

Vol LXI, #2

Michigan Regimental Round Table Newsletter—Page 1

February 2021

## MEMBER RENEWAL

The MRRT celebrates its 61<sup>st</sup> year in 2021 – and now is a great time to show your support by renewing your membership! (Or become a new member!).

Membership is \$25 a year – or \$5 for students. Checks should be made out to

Treasurer **Jeanie Graham** (the bank does not like checks made out to the RoundTable) and can be mailed to her home at **29835 Northbrook, Farmington Hills, MI 48334-2326**.

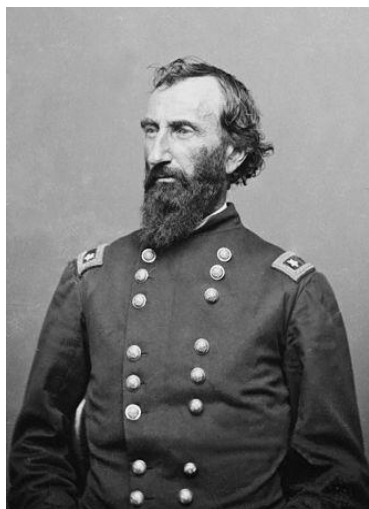
The February 2021 meeting was cancelled because of the pandemic. We are optimistic that we will be able to meet during 2021 (in person or maybe virtually) and travel to the Culpepper, Virginia area for our field trip. The Farmington Library moved into Phase 4 of their re-opening plan on February 2nd. The restrictions on the number of people in the library, 25, and only 30 minutes per visit is far short of what we need for a Roundtable meeting.

Please visit our website at <http://www.farmlib.org/mrrt>. Links to interesting Civil War programs are available.

### Civil War Essentials - Arkansas Post Campaign

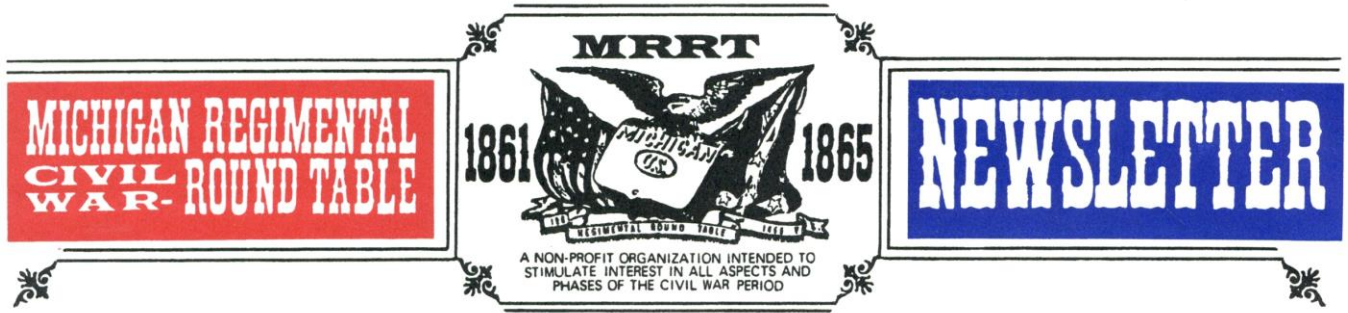
Arkansas Post, site of French and Spanish settlements starting in the late 17<sup>th</sup> Century, was also the location of a battle during the Civil War. **The action demonstrated the benefits of combined army/navy operations and probably represented the pinnacle of John McClermand's military career.** It also contained elements of low farce at its end. Arkansas Post began on the banks of the lower Arkansas River in 1686 as a French trading post. The post was moved several times over the years due to local flooding. It became American in 1803 as part of the Louisiana Purchase. Until 1821 it was the capital of the Arkansas Territory.

**In 1861, the Confederates constructed Fort Hindman, a large rectangular fortification, on a 25-foot-high bluff along the river to prevent the Yankees from moving upriver to attack Little Rock.** It was ideally located on the outside of a bend in the river giving it a clear field of fire both up and down river. **Fort Hindman's 5000-man garrison was composed of Arkansas infantry and dismounted Texas cavalry under General Thomas Churchill.** By 1863, the unhealthy area around the fort and inadequate supplies left the men in generally poor shape.



**John A. McClernand was born in Kentucky but grew up in Illinois.** Like Lincoln, he studied law and became a lawyer. After founding a newspaper, he became involved in state politics and served in the state house for several terms as a Democrat. He then moved to the US House of Representatives where he became a supporter of Stephen Douglas. **In 1861, like Douglas, McClernand supported Lincoln's determination to oppose the new Confederacy by force and raised a volunteer brigade in the southern part of Illinois.** Although he had no military command experience, he was made a general because Lincoln badly needed the support of a War Democrat from there – the people of southern Illinois were by no means entirely united behind the Union cause early in the war.

