

Unfortunately, the Roundtable has canceled its scheduled Monday, November 30<sup>th</sup> meeting. We thank our scheduled speaker and friend, John Moore. Hopefully, we will be able to visit with him during 2021. The Farmington Library has rolled-back to Phase 2 of the reopening process. Early 2021 does not look good.

A new year is near, which means it is time to begin paying our \$25 membership dues for 2021. Send your check to our Treasurer, Jeanie Graham. Please make your check out to Jeanie Graham as the Bank does not like checks made out to the Roundtable. Her mailing address is Jeanie Graham, 29835 Northbrook, Farmington Hills, MI 48334-2326.

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!

After many years, the Federal Government has given the go-ahead for the renovation of historic Fort Wayne in Detroit! Several of our friends and relatives were inducted for military service at the Fort.

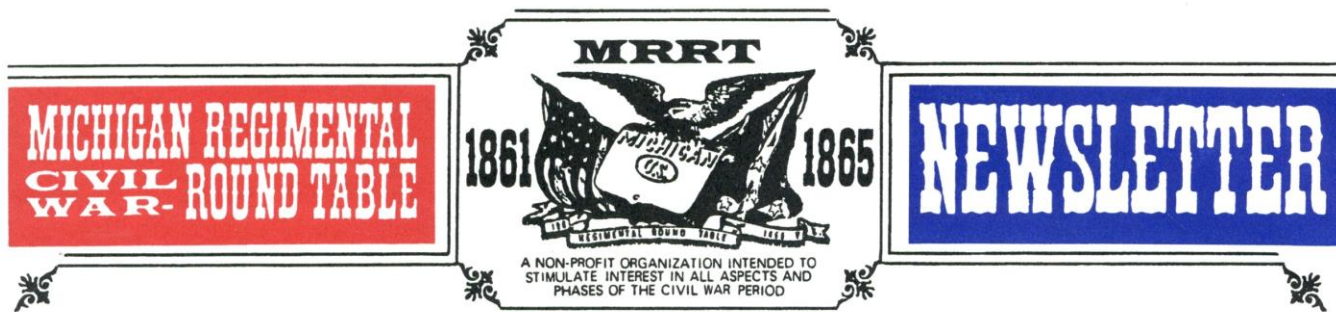
#### Civil War Essentials – Confederate President Jefferson Davis

“The Man and the Hour Have Met” – this was W.L. Yancey’s proclamation as Jefferson Davis arrived in Montgomery, Alabama in February 1861 to become president of the provisional CSA government. The man chosen to be the president of the new Confederate States of America seemed at the time, and still appears today, to have many requisite qualities for this highly demanding position.

**From the beginning the Confederacy had an uphill battle to survive and become a separate country.** It was smaller in population than the remaining loyal states with far less of the resources needed to wage war. It had to create a government and an army from scratch. It was founded at least in part on the concept of “states’ rights” which, although useful to fend off attacks on slavery prior to the war, was inherently a divisive force in a country under siege. **Any person who led the Confederacy under these conditions would have to be a political and military paragon to succeed.** We will never know if the outcome might have been different with another leader.



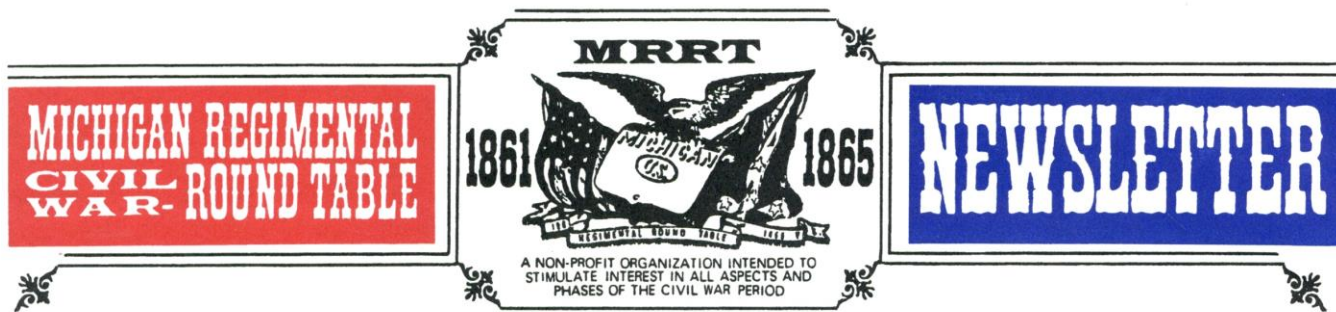
**Certainly, his credentials were more impressive than that of his northern counterpart, Abraham Lincoln.** Unlike Lincoln, Davis had the advantage of a formal education. He had attended a private academy as a youth and attended Transylvania University for a year. He was a graduate of West Point although his class ranking was not especially high. He had been in Congress both as a Representative and a Senator from Mississippi. **He had fought in the war with Mexico as the leader of the Mississippi Rifles** and was rightly considered a hero for his actions. Finally, **he had been the Secretary of War from 1853 to 1857** and is credited with having instituted important changes in the Army during his tenure. By comparison, Lincoln was a one term Congressman and a militia captain who saw no combat during the Blackhawk War. Lincoln had no administrative experience comparable to Davis’ time in the War Department.



