

Cape Fear Civil War Round Table

April, 1999

NEWSLETTER

Editor: George Slaton

FORT ANDERSON: BATTLE FOR WILMINGTON

An Evening With Chris Fonvielle

Thursday, April 29
St. John's Episcopal Church

Social Hour 7:00 pm.....Program 7:30 pm

No place was more important to the Confederacy by 1864 than Wilmington, North Carolina. Robert E. Lee himself sent word to the Cape Fear District military authorities that the survival of his Army of Northern Virginia depended on the survival of Wilmington.

To protect the Confederacy's lifeline, engineers constructed a vast network of forts, batteries and fieldworks in and around Wilmington. One of them was Fort Anderson, an imposing earthen bastion on the west bank of the Cape Fear River fifteen miles below the city.

Historian Chris E. Fonvielle, Jr. grew up exploring the mammoth fort and studying its fascinating story. His new book *Fort Anderson: Battle for Wilmington* (Savas Publishing, 1999) is the result of his interest. It chronicles Fort Anderson's history from its origins in 1862 to its rediscovery by archeologists in the 1950's.

Erected on top of the ruins of the colonial ghost town of Brunswick, England's main port of entry before the American Revolution, Fort Anderson today is a tranquil state historic site. During the Civil War, it was the largest and strongest interior fort guarding Wilmington. It was also the scene of a massive Union naval bombardment and ground assault just five weeks after the fall of Fort Fisher.

Dr. Fonvielle, author of *The Wilmington Campaign: Last Rays of Departing Hope* and a lecturer at UNC-Wilmington's History Department, will give a slide presentation on Fort Anderson at St. John's Episcopal Church on April 29. He will highlight the Battle of Fort Anderson in February, 1865, the colorful characters who controlled the fort's destiny and anecdotes surrounding its history. Oddly enough, it was the only Confederate fort surrendered by the U.S. Army to the U.S. Navy and had several eerie connections to President Abraham Lincoln's assassination.

The trade edition of *Fort Anderson: Battle for Wilmington* is a soft bound, wraps book. At Fonvielle's request, however, Savas Publishing produced a 500-copy hard bound, numbered limited Cape Fear edition of *Fort Anderson*. Copies will be available only through the author and will make their debut at the Cape Fear Civil War Round Table meeting this month.

Join us for this exciting presentation of local Civil War history by the foremost historian of the Wilmington Campaign!

THE ANTIETAM CAMPAIGN SPRING BUS TOUR Report From the Field

On Thursday, March 25, just after noon, twenty-five members and guests of the CFCWRT boarded a bus for the RT's annual spring battlefield tour. They included Jim Brandon of West Palm Beach FL (guest of Bert Williams), Bernice and Wayne Carver, Bonnie and David English, Conway Ficklen, Dan Geddie, Owen Hardy of Louisville KY (guest of James MacLaren), Tommy King, Dorene and John Krohn, Dale Lear, Richard Long, Cliff Mabry, James MacLaren, Jim McCallum, John Moore, Bob Quinn, Linda Rand, Mary and Palmer Royal, Ed Russ, George Slaton, Bert Williams, and George Wolf. Our destination was Hagerstown, Maryland, near the site of the Antietam Campaign of 1862. Our bus reached the Sheraton Inn before 9pm, and, as we settled into our rooms, we learned that the Hagerstown CWRT was just then finishing its monthly dinner meeting and program in the Sheraton's conference room. This RT, established in 1956, currently has 95 members.

Throughout the tour, we tried to be aware of where CW soldier ancestors of our tour group members were engaged during the fighting. They will be listed in this summary, followed by the name of the RT member/descendent in parenthesis

Early Friday morning, we climbed aboard the bus at 8 am to be greeted by Timothy Reese, an expert on the Antietam Campaign sites, his specialty being the fighting at Crampton's Gap which he has covered in a recently published book. Tim took us to White's Ford where CSA General Robert E. Lee's army crossed the Potomac River to begin its first incursion into a border state. We found it very moving to stand at this obscure and out of the way site where rebel soldiers waded or swam across the river and then found themselves on what some of them considered northern territory. And it was at this point that Tim paused to describe the military and political situation which led to Lee's decision to invade the North.

