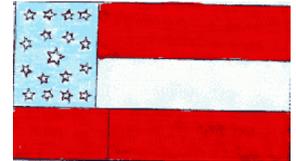




# The Vidette

## CALIFORNIA DIVISION

### Sons of Confederate Veterans



The J. P. Gillis Flag

Division Newsletter Issue 2. Published by Division Adjutant Vernon R. Padgett, 27 August 2002 [vp09@earthlink.net](mailto:vp09@earthlink.net)

## New SCV California Camp: CSS Virginia, Camp 2062 Ventura County

### CALIFORNIA NOW HAS NINE CAMPS

By Ken Koch, Commander and Life Member

CSS Virginia Camp 2062 was organized 20 July 2002 in Thousand Oaks, Ventura County, to serve the needs of members in the North and West San Fernando Valley as well as Ventura County.

Founding members came from Camp 1631 Santa Barbara, Camp 1208 Los Angeles, Camp 584 Headquarters, or, were new to SCV.

We named the Camp in honor of the 320 soldiers, sailors and Marines of the Confederate Military who served as Ship's Company from February to May 1862.

In 1862 the Confederate Navy was only a small force of naval and Marine personnel. This made it necessary to request soldiers to volunteer to serve aboard the CSS Virginia as gunners and riflemen.

On 8 March 1862 the Confederate Navy steamed out of Norfolk, Virginia with the most advanced naval vessel of the time.

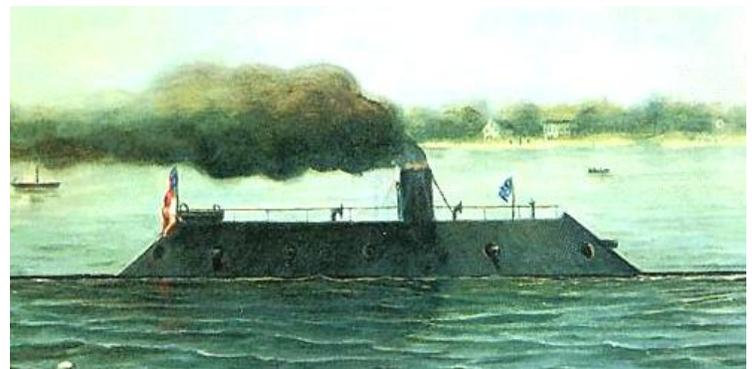
No longer would wooden planking and Oak hulls protect sailors from the cannonade and broadside of another vessel the days of "Iron Men and Wooden Ships" was passing into history due in no small part to the innovative and creative minds of the people of the Confederate States of America.

On that day in 1862, all ships in all navies of the world were obsolete.

Camp 2062 strives to preserve the memory of their forefathers in a struggle to preserve the freedom of the people and the rights, which they held as their

inalienable rights: To protect their homes and be allowed to live in peace.

For info: [SCVventuracounty@yahoo.com](mailto:SCVventuracounty@yahoo.com)



The CSS Virginia

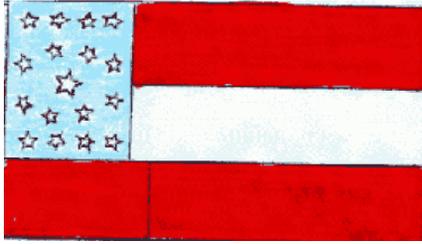
### The J. P. Gillis Flag, or the "Biderman" Flag of California

On 4 July 1861, at Sacramento, California, Major J. P. Gillis decided to celebrate not only America's independence from Britain, but also that of the South from the North.

At about 10 p.m., after an exhibition of fireworks, he unfurled a Confederate flag that had been wrapped around his walking stick, and marched up the boardwalk before the St. George Hotel at the corner of 4<sup>th</sup> and J Streets; most of those present appeared to be Southern sympathizers, pleased with the display of the flag.

Not all those viewing this scene approved of it, however: J. W. Biderman and Curtis Clark watched

with anger. After Major Gillis had demonstrated his feelings, Biderman and Clark followed him; Biderman approached Gillis, caught him by the throat with his left hand, and, with his right, tore the flag from the stick, and put it in his pocket.



