

THE CANISTER

Monthly Newsletter of the Cincinnati Civil War Round Table



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February 19, 2026 Program

Conducting Slaves to Freedom: The Underground Railroad

Presented by

Eric W. Guttag



Eric Guttag has been a member of our Round Table for 10 years and currently serves as the membership and publicity chair. He has a BA in chemistry from Carleton College and JD degree from the University of Richmond Law School. Eric is now a retired patent attorney after 42 years of practice.

*Submitted by Dan Bauer,
Program Chair*

Imagine you find yourself in the role of conductor or perhaps station master shepherding escaped slaves from station to station to freedom in Canada. Join us on Thursday, February 19th, when Eric Guttag will bring this imaginary scenario to life as he leads you through the board game, "Freedom: The Underground Railroad." You will be playing collaboratively with the other attendees as you take on the "board player" that assumes the role of the "evil" slave catchers.

Unfortunately, in the 19th Century, it was a very real and highly dangerous game of "cat and mouse" played by real conductors such as Harriet Tubman against real and armed slave catchers. Come learn by playing this award-winning game by Ohio Academy Games about the brave souls (some of whom were Cincinnatians) who risked much to "conduct" their slave charges to freedom.

Dinner Price Increase

We contract with Raffel's on a yearly basis. Raffel's has increased the price of our dinners for 2026 from \$28.00 to \$30.00.



When will it end?

President's Letter

Please join us on February 19 when our speaker will be Eric Gutttag. You probably know him or are familiar with him – he is a member of our Round Table and serves as our Membership & Publicity Chair. Eric is a retired attorney and has over 40 years' experience in intellectual property law (patent, trademark, copyright, trade secret, unfair competition issues etc.), corporate law, computer/internet matters, to name some of his practice areas. Eric is also a busy speaker on Black History topics. His talk at our Round Table will include audience participation employing a game-show-type format, which will focus on the Underground Railroad and how slaves achieved freedom



through that avenue. Eric's presentation promises to be an innovative, fun, interesting, and thoughtful presentation of the decades-long, multi-state effort to protect runaway slaves and assist them in achieving freedom. Please make your reservation to hear Eric's presentation to our organization. Eric will also speak at the Midpoint Library in West Chester (9363 Centre Point Drive) on February 23 at 6:30 PM on *Black Women at War: The Six Triple Eight*, the story of the success of 6888th Central Postal Battalion, a predominantly Black, multi-ethnic battalion of the U.S. Women's Army Corps in World War II European theater. I plan to attend both and encourage you to do the same.

Last month's Canister contained a brief article concerning the *Civil War Monitor*. Subscribers not only receive the print publication but also the *Civil War Monitor Gazette*, an online news-letter that comes out several times per month. Our Round Table also benefits when members subscribe; we receive \$3.00 (every bit helps) when one uses the code CINCWRT to sign up at www.civilwarmonitor.com/subscribe

I thought you might enjoy some humorous photos from the most recent edition of the



Gazette. The first shows that the well-known gesture of derision familiar to us was also used during the Civil War. In the second photo, a Union soldier demonstrates the size of a 15"

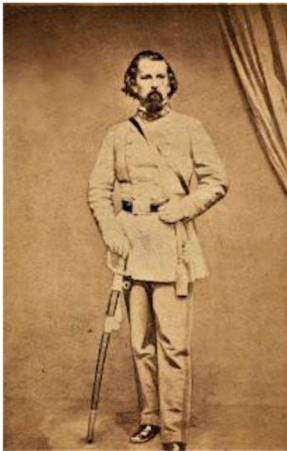


Rodman gun by going inside the tube (I have no explanation for the large bird on the gun). The third shows a Union soldier lightheartedly trying to fire a "Quaker Gun" found in the former Confederate works in Centerville, Virginia in early 1862 after the Southern forces withdrew.



