



LOWCOUNTRY CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

September 2003 Issue 30

GENERAL NATHAN BEDFORD FORREST A MOST CONTROVERSIAL SOLDIER



To often we fail to see the Forrest for the Lees. Historians of the American Civil War, and presumably their readers, have tended to treat Nathan Bedford Forrest and other quasi-guerrilla commanders as colorful supporting characters in the great drama of sectional conflict. While Forrest was having his little fun at Brice's Crossroads in Mississippi, back at the "real" war in Virginia, Ulysses Grant was preparing to cross the James and march on Petersburg. Even Forrest's biographers have allowed themselves to emphasize derring-do at the expense of larger themes and more expansive visions.

His escape from Fort Donelson; the desperate charge which saved Beauregard's army from Sherman's vigorous pursuit after Shiloh, in which he was severely wounded; the capture of Murfreesboro with the entire garrison of infantry and artillery, with his small brigade of cavalry without cannon; the charge on and capture of Coburn's infantry at Thompson's Station; the capture of the garrison at Brentwood; and the relentless pursuit of Streight's raiders which ended in the surrender of these gallant Union soldiers to Forrest with less than one-half of their number, had already attracted wide attention and had made him famous. After Forrest's death, Wyeth determined to write Forrest's biography to "place him in history not only as one of the most remarkable and romantic personalities of the Civil War, but as one of the ablest soldiers of the world"

Brian Wills knows more about Forrest than any previous biographer. He has sought the scraps of Forrest's record in county courthouses, newspapers, private correspondence, and oral tradition, and he offers previously unknown information, especially about Forrest before the war. Wills takes Forrest seriously as a person and understands him as an offspring of the Southern frontier. Before Forrest was a soldier, he spent forty years scratching and clawing his way from backcountry oblivion to wealth and

power in Memphis, principally as a slave trader.

Having offered Forrest in context, Wills concludes by placing him in perspective as a Confederate general. The contrast with Robert E. Lee is important. The "conventional" war that Lee fought relegated Forrest to a secondary role. In a sense Forrest and other "freaks" played the sideshows, while Lee and commanders like him worked the center ring. But Lee and generals like him lost. Could Forrest have won! When "total war" continued to evolve, primitive behavior again became successful. Bedford Forrest may have seemed slightly out of step in the Civil War, but he seems ideally suited for combat in Vietnam, Afghanistan, or Croatia. Our "modern" world appreciates the primitive. So again the question -- could Forrest have won? Thanks to Brian Wills, we can see the whole Forrest and Forrest whole. *Extracted partially from the forward written by Emory Thomas in Will's The Confederacy's Greatest Cavalryman...*

BRIAN STEEL WILLS

Brian Steel Wills was raised in Suffolk County, Virginia. His interest in American history began early with a love for reading books about great American figures such as George Washington and Robert E. Lee. He graduated from the University of Richmond, after which he earned an M.A. and PhD from the University of Georgia. He is a former professor of history at Georgia Southern University and is currently Professor and Kenneth P. Asbury Chair of History in the Department of History and Philosophy of Virginia's College at Wise.



Wills' reputation as a popular and dynamic speaker was recently reinforced when he was recognized with an Outstanding Faculty Award from the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, the commonwealth's highest honor for professors at Virginia's public and private colleges and universities.

His publications include *The Confederacy's Greatest Cavalryman: Nathan Bedford Forrest* and *The War Hits Home*.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

September is fast approaching and the Lowcountry Civil War Round Table is ready to launch another great year of exciting programs. We will begin our program this year with Brian Steel Wills, author and expert regarding the life of General Nathan Bedford Forrest. Wally Sword will be here in October speaking about Shiloh. Everyone will enjoy the southern wit of Richard McMurry, in November, as he discusses his passion, "the Western Campaign".

Liberty Bank will be with us again this year. We really appreciate them and will be giving away several \$100 Savings Bonds again this year as part of our "50/50" efforts. A new sponsor is Key Infiniti at the Auto Mall near Sun City. In addition to being a corporate sponsor, they are offering a great incentive program for the LCWRT to be announced at our first meeting. At press time, two more corporate sponsors may join them. If any member has leads on potential sponsors, we would love to hear from you!

We are an organization dedicated to promoting, educating, and stimulating interest in and discussion of all aspects of the War Between the States and the preservation of historical sites and monuments.

Our summer trip to Charleston to visit Fort Sumter and Fort Moultrie was just fantastic! A great job done by the Program Committee and special thanks to Don Walters.

Encourage your friends and neighbors to re-enlist or to become part of the LCWRT for the first time and to send fees to the Membership Committee as soon as possible. Tell them we look forward to their becoming part of our great group!

See you in September,

Bernie Covert

Charge to the enlistment form right now.



THE MINIÉ BALL GAZETTE

Lowcountry Civil War Round Table Inc.

