

>> From the Library of Congress in Washington, DC.

>> This is Guy Lamolinara at the Library of Congress. For the past 10 years book lovers of all ages have gathered in Washington, DC to celebrate the written word at the Library of Congress National Book Festival. The 2011 Festival, our 11th, which is free and open to the public, runs for 2 days this year, Saturday, September 24th and Sunday, September 25th. The festival will take place between 9th and 14th Streets on the National Mall rain or shine. Hours are 10:00 am to 5:30 pm, Saturday the 24th and 1:00 pm to 5:30 pm on Sunday the 25th. For more details visit loc.gov/bookfest. And now it is my please to introduce Adam Goodheart who's latest book 1861: The Civil War Awakening has been published by Alfred A. Knopf. Adam is a historian, journalist and travel writer and is the Director of the Washington College C.V. Starr Center for the Study of the American Experience. Goodheart's book received a rave review and a cover story in the New York Times book review which said that of the dilutes of Civil War books that are likely to be published marking the war's 150th anniversary, few will be as exhilarating as 1861. Adam Goodheart, thank you so much for joining us.

>> Guy, thanks for having me.

>> In 1995 a bibliographer had estimated even back then that more than 50,000 books had already been written about the Civil War. What made you think there was still more to be told and why did you focus on the year 1861?

>> Well, you know, it's a little bit daunting to set out and send one's own book into that fray of other books that are out there. As you say there's been actually more than 1 book published on the Civil War for every day since the surrender at Appomattox. So it's as I said a little bit daunting. But, you know, I really believe that with these great stories in history like the great human stories in general, they can be told and retold and examined fresh for each new generation. Each new generation of Americans finds new meaning in the story like the Civil War. And in particular I felt like so many of those 50,000 books focused on sort of whose cavalry went charging over which hill at the Battle of Antietam. Books that treat the Civil War as what one writer has called America's great 19th century Super Bowl. And those are the details that quite frankly always make my eyes glaze over a little bit. The kind of history that I like to write is the history of what was really going on in people's hearts and minds at a moment. What was it like to be alive at that particular juncture in American history when everything was up for grabs and the only certainty was uncertainty? So that's part of the reason. Another reason is that I actually made a discovery with my students just as I was about to set out and write this book. I made a discovery with my students from Washington College out on the eastern shore of Maryland where our college is in an old plantation house. We found a bundle of letters that went back to the spring of 1861 up in the attic of this old house. Although it sounds like one of those too good to be true stories. That actually did happen. We undid this bundle of letters and found in it a remarkable story of a man who was an officer in the Army at that moment, trying to choose his loyalties. So all those

things sort of conspired, came together to encourage me to write the book.

>> That brings up a good question. You know, one thing I thought that was so interesting about your book was that you really didn't focus on the most famous people of the war. But you focused on people that in many cases we know little if anything about today. Why did you do that?

>> Well, you know, again I think I was trying to make it fresh. And I also, I tend to approach history coming out of a journalism background, as you know I approach history sort of as a journalist. What a journalist does when he starts working on a story as he goes to a place, he walks around, he keeps his eyes open, he keeps his ears open. And he finds the people who seem most interesting. And he finds the story lines that seem most revealing. And then he just follows them wherever they'll lead. So that's sort of how I approached this book. I set out to immerse myself in this particular moment in time, 1861. And I just started reading around. I started listening to the voices from that time. And the voices that I found most compelling I said, there's a story here. And I'm going to follow this person, follow this thread wherever it leads. And in some cases of course I ended up writing a good bit about Abraham Lincoln and I hope giving a somewhat new version of Lincoln from the one that's often been told in the past. My Lincoln is a Lincoln who bumbles and stumbles his way through the presidency at first before finding his footing. But I also as you say ended up engaging with some little known characters. And those to me ended up really being some of the most fascinating figures, to me at least. And I hope to readers as well as I wrote the book.

>> One of those was Elmer Ellsworth. Can you tell us a little bit about him?