**Added to his broad experience, there are several admirable personal traits that Jefferson Davis displayed which helped sustain the Confederacy for as long as it existed.** He could undertake intense workload; he worked such long hours that his wife had to remind him to eat. He forced himself to continue to work and travel even during the frequent bouts of illness he endured. He was scrupulously honest. He was intensely loyal to his friends. Right to the bitter end, he was devoted to the cause.

**There were also some other traits, and the backside of certain of his favorable ones, which caused him to make judgement errors which damaged the country's ability to fight off the Union:**

- **Although tall, straight, and appearing to be fit, Davis' health was never robust during the war.** He had frequent bouts of bronchitis and painful neuralgia which were aggravated by his consistently long work hours and the stress of his position (his health improved after the war). He had apparently lost the vision in one eye prior to the war. Some historians also believe that he had an ulcer. These ailments, and the pain they caused, sometimes hampered Jefferson Davis' ability to make rational decisions.
- **He was enough of a states' rights advocate to hesitate to force the various CSA states to act in a concerted way needed to protect the whole country.** For instance, he did not agree to various kinds of taxation by the Richmond government to raise desperately needed revenue.
- **Likewise, he adopted a *laissez-faire* policy regarding commerce even when the effects of that policy were destructive.** Not until near war's end, for example, were blockade runners *ordered* to stop bringing in luxury goods to make more space available for needed military supplies.
- **Perhaps his most damaging character trait was his unwillingness to admit being in error.** Once he decided, he stubbornly stuck to it even after it was obviously wrong. He wasted too much valuable time and energy trying to prove that he was right in disputes with others. This bickering alienated those whose support he needed. His tendency to punish those who disagreed with him or pointed out his missteps was destructive.
- **Another major failing was the undue value he placed on friendship in judging a person's fitness for command.** The most egregious example of this was his continued support for Leonidas Polk, a West Point friend, long after Polk's corrosive internal military intriguing and poor battlefield performance should have caused his removal from command.
- **At critical moments, he hesitated to take decisive actions when they were clearly warranted.** For instance, he typically *requested* rather than *ordered* that department commanders send troops out of their bailiwick even when doing so might have prevented another Confederate army from being overwhelmed.
- **Initially, he tried to defend every square foot of Confederate territory since he strongly felt he was president of the entire Confederacy.** Small Confederate units were spread around the entire country. Some were wasted guarding backwater areas which the Yankees never threatened while those attacked were often too weak to resist the Union forces concentrated against them. Their dispersion deprived the major CSA armies of the manpower needed to win decisive battles.
- **Perhaps locked into the military doctrine he had learned at West Point over thirty years before, he seemed to not grasp the new realities uncovered during the Civil War.** He continued, for example, to believe that US Grant's innovative final campaign to capture Vicksburg could not succeed because his (nonexistent) supply lines were vulnerable.



- Like many on both sides, **Davis focused on the big contest in the east between the two capitals, Washington and Richmond, and at first tended to undervalue the western theater** where many historians believe the fate of the Confederacy was really decided.
- **A true West Pointer, he placed too much value on formal military education and seniority in rank.** Officers like Patrick Cleburne who lacked those credentials but were outstanding proven leaders were not advanced as far as they should have been in preference to mediocre professional soldiers.

