

# THE DISPATCH

The Civil War Round Table of New York, Inc.

Volume 66, No. 7

608th Meeting

March 2017

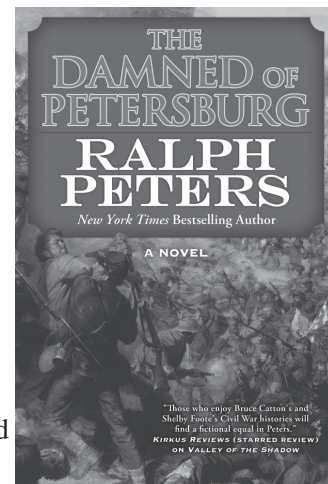


- Guest:  
Colonel Ralph Peters  
*The Damned of Petersburg*
- Cost:  
**Members: \$50**  
**Non-Members: \$60**
- Date:  
**Wednesday,**  
**March 8<sup>th</sup>**
- Place:  
**The Three West Club,**  
**3 West 51st Street**
- Time:  
**Dinner at 6:00 pm,**  
**Doors open 5:30 pm,**  
**Cash Bar 5:30 – 7 pm**

*You must call 718-341-9811 by March 1<sup>st</sup> if you plan to attend the March meeting. We need to know how many people to order food for.*

## Colonel Ralph Peters The Damned of Petersburg

Our March guest is a retired U.S. Army Lt. Colonel, author, and media commentator, who is perhaps best known for his appearances on Fox News. He enlisted in the U.S. Army after attending Pennsylvania State University, and his first assignment was in Germany, after which he attended Officer Candidate School, receiving a commission in 1980. Subsequently, he served with the 1st Battalion, 46th Infantry Regiment, then part of the 1st Armored Division. He spent ten years in Germany working in military intelligence. He later became a Foreign Area Officer specializing in the Soviet Union. His last assignment was with the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence.



## “Bud” Robertson: A Civil War Life Well Lived

Appearing on C-Span’s weekly interview series Q & A this past July, veteran historian James I. Robertson, Jr.- known universally as “Bud” to friends and admirers – received an unexpected question from host Brian Lamb: “You’re a Southerner by birth and have lived in Virginia. Are we better off as a country that the North won [the Civil War]?”

For those who expected the author of the definitive biography of “Stonewall” Jackson (now in its 13th printing) to answer nostalgically, rather than realistically – with an eye only at the past, not the present – Robertson’s reply may have come as a surprise. And it came without a millisecond of hesitation.

“Oh, of course, absolutely,” replied the 86-year-old scholar. “The right side won...I mean, there’s no question about that.”

While Robertson concedes that had he lived at the time of secession he would have fought for the South – for his beloved home state of Virginia – he quickly points out: “If the South had won, we would have become the Balkans of the Western Hemisphere. The Union has to be straightened out, just as Lincoln said. It would have been disastrous for the [divided] nation to try and continue to exist.”

Ironically, as Robertson argues in his familiar voice – strong and steady, Virginian-accented, and with just the hint of an emotional quaver – “the notion of patriotism arose only when the nation divided. We had no country to be patriotic about,” he says, “until we fought ourselves. If you doubt that, go to a national cemetery where men who loved their country more than they loved life itself now lie.” Then he slyly adds: “If I can make a class cry, I’ve succeeded.”

From *The Lincoln Forum Bulletin* Fall 2016 by Harold Holzer

## 2017 • MEETING SCHEDULE • 2017

• April 12<sup>th</sup> •  
Ed Bearss  
*Grierson’s Raid*

• May 10<sup>th</sup> •  
Fletcher Pratt Award

• June 14<sup>th</sup> •  
Chris Bryce  
*Petersburg*

## President's Message

Our special guest speaker this month is Ralph Peters, whose astute observations on the war from last year's visit entertained and educated us all, returns to discuss his most recent book, "The Damned of Petersburg."

Petersburg was a unique campaign in many ways. It was a siege that was not quite a siege, as the Confederates had freedom of movement to their South and West. The entire campaign was an odd mixture of a series of battles (both great and small), as the Union sought to seize the railroad lines supplying both Lee's Army and the civilian populace, and the brutal, deadly daily existence of trench warfare, all of which ebbed and flowed for over nine months. The butcher's bill for this longest of campaigns was over 70,000 killed, wounded, captured, and missing; 42,000 for the North, 28,000 for the South.