>> Yeah, Elmer Ellsworth, he's one of those characters who usually gets a couple of sentences in the typical big history of the Civil War. He was a very close friend of Abraham Lincoln who was also one of the very first union soldiers, the very first union officer to be killed in the war. He died almost literally minutes into the union invasion of Virginia, [inaudible] into Virginia. And Ellsworth was sort of a remarkable figure in American popular culture even before the war began. He started a movement known as the Zouave movement. And the Zouaves were these special troops patterned after French Algerian soldiers who wore big baggy sort of harem style pants and wore little feathers on their heads when they marched off into battle. And Ellsworth had become fascinated a couple of years before the war with this style of soldiering which involved not just these funny costumes but a lot of sort of gymnastic back flipping and bayonet twirling. I call them sort of a cross between Seal Team 6 and the Cirque du Soleil. They were these wonderfully gymnastic special forces, but soldiers. And so Ellsworth had created a special corps of these troops that toured the United States the summer before the Civil War began performing to crowds of tens of thousands of people. They performed on the lawn of the White House before President Buchanan. And they became these sort of national stars and sex symbols. And then Ellsworth became close friends with Lincoln, almost a member of the Lincoln family. Accompanied the Lincolns to Washington. And when the union troops crossed over into Virginia, he and a special regiment of

Zouaves were among the first troops to cross over. They were actually Zouaves he had recruited from the ranks of the New York City Fire Department. And he was killed, I won't give the story away, but he was killed very suddenly, very tragically and dramatically in a sort of a point blank double homicide, almost in the very first moments of the war. One of the things that fascinated me is first of all the exuberant and colorful figure that Ellsworth himself, extraordinarily charismatic person and a very strange little man quite frankly. But also the affect that this had on Abraham Lincoln. You know, in the years to come over 600,000 Americans would die. There wouldn't be a single family or household in America untouched by that tragedy of war very directly. And the Lincoln family, the Lincoln household was one of the very first families to be touched personally by the loss of the Civil War. And I think that's something that's very significant that hasn't really been written about enough.

>> You also focus on smaller decisions and how they really had such a profound impact on the course of the war. Can you tell us a little about some of those small decisions and what as their cumulative effect?

>> Yeah, well there's so many things at a juncture in American history like 1861 when so many things are up for grabs. Where history is changing, history is being made very, very quickly. Sometimes little decisions have a way of amplifying themselves. And so they can bring out enormous changes. And one of these is the story of the freeing of the very first slaves in the Civil War. And this is a story that I think is not [inaudible] either a lot of people have the image of Lincoln waving his pen and freeing the slaves with the Emancipation Proclamation a year and a half into the war. But in fact that process really began in the very first weeks of the war in early 1861 at a place called Fort Monroe Virginia. Where the commander, General Benjamin Butler was presented with a dilemma when 3 young African Americans, escaped slaves, made their way into the union lines, presented themselves at this Fort as fugitives. And he had to decide what to do with them. It was a big dilemma for Butler because of course Lincoln had stated in his Inaugural Address that this is not a war to end slavery. This is not a war to disturb as he called it the domestic institutions of the south, wherever they exist. It's simply a war to restore the union and we will enforce the fugitive slave codes, federal fugitive slave codes wherever they need to be enforced. Well but here's Butler isolated in a lonely Fort in the middle of confederate territory looking at these 3 men who had been used until recently to help construct confederate fortifications. They'd been put to work constructing earthworks. And he thought how can I send these men back and send them to work for the enemy? Send them back to help the confederate cause. And so the dilemma wasn't as clear in that moment as it perhaps should have been according to Lincoln administration for Butler. And the decision he ended up making was one that caused vast repercussions and really as I tell the story in the book, I believe did more to bring about the end of slavery even in Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation did the following year.

>> Okay. When I went to school and probably you did too we always learned about Fort Sumter and that was described as the beginning of the war. But

one thing we never were told which you proclaim in your book is that it was the confederacies biggest blunder. Why do you say that?

