

# Cape Fear Civil War Round Table

October, 1995

NEWSLETTER

Editor: George Slaton

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## THE BATTLE OF GETTYSBURG - THE FIRST AND SECOND DAY October 12 Meeting

The RT is presenting two superlative programs covering the Battle of Gettysburg at the October and November meetings! We're fortunate to have Tom Prisk of Chapel Hill, a Licensed Gettysburg Battlefield Guide, as our speaker for both programs. Tom's a new member of our RT.

The October program will highlight Lee's strategy for the invasion of Pennsylvania, his approach to Gettysburg, the first day's battle, and Longstreet's assault on the second day. This will be an intensive and in-depth study of the battle, incorporating new perspectives and fresh scholarship which will be new for many of us. The program format will be a combined seminar and round table discussion of the battle led by Mr. Prisk and a panel of RT members.

Licensed Gettysburg Battlefield Guides are walking encyclopedias of the Battle of Gettysburg! They know the battle in incredible detail, minute by minute and regimental movement by movement. The guides are comprised of an elite group of historians who complete an exhausting and rigorous examination which few applicants manage to pass.

So pull out your books on Gettysburg, familiarize yourself again with the battle, and attend this exciting program! Because of the comprehensive nature of the program, we'll begin 30 minutes earlier than usual....at 7:00 pm.....on Thursday, October 12, in Room 101, King Hall, at UNC-W. The program will extend to 9:00-9:30 pm.

## LEE'S RETREAT TO APPOMATTOX Spring Bus Tour

Our bus tour this spring, March 8-10, 1996 will take us to Petersburg, Virginia for a comprehensive tour of the closing days of the war. On Friday, we'll visit Five Forks battlefield, Dinwiddie Courthouse, White Oak Road, the Gilliam Farm. Saturday's tour will follow the exact route of Lee's retreat toward Appomattox, taking in the site of the cavalry clash at Namozine Church, Saylor's Creek battlefield, the backroads leading to the surrender site, the fields and woods where Lee's army encamped, and where the surrender itself took place. On Sunday, we'll tour the Petersburg battlefield, visiting the Crater and Fort Stedman.

Our tour leader will be Chris Calkins, the acknowledged authority on Petersburg and Lee's Retreat and a historian with the National Park Service. We'll travel from Wilmington by Five Star Motor Coach, spend two nights at Best Western Petersburg, and return home mid-afternoon on Sunday. The cost is \$150.00 per person (subject to an increase if we're unable to fill the bus). Reservations are available for the first 48 persons who submit a check for the full amount. So plan ahead for this unforgettable Civil War tour! (More information available on request).

## MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS DUE

It's time for last years' RT members to renew and for prospective members to join for the new year, 1995-1996! The November newsletter will be sent to those who have joined the RT by October 27. So send a check for \$20.00 to Dan Geddie, Treasurer, Cape Fear Civil War Round Table, Box 10535, Wilmington NC 28405-3757. Welcome to our 18 new members so far this year!

## A RAMBLE THROUGH REBELDOM

In the last newsletter I mentioned attending the annual conference of the Association for Preservation of Civil War Sites (APCWS) held in May in Tupelo, Mississippi. Since the conference was a weekend event, I decided to take a few extra days and visit some of the battlefields in the Western Theater of the war.

My first stop was in Columbus, Mississippi, a beautiful town full of ante-bellum homes. Columbus was also the residence of CSA General Stephen D. Lee after the war. I visited his home there and then went out to Friendship Cemetery where Lee is buried. I had forgotten that Confederate Memorial Day had begun at this cemetery when ladies from Columbus placed flowers on the graves of Union, as well as Confederate, soldiers buried there. Soon, news of this gesture circulated through the nation, creating good feeling both north and south.

The conference was a great experience! On Saturday, we toured sites around Corinth, Mississippi associated with the siege and battle of Corinth, as well as Battery Robinette where a sharp fight took place. The woods north and east of Corinth are still full of distinct breastworks and artillery positions which the park service out of Shiloh Battlefield are recording via satellite. We tramped back into the woods, watching out for ticks and dodging huge hills of fire ants, to remote earthworks. Sunday we enjoyed a tour I had been looking forward to for a long time! APCWS has purchased and will be paying for 90% of the battlefield at Brice's Crossroads where Nathan Bedford Forrest defeated the Union forces under Gen. Samuel Sturgis and sent them packing back to Memphis. Lt. Col. Parker Hills, of the Mississippi National Guard, and a historian in his own right, guided us over the battlefield which still looks as it did during the war. We started on foot at the point where Forrest's dismounted cavalry moved forward through the fields and woods and followed the route where his units fanned out and created a double-envelopment around the Union forces. At several wood or fence lines, we would stop and see how Forrest coordinated his attack. The battleground is still largely unmarked, but with a knowledgeable tour guide, it became apparent how brilliant Forrest's tactics were. What a day!

