

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2026, ROUNDTABLE MEETING

Our February 2026 meeting will be on Monday, February 23, 2026, at 6:30 pm at the lower level of the Farmington Library, on the corner of Grand River and Farmington Road. Our guest speaker, Jack Dempsey, well-known Civil War author, with an appearance on C-SPAN, will begin around 7:00 pm, after our 6:30 pm business meeting.

MEMBER RENEWAL

The MRRT celebrates its 66th year in 2026 – and now is a wonderful time to show your support by renewing your membership! (Or become a new member!). Membership is \$25 a year – or \$5 for students. **Checks should be made out to the NEW treasurer, Jim Burroughs** (the bank does not like checks made out to the RoundTable) and can be mailed to his home at **1632 North Silvery Lane, Dearborn, MI 48128.** We will gladly accept cash at our meetings. The dues are used to pay our expenses, mostly outside speaker-related, and contributions to battlefield preservation.

ROUNDTABLE WEBSITE

The Roundtable has a great website, created by our friend, Gerald Furi. We are no longer connected to the Farmington Library. The website is: <https://www.mrrt.us> Please note that the s after http is necessary to get on the website. The website is well worth visiting.

FEBRUARY 2026 SPEAKER – JACK DEMPSEY – PLYMOUTH, MI

The Roundtable welcomes Jack Dempsey as our February 2026 speaker, presenting “*Radical of Radicals: Austin Blair—Civil War Governor in His Own Words.*”

Austin Blair (1818-1894) was the Republican Governor of Michigan during the Civil War. He was a formidable opponent of slavery and secession. He and the Michigan legislature sent the first Western regiment to the scene of combat in mid-May 1861. He also worked to give women and blacks the right to vote and abolish capital punishment.

Jack’s new book, “*Radican of Radicals: Austin Blair-Civil War Governor-In His Own Wors*” will be available for purchase at our meeting. Sales assist his Antietam monument project.

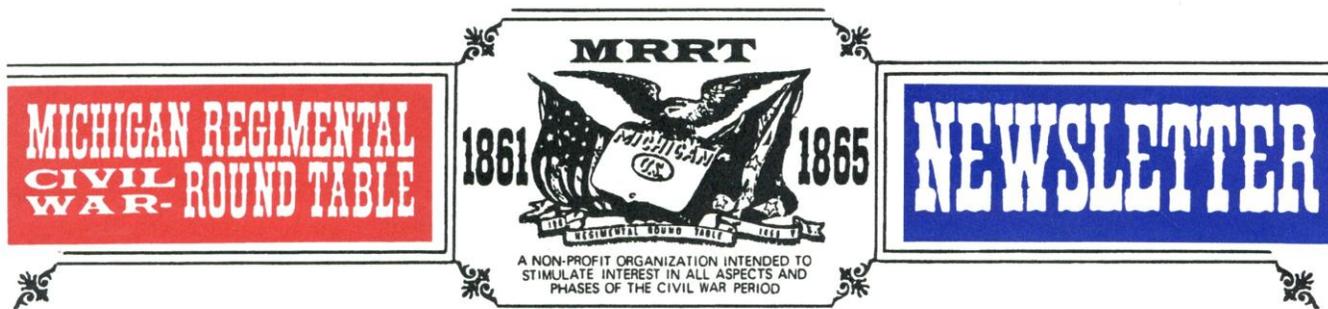
Jack is an award-winning author specializing in the Civil War, and Michigan history and culture. From Detroit, he is a graduate of Michigan State and George Washington University. He is a retired attorney.

He chaired Michigan’s Civil War Sesquicentennial Committee, led the Michigan Historical Commission, and served on the Black Historic Sites Committee of the Detroit Historical Society.

He is working to place a monument at Antietam to recognize Michigan’s contribution in the 1862 battle. Jack has authored several books to help raise funds for the monument. The Michigan Civil War Association manages fundraising. **This will be an outstanding presentation on Monday evening, February 23j, 2026!** We look forward to seeing you.

