

Cape Fear Civil War Round Table

May 2002

NEWSLETTER

Editor: Bob Cooke

Tuesday May 14 Meeting, St. Andrews On-The-Sound Episcopal Church
Social Hour, 7:00p.m. Program, 7:30 p.m.

Cavalry Operations in the Civil War

Mr. Eric J. Wittenburg is a student of cavalry operations in the Eastern Theater of the War. He is a native of southeastern Pennsylvania and was educated at Dickinson College and the University of Pittsburgh School of Law. He is an attorney in private practice in Columbus, Ohio. His first book, *Gettysburg's Forgotten Cavalry Actions*, won the third annual Batchelder-Coddington Literary Award (1998) as the best new work interpreting the battle of Gettysburg. Subsequent works include studies of the Michigan Cavalry Brigade, the fight on East Cavalry Field at Gettysburg and *Glory Enough For All: The Battle of Trevilian Station* and *Sheridan's Second Raid*, which was selected as a premium offered by the Civil War Preservation Trust. Mr. Wittenburg is involved with the preservation of Trevilian Station battlefield and works with the Foundation to preserve and interpret the battlefield.

Civil War Prisons

Mr. Lonnie Speer began his talk on Civil war prisons by admitting that although Northern "propaganda" was better than that of the South, both Northern and Southern prisons were bad. More than 674,000 soldiers suffered the fate of being taken prisoner during the war: over 211,000 Union troops were taken by Confederates while over 262,000 Southerners became POW's. Breaking down the numbers of prisons, Mr. Speer informed us that there were seventy-five prisons on each side and at least 20 of those could be termed "notorious." Both sides initially used existing jails (such as the Henrico County jail, or the Tombs in N.Y.C.) but after the parole system was halted, both sides had to find space to contain their prisoners. Prisons and then forts were used, (such as Castle Pinckney in Charleston Harbor) These sites eventually became overcrowded, with (late in the war) as many as 25 per cell which before the war, held six or eight convicts. As the war ground on, things got worse for anyone captured in battle. Mr. Speer pointed out that soldiers stood a better chance of surviving a battle than they did in captivity (the death rate of prisoners reached thirteen percent versus five percent killed in battle!) Existing buildings were used with probably the most famous (at least in the South) being Libby prison in Richmond, while Old Capitol in Washington soon gained notoriety.

When the parole system was abandoned, new prisons were sorely needed. In Camp Douglas (Illinois) barracks were built on stilts (to prevent tunneling.) By mid war, stockade enclosures were used to herd prisoners. In Salisbury prison, there were barracks, tents and even caves, where soldiers tried to survive the elements. In Elmira, some Southerners lived year-round in tents, while in Andersonville, they lived under makeshift shelters. Both sides, said Mr. Speer, utilized the infamous "Dead Line," to keep the men away from the wall. Early on, both Richmond and Washington agreed to feed their prisoners as they did their own troops; however, by mid war, the South was in a desperate way. Their crops and animals were destroyed; storage and processing facilities were gone; transportation was nonexistent. Though the people themselves suffered, it was the POW's in the South who felt it the most. In retaliation, Northern prisons cut food rations again and again, until the soldiers were on quarter rations. These men, on both sides, were forgotten or ignored by their governments (although one or two attempts were made to free them, all failed.) It would not be until wars end that relief for these men came. Mr. Speer's new book, *War of Vengeance, Acts of Retaliation Against Civil War POWs* will be available in September.

This just in! An Appraisal Fair and Collecting Symposium will be held on 31 May (5 p.m. to 9 p.m.) & 1 June (9 a.m. to 4 p.m.) at the Lattimer House (126 s. 3rd St.) The public is also invited to sample an old-fashioned pig pickin' in the Gardens, on Friday evening. Call 762-0492 for tickets and more information. D.C. North, an expert on decoys & Jim Nichols, a toy collecting authority will speak on Friday night, with their expertise. On Sat. experts will appraise, display & sell an eclectic array of collectibles, including estate jewelry, silver, maps, postcards, Oriental rugs, porcelain, furniture, heritage plant & much, much more.

