

Issue 49: May 2024

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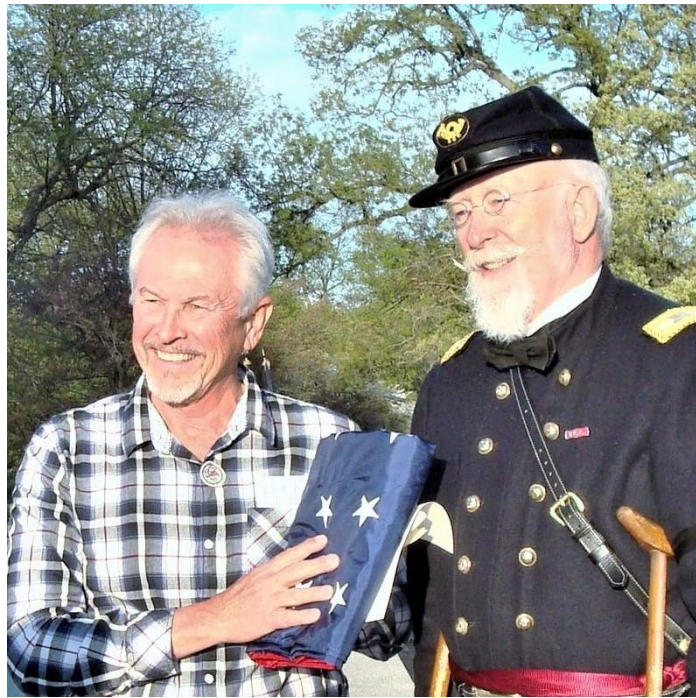
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MEMBER PROFILE OF THE MONTH KEN PALMER BY LANA BLUMHOEFER



Ken Palmer and Nichole Pederson

Ken Palmer grew up in Chicago, developing an interest in all types of history. He shared, “Being in Chicago there were probably more references to Lincoln and Grant than anywhere elsewhere in the country. In addition, our family visited Springfield, New Salem, and Galena. So, in some way I believe I gained an organic interest.”



First Minnesota Monument at Gettysburg

He and Nancy, his high school sweetheart, have been married for 55 years. Ken attended college in Champaign. He also served 12 years in the Army in Chemical Operations and Food Inspection.

Nancy shares a casual interest in the Civil War, and she's commented that one of their best vacations was a 2015 road trip that hit 17 Civil War sites, with side-visits to Jamestown and Williamsburg.

Ken has been a member of the TCCWRT since 2014. He enjoys meeting with the other members on a regular basis in addition to the speaker presentations. While there are so many aspects of the war that interest him, he said, "The reality and horror of how so many soldiers on both sides were able to endure such hardships, and then fighting to their deaths. The number of casualties is hard to comprehend, especially for such a young country. In many cases their leaders failed them, yet they forged on, regularly exhibiting true heroism. And of course, most were fighting for causes that they didn't or couldn't really understand." Secondly, he's fascinated by the political and personal dramas between and amongst Lincoln and his Cabinet and the Union Generals (and the generals amongst themselves).

His favorite battlefield is Gettysburg and hopes to return. He and his Nancy spent two days there soaking it all in and trying to visualize and understand all the events. His second favorite battlefield is Antietam, followed by Harpers Ferry.

In 2015, he and Glenn Corliss attended the Lincoln Funeral Train re-enactment in Springfield where Ken 'won' the flag at the Oakridge Cemetery Flag Ceremony.

Ken also states that he is a Sports Memorabilia collector and an ex-marathon and 10K enthusiast. He and Nancy have two daughters who each have three "wonderful" children. "We've been fortunate that both live in the area and we've been able to have fun with our grandchildren and watch them grow up to be fine and happy adults."

STEVEN SCHIER'S CIVIL WAR TRIVIA QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

War broke out in April 1861 when Confederates did what?

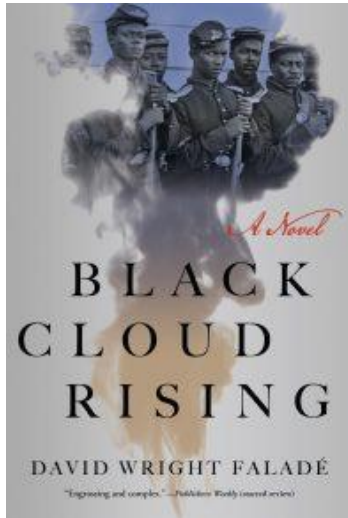
(See page 7 for the answer)

TCCWRT MEMBERS WITH MAY BIRTHDAYS

5/1 Bob Engstrom
5/4 David Haas
5/5 Jerald Carveth
5/6 Mark Pridgeon
5/9 John Martin
5/26 Deborah Bachrach
5/28 Jerome Geis

OUR MAY MEETING: MAY 21, 2024

“U.S. Colored Troops at War” – Dr. David Wright Falade



Professor Faladé will speak on his research and discoveries while writing *Black Cloud Rising*, concerning the U.S. Colored Troops and their activities in North Carolina and the Outer Banks. Of particular interest is the action by the African Brigade, a unit of former slaves led by General Edward Augustus Wild, in hunting down rebel guerillas in that area.

