



# Battle Cry

Founded 1961,  
Newsletter of the Sacramento Civil War Round Table  
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<http://sacramentocwrt.com/>



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## President's Message:

The Sacramento Civil War Round Table was well represented with almost 20 of our members attending this year's West Coast Civil War Conference in Orange County's Costa Mesa. The Crown Plaza hotel and its facilities were very nice, and the conference program had far more speakers than I expected. One speaker showed up with a virtual fleet of models of Civil War ironclad ships, and another speaker showcased civil war art painted by a former prisoner, of which the latter you may have seen on PBS' "History Detectives."

Brian Clague of the Clovis Round Table surprised us with a plan to conduct next year's conference on a cruise ship that would embark from San Pedro for a four day cruise, and include a stop in Baja California. The cruise will also be an attempt towards raising funds for battlefield preservation. Information will soon be made available for early registration.

Dennis Kohlmann has been working diligently on extending invitations to potential speakers for next year, and has successfully secured speakers for up to June of 2013. For November's meeting, we are fortunate to have Anne Peasley speak on Confederate Lt. General James Longstreet.

**Bob Hanley, President**

**MINUTES**  
**SACRAMENTO CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE**  
**Wednesday, October 10, 2012**  
**HOF BRAU RESTAURANT, 2500 WATT AVENUE, SACRAMENTO**

**ATTENDANCE – 27**

**MEMBERS**

George Beitzel  
Joan Beitzel  
Roy Bishop  
Ardith Cnota  
Mitch Cnota  
James Cress  
Jerry Cress  
John Greer  
Bob Hanley (Pres)  
Don Hayden (IPP)  
Nina Henley(MAL)  
Wayne Henley(MAL)

James Juanitas  
Vivian Miller  
Anne Peasley (VP)  
Rick Peasley  
Horst Penning  
John Rice  
Paul Ruud  
Nancy Samuelson  
Rickard Sickert  
Bob Williams  
Silver Williams  
Maxine Wollen (SEC)

John Zasso

**GUESTS - 2**  
Wade Chandler  
Brad Friedman

1. Meeting called to order at 7:05 by Bob Hanley
2. Pledge Of Allegiance led by Bob Hanley
3. Introduction of guests
4. Bob Hanley introduced the speaker, Jim Juanitas
5. When the talk was concluded, Bob Hanley thanked the speaker and presented him with a bottle of wine
6. The West Coast Conference was discussed
7. The raffle was conducted by John Zasso
8. The meeting was adjourned at 8:05

The speaker gave in interesting presentation on Admiral Farragut and the Battle for Mobile Bay. Farragut is known for the expression “Damn the torpedos, full speed ahead”. There is some dispute that he actually said it. He started commanding a vessel by age 12, served in the War of 1812, and the Indian Wars in the 1820’s. By 1864, Mobile Bay and Wilmington were the only ports open to the South. Mobile was important as it was a transportation center, and was an important target for the north, as Sherman was pushing south also. The Battle of Mobile Bay was Farragut’s crowning achievement for his willingness to take action under fire.

**Board of Directors Meeting**

Honorable mention was given to Jim Middleton and Brent Ten Pas for their good work as Editors for the Round Table. Anne Peasley to be the November speaker. About 15 of our members are attending the Conference, which should be fun for all. Mention was made that several foreign countries have Round Tables. Our group started in 1961; we are the oldest & largest RT in CA.

**Treasurer’s Report**

The cash balance at the end of the meeting was \$2,888.12. Thanks to John Zasso and attendees, the raffle brought in \$56.00.



# BOOK REVIEW



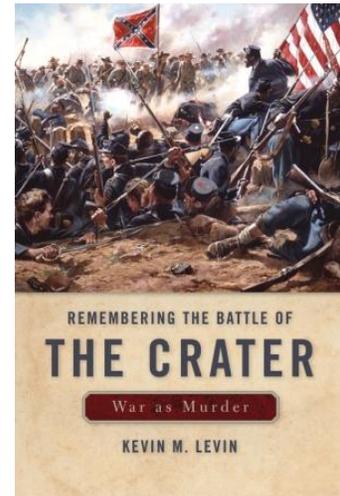
**Remembering the Battle of the Crater: War as Murder** by Kevin M. Levin. University of Kentucky Press, 2012.

In early November 1903, nearly 20,000 people gathered in Petersburg, Virginia, anxiously awaiting a reenactment of the Battle of the Crater. For one seventeen year old, Douglas Southall Freeman, the event would prove pivotal, convincing him that the stories of the brave men in gray who had fought that day must be preserved. But for the city's African American residents, most of whom did not attend the commemoration, the day reflected a common pattern in Civil War remembrance: the role played by the United States Colored Troops (USCT) had been entirely omitted. There would be no gallant charge by USCT veterans and no reenactment of their heroic efforts by any of their descendants. Thirty-four years later at yet another reenactment of the battle, the same would hold true.