The account of the incident in the Sacramento Daily Union did not reveal the relative sizes or ages of the two antagonists; the Major was apparently a fighter, and called out to the crowd for a knife, but, no one proffering a weapon, Biderman's assault was successful. He cried out that "no such flag as that could be carried in this town" in his presence, and left the scene, taking the flag with him.

Biderman subsequently brought a large number of friends to the St. George; they waved the flag and invited any "secessionists" to come and take it. No one tried. Major Gillis later "earnestly pled for the flag's return," but to no avail.

There seems to be no record of how or when, but the flag became the property of the California State Museum. The flag is made of silk, and is a variant of the first national flag, the Stars and Bars, of the Confederacy. The difference is, in place of the original seven stars in the canton, there are 17 white 5-pointed stars. Inscribed on the white bar in the middle is "Rebel Flag. Captured 4 July 1861. By Jack Biderman."

The display at the museum states that this is "the only known Confederate flag captured in California during the Civil War." It is truly a Californian flag, of unique design. Designated the "Biderman Flag," it might better be named for Major J. P. Gills, its owner.

The incident that occurred on the streets of California's capitol city on July 4, 1861, and the flag that brought it about, are prophetic and symbolic of the secessionist movement in the state: open advocacy and defence of the cause, defeat by a more powerful adversary, and all of this forgotten by history with only a battered *memento* remaining.

-- Laurence Talbott, *California in the War for Southern Independence*, xi-xii, Past Member Camp 1631, Santa Barbara.

**Note.** We thank Rich Studenick of the Richmond Howitzers for bringing the Democrat Platform issue to our attention. Compatriot Floyd Farrar, Camp 1742, Inland Empire took all photos in the last newsletter. Great work Floyd! -- Ed.

## Gun laws Irk U.S. Civil War actors

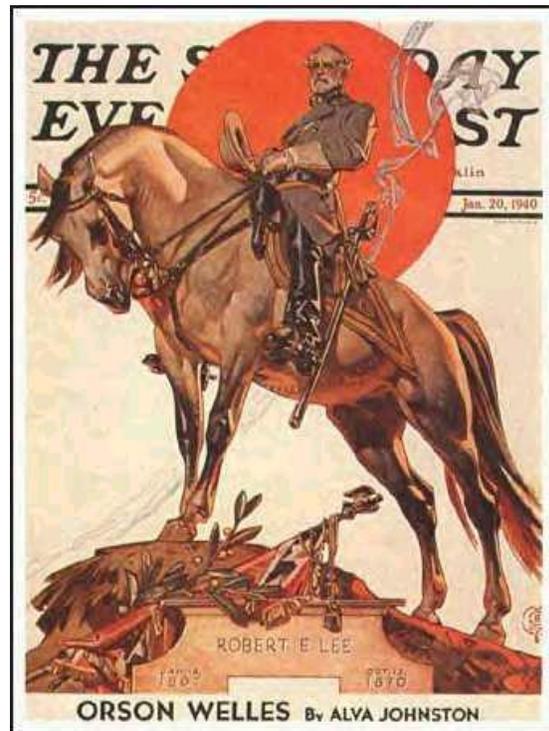
Barry Brown

THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Published 8/19/2002

TORONTO — Several hundred American Civil War enthusiasts are staying away from a re-enactment near Toronto this year rather than comply with a Canadian law that would require them to register their muskets at the border.

Descendents of the estimated 50,000 Canadians who fought in the Civil War — and other fans of American history — have been gathering for the past 12 years at a historic village to stage some of the most famous clashes between the Union and Confederate armies.



But this year's re-enactment of the 1862 Battle of Malvern Hill will go ahead without the usual contingent of about 300 Americans, said Robert Winninger, program officer at Westfield Heritage Village, about 60 miles southwest of Toronto.

"The problem is, under the new gun-control laws, most historical guns are not exempt and American re-enactors who want to bring them up have to fill out a number of forms" and pay a \$32 registration fee, he said.