There was good news regarding battlefield preservation this past December as Congressional legislation authorizing expansion of the Petersburg National Battlefield Park (currently at about 2,700 acres) by an additional 7,326 acres, which would (potentially) make it one of the largest historical parks in the country. The new acreage, not originally incorporated within the original park boundaries, includes parts of many of the campaign's eighteen separate battlefields commemorated by the National Park Service. These involve some pivotal battles well known to students of the Civil War: Five Forks, Peebles Farm, Reams Station, the "Battle of the Crater", and the "Petersburg Breakthrough".

In praising the legislation, Civil War Trust's James Lighthizer declared, "We are grateful to the lawmakers and partner organizations who recognized the critical importance of preserving this historic Virginia landscape. These battlefields are living monuments - not just to the 70,000 men in blue and gray whose blood hallows this ground - but to all of America's veterans.

Senator Mark Warner of Virginia stated, "The Petersburg National Battlefield bore witness to the longest sustained siege in our nation's military history and draws visitors from all over the country ... Expanding the park will encourage tourism to the region while preserving this important piece of American history for future generations."

Although none of the newly designated property (now in private hands) will be immediately added, the act enables the Park to incorporate this land when it becomes available, certainly great news to all of us who are interested in battlefield preservation.

So, as you are now thinking of those good tidings about Petersburg at this very moment, this would be the absolutely perfect time to call (718) 341-9811 - RIGHT NOW! - to RESERVE YOUR SPOT for Colonel Peters' views of one of the most consequential campaigns of the War.

SEE YOU THERE!

*Paul Weiss*

## RESERVATIONS

**Please show up if you call in a reservation. Then, if you cannot make the meeting, call to cancel.**

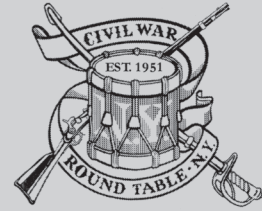
**At the November meeting nine people made reservations who neither showed up nor cancelled. We paid over \$40 each for those who were AWOL. We must give the caterer an estimate of our attendance and we always quote a low number but when we have no-shows it costs us money.**

**Please.**

**Thank you,**

**The management**

## THE DISPATCH



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139-33 250th Street,  
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## March During the Civil War

### 1862

3 – General Leonidas Polk, all by himself, abandons Kentucky to the Union. His 140 Columbus guns are shipped down stream to Island No. 10 which is now twice as fortified as Island no. 5.

8 – All Hell breaks loose in Hampton Roads, Va., as the newly christened *Virginia* wreaks havoc upon the Union's most powerful warships, the *Congress* and the *Cumberland*. This will be the US Navy's worst defeat until December 7, 1941.

### 1863

3 – President Lincoln creates an atmosphere where men will be caught in the draft as he signs the Conscription Act, which, despite its many flaws, increased enrollments. This sets a precedence for future call-ups in WWI, WWII, Korea, etc.

15 – A Union ship carrying red paint collided with a Confederate ship bringing blue paint to Fort Sumter. Fifteen sailors were marooned.

### 1864

8 – Cheers break out in the East Room of the White House as a small man in a disheveled uniform has to stand on a couch in order to be seen. U.S. Grant finally meets his commander-in-chief.

28 – The insurrectionists are not the only ones fighting with Union soldiers. An anti-war mob attacks Federal soldiers in Charleston, Illinois, killing 5 and injuring 20.

### 1865

4 – President Lincoln urges the nation to bind up its wounds and to care for him who had borne the battle, and for his widow and children. This in his 2nd inaugural as a very sullen J. Wilkes Booth hears this in person.

9 – General R.E. Lee writes to Secretary of War John Breckinridge that "the military condition of the Confederacy is full of peril and requires prompt action, Unless our men and animals can be subsisted, the army cannot be kept together." How prescient.