Late that afternoon, I drove to Pulaski, Tennessee, the home of CSA Brig. Gen. John Adams, who was killed at Franklin. I found his grave in the city cemetery. Just a few yards away, stood the spectacular marble statue and grave of CSA Major Gen. John C. Brown who led a division in the Army of Tennessee. As I was standing by Adams' grave, a fellow walked up, and we began talking about the CW. As many CW enthusiasts in Tennessee often do, he started talking in glowing terms about Forrest. He told me about a site south of Pulaski where Forrest had ambushed Federal cavalry pursuing Hood's army after the CSA defeat at Nashville. Coincidentally, only a few months before I had read about this skirmish in Wiley Sword's *Embrace an Angry Wind*. The Battle of Anthony's Hill is one of those many CW battle sites whose locations are remote and largely unknown, and when I told him how much I'd like to visit the site, he agreed to take me there. Sure enough, as the modern road entered a group of hills, it was easy to imagine Forrest choosing this location for a perfect ambush which successfully repelled the opposing cavalry.

Later that day, I drove north to Columbia, Tennessee, flushed with excitement about this serendipitous visit to an obscure CW site. In Columbia, I hoped to find the building where Forrest had a well-known encounter with Lieut. Gould in 1863, when Gould shot Forrest and Forrest managed to stab and ward off Gould with his penknife. Once again, I felt fortunate that, serendipitously, I ran into a local historian, who knows local Columbia history like the back of his hand, doing research at the library. We walked out into the streets of downtown Columbia, and he showed me the site of the Masonic building where the encounter took place, the old tailor shop across the street where Gould went for help and where Forrest later confronted him again and spared his life. He showed me the house where Forrest was staying with his family and where he recovered from his wound. And finally, we walked down to the Nelson House, a hotel built in 1828, and still standing, where Forrest visited Gould and apologized for the disagreement shortly before Gould died at the hotel. At this point, I felt like the trip was already a complete success!

Then I drove out to Ashwood, a small settlement south of Columbia, site of the historic St. John's Episcopal church which began under the leadership of CSA Gen. and Bishop Leonidas Polk who lived nearby. I had read in Sword's book that, during Hood's advance toward Franklin, some of his officers, including CSA Maj. Gen. Patrick Cleburne, "the Stonewall of the West," stopped at the church and walked through the cemetery. Cleburne especially remarked at the beauty of the place and said he would like to be buried there. Within a day or two, Cleburne was dead, killed in the assault at Franklin, along with John Adams and four other CSA generals. Cleburne was briefly buried at the little church cemetery in Ashwood. It's still a lovely spot, worth a visit if you're ever in the vicinity.

From Columbia I drove north along the route of Hood's advance, through the little village of Spring Hill where still stands the magnificent ante-bellum home where CSA Major Gen. Earl Van Dorn was assassinated by a jealous husband. Then on to Franklin, one of my favorite CW sites. The site of the Confederate assault, larger and more ambitious even than the Pickett-Pettigrew charge at Gettysburg, is pretty much covered over with neighborhoods now. The spot where Cleburne fell is now the parking lot of a Pizza Hut. But the Carter House, around which the battle at Franklin swirled, still stands; nearby is a museum. The Carnton House, on the outskirts of town, is another early and magnificent home on whose porch the bodies of the six CSA generals killed at Franklin lay after the battle.

In Nashville, the next day, I walked up the steep slope of Shy's Hill, one of the few remaining sites of the Battle of Nashville. Here is where the victorious Union troops broke through the CSA line and routed Hood's forlorn Confederates. My last stop before heading for home was also in Nashville...at the Tennessee State Museum which has an impressive collection of CW material as well as very extensive displays from other periods of Tennessee history.

I arrived home tired, but enthusiastic, and looking forward to more opportunities to visit CW sites. One of those opportunities will be our RT trip to Petersburg/Appomattox in March! Don't miss this chance for a thorough and comprehensive tour with a leading CW historian.

General Grant began his 1864 Spring Campaign by crossing the Rapidan at Ely's and Germanna Fords on May 3rd and 4th giving General Lee a mild surprise. As Lee recovered, JEB Stuart noticed Meades' supply train and Hampton and Fitz Lee attempted unsuccessfully to capture these supplies while the Union Cavalry guarded the wagon train.

