

Cape Fear Civil War Round Table

April, 1995

NEWSLETTER

Editor: George Slaton

APRIL 7 MEETING

Roger DeMik to Speak on the *C.S.S. Alabama*

Roger L. DeMik, a specialist in Civil War naval history, will present a program on the exploits of the *C.S.S. Alabama* at our April meeting. Roger is an attorney with Eastman Kodak in Kingsport TN and has studied the *C.S.S. Alabama* for 25 years. He is the past president of the Tri-Cities Civil War Round Table in Kingsport and one of its founding members.

The *C.S.S. Alabama* was one of the most important American warships to sail the sea. According to the Guinness Book of Records, the *Alabama* has the distinction of being "The Most Famous Surface Raider of all Time." In the 666 days from her commissioning on August 24, 1862 to her destruction by the *U.S.S. Kearsarge* off Cherbourg, France on June 19, 1864, the *C.S.S. Alabama* raided Union commerce from the North Atlantic to the Indian Ocean.

Mr. DeMik will discuss the history of the *Alabama's* cruise, including the controversies surrounding her captain, Raphael Semmes, one of the most colorful characters in CW history, subsequent attempts to raise the *Alabama* after she was sunk, the international controversy generated by her discovery by the French Navy in 1884, and the battle over her ownership between the US and France. Roger has lectured in Europe and in the United States. He has also contributed to numerous articles on the *C.S.S. Alabama*, including the article in the December, 1994 issue of *National Geographic*.

Roger will lecture and give a slide presentation. The program promises to be outstanding, and we feel very fortunate to have Roger DeMik as a guest speaker! Plan to attend on Friday, April 7, at 7:30 pm in Room 101, King Hall, UNC-W. (Note the change in meeting date).

BENTONVILLE BUS TOUR A Field Report

On Saturday, March 25, a group of 35 members and guests of the Cape Fear Civil War Round Table visited the Bentonville battlefield for a superb interpretative tour! The tour was led by **Mark Bradley**, a member of our RT, who followed up his December RT program on Bentonville with this on-site look at the key locations associated with this two-day battle. Our group visited the Confederate breastworks where the Army of Tennessee veterans massed for attacks against the Union flank. These breastworks are extensive and very well preserved. We also visited impressive Union breastworks, the site of a furious Confederate attack from Hoke's Division, led by **Colonel John D. Taylor** of Wilmington, his 36th North Carolina Regiment, and the 1st Battalion North Carolina Heavy Artillery. Mark's enthusiasm for this important major engagement of the war was contagious! We all gained an orientation and understanding of the battle that was refreshing and exciting.

Our RT deeply appreciates Mark's generosity in giving us such an enjoyable day on the battlefield! We're also grateful to **John Goode** and **Fred Burgess** of the Bentonville State Historic Site who assisted in leading the tour, as well as **Nancy King** and **Lauren Burgess** who made us aware of the efforts of the Bentonville Battleground Historical Association to interpret and protect the battlefield. Thanks to **Tom Broadfoot** who donated copies of his published guidebook to Bentonville for sale to our members; the sale netted \$55.00 for the RT. And thanks go to **Tommy King** for once again making arrangements for our transportation and comfort on the tour.

Mark's definitive book, *Last Stand in the Carolinas: The Battle of Bentonville, March 19-21, 1865*, will be published this summer. The book is hard cover, 456 pp, 15 detailed maps, 30 photos. Prepublication offer is \$25.00 (\$29.95 after May 31) from Savas Woodbury Publishers, Suite 204, 1475 S. Bascom Avenue, Campbell CA 95008 or (800) 848-6585. Also, Mark has directed that \$5.00 from each sale will be donated to the Bentonville Battleground Historical Association. This will surely be a book without which you cannot live. Mark has offered to do a signing at one of our fall RT meetings!

