

Issue 7: November 2020

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OUR NOVEMBER MEETING – 11/17/2020

“General U. S. Grant and the Battle of Belmont”

Thomas Arliskas

The Battle of Belmont was General Grant’s first battle when he was in direct command of troops on the ground, and which, in fact, haunted US Grant to his grave. Arliskas will present memories and articles that have never been seen or in print on Grant’s first Battle. We will discuss the Battle itself, the repercussions, the poor press releases, and how General US Grant almost faced a court martial for his action at Belmont. Additionally, Arliskas will present how it was all tied to General John C. Fremont’s Western Command and how Fremont got the blame for Belmont and not Grant.

An accomplished author of magazine articles and several books, Arliskas has served on the boards of the Company of Military Historians, the North-South Skirmish Association, a Regional Commander for the local N-SSA teams, and a member of the 29th Wisconsin Infantry N-SSA. He was past President of the Milwaukee Civil War Round-table. He is retired and living in Milwaukee with his wife Terry.

2020-2021 SPEAKER SCHEDULE

December 15, 2020 – Brian Steele Willis:

“General George Henry Thomas”

January 19, 2021 – John Haymond

“The Infamous Dakota War Trails of 1862”

February 16, 2021 - John Fazio:

“Decapitating the Union: Jefferson Davis, Judah Benjamin and the Plot to Assassinate Lincoln”



First Minnesota Monument at Gettysburg

2020-2021 SPEAKER SCHEDULE CONTINUED

March 16, 2021 – Leslie Goddard:

“Gone With The Wind and the Constuction of Civil War Memory”

May 18, 2021 – Mike Movius:

“The State of the Civil War Round Tables”

THIS MONTH IN CIVIL WAR HISTORY – NOVEMBER

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| 1st | 1861 – Gen. George B. McClellan replaces Gen. Winfield Scott as Commander of U.S. forces. |
| 5 th | 1862 – Gen. George B. McClellan removed from command of U. S. forces. Replaced by Gen. Ambrose Burnside. |
| 6 th | 1861 – Jefferson Davis re-elected President of the Confederacy. |
| 7 th | 1861 – Union forces capture Port Royal, Virginia. |
| 8 th | 1864 – Abraham Lincoln re-elected to a second term. |
| 15 th | 1864 – Gen. Sherman begins “March to the Sea.” |
| 19 th | 1863 – President Lincoln delivers Gettysburg Address. |
| 23 rd – 25 th | 1863 – Battle of Chattanooga, Tennessee. |
| 28 th | 1861 – Missouri formally admitted into the Confederacy. |
| 30 th | 1864 – Battle of Franklin, Tennessee. |

CIVIL WAR BIRTHDAYS – NOVEMBER

- | | |
|------------------|---------------------------------|
| 3 rd | 1816 – Gen. Jubal A. Early C.S. |
| 9 th | 1825 – Gen. A.P. Hill C.S. |
| 13 th | 1814 – Gen. Joseph Hooker U.S. |

EDITOR’S NOTE: Thanks again to Lana Blumhoefer for the Civil War calender information with some additions by the editor.

FROM THE DUSTY COLLECTION...

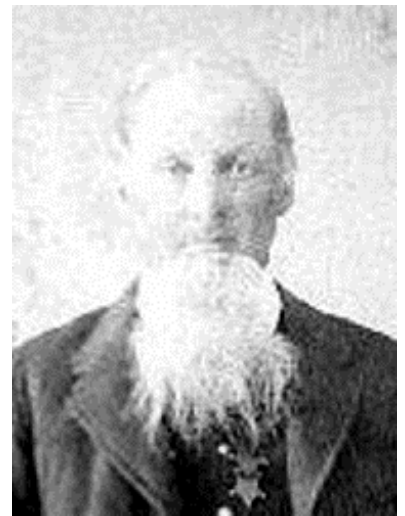
For Heroism at Fort Gregg, April 2, 1865

The end was near as Phil Sheridan's men overran Confederate positions at Five Forks on April 1, 1865. General Grant soon ordered a general assault on Lee's positions south of Petersburg to be led by the Sixth Corps with John Gibbon's Twenty-Fourth Corps and the African American Twenty-Fifth Corps to follow through. Before dawn on the 2nd the Sixth Corps broke Confederate lines, killed General A. P. Hill, and cut the South Side Railroad which effectively ended the Siege of Petersburg. Some of the survivors fled to the small bastions of Fort Gregg and Fort Whitworth two miles west of town where they organized for a counterattack.