## Springtime of Decision

### The City by the Sea

Mr. Yancey could usually be found at the Charleston Hotel, where the anti-Douglas forces were gathering, and a Northerner who went around to look at him reported that he was unexpectedly quiet and mild-mannered: as bland and smooth as Fernando Wood, the silky Democratic boss from New York City, but radiating a general air of sincerity that Wood never had. No one, seeing Yancey in a room full of politicians, would pick him out as the one most likely to pull the cotton states into a revolution. He was compact and muscular, "with a square-built head and face, and an eye full of expression," a famous orator who scorned the usual tricks of oratory and spoke in an easy conversational style; he was said to have had in his system a full three-hour speech against the Illinois Senator Stephen A. Douglas, to be unloaded at the proper time, and the Northern observer reflected uneasily that although Douglas probably had most of the votes at this convention, the opposition might be a little ahead in brains.

William Lowndes Yancey was worth anybody's study. The Democratic party was convening in Charleston, South Carolina, in late April of 1860, to nominate a candidate for the presidency, and the future of the country perhaps depended on the way the convention acted. The delegates might look for a safe middle ground, and (finding what they sought) work out some sort of compromise that would avert a split in party and nation; or they might listen to the extremists, scorn the middle ground, and commit all of America to a drastic leap into the dark. Yancey, who was called the Prince of Fire-Eaters, was ready for such a leap. This convention would indulge in no compromise if he could help it.

There was no secret about what Yancey wanted. More than a

decade earlier he had denounced "the foul smell of party which binds and divides and distracts the South," and had proclaimed the hope that someone would eventually break it – a task to which he was now devoting himself. He had asked his fellow Southerners whether, "we have any hope of righting ourselves and doing justice to ourselves in the Union," answering the question in the negative, he had said that he would work with those who did hope in the belief that eventually they would discover that nothing but secession would do."

There was nobody quite like Yancey, and yet he was somehow typical: one of the men tossed up by the tormented decade of the 1850s (John Brown was another) who would help to bring catastrophe on but who could do nothing more than that. The mildness of his manner was deceptive; he had once a great fight with his wife's uncle and, in self-defense had killed the man (a thing that proper Charlestonians still remembered), and while in Congress he had fought a famous but bloodless duel with a fellow Southerner. In his youth he had briefly brushed elbows with the crusading anti-slavery spirit which he now hated above all other things. Born in Georgia in 1814, he had been taken north while still a child when his widowed mother married a Presbyterian minister and moved to Troy, New York; and in this step-father's church, Charles Grandison Finney had preached at the beginning of the great revivalist campaign which was to spread abolition like a virulent infection (as Yancey would have said) all across the Middle West.

Close friends of his stepfather, too, were such antislavery men as Theodore Weld and Lewis Tappan. None of this touched Yancey, however. He moved south, fell under the spell of John C. Calhoun, entered law, politics, and planter society (he married a rich planter's daughter), and in the mid-40s entered Congress where his first speech was an impassioned denial that Calhoun wanted or worked for disunion. And an independent Confederacy.

What he disavowed for Calhoun, however, he presently accepted for himself; a great orator in a land that loved to listen to speeches, he eventually found in a slave-state extremism a base to which his oratory could be solidly anchored. Over the years he had developed into the most fluent and persuasive of the Fire-Eaters.

Now he was busy among the delegates who were arriving for the convention. A disturbing sign, if any of Senator Douglas's men had noticed it, was the presence in the same hotel as Senator John Slidell, of Louisiana, who one day would make a famous trip to France; a hard-working, resolute man with thinning white hair over a cherry-red face, who apparently enjoyed good health and good living; accepted here as spokesman and chief hatchet man for the

administration of President James Buchanan, very busy among delegates from the Deep South. It was whispered that Slidell ran the president – Buchanan, it was told, was “as wax in his fingers” – and though Buchanan had explicitly refused to seek or even to accept a renomination, he was deeply determined that the nomination should not go to Senator Douglas.

From *The Coming Fury* by Bruce Catton

## NEW RECRUITS

**Raymond Pezzoli** from Staten Island who found us on the Internet.

## SUGGESTIONS

**The Dispatch welcomes articles, book reviews (non-fiction only) and suggestions.**

**Just send them in to our mailing address.**

## DRESS CODE

**Ladies and gentlemen: PLEASE**  
No sneakers, no jeans, no tee shirts. Gentlemen, please wear a collared shirt. Let's dress like we are attending a business meeting.

**Thanks, The Management**



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OF NEW YORK

139-33 250th Street, Rosedale, N.Y. 11422