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Michigan Regimental Round Table Newsletter—Page 1

April 2026

MONDAY, APRIL 27, 2026, ROUNDTABLE MEETING

Our April 2026 meeting will be on Monday, April 27, 2026, at 6:30 pm at the lower level of the Farmington Library, on the corner of Grand River and Farmington Road. Our guest speaker, Ben Cwayna, from Grand Ledge, MI, will speak about his new book, “*The Invincible Twelfth: The South Carolina Infantry of the Gregg-McGowan Brigade, Army of Northern Virginia.*”

FALL 2026 FIELD TRIP – DESTINATION: WINCHESTER, VA!

We will pass around a sign-up list at our April meeting. You may call Linda at 248.841.1461 or e-mail her at lindagerhardt99@gmail.com. It looks like a great start to our trip.

Tour Guide: Scott Patchen Tour Date: To be finalized – mid-October Hotel: Hampton Inn – Winchester
Bus -: From Varsity Travel-Winchester

Saturday – 1862 Stonewall Jackson-Sandy Ridge 1864 Jubal Early-Prichard Farm and Third Battle of Winchester
Sunday – Fisher’s Hill Battlefield, Cedar Creek Battlefield, Frederick County Courthouse Museum - Winchester

ROUNDTABLE WEBSITE The Roundtable has a great 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.

APRIL 27, 2026, SPEAKER – BEN CWAYNA – GRAND LEDGE, MI

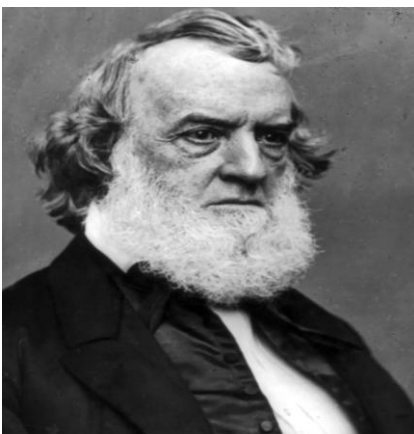
Ben, a first-time speaker with our Roundtable, will speak on his new book, *The Invincible Twelfth: The 12th South Carolina Infantry of the Gregg-McGowan Brigade, Army of Northern Virginia.* Colonel / Lieutenant Colonel Dixon Barnes installed discipline and strong leadership that turned raw recruits into one of the best units in the Army of Northern Virginia. The regiment earned the nickname of “*The Incredible Twelfth*.”

Ben describes the long and arduous marches, hunger, and horrendous and unimaginable carnage in battle. The regiment participated in every major engagement in the eastern theater of the Civil War. Mr. Cwayna researched the regiment for 15 years.

Ben Cwayna is a leader in the Civil War reenacting and living history community. He has commanded the 12th South Carolina and the 4th Michigan Volunteers. He is a tour guide and living history demonstrator.

Ben is a graduate of Michigan State University and the Michigan State College of Law. He works on the Grand Ledge Board of Education and the Grand Ledge Rotary Club.

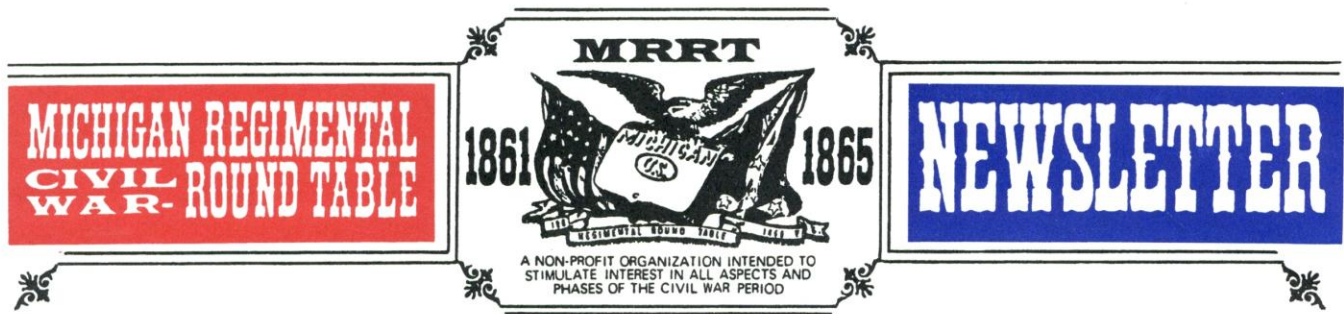
This will be an outstanding presentation on Monday evening, April 27, 2026!



