



Virginia-born Federal general George Henry Thomas remains a controversy to this day. Some historians rate him as the best of all the Union generals. Others feel he did not deserve this extreme compliment. Two current biographies on Thomas are subtitled: “**The Indomitable Warrior**” and the slightly less complimentary, “**The Dependable General.**” He earned the nickname “*Rock of Chickamauga*” for his stellar defense of the Union army as it was being routed. His men affectionately called him “*Old Pap.*” Yet, he was criticized for his sometimes dallying movements as “*Old Slow Trot.*” In fact, Thomas was not always trusted by his superiors because of his Southern heritage, and he was in command of only two battles in the Civil War, the Battle of Mill Springs at the beginning and the Battle of Nashville near the end.

After graduating from West Point in 1840, Thomas fought in the Florida and Mexican Wars. While serving on the Brazos River in Texas, on August 26, 1860, an Indian arrow hit his chin and went into his chest. Although in pain, he was able to withdraw the shaft. He had the wound dressed and continued on the field.

Perhaps no other officer faced such difficult family problems as did George Thomas when the Civil War began. He made his decision to remain loyal to the Union on April 13, 1861. When he informed his sisters, Judith and Frances, they destroyed most of his letters to them and decided he was never to hear from them again. Thomas made several attempts at reconciliation with his sisters over the years, but his efforts were futile and he never returned home. When he died in San Francisco on March 28, 1870, his two sisters refused to attend the services. One of them explained smugly, “*Our brother died to us in 1861.*” One historian observed, “*So intense was their feeling against their brother that they turned his picture to the wall, and unto death, would have nothing to do with him.*”

William T. Sherman declared in a General Order which announced Thomas’ death that he “*never wavered in battle; was firm and full of faith in his cause; never sought advancement of rank or honor at the expense of any one; was the very impersonation of honesty, integrity and honor; and stands as the beau ideal of the soldier and gentleman.*”

On **MONDAY, APRIL 25**, longtime MRRT member **Dr. Martin Brosnan** will return to the speaker’s platform with his presentation, “**General George Thomas, USA, and Friends?**” Marty has entertained us on numerous occasions with his provocative talks, and as always, Marty will find some unusual pieces of historical information to pique your interest. Circle that calendar date now!

### **QUIZ: Name the generals/naval officers who, born on one side, fought for the other.....**

1. Born in Barre, Massachusetts, this Confederate general massed 62 cannon at Shiloh to stop a Federal advance. Also, what was the nickname of this portion of the battlefield?
2. Born in Huntsville, Alabama, this Federal general’s father ran for the presidency in 1844 as an anti-slavery candidate. And, after which two battles was this general accused of “disobeying orders”?
3. Born in Leesburg, Virginia, this Federal general, better known for his Confederate son-in-law also had a son who was a Confederate general. Also, where is this Union general buried?
4. Born in Campbell’s Station, Tennessee, this Union admiral helped capture New Orleans in 1862. And, where did he shout his immortal words, “Damn the torpedoes! Full steam ahead!”
5. Born in Woodville, Maine, this Confederate general lost nearly two regiments captured in the railroad cut on the first day at Gettysburg. And, who was his far more noted politician uncle?
6. Born in Savannah, Georgia, this Union general was nicknamed the “Pathfinder” for his early explorations. And, who defeated him for the presidency in 1856?



7. Born in New Orleans, Louisiana, this Union naval officer commanded the ESSEX and assisted Andrew H. Foote on the Tennessee River campaign in 1862. And, what injury did he sustain in the fight for Forts Henry and Donelson?
8. Born in Belleville, Virginia, this Federal general's troops were routed on the first day at Shiloh, although he blamed others for his failure. And, on whose court-martial did he later serve?
9. Born in Philadelphia, this Confederate general surrendered one of the Confederacy's most important strongholds. And, after his humiliation what rank did this former lieutenant general accept for the remainder of the war?
10. Born in Boston, this Confederate general was known for his leadership of Indians. And, at which battle were his Indians accused of excessive brutality?

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The MRRT expresses a special thank you to last month's speaker, **Bill Grandstaff**, for his exceptional program: "*Three You Know, the Fourth You Don't.*" The highly interesting Dr. Minor's story stole the show. Thanks Bill!

