



Battle Cry

Founded 1961,
Newsletter of the Sacramento Civil War Round Table
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President's Message:

It was a delight once again to host the Karlbergs for another of their sterling presentations. They covered Reconstruction in detail from Lincoln's early plans to the Hayes administration. Once again they assumed identities of citizens of the era bringing to life the practical problems they faced in restoring the country after the war. A thorough power-point discussion was presented in chronological order pointing out the multitude of problems affecting the populace, economy, government, and military resulting in the turmoil of the times. Ginny and Tim, thank you for another outstanding program.

At our last board meeting on June 29th, we discussed the progress on November's Conference. Written announcements and registration forms have been sent to three hundred of our members plus to those who have attended over the past several years. Complete information has been posted on our website along with registration details. Since this is the one hundred-fiftieth anniversary of the Civil War's onset, much interest has been generated in this important part of our history and all of us are encouraged to spread the news among friends and family to consider attending this event. The opportunity to hear nationally recognized speakers here on the West Coast is indeed rare and the moderate cost includes four meals at the Doubletree Hotel. Any publicity other than word of mouth is difficult to obtain and many potentially interested folks never hear of this.

The Civil War Trust recently announced that the application for the gambling casino at Gettysburg was disapproved by the State Commission on Gambling and that the Walmart plans at the Wilderness were withdrawn. Both of these are welcome victories.

Welcome to new members Eric Henderson, Helen Trimpi, Steve Andrews, John Greer, Robert Moore, Robert Schroeder, and Ronda Simpson-Brown. Such a large addition to our group is most welcome and we encourage you to introduce yourselves to the rest of us. Please feel free to make suggestions, offer to give us a presentation, join us at dinner and especially be comfortable among us. We are delighted to have you aboard.

July 13th's meeting will be unique for our group. Jim Lane will provide an event you will enjoy. Come early for dinner and socializing. See you there.

Don Hayden, President

MINUTES
SACRAMENTO CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE
Wednesday June 8,
Hof Brau Restaurant, 2500 Watt Ave, Sacramento

ATTENDANCE - 36

Members-29

Don Hayden, President
Silver Williams, Vice President
George Foxworth, Treasurer
Edie Keister, Secretary
Roy Bishop
Ardith Cnota
Mitchell Cnota
Jerry Cress
Alan Geiken

Bob Hanley
Scottie Hayden
Nancy Hayden
Wayne Henley
Lowell Lardie
Jim Middleton
Bob Moore
Anne Peasley
Rick Peasley

Horst Penning
Mark Penning
Nancy Samuelson
Robert Schroeder
Nicholas Scivoletto
Richard Sickert, MAL
Roxanne Spizzirri
Maxine Wollen
John Zasso

Guest-9
Steve Andrews
Henry Day
Alex DeLeon
Albert DeLeon
Virginia Karlberg
Tim Karlberg
John Mifsud
Larry Spizzirri
Richard Spizzirri

1. Meeting started at 7:00, and the Pledge of Allegiance was recited. President Hayden welcomed guest and members. June of 1861 Events read by Vice President Silver Williams.
2. President Hayden thanked members for volunteering at Gibson Ranch in May. We have a new member, John Greer from our booth at Gibson Ranch and two guest from the same source- Steve Andrews and John Mifsud.
3. The newspaper "Civil War Courier" was offered for \$20 a year. Contact President Hayden if interested.
4. Our guest speakers were Virginia and Tim Karlberg. They are members of NCWA and the Elk Grove CWRT. They spoke in period costumes, on "Reconstruction 1863-1876." Their presentation was accompanied with pictures and charts of the people and events connected during this difficult time. As usual it was great- Thanks Ginny and Tim.
5. Auction was held and meeting adjourned at 8:25.

Edie Keister
Secretary

Treasurer's Report

The cash balance following the June 8, 2011 meeting was \$2,589.53. Thanks to John Zasso, other members, and guests, the raffle brought in \$51.00.