Using the Battle of the Crater as his lens, Kevin M. Levin explores the complex and evolving relationship between race and Civil War memory. How was it, he asks, that an entire division of the USCT could be erased from popular interpretations of the battle? How would they be restored and to what extent? And perhaps most importantly, what are the long-term implications of the ways in which we as a nation remember our bloodiest war?

In the early morning hours of July 30, 1864, Union soldiers ignited 8,000 pounds of gun powder beneath Confederate lines commencing the Battle of the

Crater. In the melee that followed of Union attacks and Confederate counterattacks, the Fourth Division, composed entirely of USCT, engaged in its first combat service of the war. Although the black



soldiers shared in the disappointment of the failed attack, their post-battle accounts reveal that they believed that their participation—their sacrifice and valor—would prove instrumental in securing their rights as full citizens. Many northern newspapers, however, paid scant attention to their service. Other papers, along with some white soldiers, portrayed the USCT's fighting prowess in a negative fashion or blamed the “panic-stricken retreat” of the colored soldiers for the Union defeat (24). Though white U.S. soldiers might acknowledge that emancipation was necessary to secure Union victory, observes Levin, most retained deeply prejudiced and racist views of their black comrades.

The battle also proved to the first time that the men of the Army of Northern Virginia encountered black soldiers, many of them former slaves. But unlike their foes, Confederate soldiers wrote candidly about their encounter with black soldiers in the days and weeks

after the battle. In letters and diaries, they recounted their rage at seeing black men in blue uniforms and told in great detail of the hand-to-hand fighting that had ensued. Levin thoughtfully observes that Confederates' encounter with an entire division of armed black men can only be understood within the context of the ever-present fear of slave rebellions. Recalling Nat Turner's insurrection, which claimed the lives of more than 60 white people in nearby Southampton County in 1831, along with other failed attempts such as those by Gabriel (1801), Denmark Vesey (1823), and most especially John Brown (1859), Confederates looked at the USCT men not as soldiers but as insurrectionist slaves bent on destroying the white South. Such, observes Levin, was the reason that Confederate soldiers could provide such vivid descriptions of bayoneting surrendering black men or the executions that followed the next day.

In the years after the war, however, it seemed that Confederates were as willing as white Union soldiers to forget the role of African American soldiers in the battle. Given the racial dynamics of the Reconstruction era, Levin observes that it was in the best interest of ex-Confederates to omit references to the slaughter of USCT soldiers or even their presence in the battle at public commemorations. But in individual memoirs, where the political ramifications proved less damning, some Confederate veterans clung to their vituperative accounts. Ironically, the man who claimed responsibility for the Confederate counterattack, General William Mahone of Petersburg, proved to be a champion of black political

rights and patronage through his leadership of the Readjuster Party in the 1870s and early 1880s. Though the sources may not be available, one is left to wonder how the black veterans of GAR Post 54 of Petersburg recalled and commemorated the battle—and most especially how they thought about Mahone. It seems likely that many of them would have supported the Readjuster Party and benefitted from its patronage.

Equally as important is Levin's evaluation of the battle that raged between followers of Mahone and his opponents who charged that his support of black political rights betrayed the Confederate Cause. Attacks on Mahone's generalship were often conflated with those condemning his political position, belying the notion that the Lost Cause was supported by a Solid South.

In the final chapters, Levin chronicles efforts to commemorate the battle and transform the Petersburg battlefield into a national park, albeit one that celebrated only white Union and Confederate soldiers during the early 20th century. But by the 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement had begun to chip away at such an interpretation. Scholars as well as the popular magazines *Jet* and *Ebony* recalled the role of USCT soldiers in battles such as the Crater. After 1989, in the wake of *Glory* and Ken Burns' wildly successful PBS series, more Americans, both white and black began to accept and expect that stories of the USCT be included in any narrative of the war—especially the Battle of the Crater.

In examining a single battle across such a wide expanse of time, Levin has given us a wonderful insight not only into the ever-evolving nature of Civil

War memory, but he has also helped illuminate the interplay between race and politics in our collective rendering of the war.

*Caroline M. Janney is an Associate Professor of History at Purdue University and the author of **Burying the Dead but Not the Past**.*

Source: <http://www.civilwarmonitor.com/book-shelf/levin-remembering-the-battle-of-the-crater-2012>



### **NO QUARTER; The Battle of the Crater, 1864**

By Richard Slotkin  
411 pp. Random House.