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A tale from the Battle of Chickamauga.....

Federal Colonel Hans Christian Heg led the Third Brigade of the Twentieth Corps. When John Bell Hood's Rebels drove forward on the Federal right at Viniard's Farm, Heg knew his brigade was in trouble. A Cincinnati newspaperman saw the brigade lose half its numbers: "*flank exposed....wide gap between it and troops on left....Bullets tore through the ranks; grape and canister whistled among the brave men....[who] stood their ground, not yielding an inch.*" A bullet hit Heg in the bowels but did not kill him instantly. What time he had left he devoted to rallying and protecting his men. Then he rode about a quarter of a mile and collapsed from loss of blood. It was sunset when he died. He was thirty-four years old.

Just the day before, Heg had written his wife: "*Do not feel uneasy for me. I am well and in good spirits....It is true the Rebels have not gone, Old Rosey [William Rosecrans] will give them one of the biggest whippings they ever had....Goodby, my darling.*"

Prior to the war Heg had been drawn to California by the gold rush of 1849. By the time he returned, his father had died. He married a Norwegian immigrant girl, Gunild Einong. When he ran for State Prison Commissioner he won, partly because he spoke such fluent English. He resigned to enter the army and was quickly appointed to the rank of colonel. An editorial commending him said he was "*young, powerful, attractive, honorable, unimpeachably honest*" and added that he "*had sound sense, a quality not too generously dispensed among the officers in this war.*"

Heg called for 1,000 recruits from among the Danes, Swedes and Norwegians, and they were assembled into the 15th Wisconsin Infantry. Many of the Scandinavians had just reached Wisconsin when they enlisted. Heg had said in his appeal, "*Let us band together and deliver untarnished to posterity the old honorable name of Norsemen.*" The complexion of the command could be seen from the fact that in Company F alone there were five Ole Olsens.

Heg's beautifully affectionate letters to his wife, Gunild, and his children, published by the Norwegian-American Historical Association in 1936, have touched many who have studied the Battle of Chickamauga. When Chattanooga writer, Robert Sparks Walker, read them he said that "*for many days thereafter my heart ached violently in sympathy.*" Walker decided then to prepare his interesting series of newspaper articles published in the **Chattanooga Sunday Times** in 1936 under the title "*The Pyramids of Chickamauga.*" The "*pyramids,*" erected of cannonballs by the Chickamauga



National Military Park, mark the spots where brigade commanders fell. Today one seems to encounter them everywhere on the battlefield.

**YEARLY DUES:** As of now we have 84 paid members for the year of 2011. That means 18 folks who normally pay their yearly dues of \$20 are delinquent. To avoid a reoccurrence of the dreaded RED DOT, your dues are requested now. Simply send a check for \$20 to: Carroll Tietz, 10640 Gamewood Drive, South Lyon, MI 48178.

**NEWSLETTER BY EMAIL:** If you are interested in receiving your monthly newsletter by email versus hard copy through the US Mail, simply email [ncarver55@comcast.net](mailto:ncarver55@comcast.net) a note with your agreement to do so. The newsletter is sent in a PDF format so it looks just like the hard copy. This saves approximately \$1 per person monthly due to postage, replication, letterhead, envelopes and labels. Email cost nothing; it's quicker, enhances MRRT's financial flexibility, and hopefully saves a tree or two.

#### QUIZ ANSWERS:

1. Daniel Ruggles and "Hornet's Nest"
2. David Bell Birney and Williamsburg/Fredericksburg
3. Philip St. George Cooke and Elmwood Cemetery in Detroit
4. David Farragut and Mobile Bay
5. Joseph R. Davis and Jefferson Davis
6. John C. Fremont and James Buchanan
7. William D. Porter and hit by scalding steam
8. Benjamin Prentiss and Fitz John Porter
9. John C. Pemberton and colonel of artillery
10. Albert Pike and Battle of Pea Ridge

Don't forget to circle **MONDAY, APRIL 25** for our next meeting. You'll be seeing **Marty Brosnan** present "*General George Thomas, USA, and Friends?*" Meeting begins at 6:30 P.M. at the Farmington Public Library (Grand River and Farmington Road). See you there.

Also try our website: <http://www.farmlib.org/mrrt/>

*Old Sarge*