A former Fulbright Fellow to Brazil, David Wright Faladé is the 2021-22 Mary Ellen von der Heyden Fellow of the NY Public Library’s Cullman Center for Writers. His work has been recognized by the Zora Neale Hurston/Richard Wright Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Texas Institute of Letters. He teaches in the MFA program at the University of Illinois.

David Wright Faladé is the author of three books: the narrative history *Fire on the Beach: Recovering the Lost Story of Richard Etheridge and the Pea Island Lifesavers*, and the novels *Away Running* and most recently, *Black Cloud Rising*. An excerpt from *Black Cloud Rising*, entitled “The Sand Banks, 1861,” appeared in the *New Yorker*.

THIS MONTH IN CIVIL WAR HISTORY – MAY

- 1st 1863 Battle of Port Gibson, Mississippi.
- 15th 1864 Future renown sculptor Mose Ezekiel and his fellow VMI Cadets, charge across the “Field of Lost Shoes,” at the Battle of New Market, Virginia.
- 21st 1863 Battle of Plains Store, fought near East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana.
- 26th 1862 Union and Confederate force skirmish near Calico Rock, Arkansas

CIVIL WAR BIRTHDAYS – MAY

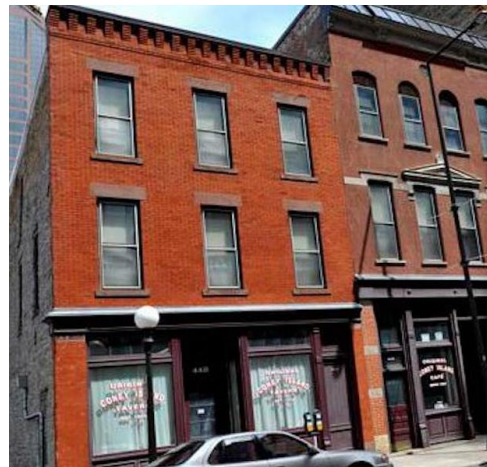
- 1st 1807 Maj. General John Bankhead Magruder C.S.
- 16th 1824 General Edmund Kirby Smith C.S.
- 21st 1807 Captain Richard Worsam Meade II, U.S. Navy (Older brother of George Gordon Meade)

From the Dusty Collection #39 The Prussian Musket in Minnesota

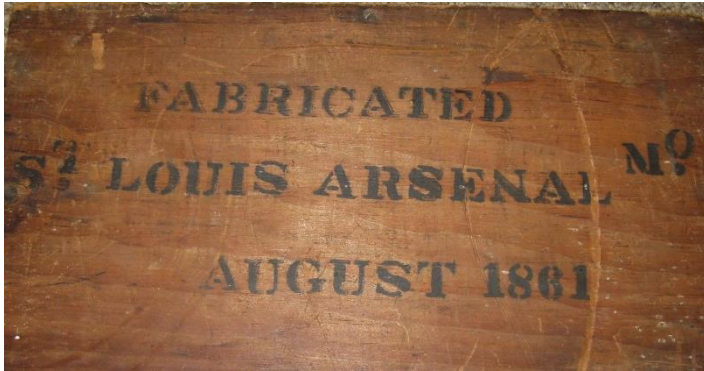
Minnesota collectors long wondered why there were so many Prussian muskets and bayonets at local gun shows, farm auctions and antique shops. They were always the neglected and often maligned relative of more popular Civil War Springfield and Enfield rifle muskets. During the formative years of the First Minnesota reenactment unit a couple of the guys carried these heavy monsters, which we labelled “pumpkin slingers.” They fired a ball nearly three quarters of an inch in diameter, kicked like a mule, and were useful only for drill until the owner found a .58 rifle musket. But their interesting story in the North Star State is a significant part of its Civil War history.



The Militia Act of 1808 provided arms to each state based on its military-aged, white-male population. The common denominator was US Muskets, current model, and typically flintlocks or their conversions until the 1850s. A cannon was the equivalent of so many muskets, as were swords and cavalry pistols. Territorial and state governors, through their adjutants general, requested the authorized mix of weapons, individual accoutrements, and field equipment based on local need. On the eve of the Civil War, Minnesota had 3 six pounder bronze field guns, several hundred muskets of various types, a hundred or so swords and pistols, and all the equipment associated with their use. Items not issued to organized militia units were stored in an armory located in the state capital. (Because of the weight load on the floors, the arsenal was moved to a rented building on nearby St. Peter Street. That brick structure is still standing today!)



With the flood of new 1861 recruits, virtually all the militia muskets and equipment were issued out and duly recorded in anticipation of replacement by the federal government. The St.



Louis Arsenal would provide most of these as well as tons of ammunition for small arms and cannon shipped to Minnesota. The system worked relatively well; however, the replacement arms were more frequently designated second or third class since all the first-class arms (the modern .58 rifle musket and its various equivalents) went to already mustered in units heading to the war

front. Thus, quite a mix of older US and foreign muskets in various calibers was shipped up river, stored in the state armory and issued in rotation to newly raised Minnesota units.