The Return of Questions and Answers!! This month the Questions pertain to common soldiers.

1. What was the nickname of the small kit that soldiers carried which included needles, thread, and a thimble?
2. How many bullets did a Union soldier carry in his cartridge box?
3. How much money would it cost a draftee to hire a substitute to go to war in his place?
4. In a normal company of one hundred men, how man privates were there?



5. In camps on both sides what was reveille normally played?
6. According to regulations, how many men could sleep in a Sibley tent? Also, in what type of pattern were soldiers supposed to sleep in a Sibley tent?

Our thanks to Old Sarge for his help with these questions.

Civil War Essentials -Albert Pike and the Confederate Indian Soldiers of Pea Ridge

The *January 2020 MRRT Newsletter* featured an article about the Native Americans who formed Company K of the 1st Michigan Sharpshooters. **Before this unit was formed, there was a substantial Indian force committed to fight for the Confederacy west of the Mississippi.** Its commander was Albert Pike, a large, mercurial man with a diverse background and interests.



Albert Pike's Background

Albert Pike (photo) was born in Boston in 1809. An accomplished student, he was admitted to Harvard but could not afford to attend. Pike moved westward over the next several years, first to Nashville then to St. Louis. After involvement in a series of grueling trapping and trading expeditions to Texas and New Mexico, **he finally settled down in Little Rock, Arkansas.** He taught school there and became involved in the newspaper business. He bought the paper he wrote for, then began studying to be a lawyer and passed the bar in 1837.

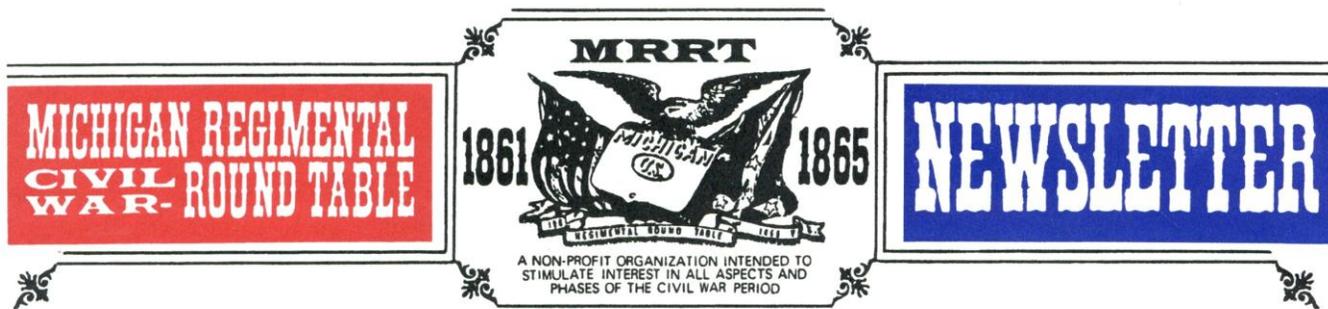
During the Mexican War, he joined an Arkansas cavalry regiment and attained the rank of captain. He fought at the Battle of Buena Vista, but shortly afterward, he was discharged after a disagreement with his superior officer. **Returning to his law practice, he often represented Indian tribes in disputes with the government;** he once won a judgement of \$140,000 for the Creek Indians. As early as 1854, he publicly declared his belief that states' rights superseded Federal law and that secession was justified if those rights were threatened. A giant of a man with a bushy beard, he wrote poetry and a set of patriotic (Confederate) lyrics to "Dixie." By the time of the war, he had become an acknowledged leader of Freemasonry.

