

# THE CHARGER

January 2010

465th Meeting

Vol. 31, #5

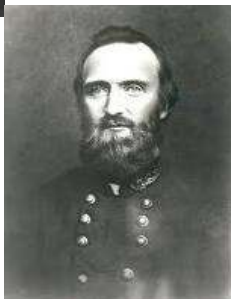
*Tonight's Program:*

## The Dick Crews Annual Debate

*After Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee,  
William Tecumseh Sherman Was the  
Greatest General of the War*

**Moderator: William F. B. Vodrey**

The contestants are:



*Tonight's Debaters:*

**Dick Crews      Michael Wells**

**Bob Boyda      Dan Zeiser**

What could be more fun? The namesake for tonight's debate returns to take on several challengers. Bob Boyda and Dan Zeiser are past presidents. Michael Wells is a new member and professor at Cleveland State. All are well read, well versed, and well prepared for the Joust at the Judson. Who will win? Grant? Lee? Sherman? Thomas? Jackson? Good choices all. Good debaters all. Come and join in the fun.

**Date: Wednesday,  
January 13, 2010**

**Place: Judson Manor  
1890 E. 107th Street  
Cleveland, Ohio**

**Time: Drinks 6 PM  
Dinner 6:45 PM**

**Reservations: Please Call  
Dan Zeiser (440) 449-9311  
Or email [ccwrt1956@yahoo.com](mailto:ccwrt1956@yahoo.com)  
By 8 pm Tuesday before meeting**

**Meal choice: Entree, vegetable,  
salad, and dessert.**

## CLEVELAND CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE

FOUNDED 1957

*President:*       **Dennis Keating**     (216) 397-0188  
*Vice President:* **Lisa Kempfer**     (440) 526-1318  
*Secretary:*       **Marge Wilson**     (216) 932-6558  
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### Directors:

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**Editor - THE CHARGER - Dan Zeiser**

### Cleveland Civil War Roundtable Past Presidents

<p>2009 Jon Thompson  2008 Terry Koozer  2007 John Fazio  2006 Dave Carrino  2005 Mel Maurer  2004 Warren McClelland  2003 Maynard Bauer  2002 Bill McGrath  2001 William Vodrey  2000 Bob Boyda  1999 Dick Crews  1998 John Moore  1997 Dan Zeiser  1996 John Sutula  1995 Norton London  1994 Robert Battisti  1993 Kevin Callahan  1992 Bob Baucher  1991 Joe Tirpak  1990 Ken Callahan Jr.  1989 Neil Glaser  1988 Martin Graham  1987 George Vourlojianis  1986 Tim Beatty  1985 Brian Kowell  1984 Neil Evans</p>	<p>1983 William Victory  1982 John Harkness  1981 Thomas Geschke  1980 Charles Spiegle  1979 William Bates  1978 Richard McCrae  1977 James Chapman  1976 Milton Holmes  1975 Thomas Gretter  1974 Nolan Heidelbaugh  1973 Arthur Jordan  1972 Bernard Drews  1971 Kenneth Callahan  1970 Frank Schuhle  1969 Donald Heckaman  1968 Frank Moran  1967 William Schlesinger  1966 Donald Hamill  1965 Lester Swift  1964 Guy DiCarlo, Jr.  1963 Paul Guenther  1962 Edward Downer  1961 Charles Clarke  1960 Howard Preston  1959 John Cullen, Jr.  1958 George Farr, Jr.  1957 Kenneth Grant</p>
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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

### JANUARY 2010

Greetings,

What could be better than to debate issues related to the Civil War, some still contentious almost a century and a half later. Rankings always provoke a good exchange of views. Ranking Civil War generals - both the good and the bad - is a popular subject.

Nobody has engendered more controversy than Ohio's William Tecumseh (Cump) Sherman. "Uncle Billy" has been credited with largely bringing the South to its knees with his March through Georgia and the Carolinas. To many Southerners, he remains the most hated Yankee general of all. Comparing Sherman to Grant, Lee, and other notable generals such as Jackson and Thomas should make for a lively contest.

This year, our volunteer debaters in the annual Dick Crews debate include none other than Dick Crews himself. Given the topic, you can agree that Sherman ranked behind only Grant and Lee, or that he surpassed one or both, or that some other general proved himself superior to Sherman.