Canada's 3-year-old national firearms law requires most gun-carrying visitors — typically hunters — to complete a nonresident firearms-declaration form, have it confirmed by a Customs officer and pay the fee.

"The Americans feel singled out," Mr. Winninger said. "Many said they didn't want to [fill out the forms and pay the fee] as a matter of principle."

Dennis Watson, one of the event's organizers, said Americans who oppose gun registration at home don't want to support it abroad. They also fear the information might be shared with U.S. authorities.

Andy Desjardins, a government-licensed firearms examiner and member of the American Civil War Historical Re-enactment Society, said guns made before 1898 are considered antique and are exempt.

But firearms and reproductions made after that are not, he said, and the government has ignored pleas to amend the law for re-enactors. In the United States, he said, muskets are not considered firearms.

Because anyone who handles a firearm requires a license, the law does not allow re-enactors to come to Canada unarmed and borrow their muskets in the country, he said.



Image and Flag by Brent Jacobs

Mr. Winninger said the law restricts percussive firearms but not cannons. "Since the Battle of Malvern was a big cannon battle, we'll still have a good show," he said.

Re-enactor Mike Lavis of Hamburg, N.Y., said like many Americans, it "pains" him not to attend the Westfield festival. For many years, members of his

49th New York Regiment have come to the event to enjoy the spirit and the company of their Canadian friends.

But since the new registration law came into effect, he and the other American re-enactors have staged a boycott.

Registering guns "goes against what we believe is American with our gun-ownership rights. Why should we pay someone for the right we have guaranteed in our Constitution?" he asked.

The single-loading, black-powder, percussive muskets they use are little more than "firecrackers," he said, and because guns, like flintlocks, are exempt, the Civil War re-enactors feel as if they've been targeted.

**[I thank Rich Studenick of the Richmond Howitzers for bringing this report to our attention—Ed.]**



## GRAPPLING HOOK SNAGGED AT HUNLEY SITE

**Civil War-era device may have been used to search for sub or used as anchor**

**Thursday, August 22, 2002**

**BY SCHUYLER KROFF  
Of The Post and Courier Staff**

Divers returning to the submarine H.L. Hunley wreck site have made a curious find: a Civil War-era grapple hook that may have been used by Union sailors to drag the sandy bottom in their search to locate the sub after it sank.

But it also could have been used as an impromptu anchor by the Hunley crew to stop the vessel from being pulled out to sea by changing tides, something that, if

true, could add a previously unknown capability to the sub.

Archaeologists aren't sure which option is more probable. They say the five-armed hook was found last week in a position consistent with its being an anchor, 18 feet directly off the bow and pointed right back at the sub.

"It makes an intriguing possibility, but none of it is definitive," Hunley project manager Bob Neyland said Wednesday.

The 3-foot-tall grapple, heavily laden with marine growth and clay, was resting about 10 feet down in the sea bed, which puts it at the same layer in the ocean strata as the Hunley was when it was recovered two years ago this month.

Divers using hand-held magnetometers found the grapple as part of a return trip this month to check out several metallic anomalies near the old wreck site. They had hoped to recover any lost pieces of the sub, including a missing section of the shroud that had guarded the propeller blade. The shroud piece wasn't found.

On the night of Feb. 17, 1864, the Hunley became the world's first sub to sink an enemy warship when it rammed a black powder charge into the Union blockade ship Housatonic, four miles out of Charleston Harbor. The Housatonic sank in less than five minutes, and the Hunley never returned.

Not long after the attack, the Navy ordered the sea bottom around the Housatonic dragged with hooks for a distance out to about 500 yards in an effort to find the elusive stealth weapon.

Using hooks similar to what was found this month "they should have come close to the Hunley if not right over it," Neyland said. At one point during the wartime search, hard-helmeted divers were put in the water when a hook snagged on something in the deep, but nothing related to the Hunley was found, Neyland said. If the Hunley did use an anchor, it would fall in line with one theory that the crew decided to stay near the battle site while

the tide changed so the hand-cranked vessel would have an easier trip back to shore.

