

Vol LX, #8

Michigan Regimental Round Table Newsletter—Page 1

August 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 August 31, 2020 meeting has been cancelled as stated in a previous e-mail. The Farmington Library is still working on a re-opening plan for future use of the library for meetings.

We thank our scheduled August speaker; our friend Dr. Roger Rosentreter from Michigan State University who was going to speak on “Michigan at Gettysburg”. We hope to reschedule Dr. Rosentreter 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.

EDITORIAL FROM ROUNDTABLE PRESIDENT GEORGE A. CROUCH – Our National Battlefield Parks are facing an emergency. The U.S. House of Representatives has passed a 2021 funding bill for the State, Agriculture, and EPA, number HR 7608. HIDDEN in its 727 pages is funding for the removal of all Confederate monuments, placards at Gettysburg, Antietam, Chickamauga, Fredericksburg, Vicksburg, and others. Les Fowler, President of Licensed Battlefield Guides, is calling for an immediate write in or email to our elected officials. Please read his web page “Battle of Gettysburg Buff”. If you are as passionate about our History as I am please contact your Representatives and Senators to stop the funding in this bill. Let your voice be heard!!!

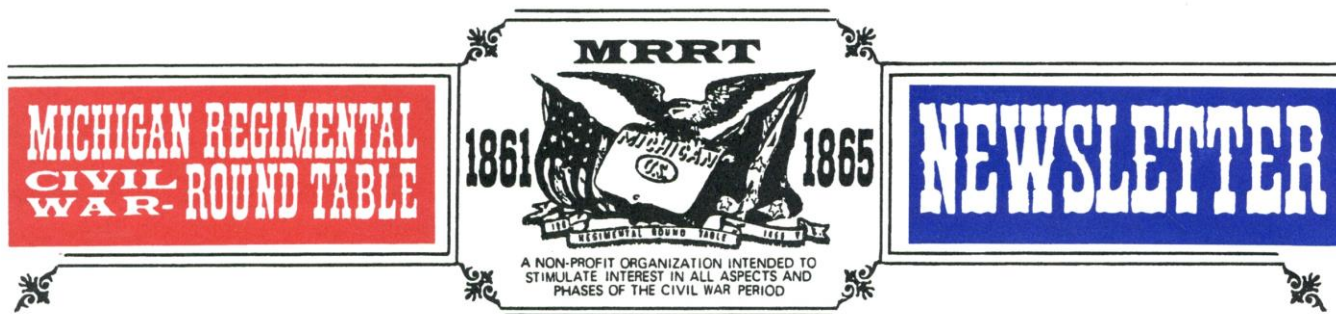
Respectfully George A. Crouch MRRT President

Civil War Essentials - The Young Union Naval Hero – William Cushing

If asked to name a heroic figure of the Union Navy during the Civil War, chances are you will think of crusty old David G. Farragut, the hero of the key battles of New Orleans and Mobile Bay. Farragut was a hero, perhaps the greatest that the Navy had during the war, **but there was a much younger man who matched Farragut in leadership, audacity, and personal bravery – William Cushing.** Cushing’s feats were on a smaller scale than Admiral Farragut’s but every bit as successful and even more imaginative.

William B. Cushing was born in 1842 in Wisconsin but grew up in New York State. Two of his brothers would become officers in the Union army during the war and another brother was also in the Navy. William entered the US Naval Academy in 1857 but was expelled shortly before the beginning of the war for pranks and for low grades. **When the war began, Cushing requested another chance from the Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles, who obliged with a commission.**

His performance in the early part of the war was enough to garner him a promotion to lieutenant in 1862 after which he held command of several small vessels on blockade duty off Cape Fear. Here he began the practice of making small raids



on Confederate positions in the area. **The most notable raids would come in 1864 when Lt. Cushing commanded the *USS Monticello*.**

