



HARPERS FERRY

CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

PO BOX 1079, HARPERS FERRY, WV 25425

Vol. 27 March 2008 No. 7

- DATE:** Wednesday, March 12th, 2008
- TIME:** 7:00 PM - CWRT Members Dinner
(Dinner Reservations Required)
- 8:00 Speaker's Presentation and Book Raffle
(Open to the Public)
- PLACE:** Quality Hotel Conference Center (Formerly the Cliffside,
located on the east side of RT 340, .5 miles west of the traffic light at the
entrance to Harpers Ferry National Park)
- SPEAKER:** Charles "Ted" Alexander
- SUBJECT:** Two Great American Armies: The Opposing
Forces at Antietam

The Subject:

The Battle of Antietam (or Sharpsburg to Confederates), the largest and bloodiest encounter of the campaign that included the siege and capture of Harpers Ferry, has been the subject of numerous books. We are fortunate indeed to hear a dissection of the Army of Northern Virginia and the Army of the Potomac from a historian who is intimately familiar with their composition. What manner of men etched places like the Bloody Lane, Burnside's Bridge, and The Cornfield into the lasting memory of the American people? Join us and find out.

The Speaker:

Ted Alexander is historian at the Antietam National Battlefield Park, where he has served with distinction for decades. A native of Wiggins, Mississippi, Ted has long resided in the town of Greencastle, in South Central Pennsylvania, and has written a history of the town during the war: "When War Passed This Way." He is the author of numerous books, articles, and reviews on many facets of the late unpleasantness. Among his many accomplishments, he is a past president of the Harpers Ferry Round Table.

THE MEAL

A complete dinner special will be available from the Hotel's Menu for \$15.67. That includes the cost of the special of \$12.95 plus tax and 15% gratuity. The Hotel would like each of you to order on separate checks. If you do not want to eat the special, you may order something else from the menu. The hotel has also requested that we provide them with the total number coming to dinner and the number of specials.

Given this, reservations are required for the meal and **must be phoned in no later than Sunday March 9th** to Allison Alsdorf, at 304-535-2101 or you can e-mail her at alsdorf@comcast.net. You must tell us if you are coming to dinner and if you will order the special. This month's proposed dinner special is:

Corned Beef and Cabbage
Champ Potatoes
Sweet Roasted Turnips and Carrots
Irish Soda Bread
Guinness Cheese Cake
Salad Bar

Marines in the Civil War

Marines saw limited action in the War between the States

Marine action during the Civil War was limited. There were few of them in the Federal military, when the South seceded from the Union. About half of the Marine officers joined their states and formed the Confederate States Marine Corps, authorized by the Confederate Congress in March 1861. The CSMC was patterned largely after the Union Marine Corps, and had an authorized strength of 34 officers and 944 enlisted men. Far fewer than those numbers served, mostly on guard duty at Confederate naval facilities along the Southern coastline. They also served aboard Confederate naval vessels and commerce raiders, performing their normal duties. They performed well. Confederate Navy Secretary Stephen Mallory commended them for their "promptness and efficiency."

The Defense Department notes that of a Union military of more than 2 million men, about 4,100 were Marines and their service was mostly on blockade duty and aboard ships. Congress explored the possibility of merging the Marines into the regular army, but the Marine Commandant at the time carefully followed all navy regulations and did not assume any of the traditional combat roles of the Army. As a result, the merging idea was dropped. A small unit of Marines was part of the attack on Fort Fisher in January

1865. They were part of gun crews on naval vessels and suffered casualties in these operations; 148 Marines were killed in action and another 312 died during the war. (Excerpted from Roanoke Times, January, 2008)

Unclaimed West Virginia Civil War Medals

Approximately fifty-two hundred names represent the number of Civil War soldiers' medals remaining in the possession of the state of West Virginia. These medals were among the twenty-six thousand and ninety-nine minted by authority of the state for Union veterans of West Virginia military units. Authorized by the West Virginia legislature by Joint Resolution No. 11 in 1866, many of the medals minted for West Virginia troops failed to be claimed because of the state's inability to establish contact with the veterans, many of whom originated from adjacent states or left the region following the war.

The almost fifty-two hundred medals remaining are stored in the Department of Culture and History's Archives and History Library, and are the object of a major media campaign to distribute them to descendants of these Civil War veterans, whose military service helped to establish the state. The medals are stored in the small cardboard boxes in which they arrived from A. Demarest of New York City following the 1866 commissioning by Governor A. I. Boreman based upon the contract arranged by Adjutant General George W. Brown of Preston County. Anyone who can establish a line of descent, supplemented by documents or copies, from one of the men on this list may submit a claim for the medal. The claim must be submitted in writing and the Union veteran's name, company, regiment and branch of service should be stated plainly, as should the line of descent from the Union veteran to the claimant. Supporting documentation can be military, census, birth, death, marriage and similar types of records.

In 1891 the Grand Army of the Republic published part of the list of medals remaining in the custody of the Adjutant General's Office. This report also referred to the loss of some of the medals during the several transfers of the state capitol between Wheeling and Charleston through "carelessness or negligence." Almost twenty years later Virgil A. Lewis, the first state historian and archivist, in writing to Governor William M. O. Dawson to solicit his support in having the medals transferred to the Department of Archives and History for distribution, stated that about seven thousand remained in 1870 and this number had been reduced by only two to three thousand in the intervening thirty-nine years. Another state historian and archivist, James L. Hupp, over fifty years later during the Civil War and state centennials implemented a program to transfer the medals from state possession to the proper heirs.

Today, the Department of Culture and History, through the Archives and History Library, is attempting to complete the task begun in 1866 by awarding the medals to the veterans' heirs who submit documented claims establishing a line of descent from the veteran to themselves. Persons documenting the most direct line of descent from one of the Union soldiers on this list will receive the medal at the end of a six-month period following submission of the claim to the Archives and History Library, Department of Culture and History, The Cultural Center, Charleston, WV 25305. (Excerpted from *The West Virginia History Journal* <http://www.wvculture.org/history/medals.html>.)