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Battle Cry

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SIZZLER CLOSED!!!!

August meeting will be at Cocos 1830

Arden Way on Tuesday Aug. 24th

Across Arden Way from Arden Mall.

**Fred Bohmfalk will speak on "Last meetings of
the GAR and UCO."**

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE:

I really enjoyed Steven Beck's presentation on D. W. Thompson and all the aspects of California in the Civil War. Who knew the California 100 was closer to 200 and they were only the first of 4 companies to go to the war from California? Thanks again to Susan Williams for finding Mr. Beck.

I watched most of the Democratic Party Convention. Once again I hear that this will be the most important election in our history. I also heard that the president wasn't telling all the truth about the war. It was July 1864 when the Republicans held their convention. All these same claims were made.

News Flash!! After the 11 Aug. Board Meeting, I found an e-mail on my computer from Roy Bishop. It seems the Sizzler on Fulton Ave. has closed. The Jaguar dealer on the corner owns the lot and has decided to expand. As a result, our next meeting will **NOT** be Wednesday Aug. 25th at the Sizzler, instead, it will be Tuesday Aug. 24th at **Cocos** Restaurant at 1830 Arden Way across the road from the Arden Mall. The meeting will be at the usual time 7PM. You can come early
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MINUTES

SACRAMENTO CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE
WEDNESDAY, JULY 28, 2004
SIZZLER RESTAURANT, 2030, FULTON AE, SACRAMENTO

ATTENDANCE- 32

Members – 27

Dennis Kohlmann, President
Kit Knight, Vice-President
George Foxworth, Treasurer
Edie Keister, Secretary
Dudley Albrecht
James Armstrong
Roy Bishop
Carol Breiter

Ardith Cnota
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Leslie Michaels
Jim Middleton
Betty Mitchell
Maurice Mitchell
Natalie Schafer
Rudy Schafer
Ted Swanson
Bob Williams

Susan Williams
Maxine Wollen
John Zasso
Guest –5
Stephen Beck
Susan Katt
H. Alan Sims
Chynna Glasson
Kyle Glasson

1. The meeting started at 7:05. Members and guests were welcomed. “This Day in the Civil War” was reviewed. “Has any one heard from Walt?” was asked. Negatory from all.
2. Our guest speaker Stephen Beck, a member of the Sacramento Historical Sites Association and docent/archivist at Ft. Sutter spoke on DeWitt Clinton Thompson, a figure none of us had heard of except one member and he was mistaken. Mr. Beck elaborated on Thompson’s involvement in California history during the Gold Rush and his regiment formed and sent East to join the Civil War. He brought many photos along with an authentic savor and rifle. He invited us all to Sutter Fort, to learn more about Thompson and California history. Thanks Stephen, for an enlightening evening!
3. The speaker for our August 25th meeting is George Martin, his subject-“The 43 Tenn. Regiment (CSA)”
4. The raffle was held and the meeting adjourned at 8:30.

Edie Keister
Secretary

Treasurer's Report

The cash balance following the July 28, 2004 meeting was \$1,711.43. Thanks to members and guests, the raffle brought in \$42.00.

George W. Foxworth,
Treasurer

(continued from page 1)

and have dinner. This is where we had our meeting when Tom Cartwright spoke. We are looking for a new permanent place. I'll let you know what the board comes up with.

I had one other problem. The planned speaker for this month is out of the country. Fred Bohmfalk will speak on the "Last Meetings of the GAR and UCO."

Upcoming Programs		
Date	Speaker	Title
24 Aug	Fred Bohmfalk	Last Meetings of the GAR & UCO
29 Sep	Paul Wagstaffe	Reconstruction
27 Oct	Dennis Kohlmann	Election of 1864
1 Dec	Bill Webb	Mark Twain's Civil War

Editorial Comment:

Our last presentation was about DeWitt Clinton Thompson.

The following is his report to the Adjutant General-California, 1867.

"Field Officer Major DeWitt Clinton Thompson- In command of the Battalion" (California Cavalry Battalion, organized in San Francisco), "from January 15th to July 15, 1863. In command of cavalry camp near Alexandria, Va., from July 15th to September 16, 1863. In

command of "cavalry forces, Upper Potomac," from September 16, 1863, to August 9, 1864, embracing post at 'Edwards' Ferry and all troops between Washington and Point of Rocks, Md. Joined Army of the Shenandoah August 9th with detachments of 620 cavalry, which were ordered to their respective regiments. Resigned and honorably discharged by General Sheridan August 9, 1864"

D.W.C. Thompson died May 13, 1919 and is buried in Mountain View Cemetery, Oakland, California.¹



De Witt C. Thompson- Major 2nd Battalion. Cal. State Parks-Sutter's Fort State Historical Park

¹ Rogers, Larry and Keith Rogers. *Their Horses Climbed Trees*. Schiffer Publishing, Atglen, PA 2001.