P.O. Box 2252

Bluffton, SC 29910

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Dedicated to Historic Preservation and Enlightenment

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Our Web Site:

lowcountrycwr.org

To view a site dedicated to the memory of Nathan Bedford Forrest, go to:

www.tennessee-scv.org/ForrestCamp215/

Norman M. Mackay

General Manager



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2003-2004 PRESENTATIONS

THE YEAR 1862

September 10	Gen Nathan Bedford Forrest Hear about that ingenious & natural tactician who was also a cavalier. <i>Presented by Brian Steel Wills, Dean of the Faculty of the History and Philosophy Department at University of Virginia-College at Wise</i>
October 8	Battle of Shiloh , Pittsburg Landing, Tennessee. <i>Presented by Wiley Sword, author of Shiloh: Bloody April, which is the definitive book on this battle</i>
November 12	The Western Campaign . The battles of Forts Henry & Donaldson in Tennessee and the City of New Orleans. <i>Presented by Richard McMurry, one of the most provocative commentators on the Southern war effort. Author of many books including John Bell Hood and the War for Southern Independence and Two Great Rebel Armies</i>
January 14	Civil War Medicine A fascinating look into the horrors of battlefield caring for the wounded and dying. <i>Presented by "Bud" Robertson, a most entertaining and informative Civil War speaker and Director of the Virginia Tech Civil War Center</i>
February 11 No Morning After	Weapons of War . A first-hand introduction, with actual implements, into the fighting instruments of the war. <i>Presented by Dana MacBean and other members of the Charleston Museum</i>
March 17	2nd Manassas/Bull Run . A revisit, with new insights, to this battle which resulted in another victory for the Confederacy. <i>As told by the energetic, indomitable Edwin C. Bearss, one of the best known Civil War lecturers and an ardent battlefield preservationist</i>
April 14	Battle of Sharpsburg/Antietam . Considered the bloodiest single day of the entire war! <i>Presented by Dr Tom Clement, an Antietam Park Guide, a noted historian, lecturer, college professor and an expert on this important battle</i>
May 12	Seven Days Battle in Virginia . From June 25 to July 1, the hills & towns of Virginia were alive with fire. <i>Presented by R. E. L. Krick, a most informative young rising star as a Civil War historian and speaker</i>

There is a **Morning After** for all meetings **EXCEPT** as noted. Call Jim Hamilton about 3 days before the monthly meeting at 705-7575 if you plan to attend so as to allow for morning coffee and cake.

STATUE OF FORREST RAISES OLD CONTROVERSY IN NASHVILLE



Considered by many the most brilliant cavalryman of the Civil War, Nathan Bedford Forrest (1821-1877) is still exciting controversy in his home

state of Tennessee, and particularly in Nashville. On July 11, 1998, a new statue honoring Forrest was unveiled in a private confederate flag park. It can be seen along Interstate 65, just north of Brentwood. The citizens of Nashville responded in characteristically mixed fashion to the unveiling. Some have spoken out adamantly in favor of the statue; others have descried it as homage to a brute. The mixed response provoked by the statue is not unique to contemporary times. As far back as the **Civil War**, Tennesseans were divided in their loyalties to the Confederacy. The state of Tennessee supplied **100,000 men to the Southern Army**, more than any other state. However, it also supplied **50,000 men to the Union Army**, more than nine northern states.

THE LOST CAUSE BY HENRY MOSLER



Bob Ham, a member of the Lowcountry Civil War Round Table, has donated a beautiful photographic copy of Henry Mosler's "The Lost Cause". The copy is framed and matted and is an outstanding piece of artwork. The original painting is still in the private possession of the Smith-Berry family in Alpharetta, GA. I have been told the original painting was appraised at over \$300,000. The painting was commissioned by a private individual and remains in the family; therefore, there are not a great many copies in circulation.

"The Lost Cause" will be on exhibit during our September meeting. If you have not seen this painting, you are in for a real treat! Be there!! *By Bernie Covert*

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Your Editor at Work

**RESERVATION FOR SEPTEMBER 10TH MEETING
AT MCCrackEN MIDDLE SCHOOL
DINNER @ 5:45PM—PROGRAM @ 7:00PM**

MENU FOR THIS MEETING
CHICKEN PERLO • BAR B Q PORK
BAKED BEANS • MACARONI
STRING BEANS • HARVARD BEETS
COLE SLAW • APPLE SALAD
STRAWBERRY SHORTCAKE
GERMAN CHOCOLATE CAKE
ROLLS • ICE TEA • COFFEE
CATERED BY DUKE'S OF RIDGELAND

TO ATTEND PROGRAM ONLY (no dinner) Make your reservation by calling 705-9898

Dinner For September 10th, 2003

Number of Dinners: ___ @ \$11 each = ___

Names: _____

Phone: _____ Ck# _____ Date _____

MAKE CHECK PAYABLE TO
LCWRT Inc

MAIL CHECK WITH THIS FORM TO:

**FRANK BULSON
37 STROBHAR ST.
BLUFFTON, SC 29909**

DINNER FORM & CHECK MUST BE RECEIVED NO LATER THAN SEPTEMBER 7TH 2003



TRIP TO FORT SUMTER & FORT MOULTRIE IN CHARLESTON



On July 22, 35 persons headed to Charleston to visit Fort Sumter and Fort Moultrie. From Patriot's Point, we took a boat across Charleston harbor to Fort Sumter. A park ranger described the fort's history and pointed where shells had hit the inner walls. The flags flying over the fort included two versions of the official flag of the CSA and two of the US flag showing different arrangements of the stars. From atop the fort, a clear sky provided a great view of Charleston as well as the nearby site of Fort Johnson from which the first shot was fired on April 12, 1861. Lunch was enjoyed at the Shem Creek marina near Patriot's

Point. The view of the creek added a relaxing atmosphere for food and fellowship. From there we headed to Fort Moultrie on Sullivan's Island.

From atop a grassy mound in the fort, park historian Rick Hatcher discussed the fort's role during the Civil War. From here Major Anderson took his small Union force to Fort Sumter for his stand against the Confederates. Between the firepower of this fort and Fort Sumter, the Confederates kept the Union out of Charleston harbor until 1865. Although lesser well known than Fort Sumter, Fort Moultrie was mentioned as a place to spend more time.



Rick Hatcher

