

Monroe County Civil War Roundtable

THE SENTINEL

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Antietam- The Bloodiest Day in American History

Member Rick Watson brought to the group a new and fascinating way to look at the Battle of Antietam, the pivotal conflict that set the course of the Union, and the nation as a whole, on a path to eventual success for the North and freedom for the slaves of the country. What Rick introduced was a new piece of computer software that graphically showed every nuance of what was a very complicated, three part battle that raged for only a single day near the village of Sharpsburg, Maryland, on September 17, 1862.

Antietam, or the battle of Sharpsburg if you are from south of the Mason-Dixon line, came about when Confederate Commander-in-Chief Robert E. Lee decided that he could cross the Potomac and inflict enough misery and injury on the North that the public, if not initially the government, would toss up their hands and cry for a negotiated settlement to end the bloodletting that had begun at First Manassas and continued through Forts Henry and Donelson, then the near Union defeat at Shiloh, and on to Second Manassas. It came very close to working for “Marse Bobby,” in spite of the bumbling efforts of Union General George McClellan, but for the discovery of a set of lost Confederate battle orders discovered in a field near Frederick, Maryland, by a trio of soldiers led by a Sergeant Barton Mitchell from our own Monroe Grenadiers, Co. F of the 27th Indiana Infantry just days earlier.

What Rick’s software graphically laid out was the ebb and flow of the first part of the battle, sending elements of the Union army through a cornfield belonging to a farmer named Miller and encountering Confederate forces entrenched in the now famous West Woods and Dunker Church area. It also laid out the slaughter, first of Northern, and then of Southern troops later in the day in the old farm track that became known as Bloody Lane because of the dead piled up in it. Finally, the day ended with Union General making a deadly, but eventually successful, charge over the southernmost of three stone bridges on the battlefield late in the afternoon.

In the end, the Union “won” but at the cost of huge casualties on both sides, almost 26,000 in one day, and without the ability to actually pursue and destroy the Confederate army, allowing it to slip back into Virginia and rejuvenate itself for an even bloodier attempt to invade the north at Gettysburg less than a year later. The principal “best outcome” of this carnage was to give Abraham Lincoln the impetus to use this “victory” as the rationale to issue the Emancipation Proclamation, turning the factional war over states rights into a crusade for black freedom.



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1. http://www.nps.gov/archive/anti/photos/G_DunkerC.htm 2. http://www.nps.gov/archive/anti/photos/G_Turnpike2.htm
3. http://www.nps.gov/archive/anti/photos/G_BBridge2.htm

Upcoming Civil War Events of Interest

- One of the largest reenactments of the season will take place near Somerset, Kentucky, over the weekend of September 28 & 29. There is a new museum near this historic spot, as well. This event commemorates the Battle of Mills Springs, or Logan's Crossing, most famous for the suicidal charge of Confederate General Felix Zollicoffer into troops he thought were his own but were, in fact, Northern regiments who efficiently eliminated the poor, near-sighted Southern commander. For details, go to www.millsprings.net.



- Professor Dawn Bakken of IU will teach a course on "Indiana in the Civil War" on three consecutive Mondays in October, the 15th, 22nd and 29th, from 7:00-8:30 pm each night at the Monroe County History Center. The cost is \$50 before October 8 and \$55 after that date. The course will include looks at letters, diaries and accounts of wives, families and children of Hoosier soldiers, why they fought, and what the results back home were.
- The last docent guided tour of the current Civil War exhibit at the Monroe County History Center will take place on Saturday, October 13, at 1 pm. It will be followed by a presentation by the major benefactor to this exhibit, Bob Willey, who will talk about being a Civil War collector and exhibitor for over 50 years. Bob's stories of buying, selling, trading and amassing such a huge collection will keep your interest...guaranteed!
- WTIU. Indiana University's public television station, will present "*Well Done, Indiana*" this Sunday, September 23rd, at 5:30 pm. This program notes the high enthusiasm and participation of Indiana soldiers in the war, so much so that Lincoln (a close personal friend) and his cabinet sent a note to war governor Oliver Morton commending the state for its support during the conflict. Only thirty minutes long, so don't miss it!
- The Roundtable is hoping to have a table at the Christmas Mart shopping day at the Farmers' Market in late November. If you are interested in helping man a table and promote our group, contact any of the officer corps and let them know. This should be a fun event!

Contact Information

Steve Rolfe, President	336-0757	srolfe@indiana.edu
David Wiley, Secretary	337-0649	davidwwiley@sbcglobal.net
Carol Wise, Treasurer	824-8708	cwise30099@aol.com
Deborah Cronin, Hospitality	323-9615	d.cronin@insightbb.com

Or on the web at <http://mypage.iu.edu/~rawatson/roundtable/>.