

Vol LX, #7

Michigan Regimental Round Table Newsletter—Page 1

July 2020

MEMBER RENEWAL

The MRRT celebrates its 60th year in 2020 – and now is a great time to show your support by renewing your membership! (Or become a new member!). Membership is \$25 a year – or \$5 for students. Checks MUST be made out to Treasurer Jeanie Graham (the bank does not like checks made out to the RoundTable) and can be mailed to her home at 29835 Northbrook, Farmington Hills, MI 48334-2326.

Our July 20, 2020 meeting has been cancelled as stated in a previous e-mail. The Farmington Library is working on a re-opening plan for future use of the library by groups.

We thank our scheduled July speaker; our friend John Simmons from Grand Rapids who was going to speak on “General John Bell Hood: Charging into History”. We hope to reschedule John for 2021.

WE HAVE DECIDED TO POSTPONE OUR TRIP TO THE BRANDY STATION/CULPEPPER, VIRGINIA AREA UNTIL THE FALL OF 2021. This decision is based on all the uncertainty involved with the COVID-19 virus. We plan to keep our great tour guide, Clark “Bud” Hall, for 2021. We are really looking forward to visiting the various Civil War sites in the Culpepper area. We thank our trip committee of Jeanie, Linda, and Mollie for their great work! We will have a great trip in 2021.

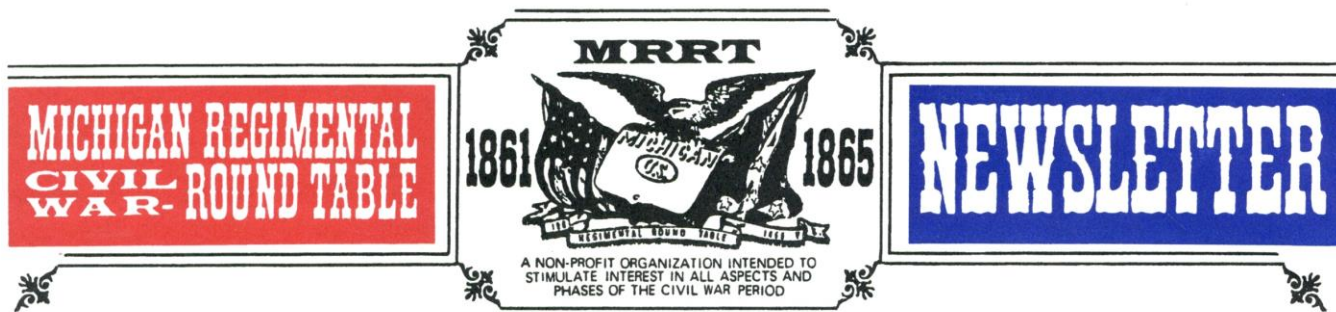
Please visit our website at <http://www.farmlib.org/mrmt>. Several Civil War presentations are listed on our website.

Civil War Essentials - From Pillar to Post Pillow to Polk: Starting the Downfall of the Confederacy in the West
In early 1861, the various southern states made their decisions to follow South Carolina and secede from the Federal Union. The states along the border, with strong factions supporting each side, were the most torn on whether to join them. **The western part of Kentucky had a large slave population and ties to the south.** Kentucky Governor Magoffin was sympathetic to the south. **However, the state’s overall economy was strongly oriented to the north** and it was the home of Henry Clay who had long labored to keep the Union together. **In mid-May 1861, Kentucky declared itself “neutral”** informing both sides that any incursion by either of their forces into its territory would be considered hostile. Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis, each born in the state, both grasped the importance of not doing anything to drive Kentucky into the arms of the enemy. Lincoln famously stated, “I think to lose Kentucky is nearly the same as to lose the whole game ...”. **Davis and the Confederate government realized that a neutral Kentucky could act as a valuable buffer** reducing their defensive burden by shielding Tennessee against possible Union offensives down the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers.



