

Vol LXIV, #4

Michigan Regimental Round Table Newsletter—Page 1

April 2024

## MEMBER RENEWAL

The MRRT celebrates its 64th year in 2024 – and now is a wonderful 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. Cash is always welcome at our meetings.

Our April meeting will be on Monday, April 29, 2024, at 6:30 pm in the basement of the Farmington Library – corner of Grand River and Farmington Road. Our guest speaker, Rita Nalodka of Plymouth, will begin around 7:00 pm after our 6:30 pm business meeting. We must leave the library by 8:45 pm.

Linda is making great progress organizing our October 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> trip to the Nashville area. Our Saturday, October 26<sup>th</sup>, guide is Joseph Ricci. He is the historian for the Battle of Franklin Trust. Joseph will share with us the stories of the battles of Columbia, Spring Hill, and Franklin. Our Sunday, October 27<sup>th</sup>, guide is Lee White, who led us on our tour of Chickamauga and Chattanooga in 2018. Sunday will be primarily devoted to the Battle of Nashville. If you want to join our tour, we may contact Linda at [lindagerhardt@comcast.net](mailto:lindagerhardt@comcast.net) or Jeanie Graham at [grahamjeanie@hotmail.com](mailto:grahamjeanie@hotmail.com). Please sign up for our great trip at our next meeting.

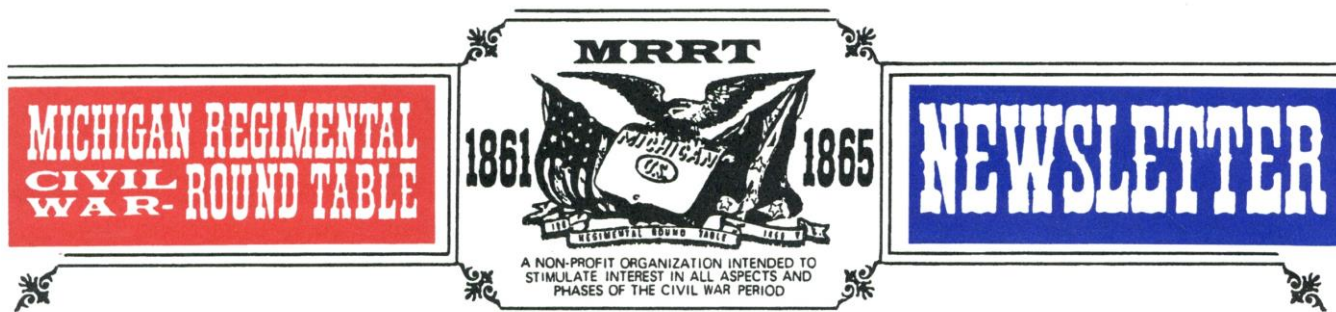
The Roundtable has a great new website, created by our friend, Gerald Furi. We are no longer connected to the Farmington Library. The website is: <https://www.mrrt.us> Please note that the s after http is necessary to get on the website. The website is well worth visiting.

The Roundtable is proud to welcome as our April 2024 speaker. Rita Nalodka, who will share with us her story of “Mary Todd Lincoln” in costume. After Rita retired from teaching in 2002, she combined two of her major interests: storytelling and history. Mary’s story is full of spunk, success, and tragedy. History has not been kind to her. Rita will tell the story from Mary’s point of view as she makes her way through courtship and marriage to one of the most admired presidents in history, and while navigating a path through the Civil War, and her husband’s death and beyond.

March 2024 Speaker – Member Bill Christen shared his extensive research on the 17<sup>th</sup> Michigan Infantry



The MRRT thanks Bill Christen for bringing us the highlights of his impressively comprehensive study of the 17<sup>th</sup> Michigan Infantry Regiment. He was gracious in filling in at the last minute as a replacement for the originally scheduled speaker. Bill has been in the process of acquiring and organizing an extensive amount of data, memorabilia, and photos regarding the 17<sup>th</sup> for several years. The 17<sup>th</sup>, called the “Stonewall Regiment”, was recruited with men from several counties in the southern part of the lower Michigan peninsula along the old Route 12 road. The regiment had about 1300



**officers and men in its ranks over the course of its three-year existence.** Most recruits were between 18-24 years old although there were a few younger boys who enlisted as either drummers or fifers. Formed in the summer of 1862, it left the Detroit Barracks with a thousand men in August 1862 and moved to Washington, D.C.

