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**Des Moines
Civil War
Roundtable**

**June 2025
Headquarters District Iowa
General Order No. 502**

- The **Sixth meeting** of the Spring campaign will **June 18** at the **The Machine Shed**
- The bar will open at 5:30 with the meal served at 6:30.
- Our program **Professor Jeff Bremer (Iowa State U) *Samuel H.M. Byers and Iowa's Civil War***
- Meal choices **Baked Ham and Steak Tips/Mushrooms & Onions at \$24.00**
- **Reservations & payment will be accepted until June 15.**
By command of Brigadier General Gordon McKenzie

Our web address www.dmcivilwar.com

**Ronald R. Nurmi
Colonel & Adjutant
email- dmcwrt@gmail.com
1424 E Walnut St #4 DM 50316**

Hi Ron- would you please put a notice in the next newsletter about the replica rifles/muskets that Plymouth is selling? That way it would reach all members, including those that were not at last night's meeting.

The description is below. I'm sure you won't use the photos for space reasons, but the description is fairly detailed. I'll send the photos separately, just in case you can fit one in. THANKS and see you next month! Joyce Larson

Lorna Truck Lrtruck@gmail.com 515-202-8202

This Kentucky Flintlock Short Rifle is a perfect addition to any militaria collection. Used during the Revolutionary War and Civil War. With its authentic design and attention to detail, this Denix replica made in Spain. And features intricate details that are true to the original musket. The weapon is perfect for reenactments and collectors alike.

Overall length 43.5 inches, 4 pounds. Wood and metal, no plastic. Non-firing, accurate detailing. Ships in original box.

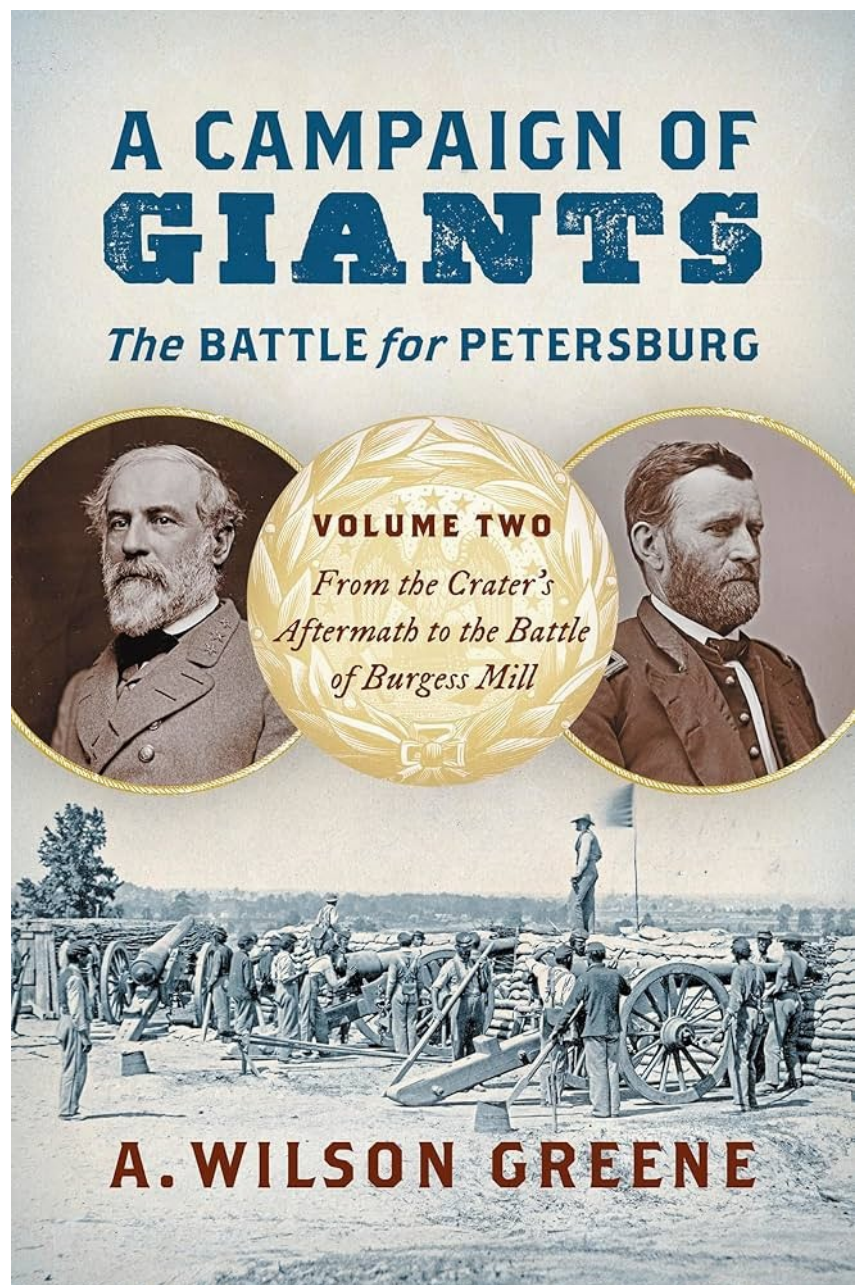


We have a balance of \$1646. in our account, which is about average for this time of year.

