Thanks to Rhoda Sneller for hosting our website

Des Moines Civil War Roundtable

February 2025
Headquarters District Iowa
General Order No. 498

- The **Second meeting** of the Spring campaign will **February 19** at the **The Machine Shed**

  The bar will open at 5:30 with the meal served at 6:30.

- Our program **Michael Swanger (Iowa History Journal) Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument**-A Stunning Commemoration of Iowans who fought in the Civil War.

- Meal choices **Steak Tips & Classic Fried Chicken** at **$24.00**

- **Reservations & payment will be accepted until February 17.**

By command of Brigadier General Gordon McKenzie

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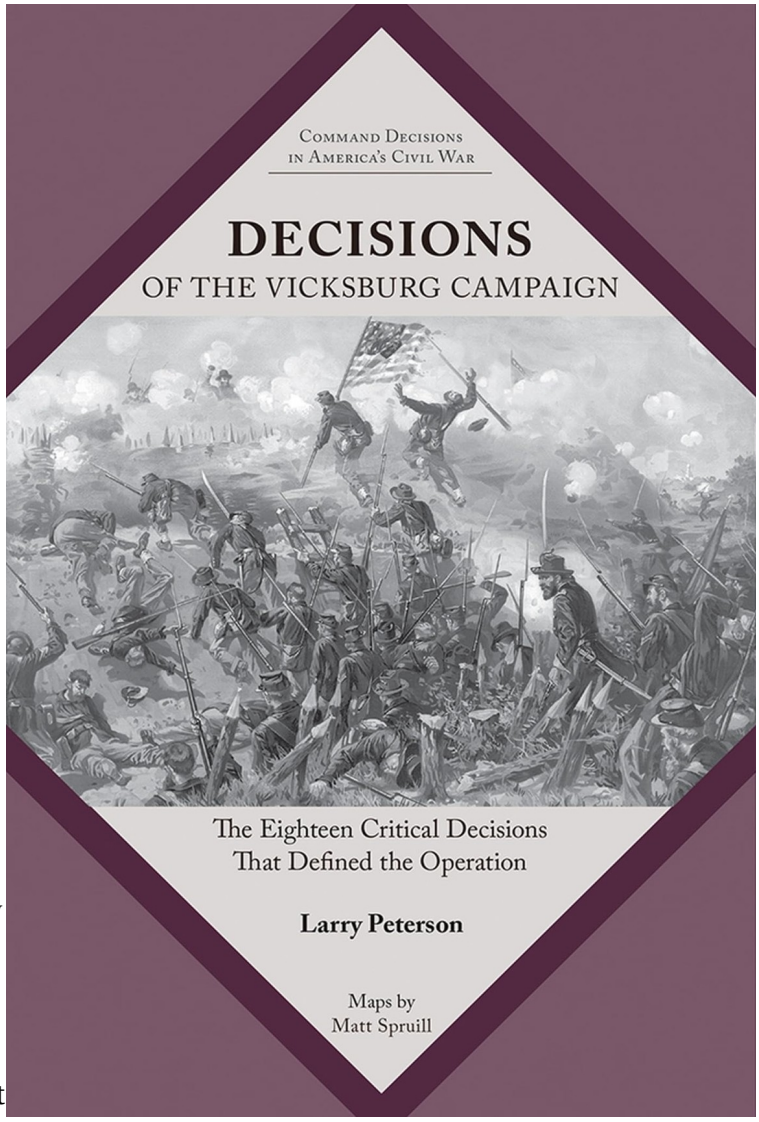
For many it is time to renew your membership in the DMCWRT.
$30.00 Newsletter via email
$35.00 Newsletter via USPS
$40.00 for Family

The following members have expiring dues--

Gene Capps 3-1 David Connon 4-1 Chuck Collins 2-1 Kathy Hillard 2-1
Gerald Ingrisano 2-1 Phil Kotz 3-1 Larry McDougell 2-1 Dave Moraniec 3-1
Garry Ripperger 1-1 Wayne Wilson 5-1

If there are errors please contact me, and I will correct the error.

***Decisions of the Vicksburg Campaign: The Eighteen Critical Decisions That Defined the Operation*. By Larry Peterson. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2024. Paperback, 215 pp. $29.99.**



Reviewed by Sam Flowers *is an assistant professor and teaches history at Louisburg College.*

As someone who does not possess an expert level of knowledge about the Western Theater, but who still has a deep interest in military history, *Decisions of the Vicksburg Campaign* stands to be a great companion for future reference. Author Larry Peterson, who is not a new face to the Command Choices in America's Civil War series, recently published *Decisions of the Vicksburg Campaign*, a widely anticipated volume covering the military preparations, initial assaults, and siege of the key Mississippi River city. Like other volumes from the series, Peterson's chapters examine the crucial choices of the campaign, the options that

the commanding generals had to work with, and the ultimate final decisions they made with an explanation as to why.