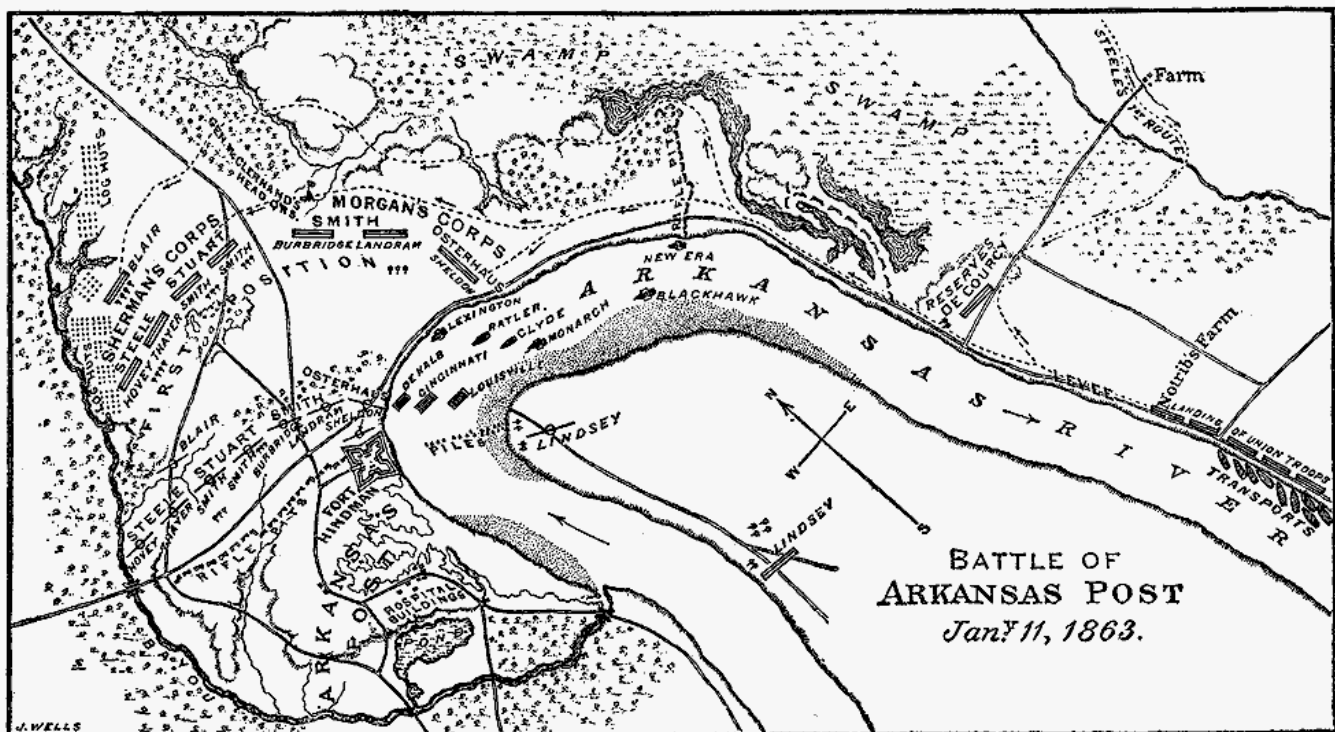
McClernand participated in the battles of Belmont, Fort Donelson, and Shiloh under the command of U.S. Grant. His military actions appear to have been mostly correct in these battles, **but he used his political connections to criticize other Union generals and to lobby for an independent command in direct communications to Lincoln and Stanton.** Stanton finally let McClernand recruit more troops and authorized him to lead a campaign against Vicksburg. In January 1863, McClernand assumed command at



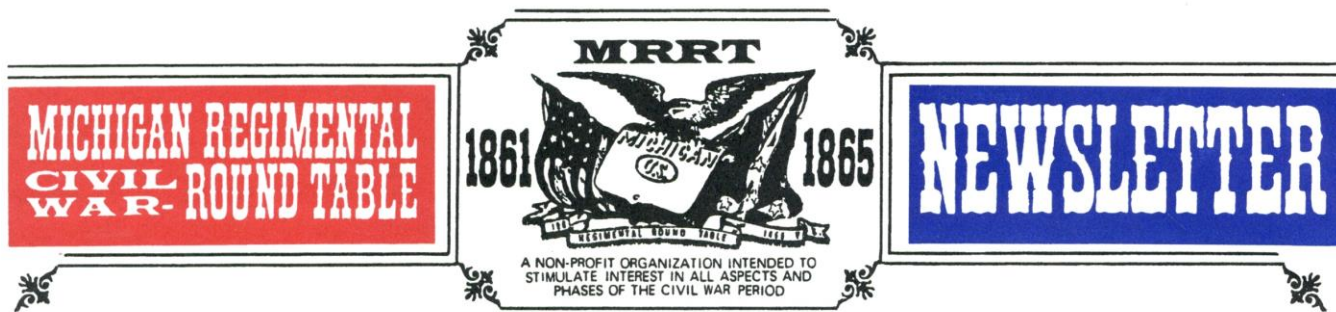
Milliken's Bend, La. superseding W. T. Sherman. He designated his combined force of over 30,000 the Army of the Mississippi. When John McClernand launched his campaign against Arkansas Post (instead of Vicksburg) on January 4, 1863, he neglected to inform his superiors, U.S. Grant, and Henry Halleck.

