

Vol LXI, #9

Michigan Regimental Round Table Newsletter—Page 1

September 2021

WE WILL HAVE OUR FIRST MEETING SINCE FEBRUARY 2020 ON MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2021, AT 6:30 PM IN THE BASEMENT OF THE FARMINGTON LIBRARY – (corner of Grand River and Farmington Road)!

Jeanie Graham has reserved the Farmington Library's meeting room for September 27th, October 25th, and November 29th, all Monday nights. We plan to have our normal meeting beginning at 6:30 PM. Hopefully, we will have speakers.

Additionally, Jeanie reserved the meeting room for 2022. The last Monday of each month except for May (one week earlier because of Memorial Day) and October and December (we do not meet during those months). We plan to be on our field trip during October 2022.

We do not know the present rules at the Farmington Library. It is a good idea to bring a mask. The Roundtable will have masks available for your use.

Yes, we will have a speaker this month! Long-time member and former President Ken Baumann will present a short talk on "Chicago's part in the April 1861 St. Louis Raid". Ken has informed and entertained us with his previous presentations.

Member Gene Kramer is downsizing at home and so he is bringing Civil War books to the meeting. Good luck shopping as a donation to the Roundtable will enable us to purchase excellent books.

Unfortunately, we will NOT be able to go on this year's trip to Culpepper, Virginia. With our first meeting of the year tentatively scheduled for late September, the Trip Committee will not have the time to put together all of the logistics involved in planning a great trip. **We look forward to visiting Culpepper, Virginia during 2022.**

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

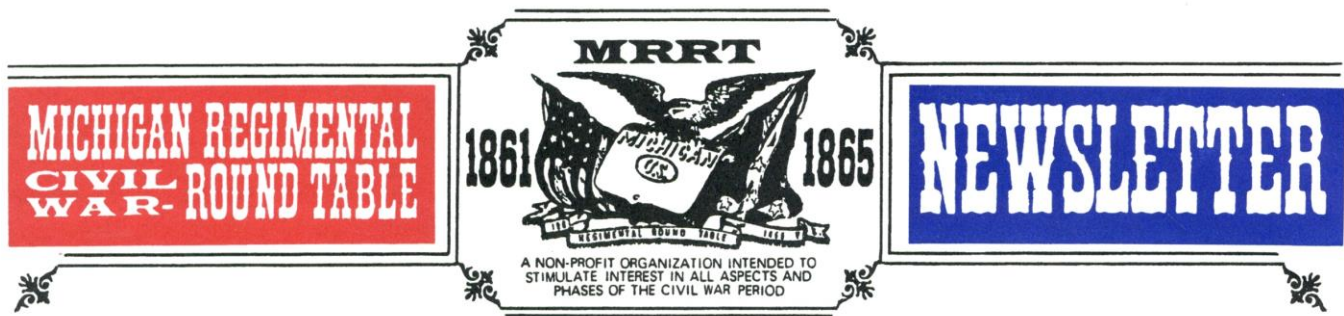


Civil War Essentials – The Desk General Who Helped Win the War

The best-known military figures of the Civil War are the fighting generals on both sides. Leading their forces in battle, they shared the hardships and dangers of the soldiers, and many died or were wounded as a result. Yet the Union was fortunate to have a war-time general whose boots were seldom muddy and whose horse probably never had to break into a gallop. **That man was Montgomery C. Meigs, the Quartermaster General of the Union Arm**

Meigs was born in Georgia in 1816 but his family soon moved to the Philadelphia area where he grew up. Extremely bright, he entered the University of Pennsylvania at age 15. Although he did well there, Montgomery was interested in engineering and a military career, so his family managed to secure an appointment to West Point for him in 1832. **He graduated 5th out of 49 in the class of 1836, and, although initially assigned to the artillery, was to spend his pre-war years as an army engineer.**

Notable achievements included **building several army posts such as Fort Wayne in Detroit**, completed in 1851, and working on Mississippi River boat landings at St. Louis under 1st Lieutenant Robert E. Lee. From 1852 to 1860, he worked on an aqueduct which continues to supply water to Washington, D.C. today. **In 1853**



Secretary of War Jefferson Davis chose Meigs to lead the construction of another timeless work, the new larger Capital dome, and the larger wings of the Capitol building. Ever thrifty, Meigs used the wood from the original dome as fuel for the steam “donkey” engines used to raise the building materials up to the construction site!