I have been very generous with those who can't make the meeting, and have not required them to pay for a meal. However, after the last meeting, we had three who indicated they would attend but did not show up or did not eat. We need to pay the Machine Shed for the number of meals we contract. We paid \$72.00 out of our funds for these meals. The yearly dues are intended to cover the costs of speakers and programming, not meals. If this does not change the alternative is for all to prepay.

A Campaign of Giants: The Battle for Petersburg, Volume Two: From the Crater's Aftermath to Burgess Mill. By A. Wilson Greene. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2025. Hardcover, 693 pages. \$45.00.

Reviewed by Peter Vermilyea



In the pantheon of Civil War battles, Petersburg too often appears as a singular engagement, alongside Antietam, Gettysburg, or Chickamauga. It was, of course, far more complicated than this, a nine-month campaign that reshaped both the course of the war and the military infrastructure of the armies. A. Wilson Greene's *A Campaign of Giants: The Battles for Petersburg, Volume 2: From the Crater's Aftermath to the Battle of Burgess Mill* is a masterful continuation of his comprehensive history of the Petersburg Campaign.

This volume covers the critical months from August through October 1864, a period that witnessed Union Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant's Fourth through Sixth Offensives against the Confederate railroad hub. Greene's book, while focused on the strategic and tactical developments of this time period, also places notable events such as the Confederate sabotage that resulted in the massive City Point explosion in August and the audacious Beefsteak Raid in September within the broader context of the campaign.

Greene challenges the traditional depiction of the Petersburg Campaign as a siege, seeing it instead as a dynamic series of maneuvers, offensives, and counteroffensives. In this volume he effectively argues that while Grant suffered heavy losses in his repeated attempts to break the Confederate lines, by the culmination of the Sixth Offensive in October 1864, it was the Army of Northern Virginia that was in a "dire situation." Simply put, Grant could replace his casualties while Lee could not. But Grant, Greene argues, was not a butcher, "engaged in some grim game of human arithmetic." The Union commander adapted his strategies, replacing frontal assaults against powerful defenses with attempts to cut Confederate supply lines west of Petersburg while forcing the rebels to stretch their defensive line, which swelled to thirty-five miles in length. Confederate General Robert E. Lee recognized this, writing to Confederate Secretary of War James Seddon during the Fourth Offensive that it was "evident that the enemy has abandoned the effort to drive us from our present position by force, and that his purpose now is to compel us to evacuate it by cutting off our supplies."

While the focus of the book is on the continuous maneuvering and fighting of this stage of the Petersburg Campaign, Greene also analyzes the impact of these experiences on the common soldier. This is especially effective, as he relies on the soldiers' own words to convey the physical and mental toll brought about by non-stop campaigning. In one particularly telling example, Pvt. William E. Fielding of the 9th Alabama wrote, "We are all completely broken down. I feel as if I was 100 years old."

Additionally, Greene provides an important analysis of the role of the United States Colored Troops (USCT) in the campaign. While the fighting at the battle of the Crater is the best-known aspect of the USCT's involvement in the campaign, Greene offers readers a comprehensive understanding of their expanding role in operations of the Union armies.

A Campaign of Giants: Volume Two is a towering achievement of research. The archival and

manuscript collections mined in researching the book take up seventeen pages of the bibliography. Yet this is not a dry book. Greene's writing is sharp, pithy, and occasionally humorous, such as when he describes Confederate Lt. Gen. A. P. Hill's performance at the Second Battle of Reams Station on August 25, 1864: "No one could accuse A.P. Hill that morning of enhancing his reputation for impetuosity." Importantly, thirty-four maps help the reader visualize the battles of these three offensives, many of which are unknown to all but the most die-hard of Civil War enthusiasts.