Like all of these Civil War military leaders, Sherman had major accomplishments (the capture of Atlanta, Savannah, and Columbia and the surrender of Joe Johnston's army) and setbacks (the initial attack at Shiloh, failed assaults at Milliken's Bend, Missionary Ridge, and Kennesaw Mountain). Sherman is especially noteworthy because he was considered insane by some when he correctly predicted what it would take to conquer the South, because of his scorched earth tactics during his March to the Sea and through the Carolinas, and his generous peace terms offered to Johnston, repudiated by President Andrew Johnson and Secretary of War Edwin Stanton.

Let the debate begin! And a happy New Year to all.                   Respectfully, Dennis Keating

**CLEVELAND CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE  
2009/2010 SCHEDULE**

September 9, 2009

**Plenty of Blame to  
Go Around: Jeb Stu-  
art's Controversial  
Ride to Gettysburg**



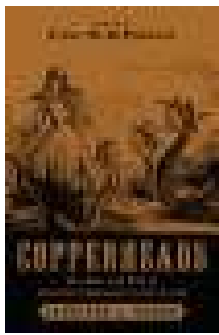
**Eric Wittenberg**

October 14, 2009

**Behind the Scenes at a Civil War Movie**

**Michael Kraus  
Curator of the Pittsburgh Soldiers &  
Sailors Military Museum & Memorial  
Advisor on Cold Mountain and  
Gettysburg movies**

November 11, 2009



**The Copperheads:  
Lincoln's Oppo-  
nents in the North**

**Prof. Jennifer L.  
Weber**

December 9, 2009

**Three Soldiers and the Negro**

**David L. Forte  
Professor  
Cleveland-Marshall College of  
Law**

January 13 2010

**The Dick Crews Annual  
Debate**

*After Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E.  
Lee, William Tecumseh Sherman Was  
the Greatest General of the War*

**Moderator: William F. B. Vodrey**

February 10, 2010

**The 26th Ohio  
Volunteer Infantry:  
The Ground Hog  
Regiment**  
**Jeff Hill**



March 10, 2010

**Steps Toward War: Two Dramatic  
Rescues That Led To It.**  
**Nat Brandt**

April 14, 2010

**Rutherford B. Hayes  
and the  
23rd Ohio Volunteer  
Infantry**  
**Thomas J. Culbertson**



May 12, 2010



**John Wilkes  
Booth:  
Escape and  
Capture**  
**Mel Maurer**

**For membership in the Cleveland Civil War Roundtable, please visit our web site:  
<http://clevelandcivilwarroundtable.com>**

# The Decisive Battle of the Civil War: Another Nomination

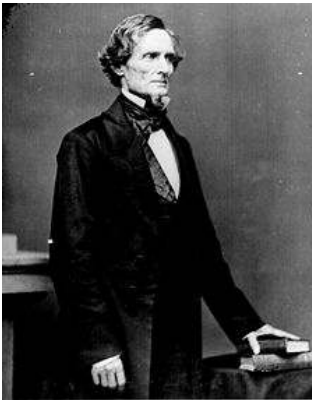
by David A. Carrino  
Part 2

For two months, William Sherman's triplet army grappled with Joseph Johnston's Army of Tennessee in a long struggle across northwest Georgia. But Johnston's participation in the affair was about to end. The groundwork for Johnston's removal had begun some time earlier in Richmond where the Confederate hierarchy was becoming increasingly frustrated with Johnston's apparent aversion to aggressive action and increasingly anxious at the shortening distance between Sherman's horde and Atlanta. Perhaps surprisingly, in light of the strained relationship between Johnston and Jefferson Davis, it was the Confederate president who had prolonged Johnston's tenure as commander of the Army of Tennessee, while Davis's cabinet was unanimous and strident in its call for Johnston's removal. For now, Davis continued to resist such a move out of concern for Atlanta and because he understood the dangers inherent in changing a commander in the face of the enemy. Davis's view at this time was to leave Johnston in command so long as he would not relinquish Atlanta without a fight. To gauge Johnston's intentions, Davis sent his chief military advisor, Braxton Bragg, to meet personally with Johnston. Before Bragg had arrived, Richmond received a telegram from Johnston recommending immediate relocation of the Union prisoners at Andersonville. This telegram informed Davis of Johnston's intentions as effectively as any information which Bragg could provide, and Davis now decided that Johnston had to be relieved. It is not difficult to surmise that Davis foresaw a more aggressive commander replicating the 1862 result of Johnston's successor when the Army of the Potomac was close enough to Richmond to hear the church bells. Davis solicited advice from that successor, Robert E. Lee, about a replacement for Johnston and asked Lee's opinion of John Bell Hood as Johnston's 1864 successor, to which Lee replied that the situation outside Atlanta was not conducive to replacing

the commander of the Army of Tennessee. Lee also gave a less than enthusiastic endorsement of Hood, "Hood is a bold fighter. I am doubtful as to other qualities necessary."