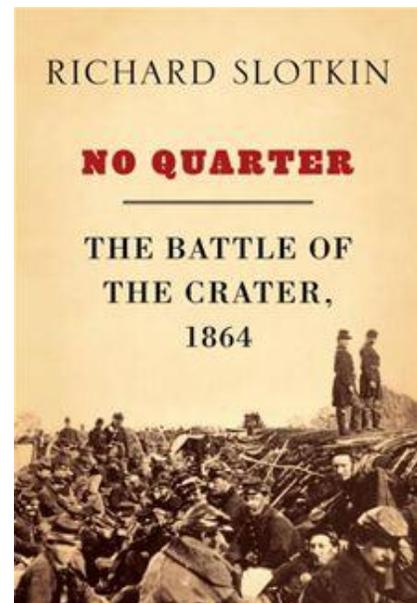
Reviewed by Mark Lewis  
New York Times: August 27, 2009

Black soldiers contributed enormously to the Union cause during the Civil War but won no famous victories that can be used to dramatize their achievement. That's why Hollywood employed a glorious defeat — the Battle of Fort Wagner — as the climax of the film “Glory.” In “No Quarter,” the historian Richard Slotkin makes similarly skillful use of the Battle of the Crater, in which black troops almost dealt a death blow to the Confederacy, but ended up being scapegoated for an infamous Union disaster.

In July 1864, Ulysses S. Grant approved an ingenious plan for an assault on Elliott's Salient, part of the fortified line that Robert E. Lee had thrown up to defend the town of Petersburg, Va. Union troops tunneled under no man's land, hollowed out a cavern and packed it full of blasting powder. On July 30, they set off an enormous explosion that ripped the

salient apart. When the dust settled, there was a gaping hole in the Confederate defenses. Thousands of Union troops, including a division of black soldiers, swarmed into the breach.

But the blast had produced a crater about 30 feet deep, and the assault troops bogged down as they picked their way around it. Meanwhile, Lee rushed up reserves to plug the gap. Both sides committed atrocities, as blacks and whites alike cried “no quarter” and murdered prisoners. By day's end, more than 500 Union soldiers were dead or dying on the field, and their comrades had retreated to their starting point. “It was the saddest affair I have witnessed in this war,” Grant said.



Had Grant triumphed that day, much of the glory would have gone to the black troops, who penetrated farthest into Confederate territory. If these men had taken Cemetery Hill and swept on into Petersburg, the defense of Richmond would have become untenable. The Battle of the Crater might have passed into tradition as the blow that doomed the Confederacy,

administered by ex-slaves who were fighting, quite literally, for freedom.

Instead, white soldiers and Northern newspapers blamed the black troops for the defeat, along with incompetent generals like Ambrose Burnside. The setback was disastrously ill-timed for Abraham Lincoln, who was up for re-election. To counter criticism from white-supremacist Northern Democrats, Lincoln “had to show an inescapable link between the preservation of the Union, emancipation and the extension of civil liberties to blacks,” Slotkin writes. “That link was symbolized by the black soldier.”

Lincoln’s critics cited the Crater rout as proof that he was wrong about emancipation. But he was saved from electoral defeat by Philip Sheridan’s thrilling victory at Cedar Creek, and by William Tecumseh Sherman’s capture of Atlanta. Paradoxically, Sherman’s triumph lives on in the national memory mostly as a dramatic scene in the film of “Gone With the Wind,” which takes a notably benign view of the Confederacy.

This sort of thing bothers Slotkin. In “*Gunfighter Nation*” (1993), he called upon progressive-minded historians to reject “nostalgia for a falsely idealized past,” and to rewrite America’s myths to reflect a more inclusive view of history. He is particularly attuned to the dramatic possibilities presented by the Battle of the Crater, which inspired his 1980 novel “The Crater.” But Slotkin is too scrupulous a historian to write propaganda. “No Quarter” offers a riveting narrative and fair play to both sides, while exhuming an important episode from relative obscurity.

Slotkin’s book is well timed. A group of historians made news this spring by petitioning President Obama to cancel the wreath the White House traditionally sends to a Confederate monument on Memorial Day. Obama sent it anyway, but he sent another to a memorial honoring black Civil War troops — including those who fought at the Crater.

Source:  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/30/books/review/Lewis-t.html>



## Did You Know?



*Fanny Kemble*

Fanny Kemble, was a famous British actress who became an anti-slavery plantation owner. In 1834, she retired from the stage to marry American Pierce Butler, heir to a large cotton, tobacco and rice fortune. They became slaveholders when Butler inherited his grandfather's sea island plantations along with several hundred slaves. Fanny accompanied him to Georgia during the winter of 1838-39, and was shocked by the conditions of the slaves and their treatment. It was the main reason for their divorce ten years later. Fanny returned to acting in order to make a living, but remained close to her two daughters, one of whom became the mother of novelist Owen Wister. Butler squandered a fortune estimated at \$700,000, but was saved from bankruptcy by the sale of his 436 slaves at Ten Broeck racetrack, outside Savannah, Georgia, the largest single slave auction in American history.