In February 1864, Cushing decided to attempt the capture of Confederate General Louis Hebert, the chief engineer of the CSA forces defending Wilmington. After dark, he took 20 bluejackets in 2 small boats up the Cape Fear River past Forts Caswell and Johnston to the tiny village of Smithville where Hebert reportedly lived. Upon landing there he found two black slaves tending a salt boiler who told him where Hebert was staying. The raiders burst into the house and captured Hebert's aide, Captain Patrick Kelly; but the General was in Wilmington that night. The raiders quickly retreated to their boats with Kelly and the slaves, who saw freedom suddenly appear, while the Confederates vainly searched for the intruders! The next day, Cushing sent an aide under a flag of truce to retrieve the Captain's clothes and money and to leave a note for Hebert which read:

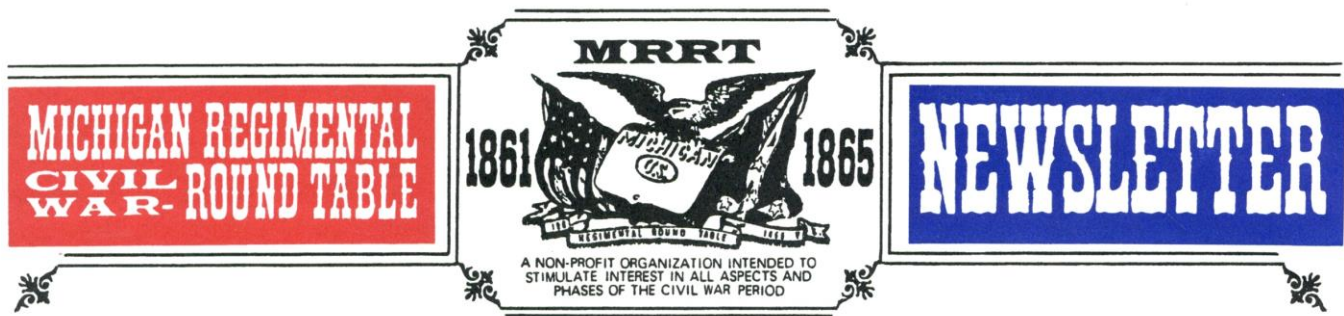
My Dear General,
I deeply regret that you were not at home when I called.
Very respectfully,
W. B. Cushing



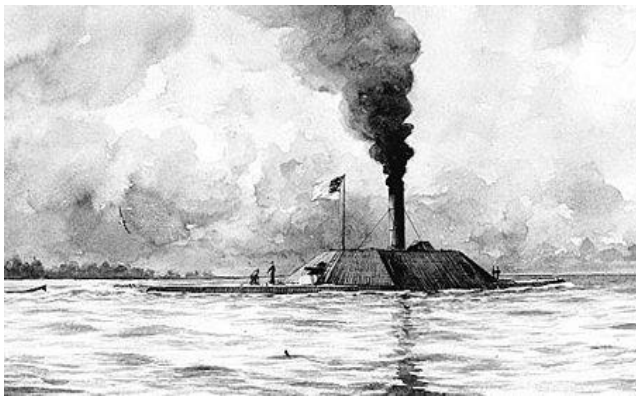
In May of the same year, the ironclad *CSS Raleigh* made an unexpected foray down the river and attacked the blockading ships. Although it created consternation among the blockaders, it did not damage. But its appearance made Cushing decide to try to destroy it in another nighttime raid. He took 17 men in a cutter and again rowed up the river to find where the *Raleigh* was moored. Passing Ft. Caswell, he captured some fishermen who informed him that the *Raleigh* had struck a mud bank. After the tide receded, the weight of the unsupported ship broke its keel. With his primary mission now moot, Cushing chose to travel further upriver to gather intelligence about Confederate defenses and shipping. **Coming ashore seven miles south of Wilmington, the raiders soon stopped several people on the road down to Fort Fisher including a mail courier whose bag contained a wealth of information about the fort.** While gathering more passersby, Cushing sent a disguised raider with some "liberated"

Confederate money to purchase food in town. Their luck finally ran out when another courier sensed that something was wrong and evaded capture. Knowing it was time to head back down the river, Cushing ordered the telegraph wire cut and put his prisoners into canoes which he towed behind the cutter. **Nearing the mouth of the river, Cushing realized that he could not drop his prisoners off on an island as planned because Confederate small craft full of soldiers were approaching from all sides.** Somehow, he managed to elude them all by a hair's breadth and returned to the blockading fleet. The escapade had lasted over 2.5 days, but no one was hurt or killed and the intelligence he brought back proved to be priceless.