In April 1861, as southern states were withdrawing from the Union, Meigs was involved in planning a secretive expedition to ensure that Fort Pickens on Florida’s panhandle was saved from capture by the rebels. One month later, **he was promoted to Brigadier General and appointed Quartermaster by President Lincoln to replace Joseph E. Johnston, who had resigned to join the Confederate army.**

As Quartermaster General, Meigs was responsible for ensuring that proper supplies of all materials were available. The Quartermaster service had three departments – 1. Clothing, Camp & Garrison, 2. Transportation, and 3. Contingent (which supplied hospitals and other miscellaneous needs such as fuel, building materials, and all armies’ favorite thing- paperwork). **It purchased all supplies except food and weapons but delivered everything including food and weapons to the armies.**

His organization, oversight, and capable subordinates of the Quartermaster service allowed the Union field commanders to operate without fear of a lack of critical supplies-the Union armies were not always well led but they were well supplied. Meigs personally signed contracts worth at least \$1.5 billion, a staggering sum in the mid-19th Century! His personal honesty, integrity, and dedication meant that the government’s expenditures went to actually buy and deliver supplies, minimizing the amount siphoned off into the pockets of corrupt contractors or government employees.

General Meigs took personal command of the provisioning of both General Grant’s and General Sherman’s armies in 1864/1865. **Secretary Seward stated that “without the services of this eminent soldier the national cause must have been lost or deeply imperiled.”** Meigs may fairly be compared to the great 20th Century U.S. Army logistics genius – George C. Marshall.

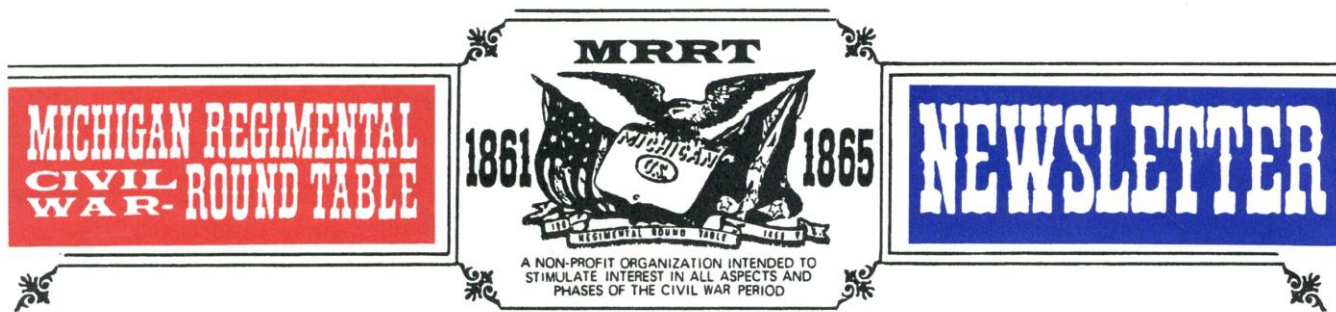
During the war, **Meigs’ only actual brush with the Confederates was during General Jubal Early’s July 1864 raid on Washington City.** He scrambled to collect as many government clerks as possible, augmenting the city’s skeletal defense force, to discourage Early from attempting an attack before the Army of the Potomac’s 6th Corps arrived by steamer from the Richmond/Petersburg front.