### **Battle of South Mountain – Sept. 1862**

From there it moved north to its baptism of fire in the Battle of South Mountain. **There the regiment gained its nickname from its charge across a field at Fox's Gap which dislodged a rebel force from behind a stone fence.** It then fought at Antietam where, after crossing Burnside's Bridge after its capture, the 17<sup>th</sup> engaged the Confederates near the town of Sharpsburg. After the casualties incurred in these fights, the regimental strength was reduced to about 765 at the end of September. Several of the men killed in these battles would be returned for reburial at their hometown of Napoleon, Michigan. Some forty-four of the missing men were listed as deserters but a few of these may have simply been separated or captured. **The 17<sup>th</sup> took part in the review of the Army of the Potomac by President Lincoln and McCellan in October.** Several 17<sup>th</sup> soldiers would meet the President in person later in the war.

The regiment was fortunate enough to be spared the bloodbath at Fredericksburg in December but had to endure the infamous "Mud March" afterward. Letters and diary entries written just before or during the battle suggested that the soldiers had expected a victory there.

**In early 1863, the 17<sup>th</sup> moved west as part of the Ninth Corps.** It was soon involved in the pursuit of John Morgan's raiders. In March, Colonel William Withington, the original commander, resigned his commission and was replaced by Col. Constant Luce. **During the Vicksburg campaign, the regiment was engaged first at Haynes Bluff and later, after Grant successfully crossed the Mississippi, attacked Joe Johnston's army at Jackson as part of Sherman's force.**

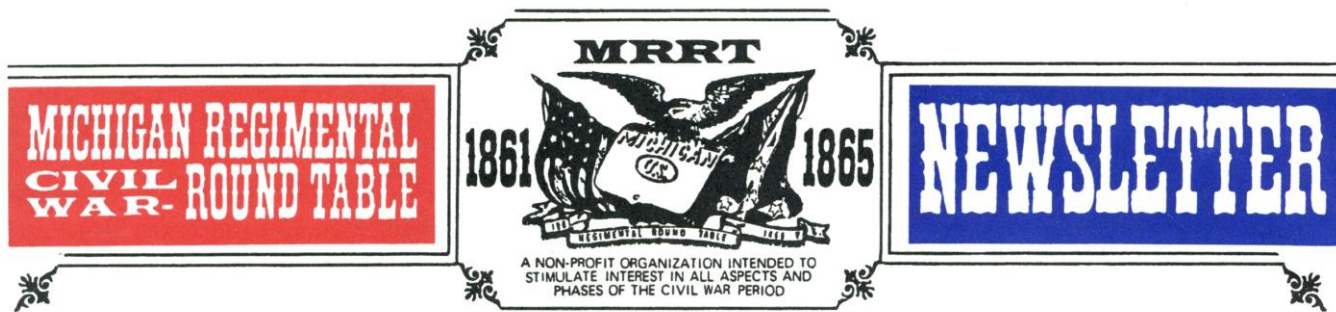
During the Knoxville campaign, the 17<sup>th</sup> fought in the mid-November battle of Campbell's Station where Gen. Longstreet unsuccessfully attempted to cut off the retreating Union rearguard as he advanced on Knoxville. Because the supply lines into Knoxville were often cut, the regiment's soldiers suffered from a lack of food and clothing during the siege. They were in the defenses of Fort Sanders when Longstreet launched his disastrous attack on November 29. **Captain Frederick Swift would become one of two 17<sup>th</sup> soldiers receiving the Medal of Honor for their actions during this campaign.**

The Ninth Corps, including the regiment, was then returned to the Army of the Potomac, and fought in the Overland Campaign of 1864. **After fighting in the Wilderness, it was badly mauled at Spotsylvania Courthouse when it was suddenly flanked by rebel forces. The regimental flag and several men were captured.** Many of these men were sent to the infamous Camp Sumter at Andersonville. Several 17<sup>th</sup> officers were able to escape from their prisons during the war. **The now-diminished 17<sup>th</sup> fought on in the remaining battles to the siege of Petersburg where they were assigned to the headquarters of General Orlando Wilcox and dubbed "Wilcox' Pets".**

