

Cape Fear Civil War Round Table

October, 1998

NEWSLETTER

Editor: George Slaton

LEE'S RETREAT FROM GETTYSBURG An Evening with Kent Masterson Brown

First Presbyterian Church
Corner Third and Orange Streets
Thursday, October 8
Social Hour 6:30-7:00pm
Dinner 7:00pm & Program 7:30pm

! Reservations Required By October 5 !

We're very fortunate to have as the guest speaker for our annual special October meeting **Kent Masterson Brown**, a leading light in Civil War scholarship. Kent received his J.D. from Washington & Lee University School of Law in 1974. He has been active in Civil War affairs for many years. He is a founder and president of the Perryville Battlefield Preservation Association, the past chairman of the Gettysburg National Military Park Advisory Commission, and the Director of the American Civil War Institute of Campbellsville University. Kent hosts an annual seminar at Gettysburg for the Civil War Education Association. His *Cushing of Gettysburg* established him as a foremost authority on the Battle of Gettysburg. His forthcoming book, *Lee's Retreat from Gettysburg*, is eagerly awaited by the Civil War community. It promises to be a groundbreaking study of this little researched, but extremely important final phase of the Gettysburg Campaign.

Kent's program will follow a delicious catered full dinner featuring chicken as the entre. The cost is \$10.00 per person, payable at the door Thursday evening. Make reservations by calling the offices of Hanover Iron Works, 763-7318, and leaving your name with the secretary or, on the weekend, with Tommy King's voice mail. Deadline for reservations is Monday, October 5, at 12:00 noon. The RT is on the line for an accurate count.

First Presbyterian Church is located downtown at Third and Orange Streets just down, appropriately enough, from the Confederate monument! The church parking lot is accessible most easily from Third Street or also from Fourth Street through Carriage Lane. Additional parking is available along Third Street. Enter the church through the office annex adjacent to the church parking lot, then take the elevator to Gilmour Hall on the second floor.

The program, dinner, and fellowship will make for a superb evening! Don't miss it! Call in your reservation before the deadline, Monday, October 5, 12:00 noon.

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MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS AND SIGNUPS NOW DUE

If you've not yet paid your \$25.00 membership dues for the 1997-1998 year, please submit them as soon as possible. You may pay Dan Geddie, Treasurer, at the next RT meeting or mail to Cape Fear Civil War Round Table, Box 10535, Wilmington NC 28404 (note new zipcode). Your membership entitles you to all the privileges of the RT, including the monthly programs, tours, and newsletter. Thanks to those members who are paying their membership dues promptly!

SAVE THE SUSQUEHANNA CHARTS

The Friends of New Hanover County Library need our help to save two important Cape Fear Civil War artifacts. The Friends have committed to purchase a huge battle chart of the 1864-1865 attacks on Fort Fisher and an 1864 blockade disposition chart of the Cape Fear from a local publisher and rare books dealer. Both of the charts were used by Commodore Sylvanus W. Godon of the U.S.S. *Susquehanna*, which served in the Cape Fear blockading squadron and saw action in the naval attacks on Fort Fisher. These extremely rare items are currently on display in the local history room of the library's main branch. The Friends need to raise \$7,000 to finalize the deal, and the Cape Fear Civil War Round Table has offered to match up to \$500 in donations from its members. Monetary contributions are tax deductible and should be made out to the Friends of the New Hanover Library. Please send to the attention of Beverly Tetterton, 210 Chestnut Street, Wilmington NC 28401, or bring your check to the Cape Fear Round Table meeting on October 8. The Friends will host a reception for donors. A fuller description of the charts is on the following page.

EXTRA RATIONS

We had a very strong turnout for the September meeting and program on blockade running. There were 84 members and visitors in attendance. It's shaping up to be another great year! We will probably continue to use St. John's Episcopal Church primarily for our monthly meetings as the space is good for a social hour and refreshments.

Many of you are still talking about the May meeting on the battleship with our new friends from the CWRT of Chicago! The Chicagoans were amazed at the turnout from our RT; some said that, in light of their experience with joint RT meetings, they were expecting 15-20 of our members. But there were 75 of you on hand that evening!

A word about the newsletter. We do the best we can in getting it out to members promptly. However, sometimes between the printer, the mailing service, and the post office, a mistake or delay results. We try to consistently send out the newsletter on the Wednesday a week before the meeting, thereby insuring that you receive it on Thursday or Friday. If you haven't received your newsletter by Friday, or Saturday (a week ahead) at the latest, call one of us on the steering committee. If your copy of the newsletter gets lost, we'll try to send you a replacement.

Our spring bus tour to Antietam will be held in March. The steering committee has decided to change our strategy on planning the tour this year. Instead of reserving a large bus and then trying to fill the seats, we're asking you to sign up for the tour by December 1. Then, those of us who've signed up will plan the tour in more detail. We'll plan transportation to reflect the number who have committed to go. More on this in the November newsletter.