Phil Sheridan had recently come from the West with a reputation for aggressiveness and stunning victories. He couldn't bear having his cavalry relegated to such a menial task. Grant gave Sheridan verbal permission to create a raid on Richmond as a diversion to Stuarts' attack on his train. Sheridan boasted that he could capture Richmond as well and his cavalry proceeded to destroy a large amount of Confederate supplies. The raid also resulted in one of the great losses of the Civil War, the death of JEB Stuart on May 11 and the commander of the North Carolina Cavalry Brigade, General James B. Gordon received a mortal wound on May 12 at Brooke Church.

The North Carolina Cavalry Brigade plagued the rear of the Union Cavalry column. On May 11, a heavy skirmish occurred in Sheridan's rear which involved the North Carolina Cavalry and elements of the Union Second Cavalry Division at Ground Squirrel Church.

One hundred and thirty-one years later as I drove about the Virginia countryside looking for Ground Squirrel Church, I thought about those North Carolinians. My great grandfather was one of those North Carolina Cavalrymen. He was wounded during that skirmish. As a result of that leg wound, he was hospitalized for a month and walked with a painful limp until his death in 1918. I had always wanted to see that battleground.

Once before I had been over many of these same roads but I could not find Ground Squirrel Church. I wished the Confederate and Union Armies would have gotten together sometime early on and decided what to call the battlefields. They never did and the Confederates went on naming the battlefields after towns and taverns and churches and the Union just kept naming them after rivers and streams. Today it's not easy to drive up to some of these lesser known skirmishes following their descriptions of the locations of the fights. Afterwards I searched the literature and studied the maps references, trying to get a better handle on this skirmish. This time, I thought I knew where Ground Squirrel Church was located.

The back roads of Virginia from Lexington are beautiful in the fall of year. A keen sense of history enhanced this slow, deliberate journey into the past. It seemed as if every crossroad that passed was a name that related to the Civil War. I slipped further and further into history as this modern automobile led me down the road. As I came to Route 33, I paused before I turned south onto this road, known then as the old Plank Road or the Mountain Road. As I sat there, only a few cars passed. They were going fast. Lost in my thoughts, I heard the soft whine of a car in the distance get louder and louder until the swoosh of the car passing woke me from my reverie.

I came to Ground Squirrel Bridge over the South Anna River. I must be getting near. There are embankments on either side of

the river on the east side of the bridge where an old bridge could have stood. In 1864, the bridge had been burned early in the morning on May 11th and General Gordon had found an old ford near but the banks were fairly steep and high. The accounts say the fording was difficult. General Gordon was the first to jump his horse down the bank, cross the stream and climb the other bank. No sooner did the 5th North Carolina Cavalry reach the stream and begin to climb the other bank, than the First Maine, the Union rear guard, begin to fire at them. The North Carolina Cavalrymen dismounted and Paul Means says in North Carolina Regiments, "In splendid style we swung out into line on the right of that road and went at their dismounted men with a steady step and fire, and drove them . . . ." As I stood on the bridge, I heard a strange sound, like men working hard but it must have been an echo or something far off.

I drove slowly south passing Gieman road on my right and Mill Road on my left and soon I was at the intersection of Ashcake Road and the Plank Road or Route 33. Only a few hundred yards before the intersection, there was a small paved road that branched to the right off 33. That was an important landmark. It was on the old maps.

I was getting close. I turned right on Ashcake and eased forward a few yards to the next junction, which was a crossing of the small road I had seen above the intersection. On the right, just beyond should have been Ground Squirrel Church!

There was a lovely little church just where it was supposed to be but it was a relatively new brick church named Cavalry Christian Church. I turned into the newly paved parking lot. Just ahead was a very small cemetery with ten or twenty graves and stones, enclosed by a cinderblock wall and a wrought iron gate. A chain with a big old lock hung around the gate but I could see the graves. One of the gravestones marked the resting place of a Soldier of the Fourth Virginia Cavalry. I saluted him in my heart and wondered when he had died. I couldn't see the date.

I sat on the cinderblock wall for a little while. The late morning sun was getting warm and I felt a little mellow. Earlier that day, as I drove slowly reliving history, I secretly looked for squadrons of cavalry in every clearing, across fields and down dirt roads. I listened for sounds of riders and the noises their swords, rifles and accouterments made as they banged and slapped together.

I let myself off the wall, sat on the ground, stretched my legs out and leaned against this warm wall. I could swear I heard men shouting and yelling. The field to the north and a little west of the church suddenly filled with smoke and dust and men and horses. The pop of small arms fire in the distance was almost drowned by the nearer musket fire and suddenly...

HONK!! HONK!! My wife blew the horn of that damn automobile. She was tired of waiting.

I tried to get back to wherever I was (I think I know) but I couldn't. I will though. I just need a little more time and maybe I'll see a certain old Confederate. Want to come with me? I don't like to talk when I get to those places so I'm not very good company but I'll show you the way.