Notable events in the Civil War that occurred in the month of February:

- February 6, 1862. Expecting (correctly) a Union attack, Confederate Brigadier General Lloyd Tilghman, commander of Southern forces at Fort Henry in Tennessee, believed he could not successfully defend that post with the troops he had, so he removed all but about 100 of his 3,000 soldiers to nearby Fort Donelson. Beginning around 1100, Union gunboats



began shelling Fort Henry. By 1400, the battle was over when the gunboats destroyed all Confederate artillery. Tilghman surrendered 78 soldiers, including himself, and 16 hospital patients to Union Flag Officer Andrew Foote of the U.S. Navy. Southern losses were five killed, eleven wounded, and five missing. Approximately 15,000 Union soldiers, commanded by then-Brigadier General U.S. Grant, arrived too late to engage in the fighting. Tilghman became a prisoner of war but was later exchanged for Union Brigadier General John F. Reynolds. In the next year, while serving as a brigade commander in the Vicksburg Campaign, he was struck and killed by an artillery shell in the Battle of Champion's Hill.

- February 1863. *CSS Alabama* began her South Atlantic Expeditionary Raid this month. The ship was constructed by British shipbuilders John Laird, Sons and Company in Liverpool in 1862. The construction was arranged by Confederate agent James Bulloch, whose

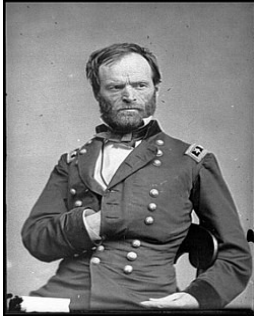


half-sister was the mother of future U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt and the grandmother of future First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. Under then-prevailing neutrality law, England asserted it was possible for a British shipyard to build a ship designed to be an armed vessel for the Confederacy, provided that the actual armaments were not installed until the vessel was in international waters or otherwise outside British territory – that was the loophole or pretext through which the Confederate Navy acquired *CSS Alabama*. The South Atlantic Expeditionary Raid, which was the ship's most successful operation, lasted until late July of that year. The voyage focused on U.S shipping to/from the Atlantic seaboard of South America. In



February, *CSS Alabama* worked its way down the east coast of Brazil, capturing or burning numerous Yankee vessels, including *Palmetto* (a curious name for a Northern ship in the Civil War), *Olive Jane*, *Golden Eagle*, and *Washington*. On June 19, 1864, *CSS Alabama* was sunk by *USS Kearsarge* in the Battle of Cherbourg in approximately one hour. After the war, the United States asserted claims against England for the losses caused by the ship, and after an international arbitration commission adopted the American position, Britain ended the dispute by paying \$15.5 million (~\$415 million today) to the United States in 1872.

- February 3 – 20, 1864. In a campaign viewed by historians as a prelude to the March to the Sea later that year, Union forces commanded by Major General William T. Sherman moved from Vicksburg



to Meridian, inflicting heavy damage and destruction to places/things that were used, or could have been used, to support Confederate military operations. In six days, Union soldiers

destroyed 115 miles of railroad track, 61 bridges, 6,075 feet of trestles, 20 locomotives, 28 rail cars, as well as sawmills, depots, warehouses, arsenals, and military cantonments. There were, however, no reported personal injuries or attacks. Confederate Lieutenant General Leonidas Polk commanded approximately 9,000 troops in the area, but declined to attack Sherman's forces (20,000 infantry, 7,000

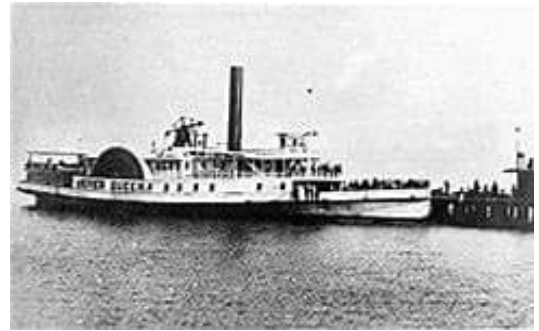


cavalry) because he was greatly outnumbered, although Southern cavalry units periodically skirmished with Northern cavalry. After inflicting such destruction,

Sherman's forces moved west back to Vicksburg.

- February 3, 1865. In what was called the Hampton Roads Conference, President Abraham Lincoln and Secretary of State William Seward met with Confederate officials – Vice President Alexander Stephens, Senator Robert Hunter, and Assistant Secretary of War John Campbell – aboard the steamboat *River Queen* in Hampton Roads, Virginia. The talks, which lasted about four hours, produced no positive results. The Confederates wanted an armistice first, with discussion of other issues such as reunion and slavery

postponed until later. Lincoln, however, insisted on recognition of federal authority as an essential first step toward peace. With respect to slavery, Lincoln also told the Southerners of the recent passage by



Congress of the proposed 13th Amendment (prohibiting slavery and involuntary servitude) and expressed confidence that the amendment would soon be ratified by sufficient states to become part of the Constitution. In fact, on that very day, Maryland, New York, and West Virginia ratified.