NORTH CAROLINA: THE CIVIL WAR CONNECTION Conference April 21-22

The North Carolina Civil War Tourism Council, a partnership of individuals from private and public organizations to promote and preserve North Carolina's role in the Civil War, is holding its first conference at the Omni Durham Hotel and Durham Civic Center in Durham NC April 21-22. A first class program of lectures and discussions will feature Mark Bradley, Tom Wicker, Rod Gragg, William Harris, John Hope Franklin, and eight other specialists in CW history. Registration is \$130.00. Call (800) 767-9111 for information. Brochures will be available for RT members at the April meeting. Hopefully, some of you will plan to attend this conference.

THE SOUTH'S MOST POPULAR CITIZEN VISITS WILMINGTON One Hundred and Twenty-Five Years Ago

In March, 1870, just months before his death, Robert E. Lee began a last tour of the South. What was originally conceived to be a vacation to restore his health turned out to be a very public tour by rail with stops in a number of Southern cities. Great, cheering crowds gathered at train depots along the route, even in towns and cities where Lee was unable to stop. Fortunately for the citizens of Wilmington, Lee paused here to spend a day and night. Lee arrived in Wilmington in late April. Following are excerpts from the *Wilmington Daily Journal*.

"Telegrams were received in this city yesterday announcing the fact that General Lee would arrive here from Charleston on the Southern train last night. A special train was arranged, through the courtesy of Colonel Fremont, the Superintendent, to start from the depot of the Wilmington & Weldon Railroad for the accomodation of those who wished to greet the great ex-chieftain upon his arrival. This train started at 8 o'clock, and proceeded to Meares Bluff - there to await General Lee's arrival, having on board a large crowd of friends and the Cadets of the Cape Fear Academy, under charge of General Colston.

After some time spent in waiting, the train from the South arrived, and General Lee, by invitation, came to the special train. A suppressed whisper of admiration, respectfully restrained, first greeted his approach. There were only a few in the car at the time, but soon the curious crowd who had rushed outside to catch the first glimpse of the noble General hurried and thronged around his seat. The corps of Cadets were on the platform and received him with arms presented, while the band played an air. We think that General Lee was affected by the sight of the grey worn by the Cadets, which no doubt called forcibly to mind many recollections of the days when "old Marse Robert" was held in such veneration and confidence by the thousands of noble and manly hearts which beat beneath many a grey jacket. But the demonstration seemed not altogether pleasing to him. The gratifying news soon spread through the car that General Lee had determined to stop here, but would probably leave tonight. On the arrival at the depot the Cadets formed in line and proceeded to escort him to the residence of Honorable George Davis whose guest General Lee is. From respect to the feelings of the old warrior, no further demonstration which people might otherwise wish to desire to make was insisted on, but the Cadets headed the crowd in a march downtown and General Lee was left in peace. April 29, 1870.

Thousands of friends and admirers of the man who possesses the devoted affection of his own people and the admiration and respect of his former enemies, availed themselves of the priviledge of visiting the sterling old patriot at the residence of Honorable George Davis yesterday. It was a reception which truly did the heart good. No formal demonstrations, no sycophantic protestations, but purely and simply the homage of hearts overflowing with veneration and true affection, with humble and unselfish reverence to the noble representative of a past made glorious by deeds of romance and heroic sacrifices - a people forgetting the present and memory reverting to the past were enshrined and embodied in this ever faithful leader of the armies. However strongly the hearts of our people may have previously inclined and clung to General Lee this feeling could be but increased and a most favorable personal impression created by his manner of receiving those who called yesterday. There was a tender warmth and cordiality in the grasp of his hand, a gentle dignity in the form of greeting and a due regard for feelings and appreciation for attentions which will ever be remembered. None could fail to be charmed with delight and the popular heart here swells with increased emotion at the name of General Lee.

The General will take leave of our city today. He leaves on a special train this morning, accompanied by his daughter, on his return to his home, but will probably stop in Richmond. We regret that he could not have been here longer, but are pleased that we have at least seen this much of him and seen him so favorably." April 30, 1870.