Fork's Road

Congratulations are in order to our town's newest treasure, the Louise Wells Cameron Museum of Art. Congratulations also to Mr. Bruce Cameron and Museum officials for their foresight in allowing the Confederate earthworks (located on the property) to remain and not be destroyed in the name of progress! As members of any preservation society realize, once these relics of the past are gone, well "...they don't make 'em anymore!"

Although not a battle on the scale of those in Virginia, this action was significant not only for the fate of Wilmington, but also for the fact that the mettle of African-Americans was again tested by combat. The battle at Fork's Road, although essentially a delaying action by Confederates, pitted about 900 battle-hardened veterans of Clingman's Brigade (Hoke's Division) against the men of the Fourth, Fifth and Twenty-seventh U.S. Colored Troops of Wright's Brigade (Paine's Division)

Fort Fisher had fallen the month before and Confederates, (consisting of the 8th, 31st, 51st and 61st Regiments) after being forced from the Sugar Loaf (Carolina Beach) line, knew the Yankees would not be long in coming! They dug in and dug in deep, behind breastworks constructed by throwing the sand about four or five feet high; there was also a ditch dug in front of the works, to further obstruct any attackers. While they made their stand along the Federal Point Road, Confederates in town (only three miles away) were busy shipping out military stores on the already-overtaxed rail system. The skirmishing began on 20 February when the 5th U.S.C.T. advanced toward the works. They got to within 150 yards before cannon and small arms fire halted their advance.

As Dr. Fonvielle has recounted in his book, *The Wilmington Campaign: Last Rays of Departing Hope*, it was also the location where brother fought brother. The Horne boys, Jacob and Hosea found themselves on opposite sides of those entrenchments. Hosey was with the Wilmington Horse Artillery while Jacob was in the Second N.C. (U.S.) Infantry.

By February twenty-second, the breastworks were abandoned. Wilmington had been flanked by Union troops coming in from the west. The city, now at the mercy of the Federals, was surrendered on 22 February. The Fork's Road site, protected because of its remoteness, remained almost pristine; we say almost because relic hunters did dig in the area. It was through the efforts of Dr. Fonvielle that the site, at one time scheduled to be developed, was preserved. With the construction of the Museum, visitors will now have the opportunity to indulge in the arts and to also step outside and be transported back in time! Restoration work has been ongoing for some time now, with our RT as well as students from Dr. Fonvielle's history courses. It is hard work, using virtually the same tools (shovels and bushhogs) that were used in the original construction. When completed, the earthworks will be covered with grass (to prevent erosion) and will be maintained by our RT. We have put together some photos (see below) of the work. If you have not already been in the trenches, don't worry, the work will be ongoing for a while longer. Come on down!



Some of the workers!
from left: Albert Jewell, Chris Fonvielle, Steve Gunter
Dan Geddie, D. "Mule" Skinner (missing Bob Cooke.)



The earthworks, looking towards the Museum,
the larger trees will remain.

C.S.S. NORTH CAROLINA

The Inglorious Career of a Confederate Ram

By Richard Long

By February 1862 the "War for Southern Independence" was not going well in North Carolina. Federal gunboats had made short work of Flag Officer William F. Lynch's "Mosquito Fleet" at Elizabeth City and most of the towns around the sounds had been occupied. Wilmington residents were nervous and began developing their own plans for defense of the port. The *Daily Journal* called for "immediate and effective action." Impressed by the performance of the *C.S.S. Virginia* against the Yankees at Hampton Roads, the newspaper proposed that a Committee be formed to collect funds to build a similar vessel on the Cape Fear. Realizing that the *Virginia* drew too much water for local use, the *Journal* suggested an adaptation. "While of course a vessel for our purposes ought not to draw more than half that much water, if even that, and ought to be in everything but power of resistance far smaller than the 'Colossus of the Roads.' No matter how rough or ugly she looks. She don't want more than two guns, but they must be rousers." Ram fever had come to the Cape Fear! A "Gunboat Fund" account was opened at the Bank of the Cape Fear and donations were solicited. A sense of patriotism swept the region as civilians and military alike, submitted donations. One local planter, short on cash, offered ten bales of cotton to encourage other locals to donate "other articles, to be converted into money." By April 1862, residents began to doubt the ability of the Army's fortifications to protect them and the desire to build "one or more" ironclad steamers reached a fevered pitch.

