



George W. Peck served in the 4th Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry during the Civil War. Entering the service in late 1863, Peck was later promoted to the rank of lieutenant. Following the war he wrote:

It may be asked why I waited so long before enlisting and why I entered at all, when the war was so near over. I know that the most of the soldiers enlisted from patriotic motives, and because they wanted to help shed blood, and wind up the war. I did not. I enlisted for the bounty. I thought the war was nearly over, and the probabilities were that the regiment I had enlisted in would be ordered home before I could get to it. In fact the recruiting officer told me as much, and he said I would get my bounty, and a few months' pay, and it would be just like finding money....I would not assert that the recruiting officer lied to me, but I was the worst deceived man that ever enlisted, and if I ever meet that man on this earth, it will go hard with him.

Peck's honesty and sense of humor probably helped him become a two-term governor of Wisconsin and a mayor of Milwaukee. He also furthered his illustrious career as a noted lecturer and writer. Among his books was *How Private Peck Put Down the Rebellion*, a rare collection of thoughts which the common reader of Civil War history was unfamiliar. Peck's work was inspired by the numerous articles written by various generals and participants in *Century Magazine* during the 1880's in which they claimed unwarranted roles as victors and heroes. In Peck's words:

To read those articles, it seems strange that the Union generals, who won so many decisive battles, should not have ended the war much sooner than they did, and to read the accounts of battles won by the Confederates, and the demoralization that ensued in the ranks of their opponents, it seems marvelous that the Union army was victorious. Any man who has followed these generals of both sides, in the pages of that magazine, must conclude that the war was a draw game, and that both sides were whipped. This is a kind of history that is going to mix up generations yet unborn in the most hopeless manner.

For decades, George W. Peck's tale was all but lost to readers. A best-seller for years following its introduction in 1885, *How Private Peck Put Down the Rebellion* has long been relegated to the rare book rooms of libraries and dusty shelves of bookstores. Now a new generation of readers can experience a nearly forgotten American humorist, thanks to a recent edition of his view of the great conflict.

This month on **MONDAY, APRIL 28**, the MRRT welcomes back speaker, award-winning journalist, and Civil War author **Don Allison** who presented "*Hell on Belle Isle: Diary of a Civil War POW*" in June of 1999. Don will inform us about the writings and exploits of George W. Peck as Peck shares his thoughts on the fear a soldier faced on the eve of battle, the losses felt by the war's civilians, the impact of illness on a soldier's life, and the inflated sense of power that often went to officers' heads. Finding a rare copy of Peck's book in an estate sale, Allison noted, "I could hardly put the book down. It was absolutely hilarious. I knew then that Peck's Civil War story deserved to be shared with a modern-day audience." Mr. Allison will share this wonderful story with us, and let us know how we can obtain a copy of the book, at this month's meeting. Make certain you attend to hear this welcomed talk.

Our special thanks to last month's speaker, **Robert Myers**, for his superb program, "*The Worst Colonel I Ever Saw: Francis Quinn of the 12th Michigan Infantry.*" Myers again lived up to our expectations and then some as he detailed the maladroit career and downfall of Quinn.



FALL FIELD TRIP: Last month 33 folks signed up for the Vicksburg Trip to be held on Sat/Sun, October 11-12. Room on the bus is still available, so you'll want to be in attendance to ensure your seat. Our guide, Terry Winchel, has set an itinerary of Saturday—Louisiana Circle overlooking the Mississippi River, then into downtown Vicksburg to John Pemberton's Headquarters, Chickasaw Bayou, Grant's Canal to Champion Hill, Port Gibson, and Raymond. Sunday will be set aside for the tour of Vicksburg Battlefield. The motel phone number for your reservations will be given at this month's meeting as well as the arrangements for the dinner and lunches. Don't miss out!