George W. Foxworth, Treasurer

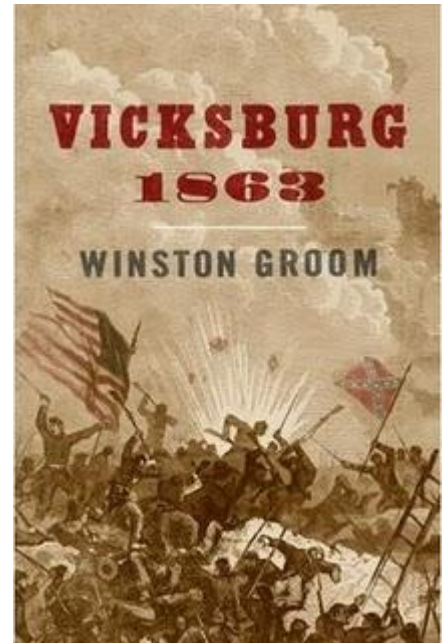
BOOK REVIEW

Winston Groom. *Vicksburg 1863*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Publishing, 2009. 482 pp.)

"Why this Happen?"

Vicksburg 1863 is the skillfully crafted work of an experienced writer. In 1978, Winston Groom published his first book, *Better Times Than These*, based on his experiences as a soldier in Vietnam. Other books have followed, and Groom most forcefully established his credentials in 1986 with a comic novel on his Vietnam experience that became a hugely successful movie: *Forrest Gump*. In *Vicksburg 1863*, Groom exhibits not only his storytelling prowess but also a delightful talent for mischievous observation. Henry Halleck is "the nervous bug-eyed military whiz" (p. 56). William Tecumseh Sherman had "zany" adventures in California before the war (p. 85). The USS *Benton* came into battle "like a bear beset by hornets" (p. 121). Groom's descriptions are clearly the work of a talented novelist: "The night was villainously dark" (p. 276). "Vicksburg twinkled along the great bluffs like a miniature galaxy" (p. 277). Such vivid characterizations and crisp sentences are the most obvious reasons to read Groom's history writing. Reviewers have generally praised Groom, one calling him "first-rate." [1]

Groom does not intend to appeal to academics or even history buffs. In a 2005 book on a different war, Groom warned readers that some of his information might be "old hat" to "those who devour every scrap of detail about the Second World War." Groom explained that he did not consider such aficionados to be his audience: "it is not for them that I write but to the average American reader." He frankly stated that he hoped readers would "take renewed pride in what our forefathers dealt with and determined to accomplish." [2] Groom has no patience for "the new liberal fad of 'moral relativism' or 'moral equivalency.'" He believes, in fact, that there are good



guys and bad guys, and dismisses "the fetish of self-hatred that has become so pervasive in the mainstream media and the halls of academia." [3] For its part, the "mainstream media" has called Groom's faith in moral progress "endearing but inherently ridiculous." [4]

In short, this well-written and entertaining book has no scholarly pretensions. There are no footnotes--even though the narrative is laced with juicy quotations and his earlier history books do have notes. Groom appends a three-page bibliographic essay entitled "Acknowledgements and Source Notes" that will allow curious readers to chart the limits of his bibliographic explorations but not trace the sources for specific facts and quotations. The introduction, a place where academic readers will go looking for a thesis statement, curiously only summarizes the author's genealogical connections to Vicksburg. His great-grandfather, it turns out, joined the Fourth Mississippi Cavalry which raced to the aid of Vicksburg's beleaguered defenders. Armed with that not obviously helpful knowledge, the reader plunges into a 464-page narrative. A brief argumentative passage at the end makes the case that Vicksburg was the most important battle of the war, forty times more important than Gettysburg. But that argument does not animate this narrative which aims more for detailed description than analysis. One event follows

another--at one point Groom suggests that the Confederates might have marched up and captured Chicago, "not that they would have," he adds (p. 71). In this way, and perhaps only in this one way, Groom echoes the thinking of a leading academic historian of the Civil War. Unlike Groom, Edward L. Ayers eschews turning points, but like Groom, Ayers "focuses on deep contingency." [5] To that, Groom might say "Amen." The author of *Forrest Gump* knows a thing or two about contingency.

