

BRUNSWICK CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

JANUARY 8, 2014

ANTIETAM

SPEAKER: ED BEARSS

Using no notes and planted firmly on a stool of knowledge, Ed addressed us with alacrity, humor and moments of amazement. He observed that his next FIVE engagements will not equal our representation of over 339 participants. We humble him as he also humbles us.

Antietam has been a favorite and lifelong study for Ed. It seems, as a boy, his Mom gave him a cow heavy with calf. Ya just had to be there to find out what a very young Ed named them. A calf named Sharpsburg MIGHT be half right. That love of getting all the facts about Antietam plows a very deep furrow Northward toward Lee's goal—take Washington. Spirits are high even though Lee has taken a spill off *TRAVELLER* and has both arms splinted. His men suggest he can whip those Northerners even with splints. Lee is so firm in his push to the North that he “outvotes” the Southern Cabinet seven to one! Imagine, if possible, that happening today? Those three cigars and special order #191 almost allowed McClellan to concentrate his forces against Lee but the General got wise and collected his forces at Sharpsburg for the bloodiest one day battle of this and many other wars. September 17, 1862, will always be remembered for its senseless carnage. Ed points to the magnitude of atrocities at South Mountain where Union Soldiers dump 60 Confederate bodies down Farmer Wise's well and at Antietam's sunken road where for the first time, photographer Alexander Gardner shows America a most ugly picture—dead Georgia and Tennessee soldiers stacked like cordwood. That was, Ed observes, a defining moment in American history. Not even the 13,000 prisoners taken at the Battle of Bataan in WWII was worse.

Ed says playfully, that McClellan has a personal body guard –not an Army. He gives a dangerous adversary too much time to regroup. Give Lee enough time and he will use it against you. He feels McClellan could learn from Bonaparte –keep it very simple! McClellan's punctiliousness (a propensity to give strict attention to precise details) plays right into Lee's hand as he uses wisely that stolen time.

If only that Dunker Church could talk. It would tell heart-wrenching tales. Wouldn't it be unforgettable if some foggy morning, Ed would step from the church mist and share---as only Ed could do---just some of those stories? Another Ed story about Father William Corby (future President of Notre Dame) follows. He gave the Irish Brigade "absolution" before the Burnside Bridge attack and created a "Ya had to be there moment."

So, Ed suggests, the Antietam outcomes are six Generals killed, as well as approximately 22,717 casualties on this one day battle. Lincoln does get his victory and shrewdly Lee sneaks back into Virginia. The Emancipation Proclamation is rolled out causing both England and France to permanently "depledge" a damaged Confederacy. General McClellan's "body guard" goes home and Lincoln suggests that if he isn't using this Army he would like to have it. Ed reminds us that in retrospect, not even Omaha Beach or 911 was worse than that one day at Antietam.

Ed, how do we tell you how special you are to us? We will keep that stool of knowledge warm for you until your anxiously awaited next visit. SEMPER FI.

Submitted by Dan

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