Rebesco: Ward’s Brigade at Gettysburg
- Oct. 3, 2025,
- Nov. 7, 2025,
- Dec. 5, 2025,
- Jan. 2, 2026,
- Feb. 6, 2026,
- Mar. 6, 2026,
- Apr. 3, 2026,
- May 1, 2026,
- June 5, 2026,

### Appointed Positions

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### Upcoming Events

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81433758155?pwd=S1FqVjJ1WmZsTTd1VlJNRCtLcjJLdz09>

This link works for the discussion group also. We will announce the topic and date in a later release.

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Questions? Comments? Email me or call.  
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I will forward your questions or comments to the appropriate person.