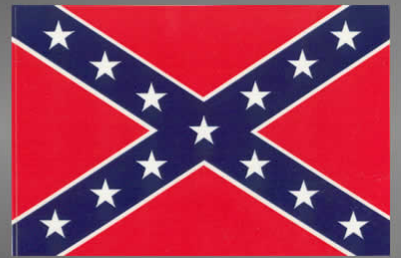
YEARLY DUES: A number of our most faithful members have yet to pay their dues. Since we are in to the fourth month of the year, a reminder is indicated by the enclosed envelope with your newsletter for those who are delinquent. Due to the expanded costs of mailing, etc., the dues have been set at \$20 per person without exception. You can write your check to CARROLL TIETZ and use the envelope provided or simply give the check to Carroll at this month's meeting (he has returned from Florida).

QUIZ: Famous Units and Their Commanders.....

1. A.P. Hill's "Light Division," created in the spring of 1862, literally saved R.E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia at the Battle of Antietam. Name its 6 brigade leaders when it was formed.
2. The Iron Brigade won laurels on the first day at Gettysburg. Which regiments made up this famous "Black Hat Brigade," and who was its leader?
3. George A. Custer led the Cavalry Brigade known as the "Michigan Wolverines." Name its 4 regiments, and under whose command were these units a part of the 3rd Cavalry Division?
4. What nickname did cavalry General Tom Rosser give to his Virginia troopers, and who led his horse-artillery? Also, what famous group of cannoners did Rosser help lead at First Bull Run?
5. Which Federal general led the "Philadelphia Brigade" in stopping the Confederate advance on Gettysburg's third day at Cemetery Ridge, and which 4 regiments comprised his brigade?
6. On the opening day at Gettysburg two highly regarded regiments faced one another at McPherson's Ridge. Name the units and their colonels, one a 20-year-old who was mortally wounded, the other a former Detroit city judge who was wounded and captured?
7. In which famous unit was the 69th New York a part of at Antietam's Bloody Lane, and which Irish revolutionary led this brigade?
8. Besides Stonewall Jackson, which 5 officers led the "Stonewall Brigade," and what were their outcomes?
9. Which Federal unit sustained the highest regimental loss in any battle (215 of 262 on the second day at Gettysburg) in proportion to the number engaged, and which colonel led this group?
10. Which Federal unit has the distinction of sustaining more battle losses than any other of the 2047 Federal regiments, and in which battle did it lose 632 killed and wounded of 900 men engaged?

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Thirty years after the Civil War, on February 27, 1894, an elderly and crippled ex-Confederate, seeking a pension for his war wounds, appeared before an examining doctor. The old widower, at least in his mid-seventies, patiently answered Dr. W.T. Delaney's questions. The veteran's name was James Keelan. The Dr. Delaney's examination of Keelan provided an ugly but astounding result: bone-white grooves across the man's scalp corresponding to sabre wounds, blanched scars scoring the left elbow, right arm, and right hand, the unmistakable marks of gunshot wounds, and the grisly absence of a left hand. Keelan explained that the wounds allowed him a discharge from the army, but he reenlisted and served the duration of the war. Keelan further stated that he was now the sole guardian of three grandchildren—ages 13, 11, and 8. His means of employment was "hauling a little wood and chopping with one hand as best I could." Two witnesses stood



in the room to verify Keelan's amazing tale as "one of the most heroic acts performed by any one during the late civil war...." They further testified that Keelan's act of bravery had taken place at Strawberry Plains, Tennessee on November 8, 1861.