Please join us on February 19th. Hope to see you there.

Submitted by Tom Robisch, President

Future Speakers for Cincinnati Civil War Round Table

March 19, 2026 **German Heritage in Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky**, Don Heinrich Tolzman

April 16, 2026 **Discovering Ormsby Mitchel**, Phil Shoemaker

May 21, 2026 **Union and Confederate Cavalry Operations in the Gettysburg Campaign**, Dr. Peter Mansoor

Cincinnati CWRT Meeting Details

Location	Raffel's Evendale Banquet Center, 10160 Reading Rd., Evendale, OH 45241
Date	Thursday, February 19, 2026
Time	5:30 Sign-in and Social 6:30 Buffet Dinner 7:15 Business Meeting 7:30 Speaker
Time Reservations	You MUST make a reservation if you would like Dinner . Please Email reservations to: CinCWRTreservations@ gmail.com Or Call, or text Jeff Mikutis, Vice President: 937-623-4879 Reservation Deadline Sunday, February 15, 2026
Cost	Dinner, meeting and speaker – \$30.00 Meeting and speaker only – \$7.00 . No reservations are required.
Cancellations	We are charged for the number of dinners called in to Raffel's after the deadline. You will be charged if you do not cancel by the reservation deadline, unless a late- comer can be substituted.

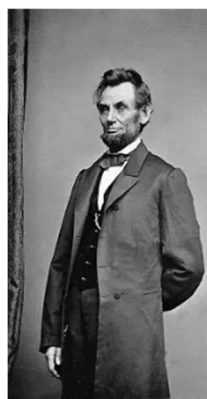
Reservations

Last month there was a problem with the reservations link in the email accompanying the *Canister*. Several members used that link rightly thinking they had made reservations. If you make a reservation, you will receive an acknowledgement within a couple of days. If you do not receive an acknowledgement, that means we did not get your reservation. Please let us know if you do not receive a timely acknowledgement of your reservation.

January Meeting

Twenty-eight members attended the January meeting, including new members Teresa Rivera and Dick Bryant. Thanks to the 40 members who have already renewed their membership. If you have not yet renewed for 2026, please refer to renewal information in the December 11th email from CinCWRTreservations@gmail.com or in the January 7th email that delivered your January *Canister*.

The Round Table was pleased to welcome Kim Villalva as our speaker. Her presentation, titled "*Lincoln: The Servant Leader*," analyzed



Lincoln's leadership by means of the modern theory of servant leadership, an approach to leadership that prioritizes the wants and needs of others. Lincoln himself wrote in his famous letter to James Conkling in August of 1863, "I freely acknowledge myself the servant of the people, according to the bond of service—the United States

Constitution; and that, as such, I am responsible to them."

Kim's analysis looked at the three characteristics of Abraham Lincoln that she believed combined to make him a servant leader: character, courage, and commitment. Within each characteristic she identified

certain important elements, and gave numerous examples of each from his life. His morals and values, exemplified by his humility, empathy, honesty, and integrity, gave him strength of character. His humility was likewise an element of his courage. His communication skills, speaking and listening, were vital to his commitment to see the country through the War, keeping the Union intact.

Quiz

The following post-war presidents were of age to serve in the military during the Civil War. None served in the Navy. What was the highest rank, if any, *not a brevet rank*, held by each during the war in the Regular Army, U.S. Volunteers, or State Militia?

Possible answers: None/did not serve. Enlisted. Second Lieutenant. First Lieutenant. Captain. Major. Lieutenant Colonel. Colonel. Brigadier General. Major General. Lieutenant General. General.

1. Andrew Johnson.
2. Ulysses S Grant.
3. Rutherford B. Hayes.
4. James A. Garfield.
5. Chester A. Arthur.
6. Grover Cleveland.
7. Benjamin Harrison.
8. William McKinley.