>> Well it's usually presented as a confederate victory. After all they did manage to dislodge the union force that had been holding Fort Sumter in the very center of Charleston Harbor, the epicenter of secession for the past 6 months. But on the other hand in winning that little two acre pile of rocks with a fort on it I really believe they may have lost the war. Because what they did in being the first to open fire on the north was they created what I call America's first 911 moment or America's first Pearl Harbor moment. One of those moments when the country comes under attack. And suddenly all previous political divisions within the north are at least momentarily suspended in this sort of flash of shock and outrage and desire for vengeance. And that's exactly what happened. The north had been very divided over whether or not to take up arms against the south, whether to compromise, whether to let the south simply succeed. And when they saw the American flag being fired upon by rebels, by an overwhelming force of rebels attacking a tiny force of U.S. Army troops, suddenly everything changed. And people, almost simultaneously across the country, thanks to the new invention of the telegraph, experienced this national trauma and rallied around the stars and stripes and decided to fight. So in that moment I think that while Jefferson Davis probably thought that he was gaining a victory, he may have lost the South's best chance for independence.

>> Okay. Would you say there's an incident that would be the North's biggest blunder and did it somehow prolong the war?

>> Well I don't think that perhaps there's one incident similar to that that would be the North's biggest blunder [inaudible]. I do think that it was a big mistake and Lincoln has to bear some of the responsibility for this. It was the biggest, it was a big mistake not to start to mobilize more quickly. And, you know, Lincoln only called up 75,000 troops after Fort Sumter. He only accepted 75,000 enlistees at a point when he could have gotten certainly a million if not more volunteers. That's how riled up the people of the North were at that moment. And he decided to honor the law that said he could only call up 75,000 in case of emergency. And the South meanwhile had already done much more to mobilize. And so the union wasn't able to strike the kind of early decisive blow that many in the North felt that it should be able to strike. So I think that was definitely something that held the North back.

>> Sort of like Colin Powell's theory about overwhelming, using overwhelming force right at the very beginning.

>> Exactly. Yeah, I think Colin Powell probably would have done things differently. Although in fairness to Lincoln it is a little bit hard to see what he could have done differently because this was a point we tend to forget in American history when the federal government was so tiny before the Civil War began. The entire Army was only about 17,000 officers and men scattered mostly in frontier forts throughout the West. The entire war department bureaucracy was fewer than 100 employees. And so suddenly this tiny bureaucracy, this tiny federal government had to deal with managing a vast war effort. And to say the least it wasn't

equipped for that. It literally didn't have the equipment, the guns and the swords and the uniforms to offer these enlistees. So to be fair it's understandable it took them a little while to mobilize.

>> Right. I know you did a lot of your research here at the Library of Congress. Can you tell us about some of the most surprising discoveries you made here?

>> Yes well I really, I wrote about 99 percent of the book sitting in desk number 12 in the main reading room of the Library of Congress. The staff there were so great that after a while they just knew that I wanted that desk. And if I came in a little bit late in the morning they would put a stack of books on it to reserve it for me. It was very nice. But there's just surprising and amazing things that you can find in the Library of Congress selection. One of these was I was in the manuscript division one day and I was going through the papers of Major Robert Anderson who was the union commander at Fort Sumter when it came under attack by the rebels. And there was a very elegant sheet of a sort of lavender blue note paper. And it had been handed to Anderson late at night on the night of April 12, 1861 by two aides to Major General Beauregard of the confederate forces besieging Fort Sumter. And written in this very elegant hand on the note paper, it said Fort Sumter 3:20 am April 12, 1861. Dear Sir, on behalf of Major General Beauregard commanding provisional confederate forces we have the honor to inform you that the firing on your positions will commence in exactly one hour. We have the honor to remain [inaudible], etc. etc. your obedient servants. And it was signed by these two aides. And you could see where the paper had been folded up when it was handed over to Beauregard to Anderson presumably. And I was holding this thing and just thinking here is the piece of paper that started the Civil War. This is the piece of paper that announced when the first confederate shot was going to be fired. And there it was in the Library of Congress. I had filled out a call slip and they had brought it to me and it's just one of the great privileges and thrills of working there.

>> Thank you. We've been hearing from Adam Goodheart author of 1861: The Civil War Awakening. Adam will appear Sunday, September 25th in the history and biography pavilion of the National Book Festival. He will also be signing copies of his book this day. Adam Goodheart, thank you very much for your time and we look forward to seeing you at the National Book Festival.

>> Thanks Guy. I'm looking forward to it very much.

>> This has been a presentation of the Library of Congress. Visit us at loc.gov.