Meigs is remembered for choosing Arlington as a new military cemetery. By the beginning of Grant’s Overland Campaign in 1864, the existing burial places near Washington were at capacity. Robert E. Lee’s estate had favorable attributes like being elevated enough to avoid the flooding that plagued parts of Washington City, **but it is believed that Meigs chose it because he felt Lee and others had betrayed their country by joining the Confederacy.**

After the Wilderness battle, Union dead began to be buried there. Meigs’ son, killed in October 1864 under controversial circumstances, was buried at Arlington. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1882 that George W. Custis Lee, was the legal owner of the estate so the U.S. paid him \$150,000 to obtain the land.

General Meigs was present at President Lincoln’s death. Meigs continued as Quartermaster after the war ended and constructed several additional buildings in Washington including the Old Pension Building which was erected to house the large staff needed to process Union veteran’s pensions. Meigs included a long frieze in its exterior design which depicted Civil War figures. **Wags of the day asserted that the scrupulous Quartermaster General had personally counted all 15 million bricks used in the building’s construction!**

Montgomery Meigs continued to live in Washington after retiring where he served as a regent of the Smithsonian Institution and was a member of the National Academy of Sciences. **He died in 1892 and is buried next to his son among the 400,000+ at rest in Arlington National Cemetery.**

**Quiz Questions: This month's questions pertain to the Battle of Antietam – September 17, 1862**

1. What happened to the four men of the 27th Indiana Infantry who found the “*Lost Order*” in a field near Frederick, Maryland?
2. To whom and what was General Robert E. Lee referring when he wrote on September 8, 1862: “*This army will respect your choice whatever it may be*”?
3. Which division literally saved the Army of Northern Virginia at the Battle of Antietam?
4. Which famous unit was the 69th New York a part of at Antietam's Bloody Lane and which Irish revolutionary led this brigade?
5. Where did the Army of Northern Virginia cross the Potomac River on September 18th to escape from Maryland?

Our thanks to “Old Sarge” for his help with these great questions.

Civil War Essentials – Should We Surrender?

John Wilder was born in the Catskill Mountains of New York state in 1830, When he turned 19, he moved West and settled in Columbus, Ohio where he became a draftsman and an apprentice millwright at a foundry. After eight years he moved to Indiana where he married Martha Jane Stewart and raised a large family. By the time the war started, John became an expert in hydraulics, patenting a unique water wheel in 1859.

As the war began, John had no military experience. John was quickly designated as a Captain for Company A, 17th Indiana Infantry after he organized a light artillery company that the Federal government did not want!

**Battle of Munfordville, Kentucky – September 14-16, 1862 – Should We Surrender?**

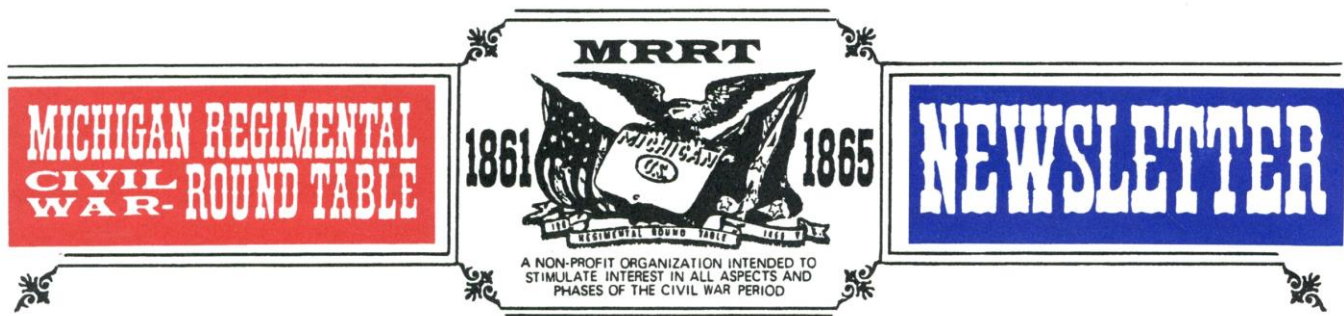
General Bragg's Confederate Army came up North to Munfordville, KY in September 1862, where the railroad to Louisville crossed the Green River. Federal Colonel John Wilder held a “strong point” there with 4,000 men.