March 2026 Speaker Review – Member Larry Hathcock- *Victory at Sea & on the Waterways*

The MRRT enjoyed a whirlwind summary of ***Victory at Sea & on Waterways*** – a trip through the many aspects of the naval side of the Civil War in record time by our own salty seadog, Larry Hathcock!

Larry began by noting that **the Navy contained far fewer men than the Army in the Civil War and that the USN’s contribution to victory has often been understated by historians.** At the beginning of the war, the Navy could recruit men easier than the Army; what it could not quickly recruit were ships. Starting with only



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ninety, most of which were not ready for sea and others were stationed at the far corners of the globe, they needed many hundreds more to defeat the Confederates.

Lincoln appointed Gideon Welles (picture left) to head the department; he was skilled and committed, remaining in office throughout the entire war and for a period afterwards, drawing on his earlier experience from the Navy Department during the Mexican War. Gustavus Fox, a former naval officer, became his able assistant. The USN built new ships as quickly as possible and purchased and converted suitable existing civilian ships early in the war. Most were designed for specific roles: patrolling rivers or harbors, for high seas duty, carrying special guns like mortars, etc.

Welles' Confederate counterpart was Stephen Mallory. His credentials were valid because he had held an elevated position in the US Senate dealing with naval affairs before the war. The Confederacy also placed James Bulloch in a position in Britain where he could acquire ships and naval supplies. Mallory decided that the only authentic way to challenge the large US Navy was through advanced technology.

U.S. Naval Blockade

Lincoln sought the advice of Army commander Gen. Winfield Scott on how to conduct the war. Scott advocated a blockade of Confederate ports together with a drive down the Mississippi River to isolate the seceding states from the outside. It was called the Anaconda Plan by some newspapers, what would decide the outcome and the Navy would clearly play a key role. Adding to the urgency of the blockade plan was the fear that rebel privateers would swarm out of the Carolinas to attack US merchant ships traveling along the east coast.

Welles convened a board of Navy officers to plan the blockade strategy.

In addition to acquiring the needed ships and men, they recommended that certain coastal areas be recaptured to both deny the rebels sanctuary there and provide coaling/supply bases for the blockading ships instead. Starting in August 1861 with Hatteras Island, a number of these enclaves were retaken by Army/Navy “combined operations” (prefiguring the US WWII Pacific Theater tactics) and this provided both strategic and desperately needed morale-building benefits. The USN blockading force was organized in four squadrons: east and west Gulf Coast and north and south Atlantic coast.