The 17<sup>th</sup> did not reach Appomattox for the surrender but did participate in the Grand Review held in Washington. After the trial of the Lincoln assassination conspirators, the regiment would be assigned to the execution detail. The losses on the famous steamboat *Sultana* in late April 1865 included at least one 17<sup>th</sup> Michigan soldier. **About four hundred men of the 17<sup>th</sup> Michigan Infantry mustered out of service at Detroit in June 1865.** The last surviving veteran is believed to be Martin Loop who died at age 103 in 1946. Markers have been erected for the 17<sup>th</sup> at several battlefields, including South Mountain.

**We thank Bill for his fascinating talk on short notice!**





### Civil War Essentials - Henry W. Halleck – Brains (but no Stomach?)

**Henry Halleck came into the Civil War as a highly regarded intellectual army officer – known among his peers as “Old Brains.”** Born in 1815, Halleck was very well educated, including as a West Point cadet where he graduated third in the class of 1839. General Winfield Scott chose him to travel to Europe to study French military trends - France was considered the authority on military science at that time. **During his pre-war army career, he authored a book on military topics and translated a famous French military text.**

At the start of the Mexican War, Lieutenants Halleck and W. T. Sherman made the long sea voyage to California on the same ship. Although he did lay out defensive fortifications at Mazatlán on Mexico’s west coast which the navy had seized, **Halleck’s Mexican War experience was primarily in administrative duties in California at which he excelled.** He was the principal author of the 1849 constitution of that state. Although nominated by the constitutional convention to be one of the two senators chosen to represent the new state, he was not selected. After promotion to captain in 1853, he resigned his commission and pursued a lucrative career as a lawyer and land speculator in San Francisco. Despite leaving the army, Halleck kept his hand in military affairs as a senior officer in the California militia. Politically a Democrat, Halleck nonetheless supported Lincoln’s decision to force the seceding states back into the Union.

**Recommended by General Scott, he was made a major general in August 1861.** He was assigned to the Department of the Missouri replacing John C. Fremont. He helped restore administrative stability and cleaned up the fraud committed under Fremont. Successful as an administrator, he was none-the-less an aloof, calculating, and sometimes harsh man who engendered little loyalty or respect from subordinates.

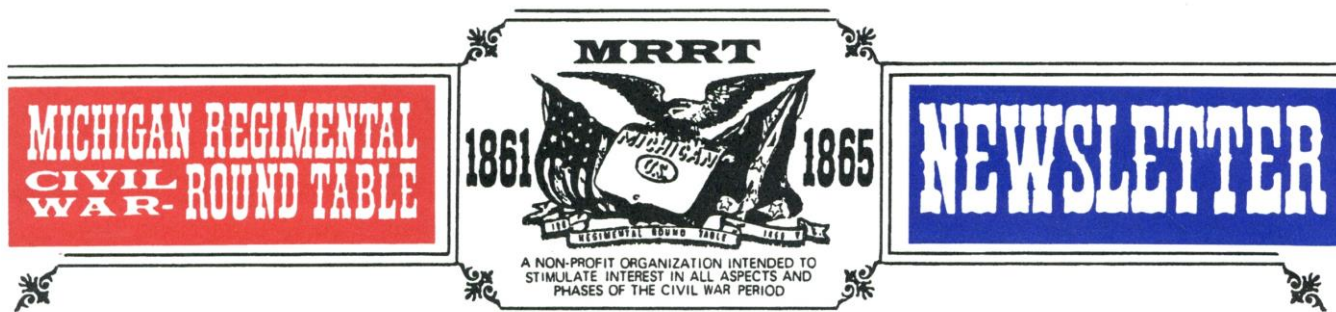
### Generals Halleck and U.S. Grant

**One of those subordinates was the unheralded but aggressive U.S. Grant with whom he had a particularly contentious relationship.** The two officers were virtually guaranteed to clash as Grant was, by his own admission, casual about paperwork and had only one or two staff officers to help him in the early part of the war. Grant in his *Memoirs* makes it clear however that he believed Halleck’s failings went well beyond a fussy obsession with bureaucracy and a paralyzing case of “cautionaries.”