A length of rope was found pushed up against the sub when it was recovered two years ago, but archaeologists aren't sure if that rope is related to the hook.

The grapple is being stored in a freshwater bath at the Warren Lasch Conservation Lab in North Charleston, where the sub is being conserved.

At least two other anomalies that bear investigating have been detected buried near the Hunley site, Neyland said.

The recent return dive was paid for in part by a \$15,000 donation from the National Underwater and Marine Agency, the nonprofit group set up by author Clive Cussler that helped find the sub in 1995.

The National Park Service also provided a \$5,000 battlefield grant, Neyland said.

Divers also report the site four miles off the coast is overrun with jellyfish. "I can still feel the scar across my face," said diver Harry Pecorelli, who got hit.

Learn more at the [Friends of the Hunley](#) web site

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## Letters to the Editor of *The Vidette*

### Regarding "The Flag Flap" --Unionist John Quimby

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To those with whom I am not yet acquainted, allow me to introduce myself. My name is John Quimby, and Mr. Padgett and I are both re-enactors. While Mr. Padgett is staunch in his southern heritage and point of view, I have often had the honor of engaging him in respectful discussions from my more northerly point of view. I am a direct descendent of several dedicated Yankee soldiers and I am proud to say so.

If you will forgive my intrusion into this forum, I wish to make my comments regarding the article on the Confederate Flag.

What my fellow democrats need to be informed of is that many generations of good Americans, south as well as north struggled to reunify this country as one nation in the aftermath of a bitter Civil War.

They should know that many veterans and sons of veterans of both sides worked together to establish a permanent peace. In light of the history of the world, this was quite an accomplishment.

It is therefore most honorable to include a symbol that now belongs to all Americans in a public display. While its meaning may be the subject of debate, it is undeniable that the flag of the Confederate States represents a significant portion of our American heritage.

If one needs a precedent on the flag issue one only need follow the example of President Lincoln. After Lee surrendered, he directed the band at the White House to play Dixie, declaring that it was now ours and fairly won. If the Southern national anthem belonged to all of us at that moment, why not the flag too?

I cannot forget the many Federal soldiers who died fighting for the cause of union, the end of slavery and the restoration of our country.

Because of this, I find it disturbing that the cause for which these volunteers gave their lives, the cause that today allows us to embrace all of our citizens and states as equals under law, would be interpreted in such a manner as to exclude honors to those who are now-- since 1865-- our fellow citizens. It might seem odd that I would say so.

But consider this: If a respectful public display in an appropriate place is not allowed, then what is left but tacky show or worse, the abuse of this symbol by those who would use it for hateful or divisive purposes. Further, I would point out that display in historic context reminds all Americans of the events of history that shaped our republic. This is not an object to fear, but an opportunity to inform.

Either we publicly maintain ownership of this flag in an honorable way, or we turn it over to the hooligans who abuse it. It is the individuals who would violate the law under this flag who should be removed. Not a flag that belongs to all of us and which should be protected as such.

From my point of view, attempting to erase this part of our history or falsely

equating 1860 America with Nazi Germany only makes it easier to forget the Americans who fought to save and then restore the union. And it is an act of dishonor to all of our good citizens who struggled to reunite our country and who have fought to preserve, protect and defend the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic, ever since.

I will forward these comments as directed in your newsletter. I thank you for your indulgence.

John Quimby

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## Reply from Compatriot Louis Olker

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We have all made our feelings known. We agree that the CSA Battle Flag and First National Flag are historical American flags. We also agree that every person who wants to fly those flags on his or her property have the right to do so.



Woodcut from William Faulkner's *The Unvanquished*

We also agree that those flags have a rightful place at historical sites and at historical events. We all agree that the flags have been misused from the 1950s on by people who wished them to represent certain

political and racial symbols (the KKK used the U.S. flag for half a century ... go figure!).

Beyond that: Let us agree to disagree.