In the late summer of 1862, the South could rejoice that it had repelled Union efforts to invade Virginia. Lee felt ready to move north, and his goal was to draw the forces of USA General George B. McClellan northward in pursuit to the Cumberland Mountains in Pennsylvania where he hoped to turn and defeat the Federals. Tim pointed out that Lee's purpose was not, as some have conjectured, to take Washington, but to defeat the Union army on Union soil, thereby gaining recognition from England and France. In fact, Tim's research has demonstrated that England was then poised to send troops to aid the South, a reality not formerly appreciated by historians.

Tim also shared his perspective of the deeper significance of the campaign. The famed Lee's Lost Order, which McClellan used to his advantage, led to the unraveling of Lee's strategic plans. Antietam, said Tim, was the real turning point of the Civil War, and the engagement at Crampton's Gap was the linchpin of the campaign. Lee, insisted our guide, had no intention to fight at Antietam, yet the loss of Crampton's Gap forced him to fight a defensive battle there.

We then drove through Frederick where Tim pointed out the general site where the Lost Order was discovered. The area, near South and Franklin Streets in southeast Frederick is now an industrial site. Tim's research has turned up strong evidence that the site of the Lost Order was not the Best Farm on the Rockville Pike, as many historians have believed.

We then journeyed to Turner's Gap where CSA General Daniel H. Hill directed the stalwart defense of two gaps in the South Mountain range. Though he was vastly outnumbered,

he held off two assaulting Federal corps which sought to punch through these gaps and attack Lee's separated forces to the west. At Turner's Gap we saw the old South Mountain Inn which served as Hill's HQ as well as the slopes where Hill's forces fought a successful delaying action. Here Angus and Archibald McIntyre (Jim McCallum) of the 6th Alabama in CSA General Robert Rodes' Brigade were heavily engaged against USA General Joseph Hooker's 1st Corps. In fact, Rodes Brigade bore the brunt of the fighting at this location.

We drove south, just one mile as the crow flies, to Fox's Gap where CSA General Samuel Garland's brigade took advantage of a stone wall, still standing, to deflect the advance of Federal troops from the 9th Corps whose acting commander was USA General Jesse Reno. General Garland was killed during this fierce action in which Peter Philo Hoke (Richard Long) of the 12th North Carolina participated. A Rebel sharpshooter's bullet killed General Reno as he rode forward toward the CSA lines near the end of the fighting; a monument to Reno erected after the war stands in the area where he was struck.

Our next stop was Crampton's Gap where the Federal 6th Corps under USA General William B. Franklin finally succeeded in breaking through the Confederate defenses. Tim gave us a new understanding of this CSA debacle. CSA General Howell Cobb, a Georgian political general, has always been blamed for the loss of Crampton's Gap. But the southern collapse actually began as a result of CSA Colonel Thomas Munford's unwise placement of dismounted Virginia cavalry below the gap. When the Virginians were overwhelmed, the troops of Cobb's command, fighting valiantly, could not stem the flow. As a result of the poor strategic CSA defense, the gap fell quickly to the Federals. The CSA division commander, Lafayette McLaws, though a Georgian, collaborated in the scapegoating of Howell Cobb, and Munford never received any blame. Tim pointed out the slopes where CSA Colonel William McRae, of Wilmington, mounted a temporary defense against the Union onslaught with his 15th North Carolina; they were finally driven off with 32% casualties in 30 minutes.

We did a drive-through of Harper's Ferry, and Tim showed us the site where Joseph B. McCallum (Jim McCallum) participated in the siege of the little town with his 24th North Carolina. John Stuart Hard, Ben Hard, both officers, and Aquilla Seigler, (John Krohn), all of the 7th South Carolina and John Calvin Clark of the 8th South Carolina in Kershaw's Brigade succeeded in taking Bolivar Heights which towers above Harper's Ferry. Our bus then proceeded to Weaverton Heights where Jacob and Hiram Williams (Bert Williams) and William Hansell Bryant (Jim McCallum) were stationed with the 1st North Carolina Cavalry. We passed through Keedysville where nearly every home was commandeered as a hospital for the wounded after Antietam.

We ended a bright, sunny day's tour with a delicious meal at the Sheraton where Tim Reese gave a summary of the campaign and responded to questions.