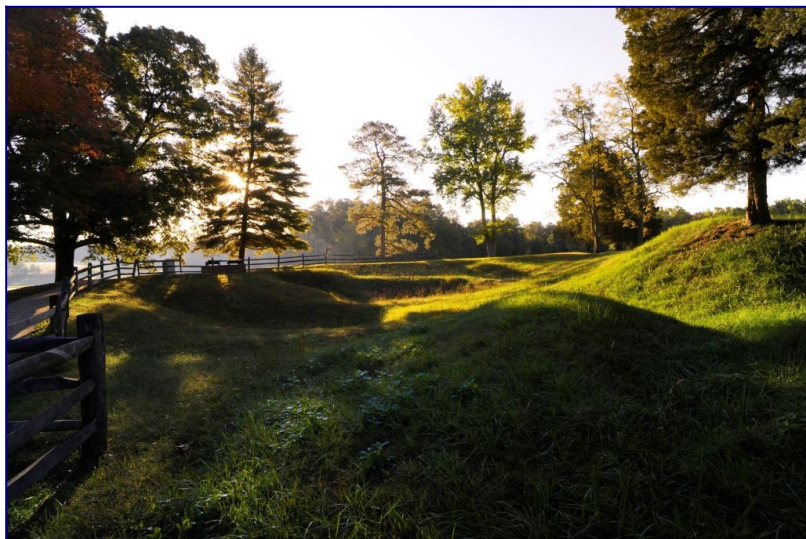
A. Wilson Greene restores this period of intense combat and strategic maneuvering to a central position in our understanding of why the United States forces triumphed in the Civil War. For as Greene concludes, despite the failure of the Union armies to seize either Richmond or Petersburg, "likelihood of Confederate independence diminished substantially between the first of August and the end of October 1864." (xi)

A Thousand Words a Battle: Petersburg

by [Steward T. Henderson](#)

The Battle of the Crater, Petersburg

July 30, 1864



The Crater – Petersburg -Chris Heisey

During the siege of Petersburg, Major General Ambrose Burnside, commander of the Federal Ninth Corps, approved a plan to explode a mine under the earthworks of the Confederate army, then have the corps' Fourth Division—the colored division—lead the attack into Petersburg. However, Maj. Gen. George Gordon Meade, commander of the Army of the Potomac, changed Burnside's strategy a day before the attack. The black soldiers would not lead the assault but, instead, would be the last troops in.

On July 30, 1864, there was a tremendous explosion under the Confederate lines at Elliott's Salient. The explosion of this mine, and the huge hole in the ground that opened up as a result, began what became known as the battle of the Crater.

Accounts of two officers in the Fourth Division detailed their experiences in this horrendous battle. Lieutenant Freeman Bowley of the 30th USCT recounted his remembrances:

My regiment led the division. With fixed bayonet , we started across the open field under a heavy cross-fire for the enemy's line. Down went their flag, the color sergeant staining the stars and stripes with his blood. A grape-shot had torn his head in pieces. A corporal quickly caught up the colors, but the color lance was shattered by a shot. A shower of canister made a great gap in my company, but the men closed up and went on. We were led to the right of the "Crater," as the chasm was called which the explosion of the mine had caused, and the First Brigade assaulted the Confederate line, carrying the rifle pits, and capturing two hundred prisoners and a color. But more than half the Thirtieth had gone down.

In the desperate fighting that followed, our colonel, Delevan Bates, was shot through the face and Major James C. Leeke was mortally wounded. Many of our best officers . . . fell. A terrific counter-charge was made by the Confederates, and we were routed. Most of the troops, white and black, rushed for the Union lines.... Whoever has read the history of the Civil War knows that, of all its battles, none exceeded in horror this slaughter at the Crater. Of six hundred or more men, representing every regiment of the Ninth Corps, who rallied there, but one hundred and thirty escaped unhurt, and all these were taken prisoners by the Confederates. All the colored men who rallied with me were killed.

Lieutenant Robert Beecham of the 23rd USCT described their incursion to and around the Crater:

Just as soon as the troops in advance of us had time to get out of our way, so that we could move, we followed as in one continuous stream. We moved out on a double-quick, and 100 yards or less brought us to the outmost Union line; another 100 yards and we were abreast of the Confederate works. . . . [W]e were led to the right, passing over the rim of the crater into the Confederate works, fronting the enemy, by the rear rank. . . . As we passed over the rim of the crater I noticed that the crater was full of our soldiers. . . . [A]nd every soldier of common sense could see at a glance that the object of the charge must be to carry the hill behind the crater. . . . My brigade passed to the right of the crater and advanced as far as we could get, on account of the troops in advance of us who had halted, and then we halted also.

The Confederates soon recovered from their confusion and concentrated their batteries upon us, catching us like sheep in a slaughter pen, for there was the whole Ninth Corps crowded into a space where there was barely room for one division to operate. . . . The 29th regiment of our brigade, and the highest rank of any officer I saw along our front line. . . . Colonel Bross formed his regiment in the lead of the column as best he could in that jam of mixed soldiers- white and black together; and next in the column came the 23rd . . . order came to us through Lieutenant Colonel Bross, who seemed to be in command of the The black boys formed promptly. There was no flinching on their part. They came to the shoulder touch like true soldiers, as ready to face the enemy and meet death on the field as the bravest and best soldiers that ever lived. . . . An absolutely certain defeat, if not annihilation, awaited us, and we knew it.

Both Lieutenants Bowley and Beecham were captured, but both survived the battle and the war.

