



SOUTH BAY CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

South Bay Civil War Roundtable Meeting Minutes August 30, 2022

Meeting Location: Denny's Restaurant located at 2077 N First St, San Jose, CA 95131 and via ZOOM

Note: The September 27, 2022 meeting will also be held at this Denny's

NOTE: THE HOLDER'S COUNTRY INN ON DE ANZA BLVD IN SAN JOSE, CA WAS DESTROYED BY FIRE ON JULY 27, 2022. A SEARCH FOR A NEW MEETING LOCATION IS IN PROGRESS

Special Activities & Events:

Annual SBCWRT Picnic **CANCELLED**

2022 West Coast Civil War Round Table Conference

Date/Time: November 4th (5:00) Thru 6th (Noon), 2022

Theme: "Combat Strategy and Tactics, Grant VS Lee in 1864."

Host: San Joaquin Valley Civil War Round Table

Location: Wyndham Garden Fresno Airport
5090 E. Clinton Way, Fresno
(559-252-3611) \$103 per night.

Event URL: <http://www.sjvcwrt2.com/events.html>

Attendee Registration: \$200 Per Person including meals (Breakfast on your own; coffee & pastries provided.) (Non participants who wish Dinner Fri or Sat Night: \$30 each meal)

Questions? Email: ronvaughan@prodigy

Officer Reports

President

No Report

Vice President

No Report

Treasurer

- Wells Fargo account balance as of August 2022: Approx \$1,639

Note: Minor changes caused by income from Book Raffle and payment for presenter's dinners

Secretary

- Civil War Quiz: What Do You Know About the Border States?
- Book Raffle: \$3
- Meeting Attendance: Total: 16 (12 in-person; 4 via ZOOM)

Preservation

No Report

Historian

Code of Conduct Regarding Military Actions

- Prior to the Civil War, there was no generally accepted Code of Conduct on what military actions were appropriate or inappropriate
- Throughout history, actions committed against non-combatants such as civilians was viewed as collateral damage and there were no retributions for these actions
- During the Civil War, numerous rogue military units, mostly Confederate committed atrocities against civilians
- Union forces however were often guilty of the same atrocities. Union General William Tecumseh Sherman was quoted, "War is Hell" as he excused his troop's actions during the March to the Sea
- Adding to the carnage of warfare was the development of weapons that today can be classified as "weapons of mass destruction." Improvements in the destructiveness of weapons such as Gatling Guns and the explosive power of cannon-fired projectiles often caused significant civilian casualties
- The Geneva Conventions produced four treaties and three additional protocols that establish international legal standards for humanitarian treatment in war.
- Treaties known as "The Hague Conventions" were adopted at the Peace Conferences held in The Hague, Netherlands, in 1899 and 1907. They establish the laws and customs of war in the strict sense, by defining the rules that belligerents must follow during hostilities.

Civil War Almanac This Day in the Civil War History: August 30th

1861: In St Louis Missouri, Maj Gen John C Fremont issues his proclamation confiscating the property “of those who shall take up arms against the United States, and their slaves, if any they have, are hereby declared free men.” Furthermore, anyone not in Union uniform, found carrying arms in Union-controlled areas, will be court-martialed, and if found guilty, shot. President Lincoln is shocked and outraged at this entirely unauthorized proclamation of Fremont’s.

1862: At Manassas, Gen John Pope believes Confederates have retreated, but not so. Longstreet attacks, sending Pope’s army into retreat. Pope has been defeated, but his army retreats in good order. McClellan will deny any blame for not having reinforced Pope. Lee won the battle, at the cost of 9,000 casualties. At Richmond Kentucky, Kirby Smith attacks the Federal garrison there, which puts up a stiff fight before retreating to Louisville.

1863: In Charleston harbor South Carolina, Confederates at Ft Moultrie, in a case of mistaken identity, fire on and sink one of their own transports. Federal batteries on Morris Island resume bombardment of Ft Sumter.

1864: Democratic party convention, meeting in Chicago, nominates former Maj Gen George McClellan as Presidential candidate. Their platform is a peace platform. In Georgia, John Bell Hood sends Patrick Cleburne to stop Sherman from advancing towards Jonesborough, to no avail.