**McClernand worked with Rear Admiral David Porter, commander of the Mississippi Squadron, to operate jointly against the rebel fort.** Porter employed several of James Eads' slow but powerful City Class ironclads as well as several more lightly armored boats known as "Tinclads".

Union troops began unloading from transports 3 miles downriver on January 9, 1863. They overran outlying Confederate outposts before nightfall. The next day, the main force approached the fort along the levee while Sherman's troops were sent through the swampy area to the north of the fort to flank it (map). One brigade was landed on the opposite side of the river from the fort to eliminate a light Confederate screening line across the neck of the point formed by the loop of the river. **Porter's naval force pounded the fort doing major damage.** Because Sherman's men were still struggling through the swamp, the final attack had to be delayed to January 11.



The next day the fighting began again while the ironclads finished the destruction of the fort's riverside defenses. Just as McClernand was about to order a coordinated attack, white flags appeared over parts of the fort. Porter ferried troops from across the river over to the fort and several Union officers from the other side also entered the fort. **Several of Churchill's senior officers began discussing surrender with various army and navy Yankees who competed to claim the honor of accepting the surrender.** Churchill arrived to dispute any idea of surrender, but Sherman pointed out to him that by then there were already hordes of Union soldiers inside the fort and many of the rebels had already been disarmed.



**The loss of Arkansas Post was a blow to the Confederate Trans-Mississippi defense and a feather in John McClernand's cap. His action was a classic example of "it's better to ask for forgiveness than to ask for permission"!** Grant was furious that he had diverted forces from the Vicksburg campaign to this secondary mission, but it was hard to argue with its success. Grant dismantled the Army of the Mississippi and McClernand became a Corps commander in Grant's Army of the Tennessee. In the battles leading up to the siege of Vicksburg, Grant believed that McClernand made several mistakes, particularly at Champion Hill. Grant's final straw was when McClernand issued his highly self-congratulatory General Order 72 to his XIII Corps after Grant's unsuccessful assault on the Confederate lines around Vicksburg in May 1863. The order was published in the press and Grant used this violation of Army regulations to remove McClernand. **It is possible that US Grant had it in for John McClernand partly because of the latter's battlefield lapses and violation of regulations, but perhaps also because this self-promoting political general had achieved a visible success while his own Vicksburg campaign had not yet yielded the victory that would come on July 4.** John McClernand briefly returned to command later in the war but was forced to retire due to health issues.

**Quiz Questions: This month's questions pertain to the month of February.**

1. On February 20, 1862, President Lincoln suffered a personal tragedy. Who died and from what cause?
2. On February 3, 1862 President Lincoln declined an unusual offer of military assistance from a foreign head of state. Who made the offer and what was it?
3. On February 15, 1861, this naval officer resigned his commission from the U.S. Navy. He would become the Confederacy's most famous admiral. Name him and the first ship Confederate ship he commanded.
4. On February 25, 1863 which U.S. ship captured a British blockade runner, but was forced to release it rather than risk an international incident? For how much money did the wealthy ship owner sell it to the U.S. Navy?
5. On February 12, 1862, the grandson of Thomas Jefferson was appointed as a brigadier general in the Confederate army. Name him and the cabinet position he later accepted from President Jefferson Davis.

Our thanks to "Old Sarge" for his help with these questions.