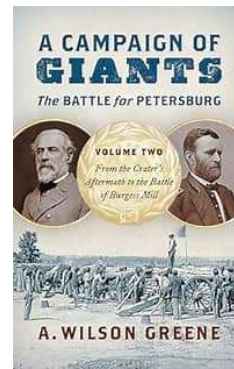
Book Review

Submitted by Eric W. Guttag

A Campaign of Giants: The Battle for Petersburg, Volume II, From the Crater's Aftermath to the Battle of Burgess Mill

By A. Wilson Greene, The University of North Carolina Press, 2025, 693 pages, hardcover/\$45.00

As described in my prior book review, Volume I of A. Wilson Greene's planned



three-volume set ends with the tragic Battle of the Crater on July 30, 1864. In Volume II, Greene takes the reader further on a three-month journey (August – October) through the next phase of the fierce fight for the Cockade City, Petersburg.

After summarizing Volume I, Volume II continues with a description of additional operations conducted by both sides beneath the surface near where Pleasant's mine exploded on the second to the last day of July. It also describes another cataclysmic explosion that occurred aboard a Union ammunition ship on August 9, 1864, near City Point. As revealed by Greene, its true cause was not discovered until eight years later by Horace Porter (former aide, now personal secretary to President Grant) when its instigator, John Maxwell, a former Confederate agent, came to the White House to complain about a patent matter relating to one of his inventions. (Read towards the end of chapter one to get more details about this incredible story of Civil War sabotage!)

Much of the focus of Volume II is on Union operations from August through October involving Grant's multiple efforts to stretch

the Confederate defenses at Petersburg and Richmond to the breaking point. These involved a somewhat repeating pattern of Union attacks north of the James River at Deep Bottom, in conjunction with strikes further south to try to cut the Weldon Railroad (Petersburg's main supply lifeline from North Carolina). Even so, Lee and especially his cavalry chief, Wade Hampton, caused significant headaches for Grant and Meade, including what became known as the infamous Beefsteak Raid (September 14-17, 1864) where the gray clad cavalry absconded with close to 2,500 cattle from the Union's herd. (I'm not making this up!)

Like his first volume described earlier, Greene's second volume in this series is extremely well-researched and written, with many interesting stories, as well as numerous informative maps. Given that Volume II came out seven years after Volume I, it may be a while before we see the concluding Volume III. Like me, I hope you can wait for that to happen!

*Submitted by Eric Guttag,
Publicity & Membership*

Quiz Answers

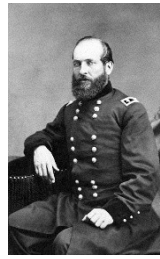
1. Andrew Johnson was appointed a Brigadier General USV on 4 March 1862 to serve as the military governor of Tennessee.

2. Ulysses S Grant was appointed a Lieutenant General on 9 March 1864.

3. Rutherford B. Hayes was appointed a Brigadier General USV in October 1864. Elected to Congress that same month, he resigned his commission in June 1865 and was later brevetted a Major General.



4. James A. Garfield was appointed a Major General USV 9 Oct. 1863.



5. The Governor of New York appointed Chester A. Arthur a Brigadier General in the state's militia. He served as Inspector General and later as Quartermaster General. At the behest of the governor, he twice turned down offers of field command.

6. Grover Cleveland did not serve in the military, choosing instead to hire a substitute, George Benninsky, a Polish immigrant, for \$150.

7. Benjamin Harrison was appointed a Colonel USV on 7 August 1862. He was brevetted a Brigadier General in May of 1865.



8. William McKinley was appointed a Captain USV on 25 Jul 1864. The following March he was brevetted a Major USV. Ever afterward, whether he was Stark County Prosecutor, Member of Congress, Ohio Governor, or President, he was known to his friends as Major McKinley.



*The Quiz, Quiz Answers, and the
January Meeting summary, were all written by
Dave Stockdale, Treasurer*



Poet-General William Lytle and His Birthday

January 1, 2026

Alex Norikane

www.blueandgrayeducation.org

On November 2, 1862, Colonel William Haines Lytle sat at his desk in Cincinnati, Ohio, and began to write a poem. Severely wounded a month earlier at the Battle of Perryville, Kentucky, Lytle had just returned home to recuperate—arriving, poignantly, in time for his birthday. But Lytle was no ordinary military officer. At that moment, he was one of the most well-known poets in America.