Subsequently, messages from Bragg confirmed that Johnston's plans had not changed from his previous pattern of awaiting developments by the enemy and hoping for an opportunity to attack. Accordingly, Bragg recommended that Johnston be relieved and eliminated Hardee as his replacement because he had agreed with Johnston's tactics. Bragg also eliminated Alexander Stewart, the successor to W.W. Loring (who had succeeded Leonidas Polk after Polk was killed at Kennesaw Mountain), because Bragg considered Stewart too inexperienced for overall command. Bragg suggested Hood as Johnston's replacement, because Hood had, for the most part, favored giving

ing battle throughout Sherman's drive toward Atlanta (although it was Hood who failed to make the attack Johnston ordered at Cassville when the opportunity had presented itself to destroy a part of Sherman's large force, and who had also failed to make the attack at Pickett's Mill which he, himself, had proposed). In a message to Davis, Bragg stated, "Lieutenant General Hood would give unlimited satisfaction." Then by way of contradicting himself, Bragg continued with hardly a ringing endorsement of the man he claimed would be a source of boundless achievement, "Do not understand me as proposing him a man of genius, or a great general, but as far better in the present emergency than any one we have available." Before making the change, Davis gave Johnston one final chance by asking Johnston his plans in a telegram. In spite of postwar pronouncements that he was at that time preparing the attack which he had been waiting to deliver against a portion of Sherman's force, which was then divided by a creek, all that Johnston told



Jefferson Davis



Braxton Bragg

Davis was that the much smaller Confederate army would have to remain on the defensive and be vigilant for the chance to attack at an advantage. On the next day, July 17, came a telegram from Richmond, which said in part, "(A)s you have failed to arrest the advance of the enemy to the vicinity of Atlanta, far in the interior of Georgia, and express no confidence that you can defeat or repel him, you are hereby relieved from the command of the Army and Department of Tennessee, which you will immediately turn over to General Hood." In his reply to Richmond, Johnston concluded his telegram with a sarcastic comment aimed at the Confederate president, "Confident language by a military commander is not usually regarded as evidence of competency."



John Bell Hood

Among the high command of the Army of Tennessee, the reaction to the change, even by Hood, was to prevail upon Johnston to ignore the order and remain in command. When Johnston refused, the three corps commanders (one of whom, technically, was now commander of the army) sent a joint telegram to Davis to request that the change at least be postponed "until the fate of Atlanta is decided," but Davis refused this request. At this, Hood tried to again convince Johnston to remain in command "for the good of the country," as if Hood had some prescient understanding of the disaster that his command of the Army of Tennessee would bring to that country. Again Johnston refused, and by that evening he was gone. On the Union side, the reaction to the change was the reverse. After the war, O.O. Howard wrote, "Just at this time, much to our comfort and surprise, Johnston was removed, and Hood placed in command of the Confederate army." Jacob Cox, a division commander under Schofield, claimed, "(T)he change of Confederate commanders was learned with satisfaction by every officer and man in the National Army." Sherman simply wrote home, "I confess I was pleased at the change," and later wrote, "At this critical moment, the Confederate Government rendered us most valuable service." Ironically, had Polk not been dispatched to stand in the presence of the only being Polk truly felt outranked him, Polk quite possibly could have been chosen as Johnston's successor, and it is intriguing to ponder how the obstreperous clergyman would have fared in overall command of an army rather than as a recalcitrant subordinate.

The switch to Hood caused two major changes with regard to Atlanta's fate. First, the last few weeks before the city's capture would include serious fighting initiated by the commander of the Army of Tennessee and, second, the city would fall into Union possession much more quickly than if Johnston had remained in command. Once Sherman's army had reached the outskirts of Atlanta, its falling into Union possession was virtually assured. The time to prevent the fall of Atlanta was when the opposing armies were in the rugged territory northwest of the three rivers Sherman had to cross to reach Atlanta. But Johnston failed to stop Sherman there or even substantially delay him. Johnston's best chance to accomplish either of these was by cutting Sherman's railroad lifeline, and Johnston seemed to recognize this. While the Army of Tennessee was still in its position on the north bank of the Chattahoochee, Johnston told an emissary from Georgia governor Joe Brown that what was needed to save Atlanta was a strike at the Western & Atlantic by Forrest or Morgan. When the emissary asked Johnston why he did not use his own cavalry for such a strike, the cautious Johnston responded that his cavalry was needed where it was. In the middle of May, just prior to the planned Cassville attack, Johnston had received word that Forrest would be sent against Sherman's railroad lifeline. But