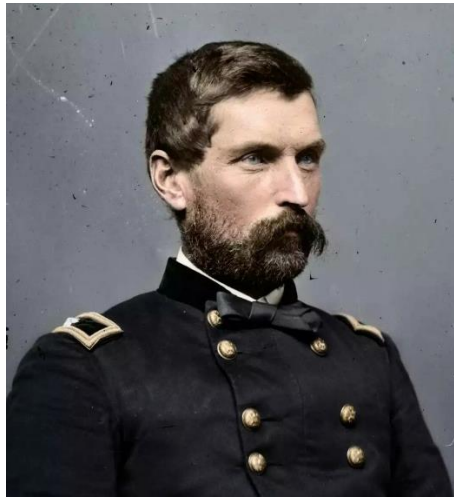
That counterattack fell apart as Gibbon's Corps approached, and most rebels moved toward the Petersburg inner lines. Around 300 brave men entered Fort Gregg, then mounted with two artillery pieces, while some 5,000 Union soldiers approached in solid battle line. The futile defense of the little fort would later be characterized as the *Confederate Alamo*. Around 1 PM Gibbon ordered his men forward, with two brigades assaulting the little fort.

As their attack stalled, a second and third wave went in with the 158th New York Infantry on the left of the latter. Union soldiers waded through a chest-deep, water-filled moat and clambered up ladders made of bayonets stuck in the parapet. They were met by concentrated musket and cannon fire and faced hand-to-hand combat before finally overwhelming the defenders. An estimated 4,400 Union soldiers eventually were packed around the Fort trying to smash their way in.



In the middle of the horrific two-hour close quarters fight Sergeant James Howard of the 158th New York Volunteer Infantry retrieved the national colors from the Regiment's third color-bearer shot down since dawn. He planted it on the parapet where the pole was soon shot in half. Howard held the flag up by the shattered staff. He was later presented the Medal of Honor, one of fourteen presented for heroism at Fort Gregg. He wears that medal in a post-war portrait.

This assault, certainly one of the most desperate of the war, succeeded by the obstinate courage of our troops, but at a fearful cost reported General Gibbon, whose Corps lost 800 killed and wounded taking Fort Gregg. Gibbon was deeply moved and wanted to honor the bravery of those assaulting regiments. Only two months later in surrendered Richmond, on June 14, 1865, he reviewed his victorious Corps and then formed six regiments in hollow square around the reviewing platform.



A newspaper reported: *The Color Sergeant of each regiment advanced to the platform and received at the hands of the General an eagle. The ball supporting the eagle bore the following inscription: "Presented by Maj.-Gen. JOHN GIBBON, Commanding Twenty-fourth Army Corps, for gallant conduct at the assault on Fort Gregg, Petersburg, April 2, 1865.*

The regiments thus distinguished were the One Hundredth New-York, One Hundred and Fifty-eighth New-York, Thirty-ninth Illinois, Twelfth West Virginia, Tenth Connecticut and Twenty-third Illinois.

Today two of those six presentation eagles are held in public collections. A third was recently discovered among a small collection of brass eagle statues stored in a Minneapolis condo. Serendipity put me at the estate sale where that collection was sold. The eagle I purchased was the very one presented to Sergeant James Howard by General Gibbon. And although the conical flag pole socket was removed long ago for easier display, the eagle's inscription to the 158th New York is a bold statement of the historical significance of this unique artifact.

General Gibbon ordered the eagles during a late April visit to Washington from one of the major military suppliers like Schuyler, Hartley and Graham. They are heavy brass lost wax castings made from one master model with the globes then individually hand engraved



for each regiment prior to casting. Polishing and gold gilding would have then followed. It is remarkable that the work could have been finished and the eagles delivered to Richmond by early June!



The national color that once waved below our eagle has disappeared to history. We have no idea where the artifact journeyed on its way to Minnesota. But in sharing its story we can all reflect on the desperation and heroism of those soldiers, north and south, at Fort Gregg in April 1865.



Major General John Gibbon (front of tree) with color-bearers who were presented the Medal of Honor by Secretary of War Stanton when they delivered captured Confederate battle flags to Washington, May 1, 1865. Sergeant James Howard of the 158th New York Infantry is probably the soldier in the rear rank just to the right of the tree.

An image of one of the other surviving eagles, presented to the 12th West Virginia Infantry, is here: http://www.wvculture.org/museum/exhibits/wv150/images/large/_DSC8105.jpg

More details on Fort Gregg are here: <https://www.historynet.com/confederate-alamo-outnumbered-rebels-petersburg.htm>

One recent book extensively covers the battle: <https://www.amazon.com/Confederate-Alamo-Bloodbath-Petersburgs-Gregg/dp/0971195005>

A talk by the Fort Gregg author is here: <https://vimeo.com/123882126>

JOIN OUR FACEBOOK GROUP!

Are you on Facebook? If so, please consider joining our Civil War Round Table - Twin Cities Group. On our Group page you will find posts shared from some of the best Civil War history organizations in the county including the American Battlefield Trust, Civil War Chronicles and Emerging Civil War. As a group member you can post and share any Civil War related items (photos, stories, questions) you wish. If you are already on Facebook, make sure you the search for our group and ask to be a member.

CONTACT US:

Twin Cities Civil War Round Table

info@tccwrt.com

<https://tccwrt.com/>

Can you contribute to a future newsletter? Writers are wanted to submit Civil War related articles to this newsletter.

Please submit your drafts to Bruce Cooper: earlofbuce@hotmail.com