His last and most spectacular exploit was in late October 1864. The powerful Confederate ironclad ram *CSS Albemarle* had created havoc along the Roanoke River and threatened to force the Yankees out of Plymouth, a key city along the river. **Cushing submitted a proposal to attack the *Albemarle* by night again use a raiding force in small boats.** The Navy approved the scheme and Cushing acquired a 30 ft. steam picket boat under construction in New York. He had a 12-pound gun installed and attached a long spar to the bow. A torpedo (mine), which could be detonated by pulling on a lanyard, was mounted at the end of the spar. Accompanied by a cutter, the picket boat journeyed upriver on the night of October 27-28. They had to pass Confederate guards at the wreck of the *USS Southfield*, one of the



Albemarle's victims, to reach the ironclad. Successful in this, Cushing toyed with the idea of trying to “cut out” the *Albemarle* (picture below) and take it down river as a prize. As they approached the ship however, they came under heavy



small arms fire and discovered a log boom surrounding it. Cushing ordered the picket boat to charge the boom and it rode up over the logs until the torpedo was against the hull of the *Albemarle*. **Just as the ship's gunners were about to fire one of the vessel's Brookes cannons point blank at Cushing's head, the torpedo detonated lifting the ironclad up and tumbling everyone in the picket boat into the river so that the ball missed him.** As the *Albemarle* settled in 6 feet of water, the Union raiders swam away and tried to avoid rebel searchers. Most were captured but Cushing and one other man escaped, and two men drowned. The Confederates were not able to raise the *Albemarle*, so its threat ended. **Cushing received the Thanks of Congress for this feat.** A few months later in early 1865 he was

involved in the final assault on Fort Fisher.

Cushing held several commands after the war and was promoted to Commander in 1872. His brother Alonzo had been killed at the Battle of Gettysburg. In 1864 he received the Medal of Honor for his heroism there – 151 years after his death! Another brother, Howard, died in 1871 while fighting Apache Indians. In late 1873, while commanding the *USS Wyoming*, William Cushing confronted Spanish authorities at Havana to save the lives of the American crew of the *Virginus*, which the Spaniards had captured while it was delivering supplies to Cuban revolutionaries.

William Barker Cushing died in late 1874, possibly from the long-term effects of undiagnosed injuries suffered during the *Albemarle* raid 10 years earlier. He is buried in the Naval Academy Cemetery. **Five US Navy ships, a torpedo boat and four destroyers, have been named after him.**

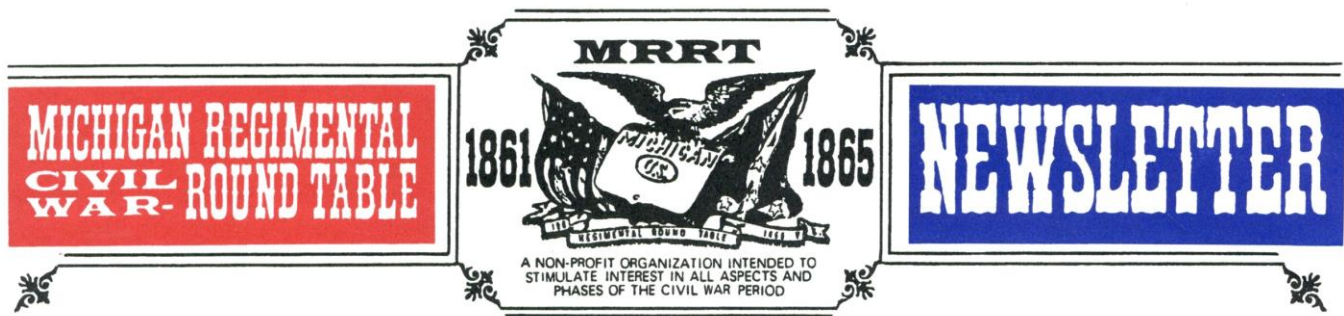
Quiz Questions: This month's questions pertain to General U.S. Grant plus a Bonus Question.