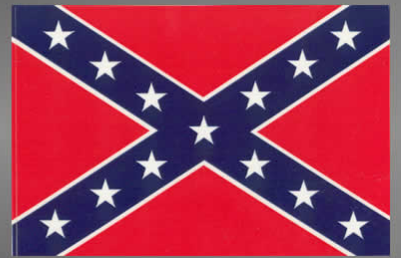
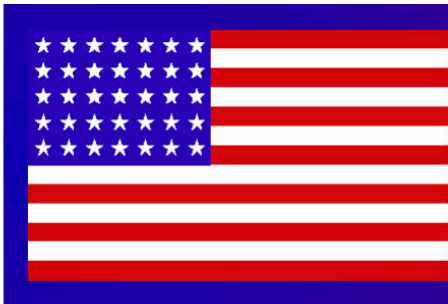
Keelan's incredible story took place as he guarded a railroad bridge. A dozen Confederate soldiers had been detailed to guard the structure, but on this night Keelan was left alone. Armed with a musket, a single-shot pistol, and a Bowie knife, he secreted himself behind some supporting timbers just above the abutment. Sometime near midnight Keelan heard the definite sound of perhaps a dozen men approaching. Undoubtedly they were Federals. Suddenly one of them mounted the pier just a few feet from Keelan's hiding place and attempted to ignite some pine splinters of the bridge. Keelan quickly fired the single-shot pistol hitting the bluecoat in the breast, killing him instantly. Cursing men now fired shots in Keelan's direction. He grabbed for his musket but in the darkness found only his knife. Dark forms scrambled toward him while wielding knives of their own. Holding his left hand up to protect his head and face, Keelan repeatedly swung his own knife in vicious circles. At first re-coiling, his attackers came on again. One missed Keelan's head and buried his knife into a support brace; Keelan pulled his victim close and drove his own blade into the attacker's side. Another assailant lunged in the darkness and cut Keelan's head to the bone as well as slicing deep into his wrist. Keelan countered and later recalled, "I poked it into him and he got the steel good." Others would feel the same sting of his blade. Enemy shots rang out and Keelan was hit three times. In the meantime he located his own musket but found he "could not lift it." It made no difference as his assailants skulked away.

Keelan, more dead than alive, tumbled into a bloodied heap and crawled up to the tracks. He crawled toward the lights of a nearby residence where he received help from the owner, William Elmore. Shuttering at the sight of Keelan's hideous wounds, Elmore heard Keelan remark, "They have killed me, but I've saved the bridge. Three men were found dead at the bridge the next morning. Various accounts at the time stated that another six to eight had been carried away badly cut. A local physician, Dr. Sneed, worked on Jim Keelan throughout the night to save his life. He found three severe sabre cuts to the scalp, a gunshot wound in the right hand and arm, and an inoperable bullet in his left hip. Seeing the left hand hanging by a mere sliver of flesh, Dr. Sneed grimly offered to remove the hand and stitch the stump.

Keelan received his soldier's pension, but in 13 months, on February 12, 1895, he died at age 77. He was buried in East Ridge Cemetery, Bristol, Tennessee. His distinctive tombstone, emblazoned with the Confederate Battle Flag, states "Defender of the Bridge—The South's Horatius." On August 20, 1994, Private James Keelan was posthumously honored with the Confederate Medal of Honor. It is on permanent public display in the UDC Confederate Museum in Knoxville.

QUIZ ANSWERS:

1. Charles Field, Maxcy Gregg, Joseph R. Anderson, James J. Archer, Lawrence O. Branch, Dorsey Pender
2. 2nd, 6th, 7th Wisconsin, 19th Indiana, 24th Michigan and Brig. Gen. John Gibbon
3. 1st, 5th, 6th, 7th and Hugh Judson Kilpatrick
4. "Laurel Brigade"/Captain R. Preston Chew and the Washington Artillery of New Orleans
5. Alexander Webb and 69th, 71st, 72nd, 106th
6. 26th North Carolina Infantry under Henry King Burgwyn and the 24th Michigan Infantry under Henry A. Morrow
7. "Irish Brigade" and Brig. Gen. Thomas F. Meagher
8. Richard Garnett (killed at Gettysburg), Charles Winder (killed at Cedar Mountain), Col. W.H.S. Baylor (killed at 2nd Bull Run), Col. Elisha Paxton (killed at Chancellorsville), and Col. James A. Walker (seriously wounded and captured at Spotsylvania)
9. 1st Minnesota Infantry and William Colvill, Jr.
10. 1st Maine Heavy Artillery and Petersburg



A last reminder for this month's—**MONDAY, APRIL 28**—meeting to hear the fascinating story of "*How Private Peck Put Down the Rebellion*," as presented by author **Don Allison**. As usual, the meeting will be held in the Farmington Public Library (Grand River and Farmington Road). We will start promptly at 6:30 P.M. Also try our website: <http://www.farmlib.org/mrrt/>.