Both Union and Confederate forces took up positions near the Kentucky borders. Both covertly recruited Kentuckians. While 5000 muskets were smuggled into the state to arm Union sympathizers, northern states, notably Ohio, attempted to curb the movement of other munitions, etc., they suspected were intended for rebel sympathizers into the state. The Confederate seizure of Louisville & Nashville RR rolling stock angered many Kentuckians. Still, neither side breached its “neutrality” by occupying state territory until September 1861. **Early that month, two headstrong Confederate commanders, Leonidas Polk, and Gideon Pillow, took a fatal step.**

North Carolina-born Polk (picture left) met fellow cadet Jefferson Davis at West Point, graduating in 1827. A sudden religious calling then changed the course of his life. Upon graduating, Polk resigned his commission, entered an Episcopal seminary,



and was ordained in 1830. His religious bent did not preclude a strong interest in politics and Polk became an ardent secessionist. When the war began, Bishop Polk was a self-assured charismatic man with long-ago military training but no actual military experience. **Polk was immediately qualified to be a company grade officer, but his friend Davis made him a general!** By comparison Ulysses Grant, who had served for 10 years and had seen combat in Mexico, was hesitant to ask Illinois' governor for a colonelcy in 1861.

Gideon Pillow's (picture below) credentials were even more problematic than Polk's. A Tennessee native, he had practiced law and politics. He helped James K. Polk, his former law partner, become President and in return Polk made him a general of volunteers during the Mexican War. At war's end, he tried unsuccessfully to claim credit for the military accomplishments of Gen. Winfield Scott. **When Tennessee seceded, Pillow was the state militia commander.** His supporters pressured Davis to give him a major Confederate Army role. **Davis had doubts about Pillow but decided not to offend Tennessee's leaders. He was made a general in charge of the state's defenses.** President Davis intended to curb any ill-advised actions Pillow might try by placing a more capable senior commander over him. His first choice, Albert S. Johnston, had not yet arrived from California. **As a stopgap, he gave the position to Polk.**

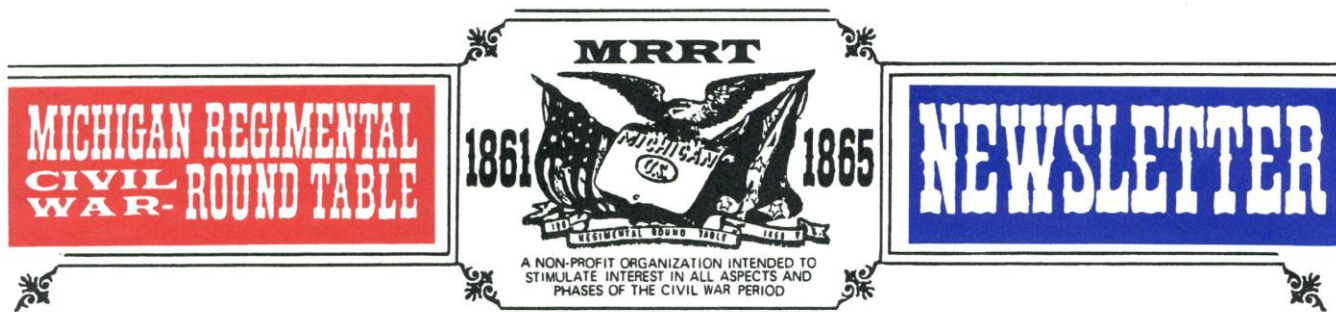
Although Pillow's Confederates had moved upriver in July 1861 to occupy strategic New Madrid, Missouri, **Pillow and Polk were fixated on Columbus, Kentucky, north of New Madrid, as an even better defensive position to fortify.** Militarily this was true, but strategically it would prove a mistake. Despite Jefferson Davis having reiterated to Magoffin on August 28 that the Confederacy would not be the first to violate the state's borders, Pillow was eager to seize Columbus to prove his prowess. **Pillow was warned by both Davis and Tennessee Governor Harris not to enter Kentucky, but he convinced Polk to permit the move using as justification Union activity which seemed to threaten Columbus as well as reports that pro-Union Kentucky citizens were forming Home Guard units.** The CSA commanders' best course would have been to let the Yankees move into Columbus first and watch Kentucky join the Confederacy.



Instead, on September 3, they moved, taking control of Columbus but failing to move quickly enough to also seize Paducah, Kentucky about 50 miles to the northeast. Located where the Tennessee River joins the Ohio, Paducah was vital to both controlling the Tennessee and guarding the flank of the Columbus position. Grant's Union troops immediately seized Paducah.

