

Vol LXI, #10

Michigan Regimental Round Table Newsletter—Page 1

October 2021

WE WILL HAVE OUR SECOND MEETING SINCE FEBRUARY 2020 ON MONDAY, OCTOBER 25, 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.

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.

It is a good idea to bring a mask to the meeting. The Roundtable will have masks available for your use.

Sadly, our long-time friend Fred Priebe has passed away. He portrayed President Abraham Lincoln several times over the years for us. Also, his wife Bonne portrayed Mary Todd Lincoln. His presentations were informative and entertaining as they helped us remember the greatness of the President and his wife. Fred's last presentation was in July 2019 on "*The Election of 1864*". Fred won the Association of Lincoln Presenters award for the best Abraham Lincoln in 2006. He will be greatly missed.

Our October speaker is Ron Carley, an outstanding Lincoln presenter in his own right. Ron has been a Lincoln presenter since 2012. He won the Lincoln Look Alike prize in 2017 and is a member of the Association of Lincoln Presenters. **When he goes to a restaurant, he does not ask for a booth!** We thank Ron for coming on short notice.

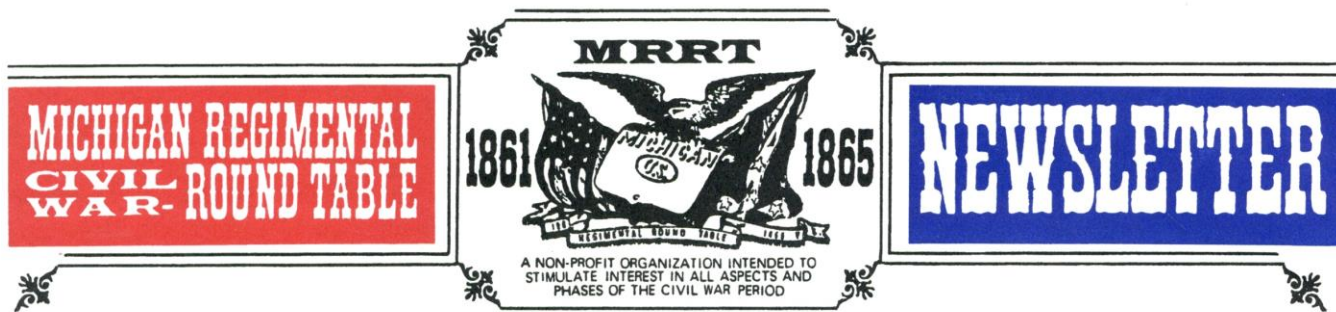
Member Gene Kramer is downsizing at home and so he is bringing Civil War books to the meeting. Good luck shopping as a donation to the Roundtable will enable us to purchase excellent books.

Please visit our great website at <http://www.farmlib.org/mrrt>. Links to interesting Civil War programs are available. Gerald Furi of the Farmington Library is doing a terrific job keeping the website up to date.

The Roundtable thanks member Ken Baumann for his educational and entertaining presentation on "Chicago's part in the April 1861 St. Louis Raid". Ken's presentation was a reminder of what we have missed for the last year and a half. On April 19, 1861 (one week after Fort Sumter) a large meeting was held in the city of Chicago, Illinois. Illinois' governor, Richard Yates, set up what became the Cairo, Illinois expedition. General R. K. Swift was directed to with all diligence to raise a force to advance to a secret destination. Acquiring muskets for the militia volunteers was an adventure. Red tape slowed attempts to procure muskets from the eastern United States. The force acquired 50 muskets from Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

The Cairo Expedition force left Chicago on a military train during the night of April 21st, comprised of mainly untrained volunteers. The force of only 400 men used anything that would shoot, including squirrel rifles. Commander General Swift had no military training. Captain Webster did have some military experience. One year later, he was General Grant's chief of artillery at the Battle of Shiloh.

The train successfully reached Cairo despite having to travel through "Little Egypt", an area of Southern sympathy in southern Illinois. Southern Illinois did provide soldiers for the Union Army during the war. The arrival was very timely as the Confederates would have seized Cairo, 300 miles from Chicago, within 48 hours.