this strike, like the Cassville attack, was canceled before it began, because Forrest's services were deemed more important elsewhere. Johnston cannot be blamed for not receiving assistance for the one best course to thwart or slow Sherman's movement toward Atlanta. In fact, after the war, Sherman remarked, "No officer or soldier who ever served under me will question the generalship of Joseph E. Johnston." Although it is difficult to be highly critical of Johnston in light of the circumstances he faced (opposing a numerically superior army, limitations on his movements due to the necessity of protecting a city), Johnston can be faulted for not taking some initiative against the Western & Atlantic Railroad, since Johnston himself realized that this was the key to slowing if not halting Sherman's advance. A more aggressive and creative commander might have at least slowed Sherman sufficiently to prevent the fall of Atlanta prior to the election of 1864 and thereby eliminated the Northern elation which carried Abraham Lincoln to victory in that election and ensured continuation of the war.

Johnston's tactics during Sherman's drive to Atlanta are reminiscent of Johnston's performance during George McClellan's 1862 advance toward Richmond, that is, a continuous, slow withdrawal while awaiting a serious error by the opponent that would permit an opening for an attack. Evidence of the willingness of Johnston's men to fight was in a letter from a young artillery officer in the Army of Tennessee to his mother in Atlanta, less than ten miles away at the time the letter was sent, "There was not an officer or man in this Army who ever dreamed of Johnston falling back this far or ever doubted he would attack when the proper time came. But I think he has been woefully outgeneraled and has made a losing bargain." Another indictment of Johnston came from W.C.P. Breckinridge (cousin of the former vice president, John C. Breckinridge), who commanded a regiment in Wheeler's cavalry during the Atlanta campaign. With the bluster and indignation that come with the advantage of hindsight, the cavalry officer wrote, "(I)t was the fate of the Southern armies to confront armies larger, better equipped, and admirably supplied. Unless we could by activity, audacity, aggressiveness, and skill overcome these advantages it was a mere matter of time as to the certain result. It was therefore the first requisite of a Confederate general that he should be willing to meet his antagonist on these unequal terms, and on such terms make fight. He must of



necessity take great risks and assume grave responsibilities. While these differences between the two armies that confronted each other in the mountains of North Georgia existed, they were no greater than usually existed, and for which every Confederate general must be presumed to have prepared." Perhaps the best indication of the dissatisfaction of Johnston's superiors with his handling of the Atlanta campaign is that the Confederate government was willing to replace Johnston with John Bell Hood, effective as a subordinate but seriously lacking as an army commander, who was chosen as Johnston's replacement in spite of Robert E. Lee's refusal to endorse Hood and despite Lee's veiled assertion that William Hardee was more worthy of this command.

No matter the opinion of Johnston's performance in the Atlanta campaign, the essential contribution of the Confederate government to Sherman's success should be acknowledged.