Local citizens got a morale boost in April when the *Journal* informed them the "whole matter has been undertaken by the Confederate government." In early May, Wilmington shipbuilders began gathering materials to construct two ironclad rams of a design similar to the *C.S.S. Richmond*. Based on an 1846 design of Naval Constructor John L. Porter, it would be a vessel of medium length, low profile and shallow draft. By war's end, a total of six such vessels would be completed. The Navy ordered two of these ships to be built at Wilmington, the *Raleigh* would be built by the Cassidey yard on the east bank of the river while the contract for the *North Carolina* went to Beery & Bros., whose yards were on the west bank of the river (just south of Battleship Park.) Some historians have claimed that these yards were ill equipped for this work, as they were used to building only small coastal vessels and river steamers. A closer look at the Wilmington area indicates that had raw materials and labor been more abundant, these two vessels could have been completed locally. In Wilmington, there were sawmills, iron works, machine shops and experienced boat wrights. Indeed, the area had everything required, except raw materials and time.

Like others of the *Richmond* class, the rams were designed to have an overall length of 174 feet, providing a ram forward and propeller protection astern. The hull length was 150 feet below the main deck with a beam of 32 feet. Above the main, a 20-inch thick, 105-foot casement, angled to 35 degrees was to be covered with four inches of armor. The deck itself was plated with two inches of armor, while two engines driving a single prop shaft furnished motive power. Both ships were to contain a battery of four guns, one each fore and aft (mounted on pivots) and one each athwart ship on each side. Thusly armed, the rams were capable of a three-gun broadside in either direction or fire from all quarters. When completed, the vessels displaced 800 tons and had a draft of 13 feet. The "shallow draft" of these vessels would prove inadequate in a river whose average depth was twelve and a half feet outside the main channel.

Work at Beery & Bros. began in June, but this ram, the *North Carolina*, was doomed to failure almost immediately. Shipbuilding throughout the Confederacy was hampered by a lack of significant labor and material shortages. In addition, when materials were found, poor overland transportation, combined with stiff competition (in the form of the army) for those scarce resources proved nearly insurmountable. In August 1862, the arrival of the blockade-runner *Kate* brought more than just much-needed supplies. The dreaded Yellow Fever spread throughout the town and soon reached epidemic proportions. By the end of September, seven hundred were dead. Citizens fled the town, commerce with the port was cut off and all work on the rams ceased through the summer. By January 1863, workers were back at their jobs, but progress was slow. Even so, the *North Carolina* must have at least looked handsome in her ways. Her 12x12 inch keel was made of gum while white oak and pine formed her beams and floors. Planks were made of juniper and ash, with the interior finished with cherry wood. Unfortunately, all of the available timber was green.

In the history of shipbuilding, green wood has been used for ship hulls and planking. Beam and ribs are easier to shape when green; hull planking is caulked with material like oakum. When the hull is put in water, the green boards swell and squeeze the joints watertight. However, once formed to shape, ribs must be given time to dry and the hull planks need to swell evenly. In addition, the bottom of wooden ships must be copper clad or otherwise treated to resist rot and worms. Ships also needed maintenance; this procedure involved beaching the vessel and cleaning its bottom. The *North Carolina* had been built too quickly, was not treated and was too heavy to be dragged ashore once launched. She was also woefully underpowered having been fitted with the engine from the 124-ton tug, *Uncle Ben*. By June 1863, the C.S.S. *North Carolina* was completed and launched. The engine was cursed with frequent breakdowns and the formidable looking ram was often towed from one post to another. Within six months she began to "hog" at the bow, a condition where the bow is lower than the stern, giving the appearance of a hog rooting around his pen. By December the warping and splitting of beams had caused planking to twist and leak. It was decided to remove the armor plating forward of the casement to bring the bow up.

