

"It wasn't like a battle at all...it was more like Indian warfare," remembered John McClure, a young private in the 14th Indiana Infantry. "I hid behind a tree and looked out. Across the way...was a rebel aiming at me. I put my hat on a stick...and stuck it out from behind the tree-as bait. Then I saw him peep out of the thicket and I shot him. It was the first time I'd ever seen the man I'd killed, and it was an awful feeling." This deadly incident, on May 5, 1864, was only one of such commonplace bloody episodes that occurred in the bitter struggle known as the Wilderness.

Beginning in 1864 North and South stood in weary stalemate. All of the Federal victories from the previous year, including Gettysburg and Vicksburg, had seriously weakened the Confederacy, but, it remained bowed, not broken. For the North to win the war, now starting its fourth year, the Confederate armies must be crushed. The South, conversely, had one final hope: stymie the North's plans and count upon a war-weary Northern home front to force the conflict to the peace table.

Now in early May of 1864, the two most notable titans of the Civil War, Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee, were about to come face-to-face in a final showdown to determine the war's outcome. Grant, whose roller coaster career had nearly ended on several occasions, was given the revitalized rank of Lieutenant General by President Lincoln, and the amazingly difficult task of besting the Army of Northern Virginia, something his predecessors had found nigh impossible. Could the cigar-chomping, whiskey-swilling Grant, noted for his tenacity and stubbornness, be equal to the task? Cyrus McCormack, an engineer on Grant's staff, answered the question: "[Grant] *habitually wears an expression,*" noted McCormack, "as if he had determined to drive his head through a brick wall, and was about to do it." James Longstreet noted, "*That man will fight us every day and every hour till the end of this war.*"

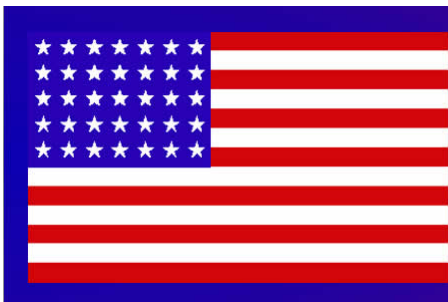
Lee, the superb gentleman and the "*very god of war,*" who came to field command in June of 1862, had been nearly invincible, constantly defeating armies of superior numbers. Could this noble, Southern patrician of surprising audacity withstand the promised slugfest that lay ahead? Perhaps no general in military history was revered by his own troops as much as Lee. A chaplain of the First Corps once asked a member of Lee's staff, "*Does it not make the general proud to see how the men love him?*" The staff officer shook his head. "*Not proud,*" he answered. "*It awes him.*" General Henry Heth saw it a bit differently. "*General Lee, I have always thought,*" stated Heth, "*was the most belligerent man in his army.*"

Lee and Grant were to meet on the most unlikely of battlefields—a 70-square-mile region Virginia that fringed the south banks of the Rapidan River about ten miles west of Fredericksburg—commonly called the Wilderness. Its thick, tangled underbrush and nearly-impenetrable gully-ridden ground would make the carnage about to occur a bloodbath of unbelievable gruesomeness. Over the first two days of this campaign the Federals suffered 17,666 casualties, Confederates losses were 10,830. For the next forty days the two great armies would know savage and relentless combat of unprecedented intensity.

This month we feature **Jim Epperson** of the Ann Arbor Civil War Round Table, presenting, "***The Battle of the Wilderness, May 5-6, 1864.***" Jim is the author of two articles, published in *Columbiad* magazine and *Civil War Times Illustrated*. Before coming to Ann Arbor he served as Program Director for the Tennessee Valley Civil War Round Table. Jim is the creator of award-winning websites on the Petersburg Campaign [<http://members.aol.com/siegel1864/>] and the Causes of the Civil War [<http://members.aol.com/jfepperson/causes.html>]. You'll want to be in attendance for this special program. Circle the date: **MONDAY, AUGUST 25.**

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Last month's auction was a tremendous success, netting \$311.00 for our Treasury. Numerous items sold at bargain prices. The key to this evening as always is YOU for donating, bidding, purchasing, laughing. Hopefully, you had a fun evening!



ODDS & ENDS:

- **FALL FIELD TRIP INFO:** A check for \$65 is due to Trip Chairman Jerry Maxwell for the Shenandoah Valley trek this October. This amount covers the cost of the bus, speaker's expenses, museum fees, etc. If you haven't made this payment, please bring a check (made out to Jerry Maxwell or Carroll Tietz) to this month's meeting OR mail your check to Jerry (1952 Tiley Cir. Commerce, MI 48382). This month another check for \$40 (covering the Saturday night dinner) is also due.
- Our own Carroll Tietz has an art exhibit, consisting of 33 original watercolors and acrylic paintings, on display at the Salem/South Lyon Main District Library u.'til August 30. The collection includes a varied selection of still life, winter scenes, lighthouses, farm houses, clowns, western steer skulls, an Arizona mission-and much more. It's a fantastic art display that you'll definitely want to view. The library is located at 9800 Pontiac Trail (just south of Eight Mile). The library's hours are Monday through Thursday 9:00am to 9:00pm and Friday-Saturday 10:00am to 5:00pm.

