

THE WASHINGTON VOLUNTEER

PUGET SOUND CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

www.pscwrt.org

DECEMBER 2021

Volume 37, Issue 4

NEXT MEETING: Thursday,

DECEMBER 16, 2021

ZOOM MEETING ONLY

Time: Social hour at 6:45 p.m.; Program at 7:00 p.m.

BOB MAY WILL SPEAK ON FILIBUSTERING BEFORE THE CIVIL WAR

Bob May, retired history professor from Purdue University, will give a presentation on filibustering before the Civil War. Were these men and their followers pirates or purveyors of American Manifest Destiny? What were the motivations of men like William Walker, John Quitman and Narciso Lopez? Was filibustering a way for the American South to expand Slavery? Join us for this interesting talk by Bob May.

Important dispatches

PUGET SOUND CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE AND COVID 19

When I became President of PSCWRT for the third time in May 2020 my number one concern was for PSCWRT to continue as a viable place where the American Civil War could be studied and discussed in a safe manner by our membership until the Pandemic ended. Thanks to our past president, Dick Miller, we started having Zoom Meetings instead of scheduled live in person meetings. This proved to work well and was getting about half of the amount of attendance before the Pandemic. If you attended some of these Zoom Meetings, you know that the presentations were excellent. On behalf of the Board of Directors and the Membership of PSCWRT I wish to express our eternal gratitude to Dick Miller for helping to keep our Roundtable alive and vibrant.

The Board still feels that at present it is still too early to have in person Live meetings at the China Harbor. While the Covid rates have peaked and have started to drop, they are still very high, but they seem to be coming down. It was decided that only who are fully vaccinated could attend our meetings. Also, it was decided that attendees of these in person meetings would be required to wear masks except when eating or drinking. In a recent vote the Board of directors has unanimously decided that members can attend live meeting if they are unvaccinated and provide a Covid 19 negative test result that is less than 72 hours before our meeting. At this point in time it is logistically impossible for there to be a simultaneous in person and Zoom meeting. The Board

will vote again shortly before New Year's Eve as to whether or not to have a live in person meeting starting on Jan. 13 when Richard Hanks is to be our presenter.

The Pandemic will be monitored by the Board of Directors. It is our sincere hope that we will be able to hold our in person meeting at the China Harbor on January 13. Stay tuned! Rick Solomon

SPEAKER SCHEDULE FOR 2021-2022

January 13, 2022 – Richard Hanks spoke to the roundtable in 2017 on Edward Hall Higby. He will return to speak about the Lincoln-Hanks connection. Hanks is a distant relative of Nancy Hanks.

February 10, 2022 – Long-time PSCWRT favorite, Ethan Rafuse, author of numerous books on the Civil War and Professor of Military History at the US Army Command & General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, will again delight roundtable members with his incisive analysis of Civil War battles and leaders.

March 10, 2022 – Ryan Booth will talk about James Sanks Brisbin, a lawyer who enlisted as a private in April 1861 and ended the war as a brevet brigadier general. In the course of seeing significant action, Brisbin was wounded five times.

April 7, 2022 – Gordon Chang, author of *Ghosts of Gold Mountain: The Epic Story of the Chinese Who Built the Transcontinental Railroad*, is the Olive H. Palmer Professor in Humanities at Stanford University.

May 12, 2022 – Caroline Janney is the John L. Nau III Professor in the History of the American Civil War and the Director of the John L. Nau III Center for Civil War History at the University of Virginia. Professor Janney's latest book, *Ends of War: The Unfinished Fight of Lee's Army after Appomattox*, will be released by the University of North Carolina Press on September 21, 2021.

DECEMBER Birthdays

Several members have birthdays in December and we'd like to acknowledge their special day! They are:

Rod Cameron
Stephen Clayton
Craig Miller
Eric Oyster
Susan Shelby
Allen Suter
Carol Whipple

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN: THE UNSUCCESSFUL SEARCH FOR A COMMANDER OF THE ARMY OF TENNESSEE PART THREE

Last month I gave a second part to a brief history of the high command of the Confederate Army of Tennessee in the Western Theater up until just before the Battle of Stones River. Braxton Bragg continued to be his own worst enemy. On January 11, 1863, made a huge mistake in sending a round robin letter to five of his chief subordinates – Leonidas Polk, William Hardee, John Breckinridge, Patrick Cleburne and Benjamin Cheatham. In that letter Bragg asked two things of his subordinates. The first was whether these generals advised Bragg to retreat or not after the battle of Stones River. All agreed that they advised Bragg to retreat. Then Bragg made a fatal error. He asked these same five generals whether he should remain in command of the Army of Tennessee. Hardee, Cleburne and Breckinridge quickly responded “that a change in command of this army is necessary.” While Polk and Cheatham did not officially answer Bragg’s letter, both were decidedly anti-Bragg generals. Nevertheless, President Jefferson Davis continued to support Bragg. Davis ordered Joseph E. Johnston, in late January 1863, to go to the Army of Tennessee and determine whether Bragg should be replaced. Johnston realized that if he recommended Bragg’s replacement, he would be the logical choice to succeed him. Johnston considered that a field army command was more desirable than his current, mostly administrative post, but his sense of honor prevented him from achieving this personal gain at Bragg’s expense. After interviewing Bragg and other prominent generals, Johnston wrote a report in which he stated the morale of the army was good and that the men were well supplied with clothing and food. Therefore, Davis sustained Bragg in command. However, Johnston may very well have been the best option to replace Bragg at this time. Some big advocates of Joseph E. Johnston taking over the Army of Tennessee at this time

were James Longstreet, E. Kirby Smith, Leonidas Polk, and Senator Louis Wigfall.