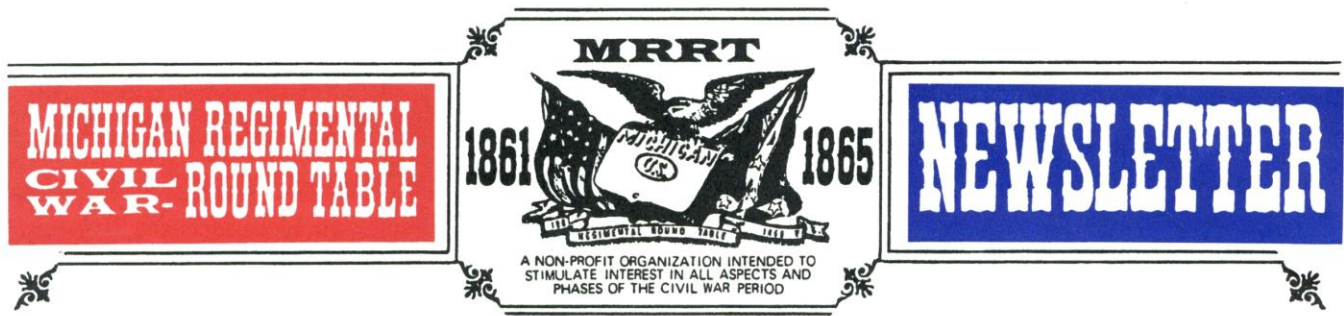


Ironclads and Blockade Runners

The blockade runners mostly came from Bermuda and the Bahamas (both British possessions) and from Cuba. To escape the growing blockade, the CSA used fast steamers with dark paint, low masts, and minimal superstructures. They employed men skilled in handling these ships and willing to risk capture by the blockaders.

To try to break the blockade, Mallory studied recent European naval trends, in particular the construction of ironclad ships by France and Britain. He had several ironclad vessels constructed in Confederate territory.

The best known is the CSS *Virginia*, built by recovering and modifying the partly burned USS Merrimack which had been burned and sunk when the Gosport (Norfolk) naval base was abandoned by the rebels exceedingly early in the war. It



featured innovative sloped side armor on its casement.

On March 8, 1862, **it proved superior to the wooden warships the US had stationed at Hampton Roads**. However, the next day, the Virginia was unable to finish the destruction of the US naval fleet there because John Ericsson's highly unconventional USS Monitor intervened and fought the larger rebel ironclad to a draw (picture left). Later CSN ironclads, like the CSS Tennessee, fiercely resisted a superior Union fleet at Mobile Bay in 1864 but lost.

Union River Ironclads

In the West, river ironclads built by James Eads were instrumental in the 1862 Union successes at Fort Henry and Fort Donelson which opened the middle part of Tennessee including Nashville. However, the battles exposed the weakness of these ships to plunging fire from Confederate guns mounted above the river level. **The Eads gunboats would be involved in other battles including the fleet action at Memphis** which also featured ships with rams used by both sides.

Union Admiral David Farragat – Opening the Mississippi River

During the spring of 1862, David Farragat led the wooden ships of his Western Gulf Squadron up the Mississippi River from its mouth and **after battling his way past the defending rebel forts, captured New Orleans**, the Confederacy's largest city, and a major manufacturing hub. He continued up the river, also capturing Baton Rouge **but was unsuccessful at Vicksburg** where CSA guns mounted on hills above the river proved too destructive to pass. After many other failed attempts, the problem of how to approach Vicksburg by land was solved by having the Ironclad River gunboats lead some transports downriver past the city's defenses at night and ferry Grant's army across the river south of Vicksburg. Once on the east side, Grant defeated the Confederate armies, and, after a siege, captured the city. **The Mississippi was now open to the Union and closed to the rebels.**



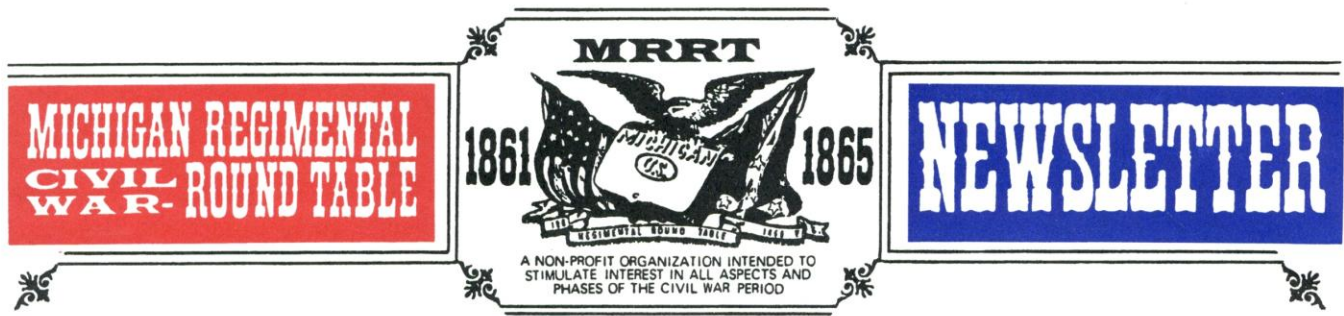
Confederate Armed Cruisers Built in Great Britain