Person of the Month: John Geyser and the US Army Corps of Engineers During the Civil War

Background

- During George Washington's Presidency, the Engineer Corp was formally established as a permanent branch of the US Army.
- In 1802, President Thomas Jefferson signed one of the most fateful acts of his Presidency, The Military Peace Establishment Act, establishing an army engineering military academy at West Point New York.
- The cavalry got the glamor, the officers got the glory, but within the army itself, the Engineers were regarded as the elite corps. The saying went, “The President can make a general with the stroke of a pen, but it takes 5 years to make a real engineering officer!”
- The Engineer Corps designed and constructed frontier and coastal fortifications, a wide variety of Federal public works, surveyed and mapped road and canal routes, and constructed lighthouses in tandem with the US Navy.
- Until 1866, the West Point superintendent was always an army engineering officer. The Engineering Corps was not large in numbers; though increased during the Civil War, by war's end the Corps had only

85 officers and 5 companies of enlisted men. (A company comprises 60-120 soldiers.)

- John Geysler came from Allegheny City Penn, a small town long since swallowed up by the city of Pittsburg. He was 23 years old at the outbreak of the Civil War.
- John Geysler had been a patternmaker in an Allegheny City machine shop. A patternmaker takes an engineering design and transforms it into a tangible product, using tools and dies, jigs and molds.
- Geysler's skills had qualified him for a rating as artificer (that is, a skilled tradesman) in the Engineering Corps. Skilled tradesmen such as Geysler, serving in the Engineering Corps, were experienced at working with engineers and manual laborers both, making it possible for the Corps to accomplish what it did.
- In April 1861 he enlisted in the 7th Penn Militia Regiment, Company F, Maj Gen Robert Patterson commanding. By law at that time, state militias could be called to service by the Federal government for no longer than 90 days.
- So, Geysler and his comrades were mustered out of service in July 1861, after seeing no action other than brief skirmishing with Rebels.

During the Civil War

- During the Civil War, the corps designed and constructed a wide variety of defensive works, especially around Washington, and constantly built and repaired roads (including RR), bridges and artillery emplacements during army campaigns.
- Intensively trained in mathematics and physics, the engineers designed; the projects were carried out by regiments or even brigades (that is, as many as several hundred men) working with picks, shovels, and axes.
- In October 1861, Geysler enlisted in the US Army for 3 years; he served in the Army of the Potomac during the Peninsula Campaign and the Battle of Fredericksburg.
- In Jan 1863, Pvt Geysler developed pneumonia, then spent several months in Army hospitals. In the fall of 1863, he was transferred to the Veterans' Reserve Corps.
- The VRC was created in 1862 for veterans made infirm by wounds or illness, but were willing and able to continue serving their country.
- Geysler did clerical desk duty at De Camp General Hospital in New York City Harbor. His health improved; in Sept 1864 he returned home to spend the rest of his life in Allegheny City
- In March 1861, the Confederate government created the Confederate Corps of Engineers, starting with 17 engineer officers who'd resigned from the Union Army.

- By 1865, Confederate armies had more engineer officers than the US Army. But, their effectiveness was fatally crippled by a woeful lack of not only material resources, but skilled tradesmen in the ranks as well.

After the Civil War

- He opened a small business, married, had 2 sons, and filed for a pension with the Army Pension Bureau, which was granted. Pension Bureau records show he died in 1908.
- John Geysers' story might have disappeared from history, had he not created during his service, a small sketchbook of Army scenes, which fortunately came to the attention of historian Bruce Catton. Thanks to his pension application, we know in some detail about his service in the Army of the Potomac, with Company A of the elite Army branch, the US Corps of Army Engineers.
- The vital link between engineers and manual laborers were the enlisted men in the Engineering Corps, skilled tradesmen like Private John Geysers.
- In conclusion, it can be arguably said that in the long run, picks, shovels and axes, railroad ties and pontoon bridge boats, proved as crucial to the outcome of the Civil War as firearms and ammunition.

Other Topics

None

August Presentation

Speaker: Tom Roza

Topic: "New York City Draft Riots"

September Presentation

Speaker: Abby Eller

Topic: "Grant's Memoirs: How and Why They Came to Be Written"

October Presentation

Speaker: Abby Eller

Topic: "The Grand Army of the Republic"