Readers will find in *Vicksburg 1863* the contingency that Ayers recognizes, but joined with the kind of national affirmation Ayers rejects. In searching for an explanation for this apparent contradiction, the Vietnam War is an obvious place to go. One critic has observed that "two landscapes loom large in the work of Winston Groom": Vietnam and the American South. These "twin towers" prop up Groom's fiction, he writes. [6] Groom has said that there will always be an important connection between *Forrest Gump* and all his other books. There is, he explains, "a little bit of Vietnam" in many of his books. Returning from Vietnam, Groom knew his service had been honorable. Confronted by the antiwar movement, "I just kept my mouth shut." [7]

These two landscapes shape Groom's Civil War narrative just as surely, if more subtly, as they do his novels. Groom has no trouble recognizing that slavery animated southerners' march to war. He makes that clear in the first chapter of *Vicksburg 1863*. He also knows that slavery and racism were and are evils; in *Forrest Gump*, he names his main character after Nathan Bedford Forrest, nevertheless observing that "startin up that Klan thing was not a good idea--any idiot could tell you that." [8] Into that single sentence Groom incorporates both his recognition of the South's racist past and his condemnation of it. In *Forrest Gump*, one unlikely event follows another until one soldier dying on a Vietnam battlefield pleads, "Why this happen?" and another character explains that "it is all part of a scheme of some sort." [9] No dying Confederate asks exactly that question in *Vicksburg 1863*. If one had, Groom would presumably have had to point to slavery. Slavery was "paramount" on the "list of contentions" between North and South, he writes (p. 29). Increasingly

militant abolitionists bedeviled the South. John Brown--"aging and unbalanced"--infuriated white southerners (p. 30). Those white southerners mistook Lincoln for a "die-hard abolitionist" (p. 33). The "national rift over slavery" ran so deep that it split religions (p. 34). All this agitation over slavery lit the fuse leading to war. In Vietnam, Groom writes, "we was tryin to do the right thing, I guess." [10] Groom cannot say that about the South in the Civil War. In *Vicksburg 1863*, he finds no Confederate soldier asking the Vietnam question, "Why this happen?" but he comes close. A young boy asks his grandmother, the daughter of a Civil War soldier, "why did they do it, Bamaw? Why did they die?" About Vietnam Groom can have his character answer the same question, "it was a bunch of shit." [11] He cannot bring himself to say that about Vicksburg. For that battle Bamaw answers, "I don't know, son. I supposed they'd all be dead now anyhow" (p. 458). To Vietnam, Groom can bring a brutal truth, to the Civil War, comic evasion.

In *Vicksburg 1863*, Groom recounts a string of events chaotic and even (at times) "zany," albeit with less reflection than he brought to *Forrest Gump*. Groom's determined rejection of the moral relativism that Vietnam encouraged in others may be an artifact from a different era stranded on a landscape remolded by the civil rights revolution. In his Civil War book, Ayers rejects "works of national affirmation" and "national redemption." [12] When writing about Andrew Jackson or World War II, Groom redeems and affirms national values, though finding those qualities in *Vicksburg 1863* challenges his imagination. Groom at least twice accuses Sherman of pyromania, as if some personal mental failing led him into wanton destruction. Black soldiers' service at Milliken's Bend gets brief mention, starting out with a claim that the battle "did not reflect much credit on anyone concerned" (p. 387). Black soldiers ran for their lives before triumphant Texans, he writes, saved only by the timely intervention of Union ironclads. This is one version of what happened--the version that most shortchanges black heroism on that battlefield. Other narrators have been more generous, and even Groom concedes at the end of this passage that black soldiers proved they would fight at Milliken's Bend. He also repeats the old canard, made famous by Ken

Burns, that Vicksburg did not celebrate the Fourth of July for eighty-five years after the war. Groom trips over that perennial bugaboo for white southerners: Reconstruction. Reconstruction is clearly not a topic of great interest for this author, but he mentions it at the end, complaining that by early 1867, “the Radical Republicans had begun to enact severe Reconstruction measures designed to divest many southerners of their property” (p. 440). There are few professional historians working today still deluded by the old idea that “Radicals” ever controlled Congress or any part of Reconstruction or that Reconstruction was ever “severe.”