Replacing Johnston with Hood probably accelerated the timetable for the fall of Atlanta. Davis and the rest of the Confederate hierarchy wanted a commander who would not allow Atlanta to fall without a fight. In Hood this is precisely what they received, and with disastrous consequences. Had Johnston remained in command of the Army of Tennessee, it is not inconceivable that Sherman would have had to lay lengthy siege to Atlanta in much the same way that Grant was stalled outside Petersburg. Protracted twin sieges would have fueled dissatisfaction among the Northern electorate and likely led to Lincoln's defeat in the 1864 election and possibly a conclusion to the war which would have been favorable to the South. Although the war effort from the Union perspective was in reality going well, the war-weary Northern citizens were questioning whether the effort was worth the costs. When Atlanta fell into Union possession, the people in the North were given their first real hope that the war would soon reach its end with a Northern victory, which also gave them reason to continue the war and the Lincoln administration. This first true glimpse of the war's end and the accompanying confidence in the Lincoln administration came when Sherman telegraphed Halleck on September 3, 1864, "So Atlanta is ours, and fairly won." Sherman's handling of the drive to Atlanta was superb, and no assessment of his performance should be diminished by any shortcomings on the part of the enemy. While it was Sherman's good fortune that the Confederate government became disenchanted with Johnston and replaced him with Hood, thereby hastening the fall of Atlanta, it was Sherman who brought about this situation. From the beginning of the Atlanta campaign, Sherman kept the pressure on his adversary and, other than at Cassville, gave Johnston no opening for the attack on a part of the Union force Johnston hoped for. Sherman also deftly anticipated his opponent's thrusts and took steps to thwart them, as at Pickett's Mill. While it is perhaps more appropriate to call the entire Atlanta campaign the decisive battle of the Civil War, because of the desire to confer this designation on a single battle, and because the battle of Rocky Face Ridge was the first battle in the campaign and set the pattern for the whole campaign, this battle is offered as the decisive battle of the Civil War. The tactics Sherman developed in the battle of Rocky Face Ridge were applied with great effectiveness throughout the drive to Atlanta. Sherman skillfully exploited the advantages at his disposal and, save for one glaring and costly exception, adeptly and wisely employed maneuver rather than assault to attain objectives and to compel Johnston to withdraw closer to the ultimate objective, Atlanta. Sherman's Atlanta campaign, a lance into the heart of the Confederacy, resulted in the capture of Atlanta, Lincoln's re-election, and the continued prosecution of the Civil War until Northern victory brought about restoration of the Union. All of this started with the battle of Rocky Face Ridge.

Most of the information in this article is from volume 3 of Shelby Foote's *The Civil War: A Narrative* and from volume IV of *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*. The maps are from volume 3 of Shelby Foote's *The Civil War: A Narrative*. The inspiration for this article came from a chapter in *How Great Generals Win* by Bevin Alexander. This book was given to me by Jon Thompson, who won it in the monthly Roundtable raffle. (So do not underestimate the benefits of the Roundtable book raffles.)

The articles from this and the December Chargers are parts 1 and 4, respectively, of a four part series on Sherman and his Atlanta campaign. All four parts, along with maps, can be found on our website [www.clevelandcivilwarroundtable.com](http://www.clevelandcivilwarroundtable.com).

Dave Carrino is a long time member of the Roundtable. He served as President in the 2005-6 year. Dave is a biochemist and Research Professor of Biology at Case Western Reserve University. Perhaps Dave's proudest moment came recently when he became a grandfather.

## Suggested Reading on William Tecumseh Sherman

William Tecumseh Sherman, *Memoirs*,  
Noah Andre Trudeau, *Southern Storm: Sherman's March to the Sea*  
Nathanial Cheairs Hughes, Jr., *Bentonville: The Final Battle of Sherman and Johnston*  
Burke Davis, *Sherman's March*  
Anne Bailey, *The Chessboard of War: Sherman and Hood in the Autumn Campaigns of 1864*  
John Barrett, *Sherman's March Through the Carolinas*  
Albert Castel, *Decision in the West: The Atlanta Campaign of 1864*  
B.H. Liddell Hart, *Sherman*  
Charles Bracelen Flood, *Grant and Sherman: The Friendship That Won the Civil War*  
Steven Woodworth, ed., *Grant's Lieutenants*  
Michael Fellman, *Citizen Sherman: A Life of William Tecumseh Sherman*  
Lloyd Lewis, *Sherman, Fighting Prophet*  
John F. Marszalek, *Sherman: A Soldier's Passion for Order*

E.L.Doctorow, *The March* (Fiction)  
Margaret Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind* (Fiction)

## Ohio Civil War 150

Check out [ohiocivilwar150.org](http://ohiocivilwar150.org), a collaboration of the Ohio Historical Society, Cleveland State University's Center for Public History and Digital Humanities, and the Ohio Humanities Council. In one location, you can access much information about the Civil War, Ohio's role in it, and its effect on the state. It has news and a calendar of events. There are links to collections and exhibits, discussions, and more. Here are a few events coming up this month:

January 11: Abraham Lincoln Conversation Series, Dayton, Ohio, 1 pm and 7 pm.  
January 17: Cincinnati Open House Event, Harriet Beecher Stowe House, 4 pm.  
February 8: Abraham Lincoln Conversation Series, Dayton, Ohio, 1 pm and 7 pm.  
February 21: The Life of POWs at Johnson's Island Civil War Prison, 2 pm.

## NEXT MONTH

**THE 26TH OHIO VOLUNTEER INFANTRY:  
THE GROUNDHOG REGIMENT**

**JEFF HILL**