The St. Louis, Missouri Arsenal was surrendered by the Rebels to the Union commander, Nathaniel Lyons. The 8,000 Rebels in the St. Louis area made it impossible to move the significant nautical supplies at the Arsenal. A plan to remove the ordnance safely to Illinois was developed. An old flotilla was sent to distract the Rebels.



The City of Alton steamer arrived at 2:00 am with 400-500 men to load 2,000 boxes. Initially, all efforts to move the steamer failed. The cargo was rearranged and an hour later the steamer began to move north and reached Alton, Illinois at 6:00 am. The town's citizens helped load the boxes on a train. Springfield was reached with the supplies by 2:00 pm on April 23rd.

Moving the boxes was quite a job as they each weighed 200 lbs. a piece and were the size of a coffin. The 23,000 arms were provided to Illinois and other Northern state volunteers. The Confederates were unable to take Missouri out of the war.

The 23,000 muskets were manufactured several years before the war began. During the war, muskets were not the best weapons. Some were loaded as many as 22 times without actually being fired. The weapons were improved as modifications were made to them during the war.

Today, a couple of the buildings of the St. Louis Arsenal are still standing there on the Mississippi River. Brigadier General Nathaniel Lyons was killed on August 10, 1865, at the battle of Wilson's Creek.

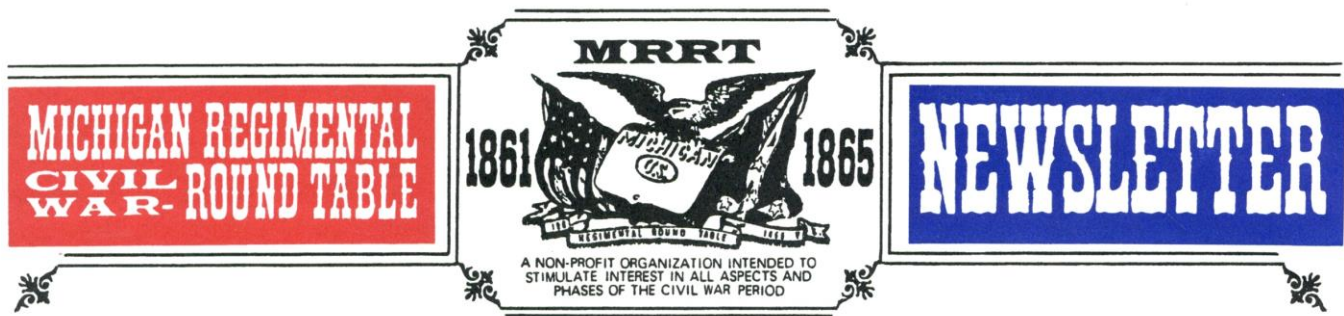
Quiz Questions: This month's questions pertain to Generals who "Didn't Like Each Other Much".

1. On September 6, 1863, a Confederate general shot and killed a fellow Confederate general in a duel with "pistols at 10 paces" after one accused the other of supposed "cowardice." Name the two generals.
2. Which general did General Jeb Stuart have transferred, calling him "by far the most troublesome man I have to deal with"? This man had earlier courted Jeb's future wife. Also, which outpost general developed a dislike for Stuart which, according to a contemporary, "ripened afterwards into as genuine a hatred as I ever remember to have seen in my life"?
3. Which Illinois-born Federal cavalry "boy general" did General George Custer remark: [He] proved himself an imbecile and nearly ruined the corps by his blunders"? Which former Union officer said when viewing Custer's body at the Little Big Horn: There he is, God Damm him! He'll never fight any more.... I am only too proud to say I hated him"?
4. This future Confederate general was expelled from West Point for breaking a mess-hall plate over the head of another future Confederate general. Name him and his mess-plate victim.
5. Which Michigan general said of General John Pope, "It can be said that he had not a friend in his command from the smallest drummer boy to the highest general officer"? And which Federal general said, "I don't care for John Pope one pinch of owl dung"?