Bragg's advance guard attacked the fortifications twice and was repulsed with moderate losses. Bragg then brought up the rest of his army, totaling 22,000 men, and demanded Wilder's surrender, pointing out that the Federals were surrounded and heavily outnumbered.

That night Colonel Wilder himself came through the Confederate lines with a flag of truce, asking for a conference with General Buckner, a division leader in Hardee's corps. General Buckner had surrendered to Union General U.S. Grant at the Battle of Fort Donelson earlier in the year.

Colonel Wilder told Buckner that he was not a military man at all but wanted to do the right thing. The Colonel asked General Buckner to tell him if he should surrender or fight it out? Buckner pointed out that the Federals were vastly outnumbered, and the Confederates had enough artillery to end the battle quickly. General Buckner said that if fighting would help the Union cause,

the Federals should then fight. **Finally, General Bragg let Wilder count the Confederate cannon. Wilder then surrendered the Union force. The Confederates had treated him fairly. He was released after two months as a prisoner.**



Colonel Wilder's Role in the Tullahoma Campaign - 1863

During the Tullahoma Campaign in Tennessee Colonel Wilder received a lot of favorable attention. His brigade appropriated horses and mules from the area and moved into battle so quickly that it became known as the "Lightning Brigade", comprising the 17th Indiana Infantry, the 72nd Indiana Infantry, the 98th Illinois, the 123rd Illinois Infantry, and 18th Indiana Light Artillery.

His men carried Spencer repeating rifles, which the Confederates did not have, and long-handled hatches instead of cavalry sabers. Wilder bypassed Army red tape and asked his men to vote on purchasing the rifles and they agreed unanimously. Each man co-signed a personal loan of \$35 (\$713 in 2019) for his rifle. The Government then agreed to pay for the rifles before any soldier spent his own money.

On June 24, 1863, the Lightning Brigade seized and held Hoover's Gap. Wilder's men beat back repeated attempts to dislodge his force until the Union infantry arrived. General William Rosecrans, commanding officer of the Army of the Cumberland, congratulated Wilder for his stand. If Colonel Wilder and his men had left Hoover Gap, it would have cost large casualties to regain the Gap.

Colonel Wilder's Role at the Battle of Chickamauga- 1863

Wilder's Brigade played a key role at Alexander's Bridge on September 18, 1863, defending the crossing of West Chickamauga Creek, helping to prevent the Confederates flanking the Union Army. At Chickamauga, Wilder's Brigade was one of the few Union units not immediately routed by the Confederate flanking attack. Major General George Thomas formally commended Colonel Wilder for his performance at Chickamauga.

Colonel Wilder and his brigade participated in General Sherman's March to the Sea. For health reasons, he resigned from the Army in October 1864 and returned home.

After the war John Wilder settled in Chattanooga. He created a company to manufacture rails for the railroad. John became commissioner of the Chattanooga and Chickamauga National Military Park. He died in 1917, age 87.

Quiz Answers:

- 1. All four were wounded during the Battle of Antietam. Sargeant John Bloss was wounded in both legs, Corporal Barton Mitchell was hit in the left calf, Private David Vance was hit in the right hand and left knee. Captain Peter Kop, the first commissioned officer to read the order, was wounded in the lungs. All four survived though Captain Kop died in 1868 and was buried at the Antietam cemetery.**
- 2. The people of Maryland and possible secession from the Union,**
- 3. General A.P. Hill's "Light Division"**
- 4. "The Irish Brigade" and Brigadier General Thomas F. Meagher**
- 5. Blackford's Ford, also known as Boteler's Ford**