Groom concludes with a patriotic salute to all Civil War soldiers: “They were not Gods, nor were they saints, but in their time they were giants who ruled the earth, and they feared not. No army as yet assembled could have matched them” (p. 458). Here we have moral positivism, not relativism--the kind of thinking that insists on clearly defined bad guys and good guys, combined with a recognition that southern soldiers (those fearless giants) fought for slavery.

Reviewed by Christopher R. Waldrep (San Francisco State Univ.), Published on H-CivWar (July, 2009)

Notes

- [1]. Michael A. Ross, “Patriotic Fire: Andrew Jackson and Jean Laffite at the Battle of New Orleans’ Draws Jackson as Daring Dazzling Man in Full,” review of *Patriotic Fire*, by Winston Groom, *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, July 30, 2006.
- [2]. Winston Groom, *1942: The Year That Tried Men’s Souls* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2005), xiv.
- [3]. Winston Groom, “Hatchet Job in ‘The War’: Criticisms of the World War II Documentary Are More Examples of Growing ‘Moral Relativism,’” *Mobile Register*, October 14, 2007.
- [4]. John Leo, “‘Forrest Gump’ and His Message the Movie Serves Up a Box of Chocolates and Moral Values,” *Charleston Daily Mail*, August 3, 1994.
- [5]. Edward L. Ayers, *In the Presence of Mine Enemies: War in the Heart of America, 1859-1863* (New York: Norton, 2003), xx.
- [6]. Nicholas Proffitt, “Bad Dreams in the American South,” review of *Gone the Sun*, by Winston Groom, *Washington Post*, December 13, 1988.
- [7]. Roy Hoffman, “Novelist as Historian: ‘Gump’ Author Explores Year of American Anger,” *Newhouse News Service*, May 19, 2005.
- [8]. Groom, *Forrest Gump* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1986), 3.
- [9]. *Ibid.*, 58, 62.
- [10]. *Ibid.*, 204.
- [11]. *Ibid.*

[12]. Edward L. Ayers, *In the Presence of Mine Enemies: War in the Heart of America, 1859-1863* (New York: Norton, 2004), xx.



UPCOMING SCWRT SPEAKER SCHEDULE

- Aug. 10** Jim Stanberry; "Union Amphibious Operations During the Civil War."
- Sep. 14** Don Stoker; "Grand Strategy During the Civil War."
- Oct. 12** Nancy Samuelson; "Sanitary Commission."
- Nov.** No meeting due to Annual Conference to be held in Sacramento on November 11-13.
- Dec. 14** Paul Ruud; "What Did They Do After the Civil War."



DID YOU KNOW?

There were more than 10,000 soldiers serving in the Union Army who were under the age of eighteen.



JULY DURING THE CIVIL WAR

9th Port Hudson surrenders
18th Battle of Fort Wagner
1864
30th Battle of the Crater

1861

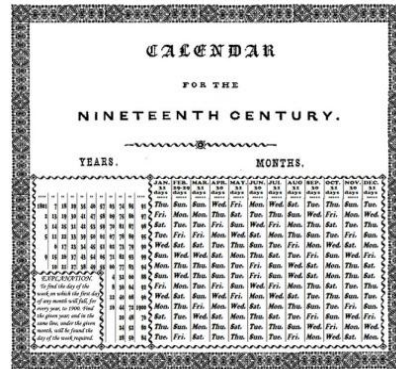
13th Union forces secure West Virginia
21st First Battle of Bull Run

1862

29th "Alabama" sails out of England

1863

1st - 3rd Battle of Gettysburg



CIVIL WAR BLOG SPOTLIGHT

The Civil War - Day by Day of a Civil War Historian & High School History Teacher

Archivists of the Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, are drawing from their vast collection of diary entries, correspondence, news articles, maps, photographic portraits and images of artifacts to daily post a document that is “150 years old to the day” to help tell the story of the Civil War as it unfolded from the first military engagement on April 12th, 1861 until Gen. Robert E. Lee’s surrender on April 9th, 1865. By the project’s end, Civil War Day by Day “will contain images of more than 1458 primary source documents.”

You can find **The Civil War – Day by Day** at <http://www.lib.unc.edu/blogs/civilwar/>