JULIA DENT GRANT, 1875:
UPON HEARING THAT MARY'S SON
CERTIFIED HER AS INSANE

Privately--
I'd never say it in print--
I have always blamed
Mary Todd Lincoln
for the assassination
ten years ago. She was
a jealous and petty woman.
Once, just weeks
before the War ended,
we were aboard a steamer
and when I sat on a coil
of ropes, Mary snapped,
"How dare you
sit in the presence of the wife
of the President?" We both
were raised in families
with Southern sympathies,
but we shared our lives
with men who symbolized
the North. While her husband
ran the country, mine
won the War. Mary and I
come from prominent and
wealthy backgrounds; we should
have been friends. I'd watch
Mary throw tantrums if
Mr. Lincoln even spoke
to a woman. I watched
Mary run up huge bills
at fine stores and I know
the staff kept distracting news
from their boss. On that
terrible night, my husband
was invited to Ford's
Theatre. I was not.
I've considered it
from every angle. I believe
Booth would have tried to shoot
the President, even if
the general were there. But
I also believe... something
would have been different
if Ulysses had been there.

-- Kit Knight

Dear Civil War and Preservation
Friends:

In the spirit of attempting to
fulfill the wishes of Jerry Russell
prior to his death in December,
2003, we will hold the 30th annual
Congress of Civil War Round
Tables in Jackson, Mississippi,
focusing on the Vicksburg
Campaign.

Jerry wanted this Congress
to be held in Vicksburg/Jackson
so we could honor Ed Bearss in
the place where, almost 50 years
ago, he began his career. As all of
you know, Ed's contribution to
Civil War history and
preservation is unparalleled.

Ed drew a line through the
portion of the program that I had
set aside as a tribute to him (Ed)
when I sent him a tentative
program for approval. So you
won't see that tribute reflected
hereon. However, it will
occur....just don't mention it to
Ed. Since he won't get this e-mail,
he won't know if you don't tell
him!

I hope to see you in
Vicksburg/Jackson!

Alice Anne Russell

For those of you interested in
this conference, The Editor will
have copies of the program at our
regular meeting.

Muzzleloaders, Breechloaders And Related Matters

An early toy I recall having as a little kid, three-quarters of a century ago, was a gyroscope. You would start this marvelous little device spinning by pulling a draw string, place it on a pedestal where it would remain all by itself apparently defying gravity and resisting attempts to be reoriented, until friction reduced its speed below a certain minimum. It was some time later that I learned that the principles behind this amazing little invention had been outlined some three centuries earlier by Isaac Newton (with assistance from Johann Kepler). Still later, that a very early application of these principles of rotational motion were the basis for rifled artillery (and subsequently in the 20th century all sorts of navigational, guidance, autopilot and stabilizer systems).

For centuries the infantry's standard firearm was the smoothbore musket. Smoothbores so-called because the inside of the gun barrel was perfectly smooth, were reliable enough and relative easy to load, but notoriously inaccurate. The weapon's effective range was only about 80 yards. Beyond that, as Grant observed, "A man with a smoothbore might fire at you all day without you noticing it".

There was an early alternative of sorts. Rifled muskets were first introduced in the 17th century. These weapons had spiral grooves cut into the inner surface of the barrel (called rifling) to induce the projectile to spin in flight as a mini-gyroscope, thereby increasing their range and accuracy. Effective at a range of 400 yards in the hands of an average marksman, the rifled musket could be deadly at a range 800 yards and beyond in the hands of a superior marksman. This being the case, why wasn't the rifled musket adopted immediately? Put simply, this was because it was too difficult to load. The bullet inserted in the muzzle had to fit very tight in order to grip the barrel's inner grooves. Using a ramrod, it took enormous force to push the projectile down the barrel; sometimes riflemen pounded the ramrod with a mallet. Slow and cumbersome to load, the rifled musket was simply not feasible under combat conditions. Whereas, the firing rate with a smoothbore might be three rounds per minute, it could be

three minutes per round or more with an early rifle.