Jefferson Davis was a man of great ability and determination. He was more capable than most of the rest of the south's leaders, **but a few shortcomings undermined his record and weakened the Confederacy, perhaps fatally.**

#### **November's Quiz pertains to the month of November**

1. Two November dates were very memorable for Abraham Lincoln-November 4, 1842 and November 19, 1863. What happened on those dates?
2. On the evening of November 9, 1863, President Lincoln attended the theater in Washington, D.C. What play did he see and who was the leading actor?
3. On November 25, 1863, the Federal Army assaulted Missionary Ridge at Chattanooga. Which Federal general led the attack at Tunnel Hill but failed to carry his objective? Which Confederate general stopped this assault?
4. Which Union general is credited for the victory at Franklin, Tennessee on November 30, 1864? Also, which Union general, who commanded the XXIII Corps, was in command of the field?
5. Who was President Lincoln's first Vice President elected on November 6, 1860? Who finished second to Lincoln in this election?

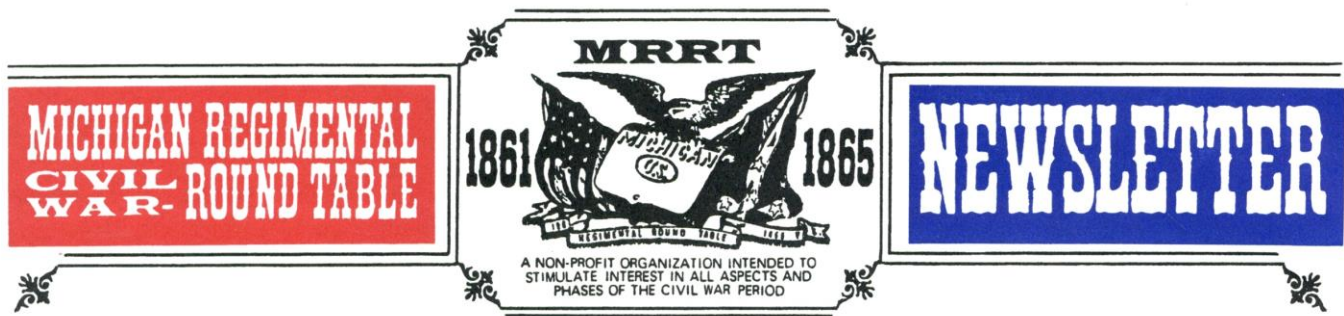
We thank "Old Sarge" for his assistance with our Quiz.

#### **Civil War Essentials- The Gettysburg Address**

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus so far nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.



**President Lincoln gave this 271-word speech at the dedication of the National Soldier's Cemetery in Gettysburg. The speech is regarded as one of the greatest statements of American national purpose.**

**To this day, there is a uncertainty regarding the Gettysburg Address,** The exact wording is disputed as the five known manuscripts in President Lincoln's hand differ in a number of details and also differ from contemporary newspaper reports of the speech. The location of the platform from which the President gave his speech is unclear. Scholars believe that the platform stood entirely within the private, adjacent Evergreen Cemetery.



#### **Contemporary reaction to the Gettysburg Address**

Sarah A. Cooke, who was 19 when she attended the ceremony, wrote that there was a dignified silence after the President's speech. *"I was close to the President and heard all of the address, but it seemed short. Then there was an impressive silence like our Menallen Friends Meeting. There was no applause when he stopped speaking"*. Pennsylvania Governor Andrew Curtin said, *"He pronounced that speech in a voice that all the multitude heard. The crowd was hushed into silence because the President stood before them ... It was so Impressive! It was the common remark of everybody. Such a speech, as they said it was!"*.

**The President was said to have to turned toward his bodyguard Ward Hill Lamon and remarked that his speech, like a bad plow, "won't scour". Historian Gary Wills has written that this statement has no basis in fact and relies on the often-unreliable recollections of Mr. Lamon.**

**National reaction was divided along party lines.** The Democratic-leaning *Chicago Times* wrote, *"The check of every American must tingle with shame as he reads the silly, flat and dishwatery utterances of the man who has to be pointed out to intelligent foreigners as the President of the United States"*. The *Springfield (Massachusetts) Republican* printed the entire speech, calling it a *"a perfect gem"* that was *"deep in feeling, compact in thought and expression, and tasteful and elegant in every word and comma."* The *Times of London* commented; *"The ceremony was rendered ludicrous by some of the luckless salles of that poor President Lincoln."*

#### **Quiz Answers:**

1. Lincoln married Mary Todd and the Gettysburg Address.
2. *"The Marble Heart"* and John Wilkes Booth
3. Generals William T. Sherman and Patrick Cleburne
4. Generals John Schofield and Jacob D. Cox
5. Hannibal Hamlin was President Lincoln's first Vice President. Stephen Douglas finished second in the popular vote and John Breckinridge was second in the electoral vote.