Most of you have probably received a flyer regarding the 1998 North Carolina: The Civil War Connection Conference sponsored by the NC Civil War Tourism Council to be held in New Bern November 6-8. A number of our members enjoyed last year's conference here in Wilmington. Once again, the conference will feature a great line-up of speakers and bus tours to sites such as the Battle of New Bern and the Battle of Wyse Forks, as well as visits to the CSS *Neuse*, Fort Branch, and Fort Macon. The keynote speaker on Saturday evening is James I. Robertson, author of the superb new Stonewall Jackson biography. Registration deadline is October 9. Call 919-788-9643 for more information.

Wilbur Jones, a member of the RT and the author of both a CW regimental history and a WWII account of US Marines is currently researching Wilmington during the 1941-45 wartime period. He's trying to contact veterans who were stationed in and around Wilmington during the Second World War. If you can provide Wilbur with names of veterans, contact him at 793-6393.

A hearty welcome to our eleven *new* members! They are Jim Hash, Clayton Callaway, Harold Pearman, Darrell Mack, Phil Smith, Brian Autry, Darryl Bruestle, Will Jones, Bill Purdom, James Steadman, and Richard Triebe.

U.S. NAVY'S PLAN OF ATTACK ON FORT FISHER, JANUARY 12-15, 1865

A large 43" x 29 1/2" printed and hand-drawn chart on heavy stock paper showing the U.S. Navy's plan of attack on Fort Fisher, North Carolina, January 12-15, 1865. Matted with archival acid-free matting, handsome gold-leaf frame.

Fort Fisher was the Confederacy's most powerful seacoast fortification, and the main guardian of Wilmington, North Carolina. Wilmington was the most popular blockade running seaport, and by the summer of 1864, the Confederacy's last major port still open to maritime trade with the outside world. Fort Fisher protected New Inlet, the northeast passageway into the Cape Fear River used by blockade runners.

Fort Fisher's mile-long-line of artillery batteries mounted forty-seven heavy seacoast guns. So immense and strong was the earthen fort that both Union and Confederate officers deemed it virtually impregnable. They called it the "Gibraltar of the South."

The Federals attacked Fort Fisher twice with all the military might they could muster in an effort to close Wilmington to blockade running. In the largest naval bombardment of the Civil War, sixty-five warships commanded by Rear Admiral David D. Porter spent Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, 1864, shelling the huge fort. They fired more than 20,000 shot and shell at the defenses. But an army support force, led by the controversial Major General Benjamin F. Butler, declined to follow-up the navy's efforts. After a landing party reconnoitered the fort, General Butler concluded that it had not been damaged enough to warrant a land assault. He aborted the expedition.

General Grant quickly renewed the attack, replacing Butler with Major General Alfred H. Terry and increasing the land force. Admiral Porter intensified his bombardment of Fort Fisher between January 12-15, 1865, finally driving the overwhelmed defenders into underground bombproofs. On the afternoon of January 15, 5,000 Union soldiers and 2,200 sailors and marines attacked Fort Fisher. After five and a half hours of hand-to-hand combat with the vastly outnumbered defenders, the Union

ground forces captured the fort. Six weeks later Wilmington fell.

Admiral Porter gave each of his gunboat commanders a plan of attack showing battle stations for their respective ships and lines of fire on the fort's batteries. This chart came from the U.S.S. Susquehanna, and was most likely used by Commodore Sylvanus W. Godon, commander of the side-wheel frigate and the Fourth Division of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron. Susquehanna is marked four times on the reverse of the chart, once in ink and the remainder in pencil. Marked in ink also are battle stations and line-of-fire for each warship, comprising three main lines plus a division of reserve vessels.

Sixty-six vessels are also marked on the chart, though it is now clear that not all of them participated in the bombardment. Some of the gunboats had been crippled in the first attack, and were undergoing repairs elsewhere when the second battle occurred. The chart also includes adjustments made to the original plan, perhaps indicating what Commodore Godon believed to be the final positions of the gunboats.

The chart mistakenly notes Fort Fisher as being an enclosed four-sided earthwork flanked by a line of batteries and rifle pits along the shoreline. Only when the fort was captured did the Federals discover that it was just a two-sided work, and from a birds-eye view looked like the number 7. Someone, perhaps Godon, roughly penciled-in the land face batteries on the chart after examining the fort.

Overall the chart is in good condition, the paper having browned slightly with age. There are tiny nicks along the edges, minor foxing in places, minimal moisture stains, and four tears. Two 12" tears—one from left to right and another from right to left—as well as a 3 1/2" tear on the left border have been professionally repaired with acid-free tape, one tear retains the old tape.

A handsome and important battle plan. We find no record of another such as this.