**Civil War Essentials – John A. Dix – Troubleshooter**

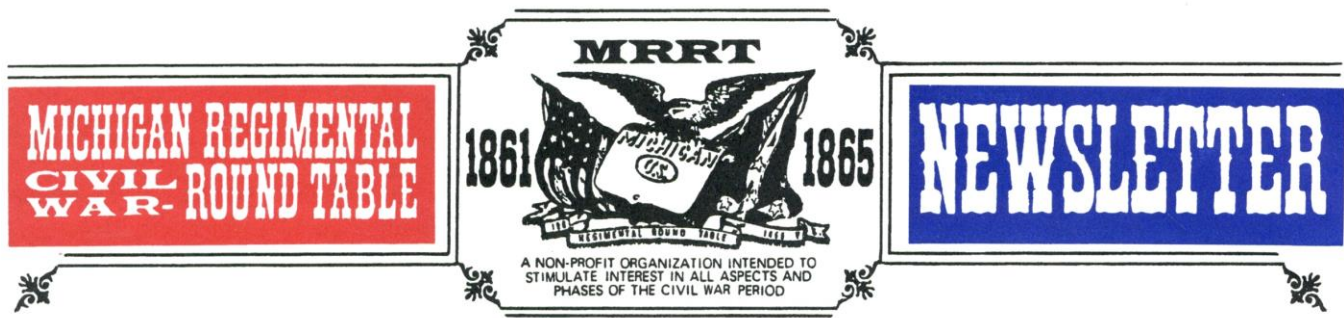
**John A. Dix (1798-1879) was a New York businessman and Democratic politician who had served as a U.S. Senator and New York Secretary of State. John was very loyal to the Union, but before the War began, he was sympathetic to the Southerners' complaints and worked very hard to achieve a compromise.** He was a leading sponsor of the December 16, 1860, "Pine Street meeting" where leading New York businessmen wrote an open letter to the South urging that the Southerners remember the long-term friendship between North and South and begged for time to resolve the problems. **When secession came, his sympathies for the South ended.**

**President Buchanan appointed John Dix as Secretary of the Treasury for the last two months of his term. John spent most of his time working to ensure that southern ports remained open and customs duties were sent to the United States.**

**John Dix becomes a national hero.**

**John Dix ordered all revenue cutters stationed in Louisiana to be brought north so that they would not be seized because Louisiana's vote to secede was imminent. When Dix heard that one of his captains, John G. Brushwood, had refused to obey the order, he sent a message ordering him arrested as a mutineer and added "If anyone attempts to haul down the American flag, shot him on the spot". The Confederates intercepted the message, and it was never delivered to U.S. Treasury agents.**

**However, the text was widely published in the newspapers, and Dix became an early Union hero. The *New Orleans Daily Delta* printed all of Dix's telegram. Every reader of the *Daily Delta* was informed of this "aggressive act"**



against *“the sovereign state of Louisiana”*. *“Captain Brushwood declined to obey the orders and brought his vessel up the river to [New Orleans]. She now lies in our waters”*.

**John Dix** was now secure as a Union hero. One cover equated his *“Shoot him on the spot”* quote with the Star-Spangled Banner and nationalist quotes from President Andrew Jackson and Senator Henry Clay.

After his short tenure as Treasury Secretary, John Dix continued to be involved in significant war activities. A few days after the Fort Sumter surrender, he became the chief organizer and speaker at a huge pro-Union rally in New York City’s Union Square. The crowd of 100,000 was the largest rally held on American soil until that time. John denounced the “unscrupulous men” who had pushed the country *“to the extremity of war and bloodshed”*.



**Mr. Dix created the Union Defense Committee**

His next major project was to create (and served as first President of) the Union Defense Committee (UDC), which was established to raise funds to equip and transport newly formed regiments. Early in the war Northern authorities struggled to raise and equip regiments to help defend the capital. President Lincoln authorized the U.S. Treasury to pay public funds to the UDC. **The UDC played a major role in the mobilization for war. The Northern states were surveyed to check on the readiness of new regiments. Arms were provided to Unionists in Kentucky, western Virginia, and Missouri. Ships were chartered to protect commercial shipping on Chesapeake Bay from Confederate privateers. The UDC assisted every New York regiment and directly organized four regiments.**

John Dix was appointed a major general of volunteers on May 16, 1861. He appeared on the list ahead of Nathaniel Banks and Benjamin Butler.

**General Dix’s role as a problem solver continued as the War went on.**

Although considered too old for field command, he served the Union in several critical assignments. **During the summer of 1861, General Dix arrested six members of the Maryland General Assembly, ending the secession movement**

**in Maryland.**

While in command at Fort Monroe in July 1862, **Dix negotiated the first formal prisoner exchange agreement, the Dix-Hill Cartel.**

**During the summer of 1863, General Dix was appointed military commander in New York City after the “Draft Riots” were suppressed. He succeeded in getting the draft to operate smoothly.**

**General Dix after the War.**

After the war, General Dix kept busy. He served as U.S. Minister to France, governor of New York (although he lost his bid for re-election), and President of the Union Pacific Railroad during the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad. Fort Dix in New Jersey is named for him.

He was married to Catherine Morgan and had one son, Morgan.

**Quiz Answers:**

1. The President’s 11-year-old son, Willie, died of pneumonia.
2. The King of Siam and elephants.
3. Raphael Semmes and the *C.S.S. Sumter*
4. *U.S.S. Vanderbilt* and Mr. Vanderbilt sold the ship for one dollar.
5. George W. Randolph and Secretary of War