Jefferson Davis wavered after Secretary of War Walker ordered Pillow to withdraw. Polk, his Academy chum, telegraphed him that it was done out of military necessity and Davis relented. Richmond then advised General Felix Zollicoffer, in charge of Confederate forces in eastern Tennessee, that he could also cross into Kentucky. He did so, as did a small Confederate force coming in through Pound Gap from Virginia, which confirmed the belief of many Kentuckians that the Confederacy was the real threat. In early 1862 Zollicoffer would be defeated and killed at Mills Springs and the rebel force from Virginia under General Humphrey Marshall was forced out of the state.

With Kentucky aligned with the Union by December 1861 (a "shadow" Confederate government existed for a time); the Confederacy's northwest was made vulnerable. As soon as he was allowed, Grant used the opening in the Confederate defenses to attack Forts Henry and Donelson. The rebel territory around the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers including Nashville was lost. In the spring of 1862, the Confederate troops withdrew from Columbus which could no longer be held. **In April 1862, Albert Sidney Johnson made a desperate attempt to regain the lost territory. At**



Shiloh he came very close to turning back the Yankees but lost his life and the battle. This battle and the abortive Bragg/Kirby Smith invasion later that year were the best chances the CSA would have to reverse the fatal error made by the two impetuous generals. Kentucky ultimately contributed many soldiers to both sides in the war. **Pillow and Polk would both make more mistakes as the war progressed.**

Such was Gideon Pillow's dubious military reputation that U. S. Grant told Gen. Simon Buckner at Fort Donelson that had Pillow also been captured there, **Grant would have released him so that Pillow would be able to do yet more damage to the Confederate cause!!** Pillow's subsequent poor performance at Stones River spelled the end of his combat career – in early 1863 he was relegated to recruiting duties but briefly returned to field command in June 1864 when he unsuccessfully attacked Sherman's supply lines at Lafayette, Ga.

Polk was very popular with the soldiers under his command. **But on several occasions later in the war he hesitated to follow orders to attack Union positions.** A reluctance to take prompt action at Perrysville, perhaps due to his dislike of Braxton Bragg, may have denied the Confederacy a clear victory there. Polk's last mistake was failing to withdraw from an exposed position on Pine Mountain, Ga in June 1864 – **he was struck by a Yankee 3" artillery shell and killed instantly.**

Quiz Questions: This month's questions pertain to Michigan and the Battle of Gettysburg.

1. Which officer, Detroit-born and West Point graduate in 1839, commanded the Union artillery at the Battle of Gettysburg? What was his uncle's connection to Detroit?
2. Which Michigan regiment ran from the attacking Confederates at Little Round Top on July 2, 1863.
3. Which Michigan regiment was involved with the repulse of Pickett's Charge?
4. A tense struggle incurred on July 1, 1863 between a Michigan regiment and a Confederate regiment. Name the two regiments and the commander of the Michigan regiment?
5. When did General Custer's "Michigan Cavalry Brigade" participate in its first battle? Which units were in the Michigan Cavalry Brigade at the Battle of Gettysburg?

We thank "Old Sarge" for his help with this month's questions and answers.

Gen. Hood – Charging into History Laudanum, Legends, Lore

We read our history books to develop a base of knowledge, but is this correct? For Gen. Hood later history writers would tell tales that cannot be found in earlier works. Watch the story grow.

1998 October *Blue and Gray Magazine* - Author Stephen Davis, his research found the first allegation in print.

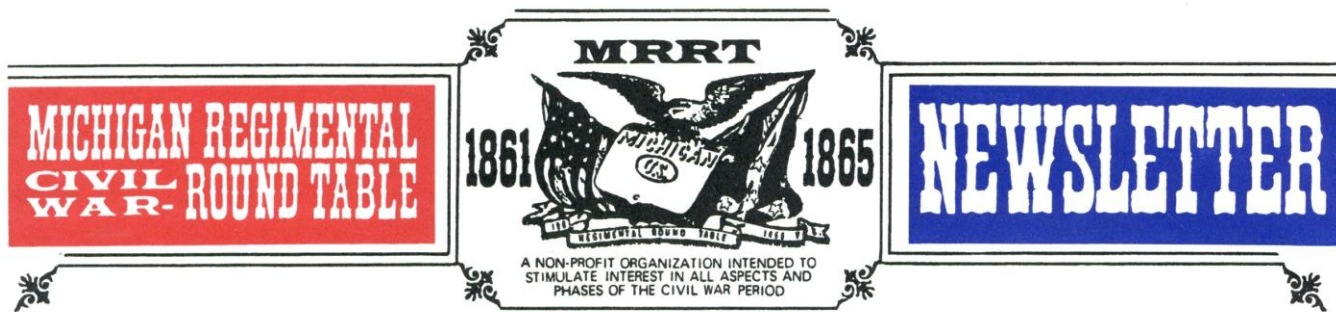
1940 Percy Hamlin "*Old Bald Head: General R. S. Ewell*"

