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General Orders

Altavilla's Brigade

Vol. 34
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April
2023



APRIL, 2023 MEETING
Thursday, April 20, 2023

Rudi Lechner's Restaurant
2503 South Gessner Road
6:00 (or sooner) Dinner
7:00 Program Begins

E-mail reservations are preferred. Please
e-mail Barry Brueggeman at
bgbrueg@aol.com or call 281 480-1130
by 6 pm Monday, April 17th, 2023

***** Reservations are Required *****

There is no cost for dues-paid members.
\$10.00 charge for visitors.

The HCWRT Presents
Jonathan M. Steplyk speaking
on:

“Fighting Means Killing: Civil War
Soldiers and the Nature of Combat”

“War means fighting, and fighting means killing,” Confederate cavalry commander Nathan Bedford Forrest famously declared. The battlefield tested the willingness of Union and Confederate to fight – and kill – for their respective causes.

The Civil War was fundamentally a matter of Americans killing Americans. This undeniable reality is what Jonathan Steplyk explores in

Fighting Means Killing, a lengthy study of Union and Confederate soldiers' attitudes towards, and experiences of, killing in the war.

Jonathan Steplyk's talk examines how weapons, tactics, psychology, and a host of other factors shaped how Civil War soldiers experienced the face of battle.

Drawing upon letters, diaries, and postwar reminiscences, Steplyk examines what soldiers and veterans thought about killing before, during, and after the war. How did these soldiers view sharpshooters? How about hand-to-hand combat? What language did they use to describe killing in combat? What cultural and societal factors influenced their attitudes? And what was the impact of race in battlefield atrocities and bitter clashes between white Confederates and black Federals? These are the questions that Steplyk will address in his talk.

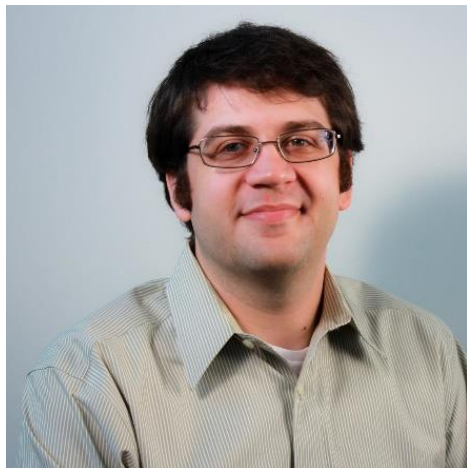


Jonathan Steplyk

About Jonathan M. Steplyk

Jonathan M. Steplyk received his Ph.D. in history at Texas Christian University and teaches at the University of Texas at Arlington. He is the author of *Fighting Means Killing: Civil War Soldiers and the Nature of Combat* (2018) and is a regular contributor to the Civil War Campaigns in the West series.

Dr. Steplyk is the recipient of the Colonel Richard W. Ulrich Memorial Book Award (2019) as well as the Grady McWhiney Award (2023). In addition to his scholarship, he has worked in battlefield interpretation at Harpers Ferry National Historical Park and Cedar Creek and Belle Grove National Historical Park.



PRESIDENT'S POST

By Keith Altavilla

Greetings, Round Table members!. Just like that, we are suddenly nearing the end of the "campaign calendar." There are just two speakers remaining, but plenty about which to be excited! It has been quite a year so far, and we are shaping up for a strong finish.

I hope everyone who was able to attend our March meeting enjoyed Jeff Hunt's presentation on Rappahannock Station. He did an excellent job providing detail of a period which the larger narrative tends to skip. Hopefully, Jeff will be able to join us again when he finishes the series with Mine Run.

This month's speaker is a newer scholar, Jonathan Steplyk. We move from narrative to analysis, and his account of how Civil War soldiers wrestled with the necessity of killing provides substantial depth to our understanding of the soldiers' experience. You will not want to miss this!

With only two meetings to go, there are two things you should be thinking about. First is renewing your membership for next year. Why not renew now? Get your payments in to Barry, either by mail or in person, and check that off your to-do list. Make sure you don't miss anything from the newsletter (including quiz questions), or anything for the coming campaign year, and help keep the Round Table going strong for another year. The other item is our coming elections. While we have the official Round Table leadership, there are always opportunities for participating. I encourage you to reach out to our board members if you have skills or interests that would help the Round Table function and grow. We can't (and don't want to) do anything without all of you.

I look forward to seeing everyone soon.

MEMBERSHIP REPORT

By Michael Clennan

Our very successful 2022-2023 campaign is quickly drawing to a close with only April and May remaining. The HCWRT's current membership is going strong with 80 members! Congratulations to our Programs Committee for the seven outstanding speakers we have all enjoyed thus far. Our chosen speaker for April, Jonathan Steplyk, represents more of the same quality speakers we've been featuring month after month.

So, why not help spread the joy; invite a friend to join now! Persons joining in April will have a membership which includes April and May plus all of the 2023-2024 campaign. What a deal!

