

Vol LX, #10

Michigan Regimental Round Table Newsletter—Page 1

October 2020

All of us have thought about our postponed trip to the Culpepper, Virginia Area. We are really looking forward to visiting the Culpepper Area in 2021!

The Farmington Library has entered Phase 4 of the reopening process. We do not know when the meeting room will be available for our evening meetings. For instance, the library will close at 7 PM on Mondays.

Please visit our website at <http://www.farmlib.org/mrrt>. Several Civil War presentations are listed on our website. Our webmaster, Gerald Furi has been updating the website almost weekly with Zoom presentations from the CWRT Congress. These presentations are usually very good and well worth a visit. We thank Gerald for his assistance!

Member Dr. Ernest Lawrence Abel has published a new book *Lincoln's Jewish Spy: The Life and Times of Issachar Zacharie*. Ernie's book has received several favorable reviews, including "Dr. Abel's sweeping research uncovered the real-life of a Jewish foot doctor who had the ear of President Abraham Lincoln and Secretary of War Edwin Stanton. Issachar Zacharie was a bon vivant, a humanitarian, a celebrated wit, a Grand Supreme Ruler of the Masons—and a wily Civil War spy". Kathryn Canavan, author of *Lincoln's Final Hours*. We look forward to Dr. Abel sharing the story of Issachar Zacharie with us during 2021! Congratulations, Ernie!

**The Mill Springs Battlefield in Kentucky became a National Battlefield Monument on October 14, 2020.** Mill Springs is probably the physically closest Civil War National Battlefield to the Detroit area!

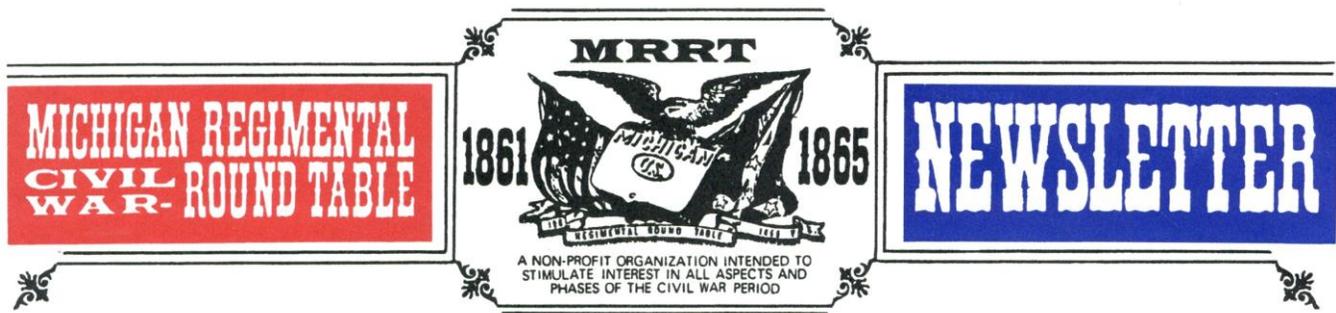
**The Battle of Mill Springs on January 19, 1862 was the first major Union victory of the war** when Union General George Thomas' Army defeated the Confederates led by General Felix Zollicoffer, who was killed during the battle. There were 17,000 soldiers participating in the second largest battle in Kentucky (after Perryville) during the war. The Battlefield is now open to the public, including the Visitor's Center and Museum. Visitors can participate in a 10-stop, self-guiding tour of the battlefield.

#### Civil War Essentials - John Buchanan Floyd

**When would actions taken shortly before the first states seceded from the Union constitute treason on the part of a high official of the US government?** This question would follow John Floyd for the last four years of his life. Historians are still divided on this issue.



Floyd was from Virginia and had served as state governor just as his father had. A southerner for sure, he had nonetheless not been an early proponent of secession feeling that the slave states could still secure their rights within the Union. **In 1857 he became Secretary of War in the cabinet of President James Buchanan.** As such, he presided over a major upgrade in the US Army's infantry ordinance – the replacement of the old smoothbore muskets with the new rifled muskets which fired the conical Minnie bullet. **This kind of transition represented a large expense and a significant administrative burden for the mid-Nineteenth Century peacetime Army and the undertaking needed a capable hardworking chief to make sure it was carried out efficiently. Floyd was not that man.** His tenure as head of the War Department was marked from its beginning by poor recordkeeping, questionable practices, and general incompetence. The President would have been justified in removing him long before the end of his administration. But,



because he liked Floyd, he did not remove him.