Among the foreign arms were obsolete muskets purchased from Prussia, then busy rearming its soldiers with the new breechloading Dreyse rifle. Ultimately 165,073 old Prussian muskets would be purchased by Federal agents along with an unknown number purchased by the south. In 1861 and 1862 a good number of these were shipped to the Midwest states. Some were used to arm newly raised units and even made it into the field. Others lay boxed in the state armories, including Minnesota's, and at the St. Louis Arsenal. The bulk of these were the Prussian musket model of 1809, manufactured as a flintlock but converted to percussion starting in 1839 and some rifled starting in 1855. These old muskets, most of them smoothbore, cost the Feds between \$4 and \$8 each.

The brass-mounted, substantial, and well-made arms had been manufactured in a number of public and private arsenals in Potsdam, Saarn, Niesse, Suhl, Zella, Mehlis and St. Blasien and elsewhere. They featured a large spring mounted under the barrel to secure the angular bayonet



socket via an eccentric ring at the outer end. Nearly 5 feet tall, weighing in at over 10

pounds and nearly 12 pounds with the bayonet attached, they were daunting to new recruits.

Aaron Sidwell of the 8th Minnesota wrote from Fort Snelling:

As yet we had no arms, and it was a matter of considerable interest to our boys what kind of guns we would get. All agreed to take the Springfield Rifle (provided they could get them). Finally, we were ordered to march to the Arsenal and get our guns, and Oh – such guns – so beautiful – Belgium [sic] Muskets – all mounted with brass – made no doubt before the war of 76; and what terrible things to shoot. If I wanted to kill an Indian or Rebel I would just load one of our guns and give it to him, and let him shoot at me. Of course he would miss me, and the musket would kick him down. Then I'd have the advantage of him. Yes, they are decidedly the thing. They only weight 14 lbs. Handsome little things. We have them yet and reckon we will keep 'em.

Thomas Hodgson of the same regiment concurred, adding:

I have just thought of another argument which proves the Belgian [sic] musket was built on humanitarian principles. It was a tremendous kicker. It rarely ever failed to kick the fellow over who ventured to shoot it. This shows that the shooter was not intended to know even by accident that he had accidentally shot another man. See?

However, perfect honesty and fairness would demand that the musket should have been stamped in plain letters something like the following: "Warranted not to hit except by accident."

None of the Minnesota units took their Prussian muskets, which Privates Sidwell and Hodgson mistakenly identified as Belgians (not brass mounted), south with them. But 332 of them were carried on Sibley's Expedition to defeat the Dakota in September 1862. And that unexpected and tragic conflict would result in an even larger number of Prussian muskets being sent to Minnesota. As the War Department realized the magnitude of civilian massacres and the ongoing threat, it appealed to several Midwestern states to send muskets to St. Louis, there to be forwarded to Minnesota. The heavy old Prussian muskets of course predominated; governors wanted to keep any newer weapons for their own recruits. When the muskets finally arrived on the St. Paul docks, they were processed through the state armory and issued to militia organizations statewide. Some 19 Minnesota counties were still largely depopulated a year following the August 1862 massacres. Convincing farmers to move back required both a chain of defensive outposts north to south in the center of the state, and widespread arming of civilians. State records show several thousand mostly Prussian muskets and ammunition so distributed.

The threat from Dakota raiding parties largely ended after the 1864 Northwestern Indian Expedition and the Battle of Kildeer Mountain. But what of all those old brass-mounted muskets sitting loaded and ready in Minnesota farm houses and barns, but still accounted for on state ledgers? A year after the war, the legislature weighed the costs of sending wagons around the state to collect this widely scattered and now nearly worthless state property. The bureaucrats wisely decided to announce that the muskets need not be returned. Many were soon shortened and turned into useful (and free) shotguns for hunting or general use on the farm. Others ended up in hay lofts and attics, forgotten as new cartridge firearms became more accessible. And to this day they continue to turn up in rural Minnesota.

This example was found in March 2024 with the hammer replaced by an ill-fitting 1863 Springfield rifle musket hammer. Back in the early 1970s the writer had found a rusty Prussian musket hammer in a dumpster that had been filled in clearing out the historic Harkin Store near Fort Ridgely. Tucked away for 50 years, the hammer now had a new purpose in life in restoring a Potsdam-marked Prussian musket that had very



likely come up river with that same hammer back in 1862. The repaired musket is still ugly, heavy, and something few would be brave enough to shoot. But it certainly tells a story about how Minnesota reacted to an unprecedented crisis during the Civil War years.

STEVEN SCHIER'S TRIVIA QUESTION ANSWER:

They attacked the U.S. fortress Fort Sumter.



HELP WANTED

SPECIAL EVENTS COORDINATOR: We're looking for someone to take over the picnic planning and other fun stuff.

Contact Carol at info@tccwrt.com for more information!



SAVE THE DATE!

**TCCWRT 4th ANNUAL
PICNIC**

Tuesday, July 16, 2024
4:00 to 7:00 p.m.
Wabun B, Minnehaha Park
Details to Follow

G.A.R. HALL IN LITCHFIELD:

Photos by Dave Greener





CONTACT US:
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<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**