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

Civil War Essentials – James H. Wilson-the Union's Other Young Cavalry Leader

Much, perhaps too much, has been written about George A. Custer, the young Michigan Civil War cavalryman who was destined to die later at the hands of the Sioux and Cheyenne Indians. Custer was a daring and successful leader in the war, but he was not the only one. **James Harrison Wilson would not only become an efficient and successful cavalry leader in the Civil War but would return to the army to lead men in the Spanish-American War.**



Wilson was born in 1837 in Illinois. He attended a college for one year then was appointed to West Point. He graduated in 1860 near the top of his class; Custer graduated one year later at the bottom of his. **Wilson was assigned to the Topographical Engineers where he served in Oregon prior to the beginning of the war.**

His first important wartime assignment was in the Port Royal expedition begun at the end of 1861. **During March 1862, he served in the successful attack on Fort Pulaski near Savannah.** His services there earned him a promotion to brevet major of volunteers, A transfer to become the topographical engineer of the Army of the Potomac under General McClellan followed and he was at the battles of South Mountain and Antietam as a result. **Still a “Topo” he then was transferred to the Western Theater to join U.S. Grant’s Army of the Tennessee.** Now a Lt. Colonel, he became Grant’s Inspector General during the long Vicksburg campaign. Becoming a brigadier general of volunteers, Wilson accompanied Grant to Chattanooga in the fall of 1863. He was General Sherman’s Chief Engineer during the latter’s march to relieve General Burnside at Knoxville.

James Wilson moved back to the East in February 1864 as Grant took overall U.S. Army command. **He transferred to the cavalry at that time** and was named Chief of the Cavalry Bureau in Washington. In this position he lobbied for the adoption of the Spencer repeating carbine by the cavalry. In June he was assigned to a cavalry division under General Sheridan. **Wilson led his division in the major battles of the Overland Campaign and Sheridan’s Valley Campaign.** In late June, he led a raid against the railroads south of Petersburg. While his 5,000 Yankees were able to tear up a lot of tracks and destroy some rolling stock, they were prevented from destroying the key objective - a bridge over the Stanton River – by a much smaller Rebel force and were chased back to the main Union Army. **This was probably the only real defeat Wilson suffered.**

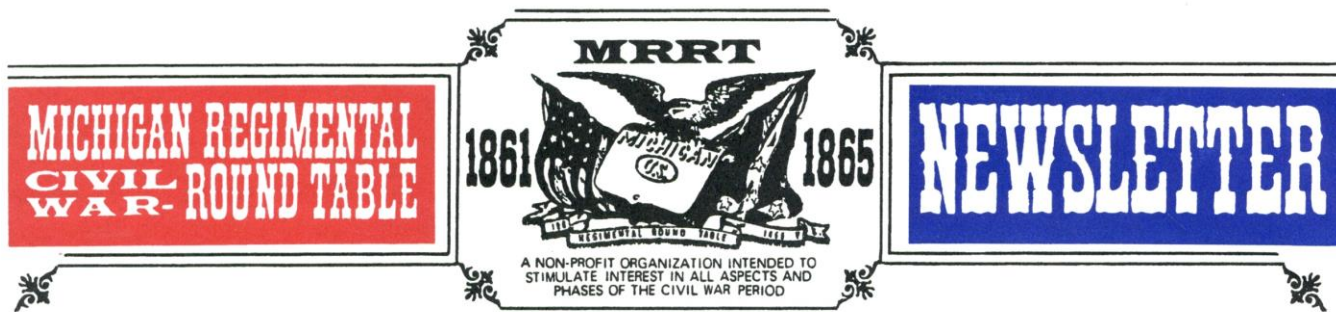


During October 1864, General Wilson was promoted to major general of volunteers and transferred back to the west. He helped to ready General Judson Kilpatrick’s horse soldiers for Sherman’s march across Georgia. Wilson was not to take part in the famous “March to the Sea” himself however, instead **he was to support the transfer of General John Schofield’s force back to Nashville by attempting to hold off the daring and brilliant General Nathan B. Forrest.** Although he was only partially successful – Union generals rarely were against the aggressive and wily Forrest – he did enough to protect the flanks of the Union force, especially at Franklin, as it scurried north to join the army General George H. Thomas was assembling at Nashville. One of the great misunderstandings about the battle at Nashville is that Thomas’ army was not a cohesive force. It was composed of units from 5 different commands which had not operated together recently or, in some cases, ever.