**In the last year of the Buchanan administration, Floyd ordered the movement of large numbers of muskets to arsenals located in the southern part of the country.** The legislation authorizing the conversion specified that the old guns were to be offered for sale to the states' militias. Only about 25,000 of these guns were purchased by the various states. Floyd ordered the movement of 65,000 old muskets (of the 250,000 remaining in the Army's hands) as well as 40,000 old flintlock muskets which had been converted to percussion, and 10,000 of the new rifled weapons to arsenals located in what would become the Confederacy. This movement did not seem suspicious as such as it represented a reasonable share of the total that would naturally be allocated to that geographic area. During the fall of 1860, however, Floyd made an undercover transaction through a third party to sell 10,000 additional muskets to South Carolina. This happened before Lincoln's election and therefore before that state became the first to secede, but the way it was done raised questions afterward.

When Fort Sumter was threatened, his initial reaction was to stand firm against the South Carolina militia who threatened it. He changed his mind however and announced that he would not send any troops or supplies to support Major Anderson and his Federal garrison. He went so far as to bypass General Winfield Scott and communicate directly with Anderson. So far, he had done nothing overtly treasonous. **But in December 1860, after Lincoln's election and while South Carolina was withdrawing from the Union, Secretary of War John Floyd ordered the Ordinance Bureau to ship 124 heavy cannon from the Allegheny Arsenal in Pittsburgh to several unfinished forts along the Gulf Coast.** Sending them at that time made no military sense as the forts were in no condition to mount them. Given what was happening, the people of Pittsburgh and at the Arsenal were suspicious and protested to the President.

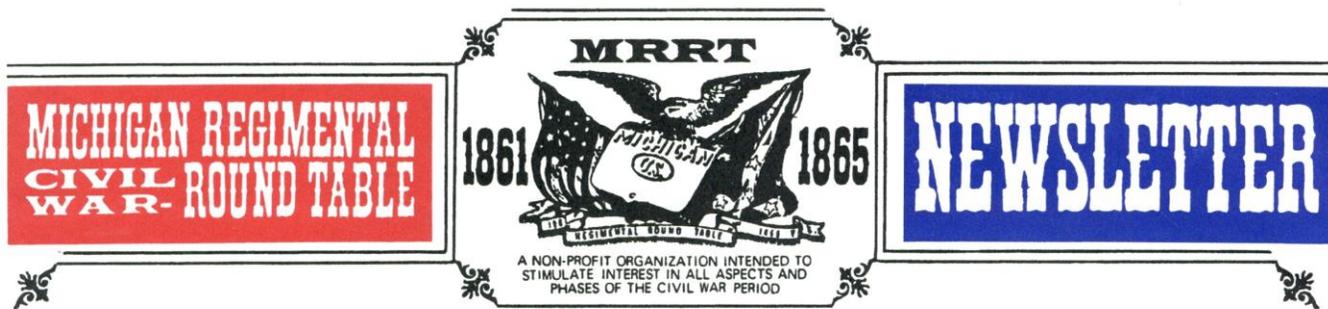
**By then, another scandal which had nothing to do with arms shipments or southern leanings had caused President Buchanan to finally dismiss Floyd.** The order to ship the guns to the forts was rescinded. Had they been shipped; some would have certainly fallen into the hands of the Confederacy as the forts on Ship Island and at Galveston were taken over by the Rebels. It was also claimed by some, notably US Grant in his memoirs, that Floyd also dispersed the regular Army in a way that would allow the Confederacy to overwhelm it piecemeal.

Once he left the War Department, Floyd was hailed as a hero in the South and became a Confederate general. His first combat was in the losing battles in the Kanawha Valley of western Virginia in September of 1861. **Given command of Fort Donelson in early 1862, he let Gideon Pillow cancel the opportunity for the garrison to escape Grant's clutches after it had forced open a route out of the siege.** Once his army had pulled back into the fort, he decided he could not let himself be captured by the Yankees, so he commandeered a steamboat and left at night with two Virginia regiments, leaving the third regiment in his command and the rest of the garrison to ultimately surrender. For this he was relieved of command and returned to Virginia in disgrace.

**He died in 1863 leaving historians to puzzle over the question of where John Floyd's muddling incompetence ended, and treason began.**

#### October's Quiz pertains to the Navies

1. While lashed to the rigging of his flagship, Admiral David Farragut shouted his immortal words: "*Damm the torpedoes! Full speed ahead!*" Name his flagship and where this famous episode occurred
2. Which U.S. gunboat played a significant role in the fighting at Belmont, Missouri, Fort Henry, Island No. 10, and Shiloh?