Several generals besides Johnston were suggested as a replacement of Bragg. One was E. Kirby Smith who had travelled to Richmond to consult with President Davis. Senator Louis Wigfall of Texas suggested a swap. Send James Longstreet to command the Army of Tennessee in exchange for Bragg taking over the First Corps of the Army of Northern Virginia. According to Wigfall, Davis had nearly agreed to this proposition, but by February 1863 had backed away from it. William Preston Johnston, son of the deceased Albert Sidney Johnston, wrote to his uncle, General William Preston, that Davis should take command of the Army of Tennessee with Bragg acting as second in command.

In the final analysis in January 1863 it made the most sense for Bragg to be replaced by “old Joe” Johnston who had the confidence of almost all the division and Corps commanders of the Army of Tennessee. At the same time most of these generals had lost faith in the ability of Braxton Bragg to command that army. However, President Jefferson Davis had confidence in Bragg that remained unshaken and Johnston remained on Davis’s black list. Despite this Davis gave Johnston the opportunity to replace Bragg with himself. Johnson’s sense of honor prevented him from doing this. Would Johnston have done better than Bragg in the Tullahoma Campaign? Perhaps, but “old Joe” couldn’t have done worse. The trail from here led to the bloody Battle of Chickamauga, a battle where Bragg snatched defeat from the jaws of victory. Part four next month is the upheaval in the command structure of the Army of Tennessee after the battle of Chickamauga.

SOME FILIBUSTERERS WHO LATER FOUGHT FOR THE CONFEDERACY

We are fortunate to have Bob May speak to us on Filibusterers in the years before the American Civil War. Bob is, perhaps, the leading living historian on the subject of Nineteenth Century Filibusterers. Several of these “rascals” had prominent roles while serving the Confederacy. I would like to introduce you to a couple of these Rebel officers.

Birkhead Davenport Fry was born in Kanawha County, Virginia (now West Virginia) on 6-24-22. After attending the Virginia Military Institute Fry attended West Point. He did not graduate with the class of 1846, having failed mathematics and was subsequently dismissed. At the beginning of his West Point experience Fry was one of four Virginian cadets who were turned off by the unfriendly behavior of another first year Virginian cadet, Thomas J. Jackson, the future Stonewall. After studying Law in Virginia Fry served as a first lieutenant in the Mexican-American War. After the war Fry moved to California as a “Forty-Niner” and practiced law in Sacramento. Starting in October 1856 Fry served as a colonel in William Walker’s mercenary army in Nicaragua. After this Fry moved to Alabama to engage in cotton manufacturing.

Upon Alabama’s secession Fry was appointed colonel of the 13th Alabama. Fry was of slight build and quiet manner, but he had a “gunpowder reputation.” He was wounded at the Battle of Seven Pines. He recovered in time to command his regiment at Antietam, where he was again wounded, suffering a shattered left arm. A surgeon told him that if his arm was not amputated his odds of surviving the wound were one in three hundred. “Then I’ll take it,” replied Fry, who kept his limb and survived. Fry was wounded again at the battle of Chancellorsville. His regiment suffered the most casualties in Archer’s brigade at Chancellorsville. At the first Day at Gettysburg Fry’s regiment was one of the first to fight Buford’s Federal cavalry. Archer’s brigade was driven off by the Iron Brigade with Archer being captured. At this point Archer assumed command of Archer’s brigade of Tennesseans and Alabamans. On the Third Day of the Battle of Gettysburg Fry’s brigade was in the front left line of Pettigrew’s Division. He and Richard Garnett, brigadier of Pickett’s division, agreed that Fry’s brigade would be the brigade of direction during the Pickett-Pettigrew-Trimble Assault (aka Pickett’s Charge). On July 2 A.P. Hill and Fry had had a conversation while standing on Seminary Ridge, viewing the Federal position on Cemetery Ridge. When Hill asked Fry what he thought of it, Fry answered that it appeared to be “an exceedingly strong one.” Fry then sought Hill’s opinion. Hill shut his binoculars “emphatically” and said that it was “entirely too strong to attack in front.” During the artillery bombardment prior to the start of Pickett’s Charge Fry was wounded in his right shoulder,, but stayed with his brigade. Once the attack started Fry made it only a few paces beyond the Emmittsburg Road when a bullet smashed into his leg, breaking the thigh bone. While Fry laid on the ground he shouted to his men, “Go on – it will not last five minutes longer!” although he could see little of the action, he “was so confident of victory.” Fry was captured and held at Fort McHenry in Baltimore. Exchanged in 1864, Fry rejoined the army of Northern Virginia in time for the beginning of the siege of Petersburg. He commanded a brigade

during the battle of Meadow Bridge. Fry was promoted to Brigadier general on May 24, 1864. After the surrender at Appomatox Fry emigrated to Cuba living in Havana near other former prominent Confederates, including Jubal Early, John Breckinridge, Robert Toombs and John Magruder, among others. He returned to the United states in 1868 living as a businessman in Alabama, Florida and Richmond.