The loading problem was not solved until the 1840's when French Army Captain Claude Mini ■ and others developed a cylindrical projectile with a hollowed out base that expanded to engage the rifling solely on the basis of the powder's explosion. This bullet was called a "Mini ■ Ball", although it was not a ball at all. The rifled musket made its true debut in the 1850's Crimean and Franco-Austrian Wars, but it was not until the U.S. Civil War that the rifle for the first time became the primary shoulder weapon on both sides of a large-scale conflict. Midway through the war the vast majority of infantry on both sides carried rifled firearms. The Union and Rebel armies used a variety of shoulder arms, but the two basic ones; both rifled muzzle-loaders were the .58 caliber U. S. Springfield and the .577 caliber British Enfield. One rifle of special note was the British-made .45 caliber Whitworth, imported by the Confederates in very limited numbers. This weapon was unique in that it had a twisted hexagonal bore using bullets shaped to fit. Equipped with telescopic sight, it is said to have had an effective killing range of 1500 yards and was a favorite among rebel sharpshooters

The effect of rifles on battlefield tactics was extremely significant. Above all, they gave a tremendous advantage to the defense. Even though the rate of fire was roughly the same as the smoothbore, the rifle's range and accuracy were far more lethal. Attacking infantry could be brought under fire much earlier, at a half-mile distance, and take heavier and more serious casualties. With a five to ten fold increase in range defending riflemen could decimate charging cavalry as well, cutting down both riders and mounts. The same was true with advancing artillery. Cannoneers and horses pulling the canons could be picked off before the guns were in position to do damage to the entrenched defenders. It is considered that rifles made defense three times as strong as offense; and the days of the so-called Napolionic tactics of massive close order frontal attacks became little less than suicide and were a thing of the past. Many Civil War generals on both sides were slow learners on this fact, however. This included both Lee at Gettysburg and Grant at Cold Harbor.

The next evolution in shoulder held firearms was the breechloaders followed by the repeating rifles and carbines. The rifled muzzleloaders reflected a ten-fold increase in range and accuracy over the smoothbores, but they were just as time consuming and awkward to load. It was a seven stepped sequential procedure, and if the soldier forgot one step he was in trouble. Additionally, in the heat of battle soldiers frequently forgot whether their weapon was loaded or not. After the fighting at Gettysburg, of the 27,500 loaded muskets found on the field, more than 12,000 had two loads each, 6,000 had three to ten rounds of ammunition, and one had twenty-three bullets in the barrel. If any of these rifles had been fired it probably would have been deadly to the soldier who pulled the trigger. Furthermore, it was nearly impossible to load a muzzleloader while in the prone position. One could do so by rolling over on ones back, but then he would lose sight of his target.

The solution to all of the above was breechloaders. These weapons fed ammunition at the breech located at the base of the barrel just above the trigger. They had been used in various forms and degrees of sophistication since the mid 1600's. An American named John Hall had patented a breechloader in 1811. (You will recall Rudy Schafer's excellent presentation *and* demonstration to the SCWRT on the Hall breechloader last January). The breechloader eliminated all of the problems inherent in the muzzleloader. A soldier absolutely could not load more than one round at a time, there was no need for a ramrod, he could load in the prone position, and fire as many as nine round per minute compared to a maximum of three with the muzzleloader. In addition accuracy and range could be further improved since tighter fitting bullets could be used. But one technical problem remained, that of gas leakage. This problem was effectively resolved by a design of Christian Sharps in 1854. The Sharps was a single shot, .52 caliber, highly accurate weapon much sought after by sharpshooters. (Note that the term "sharpshooter" predated the Sharps rifle, and did not specifically refer thereto.)

Also under development during this era were two repeating rifles of high merit. These were by Tyler Henry and Christopher Spencer. The .44 caliber Henry was fed by a 15 shot

magazine under the barrel; and the .52 caliber Spencer by a 7 shot magazine in the stock loaded via the butt plate. They were the most technically advanced firearms of the Civil War. Although also sought by sharpshooters because of their awesome firepower, some believed them to be less accurate than the Sharps. Carbine versions of these repeaters were also made and highly prized by the Calvary. Which was the better? I would opt for the Henry, but there are many Spencer fans around. Another repeater but in a different category was the .56 caliber Colt Revolving Rifle. The Colt had problems, however. It was not quite as accurate and had a tendency to cross fire, i.e. set off two or more rounds at once, a hell of a hazard to the rifleman. After the war they were sold off at \$0.40 each.

The breechloaders and repeaters were slow to be introduced into the Union Army due to negative attitudes within the entrenched bureaucracy of the Ordnance Department, namely BG James W. Ripley. He was an old fossil, an 1812 War veteran, and "the very personification of hidebound military conservatism". As Chief of Ordnance, he had absolute authority over the purchase of new weaponry, and he simply did not like breechloaders. Ripley used every device possible to disapprove or delay their purchase. Of the over 700,000 rifles purchased during the first 14 months of the war only 8,300 were breechloaders. After strong demands from Governors, Congressmen and soldiers themselves Lincoln and Stanton finally eased Ripley out, replacing him with BG George D. Ramsay, also an "old timer", but a more enlightened one. It is interesting to speculate what might have been the conduct and timing of the war had the Union army possessed more "state of the art" weaponry earlier on.