QUIZ: All questions pertain to the Wilderness

1. On the morning of May 5 which Corps did George Meade order to attack the advancing Confederates on the Orange Turnpike? And, which outspoken Federal general led this Corps? [Hint: he was removed from command the last week of the war.]
2. Whose forces did he attack? And, what error did the Federal Corps commander make in his advance?
3. What other Union Corps attempted to turn the Confederate left flank? And, who led this Federal advance? [Hint: he was killed just four days later by a Confederate sharpshooter.]
4. On the opening day of battle, May 5, which two opposing cavalry generals had a brief skirmish? [Hint: both returned to the military for the Spanish-American War and one volunteered for World War I.]
5. On May 6 which Corps (and commander) did Grant order to advance into a gap between Richard Ewell and A.P. Hill's men? And, what mistake did he make in the attempt?
6. Which Confederate Corps commander arrived to plug this gap? And, which of his staff officers, a clerk before the war who had never led troops into battle, now led a flanking attack?
7. Which Federal general, a wealthy planter, philanthropist, and politician from upstate New York was killed in the Wilderness on May 6? And, which general replaced him?
8. What was the significance of 18-year-old Private Charles Wilson of Company I, 18th Massachusetts Infantry? And, which Federal Brigadier General of the 2nd Brigade, 3rd Division, II Corps, a Pennsylvanian and a friend of Grant's since their West Point days, was killed at approximately 5:00pm on May 5?
9. Which Confederate general was struck in the throat by a bullet on May 6? And, which South Carolina brigadier was shot in the brain and killed by the same volley?
10. Which Confederate Brigadier General in Jubal Early's Division was given permission to attack the right flank of the Union army around 5:30pm on May 6, nearly shattering the Federals? And, which Confederate Brigadier General of the same Division failed to bring up his men in support? [Hint: he was killed 9 months later at Hatcher's Run.

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Some tales from the Battle of the Wilderness....

William Corby, the chaplain in the Irish Brigade, awoke on the morning of May 5 to an unpleasant surprise. Corby had pent the night about ten feet from a country road, comfortably sandwiched between two army blankets. Before the chaplain fell asleep, he had propped a soft military hat over his face to keep out the damp air. Now, as Corby awakened,



he discovered that during the night some dexterous Union soldier had swapped headgear with him. Gone was his new felt hat.

In its place Corby found one that *"must have been in use for two or three years... The lining had been tom out... and the bell of the hat had assumed the form of a pineapple!"* He could wear this caricature of a hat or go bareheaded. Grumbled Father Corby, *"The thought of it spoiled my morning meditation."*

Later in the day, Father Corby grimly wearing his pineapple-shaped hat came across a badly wounded soldier named David Lynch. Corby had disapproved of the way Lynch, a good-natured but simple-minded boy, had squandered his advancement opportunities *"for want of system and education."* Corby now counted eight bloody holes in Lynch's body. *"His mind was clear,"* the chaplain later wrote. *"I prepared him for death, and dropping a parting tear, was obliged to leave him to his fate in the Wilderness of Virginia."*

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In the midst of terrible impersonal carnage, brief moments of individual struggle stood out. Augustus Dickert of the 3rd South Carolina Infantry remembered, *"a soldier from Company C had been shot in the first advance, the bullet severing the great artery of the thigh. The young man struggled behind a small sapling. Bracing himself against it, he undertook deliberative measures for saving his life. Tying a handkerchief about the wound, and placing a small stone underneath and just over the artery, and putting a stick between the handkerchief and his leg, he began to tighten by twisting the stick around. But too late; life had fled, leaving both hands clasping the stick, his eyes glassy and fixed."*

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Not everyone who had been killed or captured was mourned on the night of May 5. Private John Haley of the 17th Maine warned that Major Mattox of his regiment had been taken prisoner. Haley grinned in the darkness as he thought, *"I can't think of any officer I'd sooner part with for he was very pompous and had yards and yards of superfluous red tape about him."*

QUIZ ANSWERS:

1. V Corps and Gouverneur K. Warren
2. Richard Ewell and he delayed until 1:00 P.M. allowing Confederate reinforcements to arrive
3. VI Corps and John Sedgwick
4. Tom Rosser and James Harrison Wilson
5. IX Corps/ Ambrose Burnside and he was late in arriving
6. James Longstreet and G. Moxley Sorrel
7. James Wadsworth and Lysander Cutler
8. First soldier killed in this campaign and Alexander Hays
9. James Longstreet and Micah Jenkins
10. John Brown Gordon and John Pegram

A reminder to attend this month's program—MONDAY, AUGUST 2—for **Jim Epperson's** *The Battle of the Wilderness, May 5-6, 1864.* Meeting time is 6:30pm at the Farmington Public Library at Grand River and Farmington Road. And don't forget to visit Carroll Tietz's art display at the South Lyon Public Library. And, while you're at it, try our website: <http://www.farmlib.org/mrrt/>.