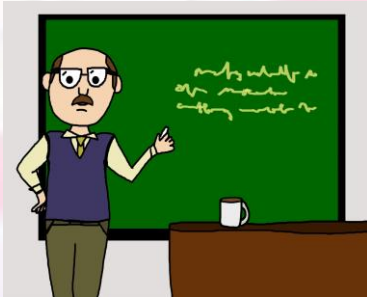
Finally, please be sure to RSVP with Barry no later than 6 pm Monday, April 17th. We really appreciate everyone's cooperation in placing your reservations timely!

APRIL QUIZ *By Jim Godlove*

Due to the topic of this month's talk, the quiz questions will focus on events that happened in the month of April during the Civil War.

On April 12, 1861, Fort Sumter was fired upon, thus beginning the Civil War.

Who was in command of Fort Sumter and who was in command of the Confederate forces at Charleston, South Carolina?



BOOK RAFFLE *By Donnie Stowe*

I really enjoyed the talk last month from Jeffrey Hunt on the Army of the Potomac's first post-Gettysburg offensive from Kelly's Ford to the Rapidan. I followed Jeff to Baton Rouge, Louisiana the weekend of March 17th where he spoke at the Baton Rouge Round Table's 6th Annual Symposium. His topic there was about the Civil War's last battle: Palmetto Ranch.

But that was last month and now we turn to our raffle for this month: The list of books begins with **GALLOPING THUNDER: The Stuart Horse Artillery Battalion** by Robert J. Trout. This volume is a donation from Neil Weaver and is autographed by the author. Another interesting book is **CIGARS, WHISKEY, & WINNING: LEADERSHIP LESSONS** from

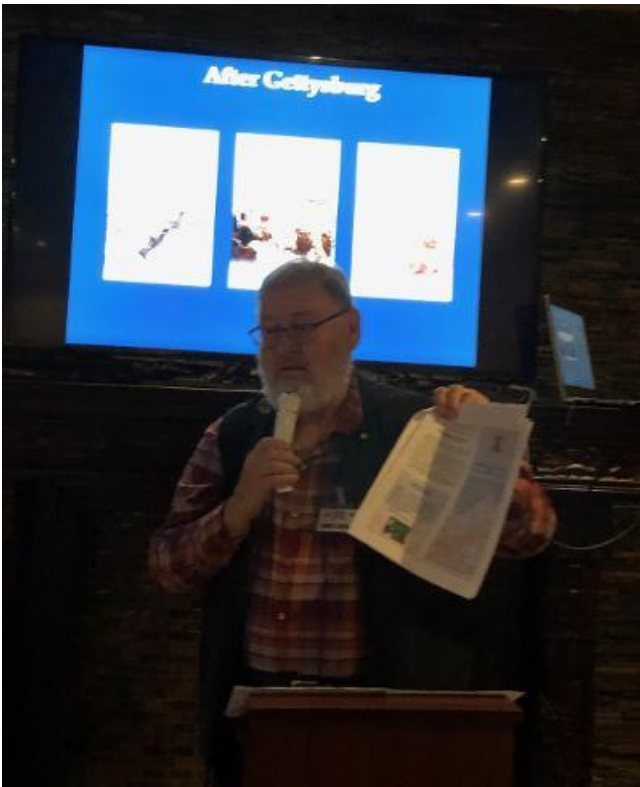
General Ulysses S. Grant by Al Kaltman. This is a book I won at the Baton Rouge Symposium and I certainly hope you like it. Also, we have **STRINGFELLOW OF THE FOURTH: The Amazing Career of the Most Successful Confederate Spy** by R. Shepard Brown. This donation is from Nate Jennings. In addition, there is **GENERAL A. P. HILL: The Story of a Confederate Warrior** by the renowned historian James I. Robertson, Jr. A. P. Hill was a West Point classmate of such future Civil War generals as Jackson, McClellan and Burnside. Another Confederate biography is **GENERAL JAMES LONGSTREET: The Confederacy's Most Controversial Soldier** by Jeffry D. Wert. This softcover volume is from the estate of Dale Troth.

Other volumes this month include **THE WAR FOR THE UNION: War Becomes Revolution 1862-1863** by Allan Nevins. We're also offering **TERRIBLE SWIFT SWORD** by Bruce Catton. This is the second volume of Catton's Centennial History of the Civil War.

Other books included this month are **ONE of CLEBURNE'S COMMAND: The Civil War Reminiscences and Diary of Capt. Samuel T. Foster**, **GRANBURY'S TEXAS BRIGADE, CSA, THE YANKEE PLAGUE** by Lorien Foote, **THE HISTORY of the CONFEDERACY: 1832-1865**, **BROTHER AGAINST BROTHER** by William C. Davis, and more. To see them all and get a chance to take a couple home, please come to the meeting and bring a friend.

