

BRUNSWICK CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

MEETING – December 1, 2020

“CURT FIELDS VOICES GRANT FROM THE FIELD”

SPEAKER: Curt Fields

Conducting an effective program via Zoom is no summer lark. Keeping your place in your material, pushing all the right magic buttons, somehow maintaining eye contact and intimacy through the looking glass, and, in the case of our round table experience, effectively using maps, all give our speakers just one more opportunity to excel. Dr. E.C.(Curt) Fields, Jr., excelled at our December Zoom meeting.

Although we have hosted Grant imitators before (See “Now We Stand by Each Other Always” in our March 2020 *Call to Arms*), Dr. Fields singularly mastered the mimicry. Grant looked appropriately grizzled in beard and rumpled uniform, a cigar clamped in one fist. He carried the cadence of nineteenth century American English in phrases such as, “I was most gratified with the surrender,” commenting on the victory at Ft. Donelson. Instead of happy excitement, Grant avers laconically, “Johnston gave up on Donelson before I’d taken it. He had told Davis he expected it to fall.” We could almost be reading his Grant’s memoirs, and yet that pace set us nicely in the mind of this military man.

For here lies Dr. Curt’s strength, capturing the heart of a man at war, with all the expectations of a soldier at the work of war. Concentrating on Grant’s service in the Western Theater, Mr. Fields tasted Grant’s victories at Ft. Henry, Ft. Donelson and Shiloh, as well as the ghost of his tippler’s curse following him forevermore. Grant’s victories in the West served bracing tonic to the Union cause which had suffered so much in the Potomac with 1st Manassas, but politics and stubborn men dragged at Grant. A soldier depends on actually fighting wars for his advancement and pay, so being placed on the shelf frustrates him. Mr. Field’s voicing of Grant amiably portrayed the General’s distress when, after the capture of Donelson, General Halleck removed all troops from Grant’s command while threatening Grant with a court martial. Commiserating as a general without troops, Mr. Fields shared Grant’s bitterness that Halleck adjudged, “Grant has returned to his old habits” of the bottle.

Eventually, Halleck, promoted to Washington, left, returning Grant to his men. Grant fought the bloody battle of Shiloh with the help of Buell the second day. Ultimately, Grant prevails but the insights he shares may be the greatest success in Mr. Fields portrayal. Answering questions about his insistence on Buell's men, Grant tells us, "When attacking entrenched men you need three to one on the attack." Other insights tell us of both sides. Of General Albert Sidney Johnston's army, he said, "His army is as green as mine." But then Buell did not make good use of his men, a dangerous failure with Grant noting, "I don't think General Buell ever distinguished between a regular soldier and a volunteer." Most of the men in both armies were career civilians and not career military. "After all," Grant told us, "A wet cigar does not smoke well." Leaning into the camera conspiratorially Dr. Curt reported, "Engage him and fight him." In spite of the fact Halleck contemplated calling a court martial, Grant's appeal to Lincoln for support provokes the defense with Lincoln's comment "I can't spare this man, he fights." Signed: A. Lincoln.

Being of like mind, I could conclude of Dr. Fields, "I like this historian; he acts well."

By Jim Medeiros