The other Confederate officer I want to introduce you to was C. Roberdeau Wheat. Born on 4-9-26 in Alexandria, Virginia, Wheat was the son of a preacher. Wheat moved with his family to Louisiana as a young boy. He grew to 6 foot, 4 inches tall and weighed 240 pounds. He was a captain under General Winfield Scott in the Mexican-American War. In 1848 he was elected a representative of New Orleans to the Louisiana State Legislature. He was admitted to the bar in 1849. Then he caught filibuster wanderlust fever serving under Narciso Lopez in Cuba, Carravagal in Mexico, William Walker in Nicaragua and Alvarez in Mexico. Wheat joined Garibaldi in Sicily until going back to America during the Secession Crisis of 1861. He was given command of what became known as “Wheat’s Special Battalion” or the “Louisiana Tigers”, a hard fighting, hard living unit that fought well on the battlefield, but lacked discipline. These “street toughs” were drawn from the “bottom of the barrel” of New Orleans society. They were very loyal to Wheat, who was a charismatic and humble leader of men. At the First Battle of Bull Run Wheat took a bullet through both of lungs. When a surgeon told him that there was no instance on record of a man surviving such a wound, Wheat replied, “Well then, I will put my case on record.” He also fought in Jackson’s Valley Campaign and the Peninsula campaign. At Gaines Mill he received a mortal wound.

OFFICERS AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS POSITIONS NEED TO BE FILLED

GREETERS

We need motivated people who are outgoing who would be willing to meet and help visitors and new members, to answer questions and help them feel welcome to our group. This is currently a non-board position, but for this position “the more, the merrier”. Everyone here was new at some point. Didn’t you like being welcomed rather than ignored?

SECRETARY

The main job of the Secretary is to take minutes at board meetings and to publish them for the board, the advisors and the general membership.

VICE-PRESIDENT RESERVATIONS

This is the person that records the meal choices and reservations for each month’s meeting as they come in. Once live in person meetings resume at the China Harbor we need someone regular in that position. Vice President-Successor Jim Dimond has stepped in temporarily.

VICE-PRESIDENT EDITOR

This monthly newsletter, the Washington Volunteer, is edited and put together by the VP-Editor. The opening is immediate with Rick Solomon filling this position temporarily. Right now I have my plate overflowing with serving as President and trying to find speakers for 2022-2023. This is one of the most

important positions in PSCWRT. If you volunteer, you can call on past Newsletter Editors Jeff Rombauer, Mark Terry and Rick Solomon for advise.

Please note that anyone who volunteers will be given help and instruction for their role. For the most efficient and smooth operation of the PSCWRT, we need YOUR HELP to make it happen!

DUES & DONATIONS

The PSCWRT season goes from September to the following May. Dues should be paid in September. Dues are payable either at the meeting or by mail: \$25 per individual or for a couple. Also, donations are gratefully accepted. These will help secure speakers for our meetings. Please note that all donations are tax deductible as the PSCWRT is a 501(c)3 organization. Mail to: Chris McDonald, Treasurer, 34705 NE 14th Avenue, LaCenter, WA 98629. Call (503) 930-4940 or email: alpacamomchris@gmail.com

We welcome your article or research submissions for the newsletter, but they may be edited for space. Note that the contents of each newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of the PSCWRT. The deadline for the January 2022 Washington Volunteer is Friday, December 31, 2021. Please have it in Rick Solomon's hands via email or snailmail by then. Thank you!

2021-2022 OFFICERS

Elected:*

President: Rick Solomon; ricksolomon192@gmail.com

Vice President Successor: Jim Dimond; shinodad@gmail.com

Past President: Jeff Rombauer; jeffrombauer@foxinternet.org

Co-Vice President Programs: Pat Brady; patsbrady@comcast.net; Dick Miller;

milomiller882@msn.com; Rick Solomon; ricksolomon192@gmail.com

Acting Newsletter Editor Temporary): Rick Solomon; ricksolomon192@gmail.com

Vice President Marketing: Dave Otis; jbhood81@aol.com

Vice President Membership: Arthur Banner; banneras@comcast.net

Acting Vice President Reservations: Jim Dimond; shinoded@gmail.com

Acting Vice President Social Media: Jim Dimond; shinodad@gmail.com

Treasurer: Chris McDonald: alpacamomchris@gmail.com

Secretary: VACANT

Board Member: George Yocum;

**All, except for Past President, an automatic position.*