In the early days of the Civil War marksmanship training was minimal. Infantry soldiers were taught the manual of arms, how to load and care for their weapons, and close order drill; but very little time and ammunition was actually dedicated to practice firing to improve skills. Perhaps this was a hangover from the smoothbore days wherein it was believed that the musketeer, even if untrained, was inherently more accurate than his musket. After all, the latter had no rear sight and one did not really "aim" it, rather he "pointed" it in the general

direction he wanted to fire hoping that the enemy would be in the way.

This attitude changed, however, with the coming of Hiram Berdan on the scene. Berdan, an influential New Yorker had no military experience, but he was considered to be the country's best marksman. At the beginning of the Civil War he requested and was granted permission to raise a regiment of Sharpshooters for the Union. Actually he raised two regiments. George Washington in the Revolutionary War had first authorized these special units of highly skilled marksmen. They were also used during 1812-14, but apparently not so during the Mexican War. "Sharpshooter" and "Sniper" were not synonymous. The former was a unit of soldiers who fought in open rank and served mainly as scouts, skirmishers and pickets. Today they would be called "Special Forces". The latter was an individual operator on a special mission, but the term "sniper" had not been coined until WWI.

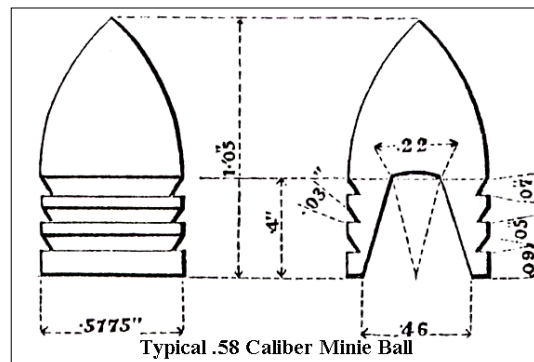
The Union and Rebel armies had a total of about 60 companies each of sharpshooters. The union soldiers carried a distinctive insignia "USSS", and both sides wore distinctive green uniforms with leather leggings. They were all volunteers and in Berdan's units each applicant had to pass a shooting test. No man could enlist who could not put ten consecutive rounds at an average of five inches from the bulls-eye center at 200 yards. (It is said Berdan himself could do this on a windy day with a strange rifle to 1.1 inches). Initially each man was permitted to bring his own target rifle, but this proved unworkable because of the wide variation in ammunition. After a short period with Colt Revolving Rifles, which were very much disliked, Sharps Rifles were finally issued to every ones satisfaction except the Ordinance Dept. (The Sharps cost \$42 each against \$13 for the standard issue Springfields, something else that gave miserly old Gen. Ripley much pain.)

Most sharpshooter companies carried in their wagons a custom target rifle sometimes called the "American" rifle for extra long distance firing. This weapon was a muzzleloader with an extra heavy barrel weighing up to 35 pounds. It was equipped with a seven power brass scope and was generally fired from a rest when the unit was in a static position. Near pen

point accuracy at ranges of 1000 yards could be expected of these rifles

Colonel Berdan organized a rigorous marksmanship training program, but his own lack of military experience and personal fitness soon became apparent. Fortunately he did have two highly competent Lieutenant Colonels, Charles Mattocks and Casper Trepp, and company officers. Two others who served with distinction in the USSS were Colonels Francis Peteler and Henry Post. Berdan was essentially relegated to the role of instructor and arranger of shooting matches. One match was attended by President Lincoln who it was said shot well, but was outdone by Berdan who put out the right eye of an effigy of Jeff Davis at 600 yards.

Hiram Berdan deserves much credit as the founder and organizer of the U. S. Sharpshooters. One can not speak well of him as its commanding officer, however. Totally without military knowledge and with seemingly poor judgement, he was arrogant, temperamental and dictatorial. Moreover, there was evidence that he was a coward. When his unit was ordered to the front, he frequently found reason to go to the rear on "urgent business", like visiting the sick, etc. He also had a habit of falsifying his after action reports. In August 63, Berdan was placed on extended medical leave for the relapse of a minor shrapnel wound he had received 14 months earlier, while in the rear, as usual. He was discharged 2 Jan 64. Notwithstanding, Hiram Berdan was honored with a brevet to Brigadier General. This was perhaps deserved for his instilling a greater awareness of the need for marksmanship training in the army, and for his forming and training of the 1st and 2nd USSS, but it was not warranted for his service as a commanding officer.



Bob Williams 8-06-04