Also this month, I will be offering various Civil War and/or Military Heritage Magazines for 25 cents each or 5 for \$1.00.





HCWRT's Quizmaster, Jim Godlove

THE DESTRUCTION AND ABANDONMENT OF THE GOSPORT NAVY YARD

By Stephen C. Kinnaman

In the opening days of the Civil War, the U.S. Navy suffered the catastrophic loss of its most valuable navy yard at Gosport, Virginia, commonly known as the Norfolk Navy Yard. Early in the morning of Sunday, April 21st, fleeing federal forces set fire to and abandoned the navy yard, destroying ten warships, leaving 1,200 naval guns to the secessionists and giving up a site that contained workshops, storehouses, naval supplies and a granite-lined graving dock. No lives were lost, but the shock to the nation and humiliation suffered by the U.S. Navy was reminiscent of the Japanese assault eighty years later on Pearl Harbor.

The fuse that ignited this debacle was lit on April 17th when Virginia passed its ordinance of secession. Up until then, the Lincoln administration had practiced a do-nothing policy toward the Gosport Navy Yard, hoping such a

benign posture would dissuade Virginia from leaving the Union. But once Virginia seceded, its insurgent forces initiated a relentless campaign of isolation, intimidation and obstruction against Gosport. The yard's Commodore Charles McCauley was trapped between the secessionists' pressure and the inability of Navy Secretary Welles to provide reinforcements. Attempts to remove the big steam frigate *Merrimack* failed, largely due to the masked actions of the yard's Southern officers, but also because of a blocked river channel, lack of crew and a pilot, and an inept acting captain. But despite the setback, the watchful guns of the Home Squadron's flagship *Cumberland* gave assurance that the yard was well guarded.

On Saturday, April 20th the situation at the Gosport Navy Yard spiraled downhill. By now, nearly all of McCauley's officers had resigned. The night before, secessionists seized the Navy's arsenal and its gunpowder. That same day, rebels attempted to storm the government steamer *Yankee*, a hostile act that convinced Commodore McCauley the yard would soon be overrun. Without the receipt of reassurances from Secretary Welles, McCauley reluctantly ordered the scuttling of four ships ready for sea—*Merrimack*, the sloops *Germantown* and *Plymouth*, and the brig *Dolphin*—to prevent their seizure and allow him to concentrate his men on the yard's defenses. Just hours after the last vessel had settled to the bottom, the steamer *Pawnee* appeared carrying Commodore Paulding and a regiment of Massachusetts volunteers, bringing the much longed-for reinforcements. But it was too late. Paulding made the snap decision that the yard was indefensible—a judgement later hotly debated—and ordered it destroyed. Early next morning, the Gosport Navy Yard was put to the torch. Paulding's command escaped on *Pawnee*, which towed the sloop *Cumberland* to safety.

McCauley was vilified for the loss of Gosport but never court-martialed. A year later, the Confederate ironclad *Virginia*, built on the hulk of *Merrimack*, chose *Cumberland*, the one ship to escape Gosport, as her first target during the Battle of Hampton Roads.



HOUSTON CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

The Houston Civil War Round Table is dedicated to the study of the civilian, military, and cultural aspects of United States history during the period of 1861 – 1865 and to the preservation of historical sites and artifacts. For additional copies of this form please go to www.HoustonCivilWar.com

Membership Type

(CHECK ONE BOX ONLY.)

- \$50 – Individual
- \$60 – Family
- \$25 – Student/Faculty or Out-of-Town
- Existing Member - Address / Information Update Only

JOINING BETWEEN JANUARY 1 AND MAY 31

NON-RENEWING MEMBERS JOINING IN THE MONTHS OF JANUARY THROUGH MAY WILL AUTOMATICALLY BE ENROLLED AS MEMBERS FOR THE CURRENT AND FOLLOWING YEAR'S SPEAKERS' SERIES ("CAMPAIGN").

Name: _____
(FIRST, MIDDLE, LAST)

Address: _____

City: _____ St _____ Zip _____

Phone: _____ Cell Home Work

Email Address: _____

In which format would you like to receive your newsletter?

Email (PDF) U.S. Postal Service (Printed)

How did you learn about us? _____

FOR FAMILY MEMBERSHIPS ONLY

Family Member Name: _____
(FIRST, MIDDLE, LAST)

Relationship to Applicant: _____

Phone: _____ Cell Home Work

Email Address: _____

Note: For memberships or subscriptions outside the U.S., extra cost of postage to mail the newsletter may be added. Cost will vary; please write or email to inquire.

Mail your completed application and dues to: Houston Civil War Round Table
C/O Barry G. Brueggeman
3706 Lonniewood Drive
Houston, TX 77059

2022 – 2023 SPEAKERS CAMPAIGN

Apr. 20, 2023 Jonathan M. Steplyk: *“Fighting Means Killing: Civil War Soldiers and the Nature of Combat”*
May 18, 2023 Lorien Foote: *“The Yankee Plague”*

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