Some of the most interesting selections in Peterson's study were decisions that were not on-the-ground military maneuvers, but rather the choices to promote and reassign generals that predated the actual campaign. Confederate President Jefferson Davis's appointment of John C. Pemberton as the head of the Department of Mississippi and Eastern Louisiana was the first decision detailed in the initial chapter. Davis's other candidates, Joseph E. Johnston and P. G. T. Beauregard, are two choices that I personally did not consider when thinking about the Vicksburg Campaign. Peterson examines the ultimate decision after laying out all the options and ends it with paragraphs about the results, impacts, and potential alternate scenarios for readers to contemplate. Vicksburg's commanding generals, Pemberton and Ulysses S. Grant, have become so fixed in the minds of Civil War students. Therefore, considering different potential options and thinking about how other leaders may have performed during the campaign was an intriguing brain exercise.

The rest of the book's chapters mostly focus on the various decisions about maneuvers that Grant and his army choose and made as they marched and fought their way through central Mississippi, culminating in the assaults and siege of Vicksburg. Additionally, the last chapter delved into the important decisions that Grant had to consider about the terms of surrender, as well as how he was going to deal with the thousands of Confederate prisoners he would soon inherit.

Decisions of the Vicksburg Campaign's best section was Appendix I, which is a driving tour that guides the reader through all of the critical decisions that Peterson covers so thoroughly. The appendix offers primary sources that mostly consist of official reports and memoirs from the generals on both sides of the fortifications. The sources and the maps that Peterson provides throughout the book helps readers better understand why these decisions were arguably so critical in the first place. As a North Carolinian with more knowledge about the military campaigns in the Tar Heel State and in the Eastern Theatre, I found it interesting that Peterson considered Vicksburg the "Gibraltar of the Confederacy." Fort Fisher, near Wilmington, is also often referred to by that moniker. Perhaps it is possible for each key location to share the same recognition given their importance to both side's military strategy in 1863 and 1864-65 respectively.

Overall, Peterson's volume is an easy read and a great beginner's guide to understanding the military ins and outs of the extremely significant Vicksburg Campaign.

The Thirteenth Amendment: The Vote

By Walter Coffey

Debate over a constitutional amendment permanently abolishing slavery had taken place in the U.S. House of Representatives throughout January. The Senate had already passed the amendment the previous year, so only the House was needed for approval. The Lincoln administration, led by

Secretary of State William H. Seward, lobbied various Democrats thought to be willing to support the amendment. These congressmen were promised prized government jobs and favors in exchange for their votes.

Montgomery Blair, Lincoln's former postmaster general, tried to drum up Democrat support by asserting that emancipating the slaves would not lead to "Negro equality." He urged Democratic leader Samuel Barlow to rally his party behind the amendment because, "If the northern Democracy could now be rallied to the support of the President and ignore the slavery question, we can soon bring back the South."

Congressmen from the loyal slave states were also targeted. Lincoln wrote James S. Rollins of Missouri, "This is my chief hope and main reliance to bring the war to a speedy close… The passage of this amendment will clinch the whole subject; it will bring the war, I have no doubt, rapidly to a close." In reality the war was winding down with or without the amendment, but support from the border states would show a united northern front against the Confederacy.

The administration's efforts seemed to be paying off, but then rumors of peace talks threatened to kill the amendment. Lincoln had dispatched Seward to Fort Monroe a few hours before the vote was scheduled to begin, confident that House Republicans had enough votes to get the necessary two-thirds majority. But Democrats who had voiced support for the measure now hesitated. They feared that a constitutional amendment abolishing slavery could offend the Confederate envoys and break up the talks, and the war would go on indefinitely.

Congressman James M. Ashley, the amendment's sponsor, wrote a frantic note to Lincoln as voting time neared: "The report is in circulation in the House that peace Commissioners are on their way or are in the city, and is being used against us. If it is true, I fear we shall lose the bill. Please authorize me to contradict it, if not true." Lincoln responded, "So far as I know, there are no peace commissioners in the city, or likely to be in it." Lincoln was correct in that no commissioners were in Washington, but he conveniently failed to acknowledge that they were within Federal lines.

On the afternoon of January 31, debate ended and House Speaker Schuyler Colfax began the voting process by asking, "Shall the Joint Resolution pass?" The Republicans unanimously voted "yes." Of the 80 Democrats, 16 voted "yes" (including 14 who would not be in the next Congress and therefore did not risk their reelection chances), and eight abstained. The final vote was 119 in favor and 56 opposed, which was the two-thirds majority needed for passage. The amendment passed by just five votes.

