



HARPERS FERRY CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

BOX 389, HARPERS FERRY, WV 25425

Vol. 26 November 2006 No. 4

DATE: Wednesday, December 13th, 2006

TIME: 7:00 PM - CWRT Members Dinner
(Dinner Reservations Required)

8:00 Speakers Presentation and Book Raffle
(Open to the Public)

PLACE: **Note! New meeting location**
Hilltop House Hotel,
400 East Ridge St. Harpers Ferry, WV
(Follow signs for Hilltop house from Washington St.)
(Turn Right on Ridge St. and go to the end of the street.)

SPEAKER: Dr. Tom Lowry

SUBJECT: Great Hits of the Court-Martials--Pathos,
Pathology and In Between.

The Subject:

The 90,000 surviving transcripts of Civil War courts-martial have an astounding range of stories. Tales of individual courage are mixed with fraudulent heroes, crazed murderers, 1861 obscure junior officers who were famous by 1865, scams by Alexandria bordellos which defrauded the Union Army of tens of thousands of dollars, Lincoln's personal bodyguard (which mistreated the White House animals), tragic stories of boy soldiers, the role of branding and whipping in the Confederate armies, nose biters, and carnal malfeasance in the little Pennsylvania town of Gettysburg.

The Speaker

We welcome Dr. Lowry back to the roundtable. He was a guest here in 1999 and 2001. Dr. Lowry is a graduate of Stanford University, where he studied history and medicine. He has served in the U.S. Air Force and was on the staff of the Masters & Johnson Clinic in 1972 and 1973.

His previous books and numerous journal articles are on anatomy and the history of medicine. For more than thirty-five years a physician and psychiatrist, Dr. Lowry was on the faculty of the University of California at San Francisco and is currently retired. His book, entitled *The Story The Soldiers Wouldn't Tell: Sex in the Civil War* (1994), has received great interest and acclaim. Other writings include *Tarnished Eagles*, *Tarnished Scalpels*, *Swamp Doctor* and *The Bawdy Houses of Washington, DC*

The Meal

A family-style meal will be served at 7:00 PM prior to the program. The cost of the meal is \$11.00 per person. Reservations for the meal **must be phoned in no later than Sunday, December 9th**, to Allison Alsdorf, at 304-535-2101 or you can e-mail her at alsdorf@adelphia.net

December 13, 1864

Fall of Fort McCallister, Georgia

General Sherman reached the sea. The Federal commander made contact with the Union fleet after the capture of Fort McAllister on the Ogeechee River below Savannah. About 5 p.m. Federal troops of W. B. Hazen's division of the Fifteenth Corps charged the earth fort from the land side, despite mines and other obstructions. Sherman watched the courageous assault from a rice mill across the Ogeechee. The Confederate garrison under Major G. W. Anderson numbered 230 men and suffered 35 casualties, while Hazen had killed 24 and 110 wounded. The fall of the fort opened river communication with the Union fleet. Savannah was doomed. Signals flew between Sherman and the vessels coming up the Ogeechee; soon the general personally visited his naval compatriots and on December 14 he conferred on the river with General John G. Foster and later with Admiral Dahlgren. Supplies could reach Sherman's army now, and contact with the North, although still slow, was reestablished. (Excerpted from The Civil War Day by Day, An Almanac 1861 – 1865, E. B. Long, Doubleday, 1971)

Battle of Franklin haunts fictional characters

By Thomas J. Ryan, November 25, 2006

Americans typically associate the Civil War with Pickett's Charge at Gettysburg, Sherman's March to the Sea and Lee's surrender at Appomattox. A mention of the Confederate disaster at Franklin, Tenn., likely would elicit blank stares. This is because the Battle of Franklin occurred in a remote western area out of the sight and

consciousness of the conflict's chroniclers, who were concentrated primarily in the East.

At Franklin on a cold Nov. 30, 1864, 20,000 Rebel soldiers formed battle lines and marched into a firestorm emanating from Union guns behind breastworks along the Harpeth River. More than 6,000 became casualties, and many would suffer excruciatingly while stacked up in a ditch fronting the Union defenses. In "Embrace an Angry Wind; The Confederacy's Last Hurrah: Spring Hill, Franklin, and Nashville," Wiley Sword described these events as "one of the most extraordinary and compelling of human experiences."

A decade ago, Winston Groom attempted to remedy this omission with the novel "Shrouds of Glory" describing the military aspect of that appalling collision in central Tennessee. Mr. Groom's efforts on behalf of those who gave their lives at Franklin went virtually unnoticed. More recently, Robert Hicks' novel "The Widow of the South" focused on the deeds of Carrie McGavock, an eyewitness to the slaughter at Franklin, who dedicated a cemetery on her plantation for the Confederate dead.

Howard Bahr has crowned these efforts with "The Judas Field," which portrays the star-crossed lives of soldiers from a small Mississippi town who survived the sanguinary ordeal at Franklin only to live with its effects. In this version, Mr. Bahr concentrates on the heart more than the history of the matter. The title of the book derives from the biblical reference to "the field of blood" Judas Iscariot purchased with his "reward of iniquity."

This novel evolves from Army of Tennessee commander Gen. John Bell Hood's decision to attack a strong Union position at Franklin, in part to persuade his men to abandon their ingrained preference for fighting defensively. Hood's directive ominously called for a head-on charge, causing thousands of his soldiers to meet with the "angel of death" and thereby forfeit any future benefit from the experience gained.

One survivor was Cass Wakefield, a sergeant in the 21st Mississippi, who returned to his Cumberland, Miss., hometown after the war to a life afflicted by what is referred to today as post-traumatic stress disorder. He brought home with him a teenage orphan boy named Lucian who had attached himself to the army and whose experience at Franklin affected him similarly. They both hung on for years after the war, dependent on drugs and alcohol.

In 1885, Cass' boyhood friend Alison Sansing, who was dying from cancer, decided to visit the place where her father and brother had been killed on the battlefield. She recruited a reluctant Cass to escort her to Franklin. In a traumatizing variation of the Canterbury Tales, Cass and Lucian emotionally relive their fearsome battlefield experiences as this journey unfolds.

Howard Bahr frames this story so the reader vicariously encounters the numbing distress of men in battle. Soldiers transform into wild animals amid mindless slaughter. Men caught up in the agonizing sound, smell and spectacle of war find death preferable to the inescapable nightmare that has them in its grip.

Howard Bahr has crafted a novel worthy of attention for its insight into a cataclysmic Civil War event. The author captures the mood of the times and transports the reader to a rural Mississippi town and a community in Tennessee where the mayhem occurs. It is an experience that is at the same time distressing and fascinating and one that makes the Battle of Franklin obscure no longer.

Thomas J. Ryan is president of the Central Delaware Civil War Round Table. He lives in Bethany Beach (Excerpted from the Washington Times Online November 25th, 2006)