"We" (SCV and SUV) have come a long way (and very fast) in California, at least, to realize that there is more that we share in common than anything that would divide us. That we respect and honor the memory of our ancestors and those principles and the states for which they fought should be foremost in our thoughts and deeds.

We are ALL descendents of soldiers who were a part of American history. And while that war is over, we have a right to express our pride, in many forms that that might take, in our ancestor's role in that war.

I am amazed at the shared e-mail between SCV and SUV members, as opposed to a couple or three years ago! And that both organizations have extended, in the past two years, invitations to members of the other organization to their annual convention is most commendable.

In the North Bay and Northern California, the SUV and SCV have worked together to place markers for Confederate and Union veterans whose graves were unmarked. And at CSA memorial programs Confederate flags flew! And they flew with no complaint from city officials or otherwise.

It is my hope that we get beyond the prejudice against "rebel" flags and gray uniforms because of the thousands of young men who died in those uniforms under those flags. They are a part of our history.

Though they tried to secede, by act of Congress, they are "Americans."

Let us let go of the symbols that divide us and concentrate on those symbols that unite us: whether it be a broken and defaced headstone of a Union soldier, or the daughter of a Confederate soldier.

Your Obedient Servant,  
Lou Olker, Adjutant  
Gen. George Blake Cosby Camp 1627

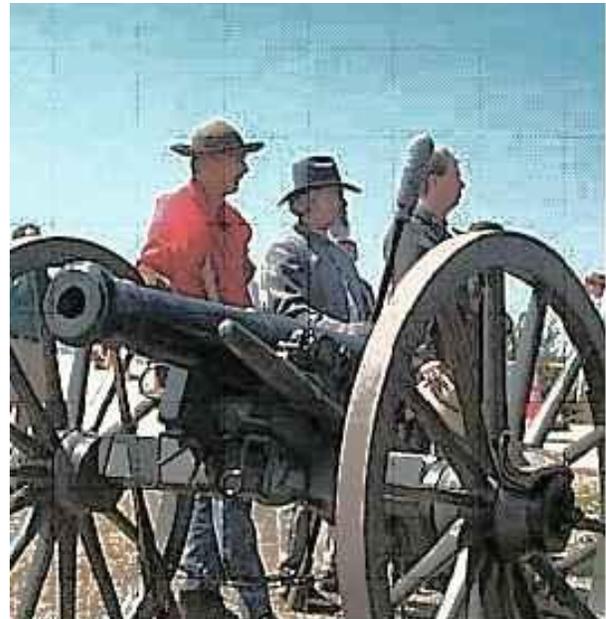
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**From Kermit Albritton--**

"I generally don't take too hard a look at the graphic expressions of ignorance by Democratic radicals, because most of the time theirs is not terribly well thought out and it appeals to an uninformed Majority who has been indoctrinated with "tainted" perspectives in the first place. Education is the key to undoing the "blinding binders" of the past." – **Kermit Albritton, Provisional Commander, SCV Camp Modesto**  
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**From Bill Olinger—**

"I think I'll finally get around to changing my party affiliation from Democrat to Republican ... Equating Confederate flags with swastikas etc. is going too far."-- **Bill Olinger, School Administrator**  
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**Special Birthday Greetings** to  
Compatriot Bryan W. Padgett, Camp 1458, P.G.T.  
Beauregard, Sumter South Carolina. Happy 40<sup>th</sup>!  
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**Confederate Artillerymen defend their homes and families from the Yankee invaders (Photo by James A. Neal)**  
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**Image Credits This Issue: Commander Ken Koch supplied the CSS Virginia image page 1; Saturday Evening Post 1940 Cover, page 2, courtesy of Commander Joe Alarid; silk ANV 3d Richmond Clothing Depot flag on page 3 is an example of Division Commander Brent Jacob's excellent work (see future issues for a story on him); cannon crew photo above by Floyd Farrar.**  
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**SCV Credit Card available**

APR 12.65%. Confederate flag logo, with soldier image, VISA. I have three applications left—contact me at [vp09@earthlink.net](mailto:vp09@earthlink.net) --Ed.  
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