"A Competent, cautious man was replaced by one who, brave and loyal though he was, had been so **crippled by wounds as to make him dependent upon the use of Opium.**"

1941, Stanley Horn *the Army of Tennessee* - "Old soldiers and old residents around Spring Hill explain all that nights fumbling in blunt terms: Hood **Was Drunk.**"

1949, Richard O'Connor *Hood: Cavalier General*

"Was **a legend** of the countryside for many years after that Hood **was drunk that night.**"



Vol LX, #7

Michigan Regimental Round Table Newsletter—Page 4

July 2020

1971, Thomas Connelly *Autumn of Glory*

“His old leg wound **may** have been irritated by the long, damp ride over rough roads.” “He was a simple man, often tactless and crude, more of a fighter than a general.”

1972, Richard McMurry *The Road Past Kennesaw: The Atlanta Campaign of 1864*

“**May have been** taking a derivative of laudanum to ease his pain.”

1983, James McDonough *Five Tragic Hours: The Battle of Franklin*

“**Especially if** he took any liquor or a drug to relax.

1985, Ronald H. Bailey *Battles for Atlanta*

“By the accounts of **some** contemporaries, Hood suffered such intense pain that he was **taking Laudanum and Opioids**, that **could impair** mental judgment.”

(NOTE-No contemporary sources are listed for reference)

1993, Wylie Sword *the Confederacies Last Hurrah*

“**Perhaps** swallowed some Laudanum.” “Hood **often resorted to laudanum.**”

William Garrison Jr. 1995 *Atlanta and the War*

“**Perhaps** from the use of laudanum to dull his constant pain.”

1994, Stephen Woodworth *The Campaign for Atlanta and Sherman’s March to the Sea*

“...**at times resorted to** alcohol and opium or a derivative of laudanum.”

1997, Craigs Symonds *Stonewall of the West*

“An early dinner and **a laudanum induced sleep.**”

2002, Webb Garrison Jr. *Strange Battles in the Civil War*

“**Assuaged his pain with laudanum**, which effected his judgement.”

2003, Dr. Barbara G. Ellis 2003, *The Moving Appeal* “Hood and Drugs”

“...**Increasingly skewed by a growing dependence on opiates**,” and that Jefferson Davis mistook Hood’s look of enthusiasm and resolve on the battlefield as “**Eyes Ablaze with A Need for Narcotics.**”

2007, Eddy Davison and Daniel Foxx *Nathan Bedford Forrest: In Search of the Enigma*

“Not to mention his **addiction to alcohol and laudanum.**”

2010, Russell Blount *The Battles of New Hope Church*

“**Often turns to** laudanum and whiskey for relief.”

Scott Bowden *Last Chance for Victory: Robert E. Lee and the Gettysburg Campaign*

“As is often the case in military history, if a story is repeated frequently by a legion of writers, it becomes accepted as fact by many readers. These stories acquire a life of their own and become part of the popular culture; there factual foundation is no longer questioned, much less critically evaluated.

We thank John Simmons of Grand Rapids, our scheduled July speaker on General Hood, for this article.

Quiz Answers: Michigan and the Battle of Gettysburg.

1. Henry Jackson Hunt. His uncle was the second mayor of Detroit.
2. The 16th Michigan Volunteer Infantry.
3. The 7th Michigan of General John Gibbon’s Second Division of the 2nd Corps of the Army of the Potomac.
4. The 24th Michigan and the 26th North Carolina. Colonel Henry A. Morrow commanded the 24th Michigan.
5. The Michigan Cavalry Brigade participated in the Battle of Hanover (southern Pennsylvania) on June 30, 1863. The 1st, 5th, 6th, and 7th Michigan Cavalry units and Battery M, 2nd United States Artillery.