



South Bay Civil War Roundtable Meeting Minutes October 27, 2026

Meeting Location: Jack's Restaurant & Bar 1502 Saratoga Ave, San Jose, CA 95129 located in the Westgate Center Shopping Mall and via ZOOM

Special Activities & Events:

SELDOM HEARD HISTORY of the CIVIL WAR ERA

- 4th Central Coast Conference
- April 30-May 2, 2027 - Monterey, California
- Website URL: <https://www.montereyhistory.org/event/4th-central-coast-conference-seldom-heard-history-of-the-civil-war-era/>

Officer Reports

President

- Welcomed members to the meeting

Vice President

No Report

Treasurer

- The ending balance of our most recent SBCWRT Wells Fargo checking account as of 9/30/26 was \$2,274.00

Secretary

- Civil War Quiz: What Do You Know About the Types of Weapon Used During the Civil War? Meeting Attendance: Total: 11 (11 in-person; 0 via ZOOM)

This Month in Civil War History: October

1861: Battle of Ball's Bluff, Virginia. Colonel Edward D. Baker, senator from Oregon and a friend of President Lincoln, led troops across the Potomac River only to be forced back to the river's edge where he was killed. The ensuing Union withdrawal turned into a rout with many soldiers drowning while trying to re-cross the icy waters of the Potomac River

1862 Command Changes: Union Major General William S. Rosecrans replaced Major General Don Carlos Buell as commander of the Army of the Ohio

1863: Bristoe Station Campaign. In a feint toward Washington, Lee's Army of the Northern Virginia marches into northern Virginia in an attempt to flank the Army of the Potomac, under General Meade. Lee successfully outmaneuvers Meade though fails to bring him to battle or catch him in the open. An engagement at Bristoe Station, Virginia, on October 14 gives the campaign its name

1864: Third CSS Shenandoah: The Confederate cruiser set sail from England to begin raiding Union merchant shipping globally.

Person of the Month: Jean Napoleon Zerman - Soldier of Fortune

Early Life

- Born in Venice, Italy, on June 24, 1790
- Zerman joined the French Navy in his youth
- Returned to Italy 1830; participated in failed attempt to overthrow Austro-Hungarian rule
- Was arrested/sentenced to death for high treason; sentence was commuted to lengthy prison
- In 1842, worked as a secret agent for the Austrian chancellor

California

- In 1848, Zerman opened ship ballast business in San Francisco
- Dissidents of Mexican President Antonio López de Santa Anna recruited Zerman to overthrow his rule in Baja California
- In 1855, Zerman left San Francisco for Baja; designed outlandish uniform; combined Mexican & English naval officer's formal dress and included a sombrero with two chicken feathers jutting out of it.
- Arrested by Mexican governor upon landing in Baja's capital of La Paz
- Was imprisoned for two years/tried as a filibuster for being engaged in unauthorized military operations; acquitted by Mexico's Supreme Court
- Made his way back to the United States a free man

Civil War

- In August 1861, Maj. Gen. John Frémont added Zerman to his staff, reportedly to command a flotilla down the Mississippi River

- The next month, Maj. Gen. David Hunter appointed him 1st Division's inspector general and endorsed his promotion to brigadier general
- Lincoln followed with a formal nomination to brigadier general

Brigadier General For & Against

- **Opposed by French ambassador Henri Mercier**
 - called Zerman a “detected adventurer and imposter/convicted swindler and forger, who has served in galleys and pined in the jails of Europe so often, that such facts ceased to be novelties worth mentioning.”
- **Commodore Charles Henry Davis wrote to Seward on April 2**
 - “I am curious to know who recommended this person to the confidence of the President—he must be either a deluded fool or a confirmed knave. If the report of this nomination is an error—then I have no more to say regarding this Vagrant—but if otherwise you will not fail to see the importance of preventing a very bad egg from going into the great national pudding.”
- **Major Gen. Henry W. Halleck in a letter to Brig. Gen. Seth Williams, Adjutant General of the U.S. Army**
 - “Having known his history for many years, and being familiar with his swindling transactions in Mexico, New York and San Francisco, I declined having anything to do with him.”
- **Brigadier General James Cooper wrote President Lincoln on March 21, that he had known Zerman for several years**
- **General Angel Triás Álvarez and several other distinguished Mexican politicians gave Lincoln the impression that Zerman was**
 - “as an able and upright man, possessing great activity, energy and prudence.”
- The Senate confirmed the nomination on May 5, 1862, only to recall it on May 6 because of continued outrage from the foreign diplomatic corps

Mexico

- Embroiled during Civil War in blockade-running scandal to supply arms to the Mexicans against the French
- In Mexico, served as Emperor Maximilian's chief of his secret police
- Expelled from Mexico in 1868 by new Republican government; returned to the United States
- Two years later, escaped an assassination attempt
- December 10, 1876, died of natural causes age 86: Jean Napoleon Zerman's unmarked grave Holy Cross Cemetery outside San Francisco

Historian

The South's Disillusionment With God After the Civil War

- After Confederate defeat in 1865, many white Southerners experienced deep sense of spiritual & cultural crisis
- The war's devastation, loss of political power, imposition of Reconstruction policies left Southerners feeling humiliated and abandoned
- This disillusionment with God was not simply about military defeat it was tied to a belief that their cause had been unjustly judged and God

Religious Interpretations of Defeat

- Southern Evangelicals had long argued that their war was both Christian and just
- Many believed the loss was a sign of divine chastisement
- In the immediate aftermath, this was expressed in the "Confederate Understanding" of the war as God's punishment for sin, often linked to the moral and social order they defended.
- However, as Reconstruction unfolded with the imposition of Martial Law and the passage of the 3 Reconstruction amendments (13,14,15), Southerners now became emboldened and eventually were able to reestablish much of the former Antebellum Southern culture

Other Topics

Gary Johnson brought a number of Civil War era buckles that he had acquired over the years, some very rare.

October Presentation

Mark Costin on "KKK in 1920s Indiana"

November Presentation

Kristin Patterson on "Brigadier General Lucius Fairchild"

No Meeting in December

January Presentation

TBD