After Kentucky dropped its pretense of neutrality in the war, Grant proposed that Forts Heiman, Henry, and Donelson should be attacked so that the central part of Tennessee could be taken from the Confederacy. Halleck’s initial preemptory denial of this suggestion would have been a major setback, but Lincoln and Stanton prodded him to vigorously prosecute the war, so he reversed his decision and authorized Grant’s plan.

**During the battles at the forts, Halleck attempted to use Grant’s failure to make timely routine reports of his forces’ strength and other bureaucratic omissions to suggest to overall commander, George McClellan, that Grant was irresponsible, drinking again, and should be relieved and arrested.** Once the news of the great victories there became known, he quickly reversed himself and professed to Grant to have championed and defended him against malicious reports. In his *Memoirs*, Grant wrote that he had not known at the time that these malicious reports came from Halleck himself!





**A comparable situation occurred after the Battle of Shiloh.** Four days after the battle, Halleck arrived and summarily took command of Grant's Army of the Tennessee, Buell's Army of the Ohio, and John Pope's Army of the Mississippi (which had just arrived). **Although Grant was left in titular command of part of the combined armies, orders from Halleck bypassed him.** Grant's application to be relieved of duty under Halleck was denied. Halleck then proceeded at a glacier-like pace to advance on Corinth, Mississippi, taking most of May 1862 to advance about twenty miles! Every night, the 120,000 strong combined army was ordered to dig intrenchments. No aggressive probing by any of the army commanders was permitted; twice Halleck ordered General Pope to pull back from the village of Farmington, northeast of Corinth, after he had driven the rebels out of it because it is possession under those circumstances did not conform to Halleck's plan! **As a result, Beauregard's Confederates had ample time to remove everything of value from Corinth despite having only about 50,000 troops to oppose Halleck's force.** After occupying Corinth which the rebels had evacuated and constructing a large elaborate ring of defensive fortifications around the town, Halleck's brief career as a field commander was over.

#### **Union General-in-Chief (1862-1864)**

**In July 1862, Halleck was summoned to Washington to become General-in-chief of all Union armies** replacing McClellan after the latter's failed Peninsular Campaign. Grant nominally replaced Halleck in the Department of the Mississippi but Halleck, in his new position, separated Buell's army from Grant's command and transferred some of Grant's remaining forces to Buell. After his pivotal victory at Vicksburg, Grant proposed to Halleck that he be permitted to attack Mobile, Alabama, a manufacturing center and major port, while the Confederate forces were weakened and disorganized. Halleck denied this proposal and instead ordered parts of Grant's army to be sent elsewhere just as he had done after the capture of Corinth.

**As General-in-chief, Halleck continued to promote administrative efficiency but failed to motivate his generals to aggressive action as Lincoln had hoped.** His "Old Brains" nickname became less an expression of respect and more one of dismissal during his time in Washington. One of his unusual traits which irritated some with whom he dealt in person was his habit of rubbing his elbows while in deep thought.

Lincoln lost respect for him because some Union commanders routinely ignored his orders. **It was claimed that John Pope's defeat at 2<sup>nd</sup> Manassas crushed Halleck's self-confidence.** Historians have debated how much of this ineffectiveness was due to Halleck's failings (he has been described as "a *large emptiness surrounded by an education*") and how much was caused by Lincoln and Stanton bypassing him to direct generals in the field. Stung by the criticism, Halleck submitted his resignation in early 1863, but Lincoln did not accept it.

#### **Chief of Staff for General Grant (1864-1865)**

**When U.S. Grant was promoted to Lt. General and General-in-chief in March 1864, Henry Halleck was effectively demoted to chief-of-staff.** No longer expected to direct generals in the field, Halleck was able to concentrate on military administration – his strength. Overall, his contributions during the remainder of the war were positive and he even meshed well with Grant during this period. He declined to assume active command of the defenses around Washington however during Jubal Early's lunge at it in July 1864.

After the war Halleck remained in the army. While assigned to California, Halleck visited Russian America which had just been purchased by the US. Its present name, Alaska, is credited to Halleck and Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner. **Henry Halleck died of natural causes in 1872 and is buried in a Brooklyn, NY cemetery.**