U.S. NAVY BLOCKADE DISPOSITION CHART OF CAPE FEAR, NORTH CAROLINA

A 22" x 26 1/2" partially printed partial manuscript chart on heavy stock paper showing deployment stations for Union gunboats "on the blockade" at Cape Fear, N.C.

Wilmington was the Confederacy's last major seaport open to trade with Europe during the Civil War. For more than three years the U.S. Navy had been unable to stop blockade running ships carrying military products and civilian goods so vital to the South's war effort from making their way into Wilmington.

Then, on October 12, 1864, Rear Admiral David D. Porter was assigned to command the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron, with orders to capture Wilmington. While the navy and army planned an amphibious attack, Admiral Porter strengthened the blockade of Wilmington in an all-out attempt to close the port to blockade running.

This chart of Porter's disposition plan, showing the stations of blockaders from Cape Lookout to Shallotte Inlet just south of Cape Fear. The chart notes a heavy concentration of bar-tenders at Old Inlet and New Inlet, the two passageways into the Cape Fear River and Wilmington's harbor. Chase vessels comprised the second line of the dragnet, while cruisers watched the shipping lanes further out to sea. Of the forty-six blockaders noted on the chart, all but eight of them would later participate in the attacks on Fort Fisher, the key to Wilmington's defenses.

The unpublished chart is slightly soiled, has minor moisture stains and two tears which have been professionally repaired. Condition is fine overall, and its rarity makes it a most desirable item. We find no record of another chart such as this one. Acid-free mat, handsome gold leaf frame.

A PARTING SHOT

(David Holt, a private in the 16th Mississippi Regiment, CSA, came from a wealthy plantation family near Woodville. He served through the entire war, later fathered ten children, became a priest in the Episcopal Church, moved to California and Florida, and died in 1925. His *A Mississippi Rebel in the Army of Northern Virginia: The Civil War Memoirs of Private David Holt*, from which this excerpt is taken, was published by Louisiana State University Press in 1995. The following incident took place in May, 1864, a few days after the Battle of Spotsylvania Courthouse)

A Yankee sharpshooter ventured out into the field to pick off a Johnnie. I being the man he was looking for. He crept from bush to bush until he had gotten about thirty steps from me. I was flat on the ground and the bush was between us. He raised up a little with his gun pointed and moved around to get a better view, thereby exposing himself to Tommy on my right. Tommy fired and the Yank fell. There were many shots fired by the Yanks in response for a few minutes.

Then the firing ceased, and we heard the wounded Yank say in a feeble voice, "Oh, for the sake of God, come to me! Come quick, please come."

"Captain," said Tommy, "let me crawl out to him. I shot him."

The captain gave consent. Tommy pulled off his accoutrements, laid down his gun and crawled out to the Yank. They were so close that I heard every word spoken.

"What can I do for you?" Tommy said in a low voice.

"Put your hand into the breast pocket of my jacket and get out the daguerreotype of my wife and child and hold it before my eyes," answered the Yank in a weak voice.

As Tommy complied with his request and held the picture for the dying man to see, we plainly heard the Yank sob, "My darlings, Oh, my darlings! It's hard to leave you." Then he said to Tommy, "My sight is failing and I am dying. I want you to promise me man to man that you will send this picture back to her. The address is on some letters that you can take off of my body, and I give you all my belongings and money. Tell her that I died gazing fondly on her dear face, and her name was on my lips." Then he said, "Mary," and died. Tommy took all his possessions and crawled back.

It was very pathetic, and I found tears in my eyes. After all we were Americans and brothers. Underneath all the sectional hatred and political strife was the broad foundation of blood relation. To get through the accumulated super strata that had been piled on by ambition and selfishness and reach the living bedrock, it required a death scene and a pathos that could touch the heart. The death scene of our Saviour draws all men unto Him and to one another. It is the one place where strife is forgotten and the love of brotherhood is supreme.

Tommy laid on the ground and cried like a baby. He seemed to be struck with horror at the idea of war and bloodshed.

"Damn war and shooting your brother man," he said. "It never came from God and can't be justified. I had no quarrel with that fellow. Why couldn't he stay in ranks where he belonged and not come trying to pick off a Reb, as though he had a personal grudge."

"Tommy," spoke up another, "he would have settled Dave Holt's hash if you hadn't got him. You can go North after the war and marry the widow. She will sure marry some fellow; she is too pretty to stay single. Then you can show your good feelings by raising his baby."

Which made Tommy mad, and he said some things that are not heard in the best society. He placed the letters together with the picture in the oilcloth case that the Yank carried, and he would not let any of us read the letters, saying they were sacred. To Tommy that package became a heavy burden, weighing on his heart. In the siege of Petersburg, when we got to exchanging coffee and tobacco and swapping papers, Tommy got in touch with the Yank's command and sent back everything the Yank had, to every cent of his money.