Confederate Envoy to the Native American Tribes

At the beginning of the war, Pike was appointed Confederate envoy to the Native American tribes. He managed to secure treaties with the leaders of several "civilized" tribes, the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, and Seminole – all tribes which had been forced from their Eastern homelands to the Indian Territory in the first half of the 19th Century. He promised them money, presents, and the possible creation of a separate Indian state if the Confederacy was victorious. Some of the tribal leaders were major slaveholders like white plantation owners in the south. The Confederacy valued the Indians' large herds of cattle in addition to their possible military contribution.

Not all members of the tribes agreed with the idea of siding with the rebels, however, and there were several battles between factions in late 1861 with the pro-Confederate majority prevailing. **Pike, now a brigadier general, raised several regiments of Indian troops – a total of more than two thousand men, although the number present at any time fluctuated as warriors came and went as they wished.** This approach would prove to be flawed as his force was never truly integrated into the Confederate army with the discipline that process entailed.

Confederates Move into Eastern Missouri – After Battle of Wilson's Creek



The Confederate thrust into eastern Missouri following their victory at Wilson's Creek in August 1861 had been turned back and Sterling Price's force had again retreated to the southwest part of the State. **In mid-February 1862, the Union army under Samuel Curtis began an advance into southwest Missouri.** Once they accomplished that, they pressed on into Arkansas pursuing "Pap" Price's force. Ben McCulloch, who had been in command at Wilson's Creek (*Sept. 2019 MRRT Newsletter*), was also in Arkansas. He and Price soon renewed their rivalry which had festered before that battle. **Asked to choose between them, President Davis instead sent Earl Van Dorn to command the newly created Trans-Mississippi Department No. 2** (Missouri, Arkansas, the Indian territory, and part of northern Louisiana). Van Dorn's force totaled at least 16,000 men (but fewer weapons) and sixty guns and included Price's and McCulloch's troops, plus Albert Pike's Indians.

Van Dorn vowed to rout the insolent Yankees under Curtis and then march back up into Missouri and capture St. Louis. Curtis had deployed a screen of scouts, including "Wild Bill" Hickok, which alerted him that Van Dorn was coming. He ordered his scattered force of about 10,500 men and 50 guns to concentrate at Pea Ridge, Ark. Union General Franz Sigel, failing to move quickly, was nearly cut off by the Confederates and was forced to execute a fighting retreat to reach the Union position; fighting retreats seemed to be the one military skill at which Sigel excelled!

Battle of Pea Ridge, Arkansas – March 7, 1862

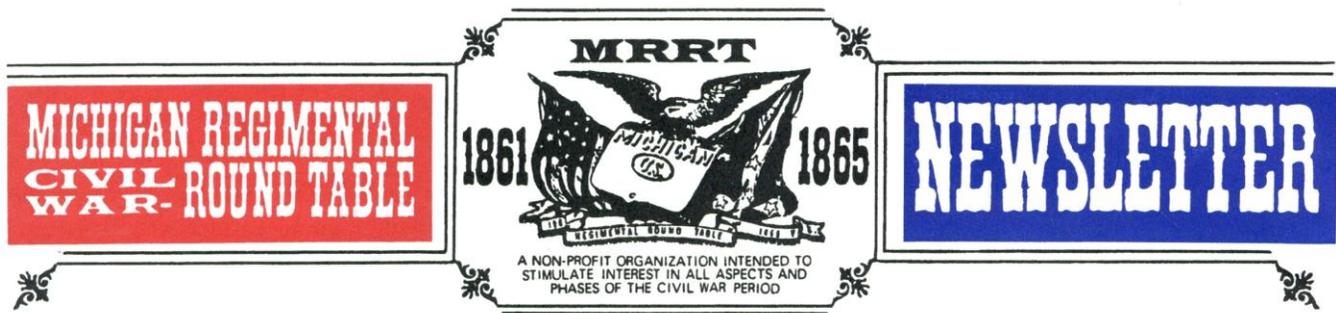
Pea Ridge itself was a long irregular escarpment running east-west. It was located just west of the "Wire" Road which ran alongside the telegraph line from St. Louis to Ft. Smith, Arkansas. The **Elkhorn Tavern (photo)**, a 2-story frame building, was located along the Wire Road southeast of Pea Ridge.