The speaker announced, "The constitutional majority of two-thirds having voted in the affirmative, the joint resolution is passed." The *Congressional Globe* reported that upon this announcement, "The members of the Republican side of the House instantly sprang to their feet, and, regardless of parliamentary rules, applauded with cheers and clapping of hands. The example was followed by male spectators in the galleries, who waved their hats and cheered long and loud, while the ladies… rose in their seats and waved their handkerchiefs…"

A correspondent reported a loud explosion of cheering, "the like of which probably no Congress of the

United States had ever heard before." Another report stated that there was "an uncontrollable outburst of enthusiasm." A Republican congressman wrote, "Members joined in the shouting and kept it up for some minutes. Some embraced one another, others wept like children. I have felt, ever since the vote, as if I were in a new country."

Those celebrating in the House gallery included several black men and women who had not been allowed in the House chamber until last year. Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton ordered a 100-gun salute fired to commemorate the amendment's passage, and the House adjourned for the rest of the day "in honor of this immortal and sublime event."

Passage of this Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution made the **original Thirteenth Amendment** virtually forgotten. Having passed just four short years before, the original would have prohibited the Federal government from interfering with slavery where it already existed. This failed ratification because the southern states had already seceded. Ironically, the southern secession prompted northern politicians to place even greater restrictions on slavery until finally abolishing it altogether. This became the first constitutional amendment to place restrictions on individuals rather than the government.

This new amendment satisfied Lincoln, who feared that his **Emancipation Proclamation** would be overturned by the courts after the war because it was admittedly just a wartime measure with no real basis in law. State legislatures soon began debating and voting on the amendment's ratification, which would make Lincoln's proclamation permanent.



2024 Year in Review: The Top 25 Emerging Civil War Book Reviews

 By **Tim Talbott** on December 28, 2024

Without further ado, the following are 2024's Top 25 reviews!

1. The Boy Generals: George Custer, Wesley Merritt, and the Cavalry of the Army of the Potomac, from the Gettysburg Retreat Through the Shenandoah Valley Campaign of 1864
Reviewed by Bert Dunkerly
2. The Battle of Little Bighorn: A New Appraisal
Reviewed by Dan Davis
3. The World Will Never See the Like: The Gettysburg Reunion of 1913
Reviewed by Jon Tracey
4. Longstreet: The Confederate General Who Defied the South
Reviewed by Andrew F. Lang
5. Klan War: Ulysses S. Grant and the Battle to Save Reconstruction
Reviewed by Rich Condon
6. Sexual Violence and American Slavery: The Making of a Rape Culture in the Antebellum South
Reviewed by Sheritta Bitikofer
7. Abolitionist of the Most Dangerous Kind: James Montgomery and His War on Slavery
Reviewed by Tim Talbott
8. Soldier of Destiny: Slavery, Secession, and the Redemption of Ulysses S. Grant
Reviewed by John G. Selby
9. The Limits of the Lost Cause: Essays on Civil War Memory
Reviewed by Patrick Young
10. Creating a More Perfect Slaveholders' Union: Slavery, the Constitution, and Secession in Antebellum America
Reviewed by Kevin C. Donovan
11. In the Shadow of the Round Tops: Longstreet's Countermarch, Johnston's Reconnaissance and the Enduring Battles for the Memory of July 2, 1863
Reviewed by Peter Miele
12. An Unholy Traffic: Slave Trading in the Civil War South Reviewed by Patrick Kelly-Fischer
13. The Civil War and the Summer of 2020 Reviewed by Sam Flowers

14. Searching for Irvin McDowell: The Civil War's Forgotten General Reviewed by Kevin C. Donovan

15. "Tell Mother Not to Worry": Soldier Stories from Gettysburg's George Spangler Farm

Reviewed by Peter Vermilyea

16. The Iron Dice of Battle: Albert Sidney Johnston and the Civil War in the West

Reviewed by Sean Michael Chick

17. America's Unending Civil War: The Enduring Conflict from Jamestown through to Recent Elections Reviewed by Evan Portman

18. Building a House Divided: Slavery, Westward Expansion, and the Roots of the Civil War

Reviewed by Patrick Kelly-Fischer

19. J. E. B. Stuart: The Soldier and the Man Reviewed by John B. Sinclair

20. Lincoln's God: How Faith Transformed a President and a Nation

Reviewed by Max Longley

21. Pulpits of the Lost Cause: The Faith and Politics of Former Confederate Chaplains during Reconstruction Reviewed by Max Longley

22. Combee: Harriet Tubman, the Combahee River Raid, and Black Freedom During the Civil War Reviewed by Rich Condon

23. Adelbert Ames, the Civil War, and the Creation of Modern America Reviewed by Brian Swartz

24. Sleeping with the Ancestors Reviewed by Sarah Kay Bierle

25. Silent Cavalry: How Union Soldiers from Alabama Helped Sherman Burn Atlanta and Then Got Written Out of History Reviewed by Doug Crenshaw