3. Who commanded the *USS Monitor* and *CSS Merrimack* during their famous battle on March 9, 1862? What happened to the two commanders during the battle?
4. Which two British-held areas of the Caribbean were the major centers of Confederate blockade-running?
5. According to U.S. law, how much alcohol (grog) was officially allowed in a seaman's daily diet? After Congress rescinded this law during the summer of 1862, what was given to each sailor every day as a substitute?

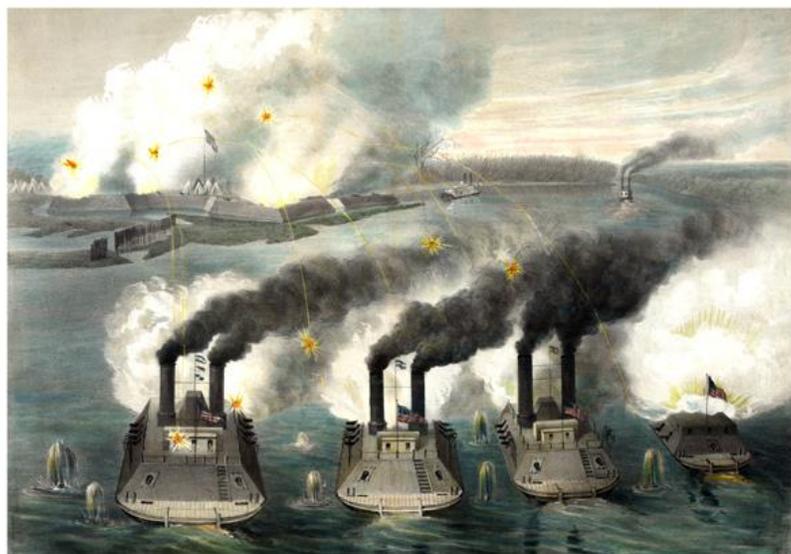
We thank "Old Sarge" for his assistance with our Quiz.

### Civil War Essentials – The Mississippi River Squadron

**The fight for the Mississippi River was one of the longest and most challenging campaigns of the Civil War.** The river extended 700 miles from Mound City, Illinois, to the Gulf of Mexico. **If the United States Navy controlled the river, the western Confederacy's vast resources would be isolated from the east where they were needed.** General William T. Sherman wrote a letter to his wife, Ellen, "*I think the Mississippi the great artery of America, whatever power holds it, holds the continent.*"

**The War Begins – River warfare technology and tactics did not exist in 1861. There were no warships, no experience, no tactics, no command structure, and no infrastructure at the beginning of the war.** Out of the U.S. Navy's 90 pre-war wooden ships less than half were in commission. Only roughly half of the pre-war fleet was powered by steam and none of them were designed or intended as fighting river craft.

**The Union Begins to Build Its River Navy - Union Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles, in May 1861, appointed Commander John Rodgers to establish "a naval armament on the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers...with a view of blockading or interdicting communication and interchanges with the States that are in insurrection".** During the summer of 1861 Rodgers led the production of the first three gunboats to use in the "*brown water navy*". Rodgers worked on his own initiative, without instructions, plans, authority, and no funding when he began. The *USS Tyler*, *USS Lexington*, and *USS Conestoga* were wooden steamboats used as merchant ships enhanced for military use when the war started.

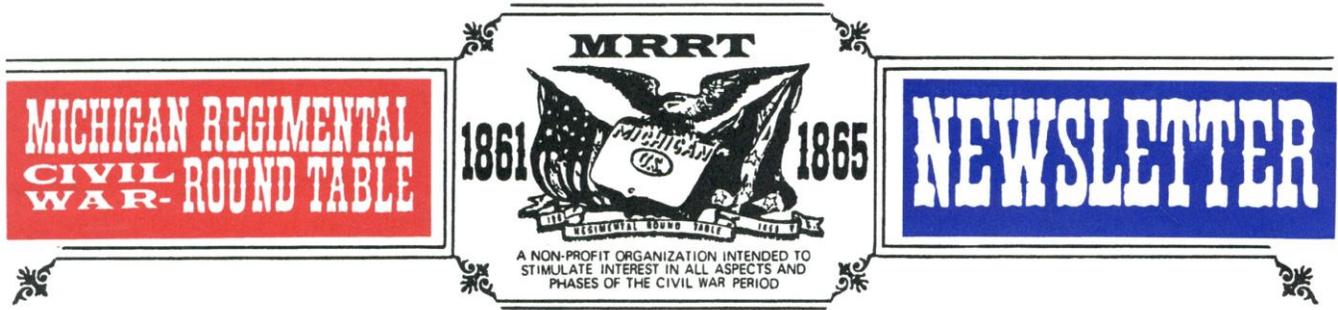


The ships, known as "timber clads", included between six and seven smoothbore guns and thick oak armor. **These gunboats probably saw more service than other gunboats in the Western Theater.**