Once at Nashville, Wilson needed to remount and re-equip his cavalry. Horses were so scarce that they were taken from the city’s horse trolleys and even from Governor Andrew Johnson’s personal carriage to outfit the artillery and cavalry!

Thomas, although under intense pressure from Secretary Stanton and Grant to attack the Confederates under General Hood, methodically prepared his army for the coming battle. **Key to his plan was to use Wilson’s cavalry equipped with Spencers to threaten the left flank of Hood’s entrenched line.** He needed Wilson’s men to be remounted and to have dry enough conditions in order to operate.

Risking being replaced by another general, Thomas waited until these conditions were realized on December 15, 1864. **The cavalry achieved its objective and helped force Hood to abandon his primary position and withdraw south to**



another line of entrenchments. The next day, with Forrest still away attempting to destroy Union forces around Murfreesboro, **Wilson also flanked this position as well and, after infantry assaults forced the rebels out of their fortifications, then pursued the disorganized rebels as they fled back south** past Franklin to the Duck River where the lack of pontoon bridging interrupted the pursuit.

During the spring of 1865, Wilson and his 13,000+ cavalymen moved on the key Confederate arms manufacturing center at Selma, Alabama. Although Wilson's old foe, tried desperately to defend the city, the now veteran Yankee force overpowered his Confederates and occupied Selma and destroyed the munitions works located there. Then they moved on into Georgia and defeated a Rebel force at Columbus, then occupied Macon. As combat wound down, some of Wilson's men searched for and in May captured the CSA's fugitive president, Jefferson Davis.

At war's end, James Wilson, like other career officers, was reduced to his regular army rank of Lt. Colone and returned to engineering projects. In 1870 he resigned his commission and pursued a series of engineering positions with railroads and river control projects.

When the Spanish-American War began in 1898, he returned to the army and led soldiers in the anti-climatic invasion of Puerto Rico. After the American victories in Cuba and at sea, the Spanish Army had become defeatist. At the town of Coamo in the south-central part of the island the most serious fight of the campaign took place, Casualties were 6 Americans wounded and 6 Spanish killed and 30+ wounded – similar to the casualties from a typical small unit skirmish in the Civil War.

Wilson also played a secondary role in the suppression of the so-called "Boxer Rebellion" in China. In 1902, General Wilson represented the United States at the coronation of Britain's King Edward VII. **Returning to civilian life, Wilson was active in business until his death in 1925.**

James Wilson and his wife, Ella, had two daughters, Mary, and Catherine.

Quiz Answers:

1. General John Marmaduke killed General Lucius Walker
2. Generals Beverly Robertson and William E. "Gumble" Jones
3. **James Harrison Wilson (see story above)** and Frederick W. Benteen
4. Lewis A. Armistead and Jubal Early
5. Alpheus S. Williams and Samuel Sturgis

Civil War Essentials – Grand Review of the Union Army

On May 23, 1865, Washington, D.C. was very alive with pomp and enthusiasm. Replacing the sadness of the Lincoln Assassination were flags and mile after mile of red-white-and-blue bunting. The city was exceptionally clean.

Approximately 100,000 Union soldiers and a similar number of civilians were assembled for the grand review of the victorious Union Army.

A signal gun started the parade at 9:00 am. General George Meade started the parade leading his Army of the Potomac, victorious after four years of bloodshed. For nearly six hours, even lines of 60 men marched up Pennsylvania Avenue.

The next day another 100,000 men from the western armies repeated the march down Pennsylvania Avenue. Their leader was General William T. Sherman. The regimental bands played "*Marching Through Georgia*". That night Sherman's men had a great party to celebrate the end of the war.