1. What was General Grant's real name? When did he graduate from West Point and what was his class rank?
2. What unit was Grant's first command? Which Illinois Congressman, later Secretary of State for President Grant, helped ensure that Grant was promoted to brigadier general?
3. In an August 9, 1863 memo to General Grant, what was President Lincoln referring to when he spoke of “a resource which, if vigorously applied now, will soon close the contest?”
4. Where did General Grant lead an ill-advised attack in his first combat in the Civil War? What nickname did he receive for his victory at Fort Donelson?
5. Which well-known writer helped the dying General Grant in publishing his well-received memoirs?
6. Which Civil War era individual created the term “Michigander” to refer to residents of the State of Michigan?

We thank “Old Sarge” for his help with this month's questions and answers. Question #6 was from WJR Radio.

Civil War Essentials – Phoebe Pember Unsung Southern Hero (1823-1913)

Phoebe was a native of Charleston, South Carolina who served as a nurse and administrator at Chimborazo Hospital in Richmond, Virginia during the Civil War. She assumed responsibility there at age 39 and eventually more than 15,000 patients came under her care.



She was born and raised in Charleston. Her father was a successful merchant and her mother a popular actress until financial setbacks forced the family to move to Savannah, Georgia in the late 1840's. There she married in 1856. Sadly, her husband died shortly thereafter of tuberculosis. She then lived with her parents who had moved to Marietta, Georgia to escape the war.



Phoebe accepted an opportunity in late 1861 to serve at Richmond's Chimborazo Hospital. She had received medical training at home caring for a loved one, a common occurrence during the pre-Civil War period. Chimborazo became the largest military hospital in the world during the Civil War. By the end of the war the facility cared for 76,000 patients. Phoebe Pember became the Chief Matron of one of the hospital's five divisions. Her chief duty was overseeing food service for a division with more than 30 wards. This was very unusual as almost all nursing was done by males.

Phoebe's duties required, as one contemporary described, "will of steel under a suave refinement". One-time she had to stop a theft of supplies with a threatening gun. Lacking adequate food, medicine, and other supplies her main function sometimes being a final companion for the dying.

A major responsibility for Phoebe was the rationing of whiskey – a vital medicine at the time. She kept a pistol to prevent men from stealing the whiskey. She wrote in her memoir, ". . . the monthly barrel of whiskey which I was entitled to draw still remained at the dispensary under the guardianship of the apothecary and his clerks, and quarts and pints were issued through any order coming from surgeons under their substitutes, so the contents were apt to be gone long before I was entitled to draw more, and my sick would suffer for want of the stimulant." Whiskey helped keep her patients alive and she did everything in her power to keep the surgeons away from her supplies.

She proved to be an exceptional administrator and eventually won the respect of her male colleagues and the approval of many patients. Enlisted men were more courteous than officers and officers more cultured than physicians.

Phoebe served at Chimborazo until the end of the war. She then wrote her memoir, "*A Southern Woman's Story, Life in Confederate Richmond*" (1879). She told of the hostility from male doctors at Chimborazo.

She died in 1913, age 90 after extensive traveling in the United States and Europe. She is buried in Savannah's Laurel Grove Cemetery.

Quiz Answers:

1. General Grant's real name was Hiram Ulysses Grant. He graduated from West Point in 1843, ranking 21st in a class of 39.
2. Grant's first command was the 21st Illinois Infantry. Illinois Congressman Elihu Washburne helped Grant achieve the rank of brigadier general.
3. Negro troops
4. General Grant's first combat during the Civil War was at Belmont, Missouri. Grant's nickname became "Unconditional Surrender".
5. Mark Twain
6. Abraham Lincoln, a Whig Congressman in 1848, spoke on July 27, 1848 against Democrat Lewis Cass, long-time territorial governor of Michigan, who was running for President. ". . . I mean the military tale you Democrats are now engaged in dovetailing onto the great Michigander (Lewis Cass)".