In addition to ironclads, **Mallory's navy included several fast armed cruisers built in Britain which he used to prey on US merchant vessels on the high seas (CSS Alabama-picture left)**. This strategy proved very damaging to the US merchant fleet. The United States Navy was required to allocate its cruisers and personnel for the purpose of locating and intercepting these commerce raiders. Several were destroyed but others survived to war's end.

The United States formally expressed concerns to Britain regarding insufficient enforcement of neutrality laws; however, Britain began implementing stricter controls on ship construction for aggressors only toward the conclusion of the conflict. Years after the war, the British would be called into account for their

laxity.

The continued Union assault on southern ports met with mixed results. **Charleston, symbol of the session, resisted all Union efforts to capture it.** The fortifications were well placed and defended and the monitor ironclads proved to be ineffective against fortress walls. However, David Farragat launched an attack on Mobile Bay in 1864. Although stubbornly defended by the CSS Tennessee and two strong forts, the US fleet prevailed despite losing a monitor to a torpedo (mine). Mobile itself was still Confederate but was now cut off from the world.



In these ways, the US Navy contributed to the ultimate Union victory. We thank Larry for his great summary of the often-neglected Naval War.

Civil War Essentials -Building of Data Centers in Virginia

The building of data centers remarkably close to Civil War battlefields has become a major issue in Virginia. The Virginia Court of Appeals ruled against a rezoning request in Prince William County that would have allowed the construction of the world's largest data centers remarkably close to the Manassas battlefields. This legal battle has lasted for 26 months.

Legislative and court hearings continued in Orange County concerning a proposed “Wilderness Crossing” that is asking for one or more data centers. Concerns have been raised about power-line rights-of-way that would infringe on battlefield land.

The Virginia legislature is in a budget impasse because of the data centers.

The Prince William site is the equivalent of 144 Walmart supercenters which would require fourteen on-site electrical.

substations, consuming nine gigawatts of electricity, are enough to power over two million homes.

Mac Haddow, president of the Oak Valley Homeowners Association said, *“This is a great victory for every citizen who can now trust the county must strictly adhere to legal processes put in place...”* David Duncan, President of the American Battlefield Trust also said, *“we know we must stay in the fight and pursue every angle to ensure this project does not come to fruition and desecrate the hallowed ground of the Manassas Battlefield.”*

The Orange County zoning proposal is being debated in the courts and Virginia’s legislature. State budget approval is behind schedule as the Governor and State House of Representatives wants to keep a significant tax break for the data centers while the State House does not. Lobbyists for the large tech companies were in two historic rooms trying to get the tax breaks. The budget must be approved shortly. The major argument for the data centers is the jobs that will be created.

John Buford – The Union’s Short-Lived Hero

John Buford was primarily remembered for his actions on July 1, 1863, at Gettysburg. He made several other contributions to the Union cause. He graduated from West Point in 1848 and chose not to accept a commission from the Confederacy. “I will live and die under the Union.” A cousin became a Confederate general.

General Buford quickly whipped General Pope’s cavalry into shape during the Second Bull Run campaign.

General Buford was gravely wounded at Second Bull Run. Soon, he came back and served as a cavalry commander for Generals McClellan, Burnside, Hooker, and Meade.

Unfortunately, the general did not live exceptionally long after the Gettysburg campaign. He died on December 16, 1863, of typhoid fever, the same day that he was promoted to major general!