Saturday morning we were on the bus and ready to ride again at 8 am. This day would be devoted to the Battle of Antietam! We approached the battlefield from the north and stopped at the Visitor's Center for an orientation by our guide. Standing behind the Center, we looked down into the shallow valley below where CSA General Roswell Ripley's Brigade (containing the 3rd North Carolina of Wilmington renown) passed the night before the battle. Our group then walked across the Hagerstown Pike to the Dunker Church which became the focal point for three major assaults by Union troops during the first phase of the fighting at Antietam.

Boarding our bus once again, we drove to the edge of the famous Cornfield which was the scene of terrific fighting as Union and Confederate troops swept back and forth across the ground, always seeking an advantage. In the early morning hours, the Federal 1st Corps began the offensive, slamming into CSA General Alexander Lawton's Brigade in the Clover field just

south of the Cornfield. Here William Henry MacLeod (George Slaton) of the 61st Georgia was mortally wounded; he was later captured by Federal troops and died the next month in a US Hospital in Frederick, MD. Shortly afterwards, Ripley's Brigade, on the Confederate right, moved into the Cornfield alongside the East Woods. In this attack, Colonel William Lord DeRosset received a disabling wound which put him out of active service for the remainder of the war; his 3rd North Carolina took high casualties. William Croom (Jim McCallum) of the 1st North Carolina and Isaac Croom (Jim McCallum) of the 3rd North Carolina saw combat in this phase of the heavy fighting in the Cornfield. Peter Philo Hoke's (Richard Long) 12th North Carolina also assaulted the East Woods sector. During the first phase of the fighting through the Cornfield, the Clover field, around Dunker Church, and into the West Woods the troops from both sides slugged it out. The casualties mounted moment by moment. Thomas J. Shemwell (John Moore), serving in the 48th North Carolina of Walker's Brigade, was mortally wounded near Dunker Church; he died in a hospital in Charlottesville VA.

As the fighting died down from the morning's assaults, the activity shifted to the center portion of the Confederate line around a sunken farm road known thereafter as Bloody Lane. There two divisions of USA General Edwin Sumner's 2nd Corps sought to dislodge CSA General Daniel H. Hill's Georgians, Alabamians, North Carolinians, and Mississippians who were firmly entrenched in the sunken road. We walked slowly along the southern length of the road where the Federal attacks were furious, the Rebel defense courageous, and the casualties on both sides very heavy. John Wesley Mallard (Tommy King) of the 30th North Carolina, William Atkins (Jim Brandon) and Jacob Long (Richard Long), both of the 14th North Carolina, Angus and Archibald McIntyre (Jim McCallum) of the 6th Alabama, Samuel Davis McCallum and Henry Scott McCallum (Jim McCallum) of the 12th Mississippi were all engaged at Bloody Lane. Finally, the Federals succeeded in pushing the Rebels out of the sunken road. A few hundred yards behind the road, on the Piper Farm, General Hill, picking up a rifle himself and led remnants of several CSA units in a counterattack which contributed to an eventual Federal retreat back to the area of Bloody Lane.

Thus far we had visited the sites of the first two phases of McClellan's offensive battle against Lee, the Cornfield area and Bloody Lane. Now, our bus turned towards the southernmost portion of the field where McClellan's third phase attack was directed toward what became known as Burnside's Bridge.

USA General Ambrose Burnside's 9th Corps was chosen for the assault on the Confederate right at the bridge, then lightly defended by CSA General Robert Toombs' two regiments of Georgia troops. John Wesley Wilcox's (Tommy King) famed Washington Artillery was guarding Snavely's Ford, just below the bridge. Though the Yank's initial assaults failed to take the bridge, finally the 51st Pennsylvania and the 51st New York rushed across, followed by other 9th Corps units. Soon the fighting was swirling in the fields west of Antietam Creek, and the Rebels were about to be overwhelmed by the full weight of Burnside's troops. Then, arriving from Harper's Ferry, to save the day for Lee, the Light Division of CSA General A. P. Hill pitched into the fighting. William Long (Richard Long) and his 34th North Carolina were part of this successful effort to halt the Federal onrush.

As our two-day battlefield tramp ended, everyone agreed that our Fifth Annual Spring tour was a winner! Thanks to Tommy King who conceived of and made arrangements for the weekend and to Dan Geddie who worked tirelessly to facilitate our group through planning and execution! We also appreciated the efforts of Wayne Carver, whose technological know-how saw us through the calamity of a bus breakdown. And thanks to Ed Russ who provided extra eats and a CW video for members during the long bus trip.

Let's get ready for Spring, 2000!