**U.S. Attorney Edward Bates enlisted the assistance of his close friend, naval engineer James B. Eads of St. Louis, Missouri.** Edward Bates was a self-taught engineer who worked on the Mississippi River as a salvager and inventor of naval craft. He understood both the machinery and the river. This was the first step in building the naval force that would capture the Mississippi River.

**The Union Navy builds ironclads – Eads was not a naval architect, so Samuel Polk and designer Thomas Merritt created a design approved by both the army and the navy to use**

**in combined operations along the western rivers.** Each ironclad, called "*Pork Turtles*" was designed at 175 feet long



with slanted sides to deflect shot, carried 13 smoothbore and rifled guns, and was protected by 2.5 inches of iron armor. **James Eads won the bidding contest to build seven gunboats of Polk’s design for less than \$90,000. The first boat, the USS St. Louis, was launched in only 45 days. The remaining boats came shortly thereafter. These gunboats, designated city-class ironclads, they formed the backbone of the Army’s new Western Gunboat Flotilla.** The “Pork Turtles” had several defects including inadequate armor, restricted maneuverability, and vulnerable to mines, which sank the *USS Cairo* and *USS Baron de Kalb*. Eventually, these ironclads took part in almost every **significant** action on the upper Mississippi River and its tributaries.



**Flag Officer Foote and the Assault on Fort Henry** – Flag Officer Andrew Foote, a 40-year veteran of the Navy, replaced Commander Rodgers as leader of the Western Gunboat Flotilla in February 1862. The first major campaign was to capture Confederate Forts Henry and Donelson, guarding the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers, respectively. General Halleck ordered the Navy Gunboat Flotilla to “*protect the (army) transports*” while the remaining gunboats “*should be left for the defense of Cairo (Illinois)*”. General Grant commanded the Army in this endeavor.

**Battle of Fort Henry**

On February 6, 1862 seven gunboats (four ironclads and three timberclads) positioned themselves on the Tennessee River below Fort Henry. **Before General Grant’s army arrived, the Western Gunboat Flotilla opened fire on the Confederates at 600 yards (picture on Page 3).** Admiral Foote wrote in his report, “*The firing continued with unabated rapidity and effect upon the three gunboats as they continued to approach the fort, with their destructive fire...*”. **After one hour and fifteen minutes of intense fire from Admiral Foote’s gunboats the Confederate commander, General Lloyd Tighlman, surrendered the fort.**

The gunboats suffered some casualties during the bombardment. Each of the boats were struck by shell or shot at least six times and only the *USS Carondelet* and the *USS St. Louis* did not suffer any casualties. Without the gunboat flotilla, General Grant’s army would probably have suffered more casualties assaulting Fort Henry.

**Significance of Fort Henry Victory**

Naval officer Roger Stembel, commander of the *USS Lexington* and the *USS Cincinnati* during the Naval assault wrote, “...*suffice it to say it was the entering wedge to all our subsequent successes in the South West; and the first step towards the opening of the “Mississippi River”.* **To be continued...**

**Quiz Answers:**

1. *USS Hartford* and the Battle of Mobile Bay
2. The *USS Lexington*
3. The *USS Monitor*’s commander was John L. Worden, who was blinded during the battle. The *CSS Merrimack*’s commander was Samuel Dana Greene who was wounded during the historic battle.
4. Nassau, Bahamas, and Bermuda
5. One gill (4 ounces) was the alcohol limit for each sailor. When this was rescinded during the summer of 1862 each sailor received five cents per day.

**Civil War Nuggets** – Mrs. Lincoln’s seamstress and confidante, **Elizabeth Keckly**, assisted the black residents of Washington in organizing the “Contraband Aid Society”, which created a hospital in Washington to take care of indigent fugitives from slavery. Thousands of contrabands moved to Washington during the war. The Lincolns contributed financially and visited the hospital.