William Haines Lytle, a celebrated military officer and poet

Born in Cincinnati on November 2, 1826, William Haines Lytle came from a large and distinguished military family: his father, uncle, and grandfather had all served in state or national armies. A child prodigy, Lytle was orphaned at fifteen yet went on to graduate as valedictorian of his class at Cincinnati College (now the University of Cincinnati), earning a law degree. After a brief, uneventful stint in the

Mexican War, he entered politics and was elected to the Ohio House of Representatives.

Already known as a gifted orator, Lytle gained his greatest fame through poetry published in newspapers across the country. His poem "Antony and Cleopatra," a lyrical meditation on the suicides of the Roman general Mark Antony and the Egyptian queen Cleopatra, became his most famous work—recited and admired by readers in both the North and the South.

When the Civil War broke out, Lytle grew restless with legal and political life and accepted a commission as colonel of the 10th Ohio Infantry Regiment. At the Battle of Carnifex Ferry in western Virginia, the 10th Ohio spearheaded the Union assault, suffering heavy casualties. Lytle himself was wounded when a Confederate bullet ripped through his calf. At Perryville, he was injured again, struck by shrapnel that lacerated his cheek.

Relieved at last to rest and recuperate, Lytle returned home in time to celebrate his thirty-sixth birthday. That day, he wrote another poem, but unlike his earlier works, which often celebrated gallantry and glory, this one took a more pensive tone. Titled simply "Lines on My Thirty-Sixth Birthday," it read:

*Swift through the hurricane of life
My shattered bark drives on,
The pilot's hand has left the helm,
Rudder and mast are gone.
I hear the roar of angry seas,
And see the breakers rise,
Revealed amid the sullen gloom
By lightning-lighted skies.*

*'Tis done! To hope I bid farewell,
Love and her lights may flee,
And youth's entrancing glamour fades
From hope to memory.
Far o'er the Atlantic's waves to-night
My true love wends her way,*

*And many a tear is mingled with
The ocean's briny spray.*

*Gird on my trusty blade once more,
And saddle my sinewy steed;
Dash down the gloomy page to earth,
Whose lore I would not read.
Weave fast your woof, weird sisters
three!
Again among the brave,
For freedom and for victory,
Or for a soldier's grave!*

The “storm” of war invoked in the opening stanza had, by then, fully engulfed Lytle. After almost eighteen months of grueling service, the youthful “glamour” of war had faded, leaving him a battle-tested soldier, keenly aware of the cost of duty. He could well imagine what lay ahead: a gallant victory for the Union—or a warrior's death on the field.

On September 20, 1863, newly promoted to brigadier general, Lytle led troops at the Battle of Chickamauga in Georgia. Initially held in reserve, his brigade was suddenly committed after Confederate forces exploited a dangerous gap in the Union line. As waves of gray-clad infantry stormed forward, a bullet struck Lytle in his spine as he sat mounted on his horse. As aides rushed to his side, a Confederate sniper



Sketch of the Battle of Chickamauga

delivered a fatal shot to his head. Gently lowered to the ground, Lytle died within

minutes on a hill that would later bear his name.

Confederate troops soon overran the position, preventing his men from recovering his body. Yet many of the advancing soldiers paused to pay their respects to the fallen poet-general. Confederate General James Patton Anderson, a close friend from before the war, removed Lytle's personal effects and a lock of his hair to send to his family and ordered an honor guard placed around his body. That night, a fellow veteran of the Mexican War oversaw his burial.

A week later, Lytle's body was exhumed and carried through the lines under escort of soldiers of his beloved 10th Ohio. His funeral, held a month later in Cincinnati, drew the largest crowd the city had ever seen. The procession did not reach the cemetery until dusk, with his casket borne by friends—including fellow general and future President James A. Garfield, who served as lead pallbearer.

In the end, Lytle fulfilled the fate he had foreseen in his poem. Embracing the hardships and obligations of military life, he led his men into the heart of battle and died as he had lived—with courage, conviction, and honor. He was a leader beloved by his troops and a poet remembered by a nation.



This article comes courtesy of the Blue and Gray Education Society, a non-profit 501(c)3 organization. You can visit them at www.blueandgrayeducation.org

A monument honoring the poet-warrior's memory in Cincinnati's Spring Grove Cemetery.

Cincinnati Civil War Round Table

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*The **CANISTER** is regularly published eight times per year, in January, February, March, April, May, September, October, and November; sometimes more often, if we have a lot to say to our members.*