Curtis, a military engineer, constructed defensive fortifications along Little Sugar Creek south of the Pea Ridge because he expected Van Dorn to attack from the south.

Van Dorn approached on March 6 in bitter weather after chasing Sigel. He recognized the strength of the Union position. **Rather than assault it directly, Van Dorn decided to wheel his army around to the west of Curtis' line and attack from behind on both sides of Pea Ridge.** That night, leaving a line of campfires burning south of Curtis' entrenchments to deceive the Yankees, he moved McCulloch and Pike up to attack the enemy's right rear (near Leetown, a small settlement now gone) while Price swung north of Pea Ridge to attack their left rear near Elkhorn Tavern.



A good plan in theory, it assumed that Price's exhausted troops could cover the long distance required to pass Pea Ridge in snowy wintry weather by daybreak. It also required that Curtis not react quickly enough to turn around and face north before the rebels could attack. **Neither assumption was held true.** Price's weary men finally approached the Elkhorn Tavern around 10 AM and Union scouts had again warned Curtis so that he was able to start repositioning his troops in time.



Van Dorn was ill, having been soaked while fording an icy river during the previous march. **As a result, although both wings of the outnumbered Union army were pushed slowly backward in desperate fighting all day on March 7, both managed to just hold on.** Curtis used the advantage of interior lines to shuttle parts of his force to where they were most needed at any time.

Aftermath of Battle -March 8, 1862

By the morning of March 8, the bulk of both armies had shifted to the Elkhorn Tavern front. Van Dorn tried to renew his attacks, but his troops were tired, discouraged, and low on food and ammunition. Lack of competent staff work caused the Confederate supply train to be mistakenly left miles away, south of the original Union position, during night march. In addition, **most of Pike's Indian soldiers decided that making frontal assaults, especially against artillery ("wagon guns"), was not to their liking so they had left the battlefield on the evening of March 7.**

Finally, the deaths of popular Ben McCulloch and his replacement, James McIntosh, and the capture of Louis Hebert on the previous day left the Confederates with a leadership void. Curtis sensed that his opportunity had arrived and began a successful counterattack starting with a massive artillery bombardment. Despite Van Dorn's efforts, his army fell back with most going east across the Wire Road. **Pea Ridge was a Union victory which Van Dorn refused to acknowledge.**

Battle of Pea Ridge Ended Confederate Thrust into Missouri

This Civil War battle was unusual because it was fought in wintery conditions, with the Yankees facing north and Confederates south, and the Federals were outnumbered. **Pea Ridge ended the immediate Confederate threat to Missouri.** It received less notice in the North than it should have because the battle between the *Monitor* and *Virginia* took place one day later.

Albert Pike – After the Battle of Pea Ridge

Pike's Indians returned to their tribal lands. Some continued to fight for the Confederacy. **They would suffer for choosing the wrong side – retribution by the US during and after the war*.** Meanwhile, the Confederate command accused Albert Pike of mismanaging funds he controlled, and his Indians were accused of scalping about forty dead and wounded Yankees. There were Union soldiers scalped, but Van Dorn claimed the German soldiers in the Union army had also committed atrocities. Pike, fearing arrest, deserted the army. He was arrested later, held in Texas then released.

Just as in the Mexican War, his Civil War combat experience was over after one battle. Pike returned to his law practice and Freemasonry. There were rumors that he participated in the Klan after the war. He died in 1891.

**This issue has returned to prominence with the July 2020 US Supreme Court 5-4 ruling that the Creek (Muskogee) tribe still had certain legal rights in a large area of eastern Oklahoma taken from them after the war*

Quiz Answers:

1. "Housewife."
2. 40
3. \$300
4. 82
5. 5:00 AM
6. 20. Whel-spoke fashion with their feet toward the center – (sounds complicated!)