Even with her problems, the federal fleet was quite concerned about the presence of ironclads in the Cape Fear River. The closest the *North Carolina* ever came to firing a shot in anger was early in 1864, when local Confederate forces faced off against each other. In the first months of the war, Navy Secretary Stephen Mallory had turned cotton onto currency to pay for overseas war materiel. Blockade-runners were required to hold a portion of space for government cargo. In March 1864, the runners *Alice* and *Hansa* refused to take on their share of cotton belonging to the Navy. Newly appointed Naval Agent William Peters informed Secretary Mallory of the situation and was instructed to hold the runners. Peters was also told to call on Commander Lynch for assistance, if needed. The situation quickly deteriorated when, on March eighth, Lynch thought the runners might be attempting to slip away, without the Navy cotton.

Lynch ordered the *Alice* to anchor near the *North Carolina*. Her Captain refused, so Lynch sent Marines aboard to take control of the ship. As this was taking place, Major General William Whiting (the area's Army commander) received an order from Lynch to stop and detain the *Hansa*. The two men had had a strained relationship for months and Whiting had no idea what had taken place. In his demand for an explanation, he wrote, "I will permit no interference with any vessel not belonging to the C.S. Navy by any authority but my own, or by orders of the War Department." Commander Lynch explained his position and Whiting sent soldiers aboard to guard the *Hansa*. Throughout the day, the two commanders argued as to whom was in charge. Lynch gave orders to use any means to stop the vessels, while Whiting insisted the Marine guard be removed and moved troops near the Navy Yard to expel the Marines by force if necessary. Sometime during the night, both vessels were returned to the quartermaster's wharf and the troops were reduced to a small detachment each. The next morning, the Army and Navy stood poised to do battle with each other as Lynch had the *North Carolina* towed over and moored close by the *Hansa*. The *North Carolina* was ordered to "sink her if she moves!" There they remained until Inspector General Samuel Cooper intervened, ordering the two branches of the service to return to their posts.

In June 1864, a crewman wrote home, "Our ship is not worth much, her decks are beginning to give way so much that we can hardly work the guns." Only a month later the *North Carolina* was moved to a shoal off Smithville (Southport) where her guns were removed and the remaining crew began stripping her armor. The *Raleigh* (which had been completed in 1864) struggled over the bar at New Inlet and with three smaller gunboats engaged the Union fleet off Fort Fisher. The ten-hour "engagement" was unremarkable and the *Raleigh* ran aground on her return, becoming a wreck in short order. As for the *North Carolina*, things got worse. Toredos (shipworms) turned the unprotected hull into a honeycomb-like sieve and the constant leaking required the pumps to be run at all times. In July, she was moored off Battery Island opposite Smithville as engineers continued the fight to keep her afloat. She finally settled on a shoal in September and what was left of her crew removed the last of her guns and continued stripping her armor plating. For a while, the *North Carolina* was used as a picket station, but her days as a warship were over. She remained at her last post until she was burned to the waterline in 1871. The Editor of the *Morning Star* wrote, "We hate to see the old relics of the late 'unpleasantness' thus disappearing."

In October 1995, a 15,000-pound anchor was dropped into her hull and the Army Corps of Engineers thought it a good time to document the wreck. It was discovered that significant damage had occurred and documentation was begun in July 1997. Today, the C.S.S. *North Carolina* lies at the edge of Battery Island in 12-

16 feet of water, partially buried in silt. There is a surprising amount of the lower hull remaining, as well as many artifacts. There appears to be as much of her left as remains of the *C.S.S. Neuse* and the documentation provides good insights into her construction. Interestingly, the Wilmington-built ram was not the only *C.S.S. North Carolina* to be built, if not commissioned. The Confederate government had ordered twin 2750-ton, ironclad, turret ships from Laird Shipbuilders in England. These steam and sail barks were to be named *North Carolina* and *Mississippi* and were nearly completed when seized by the British government in October 1863. A few months later, the would-be *North Carolina* was commissioned by the Royal Navy as *H.M.S. Scorpion*, assigned to the Channel fleet until 1869 when she was moved to Bermuda. *H.M.S. Scorpion* served the Royal Fleet until she was sunk as a target in 1901. In 1903 she was raised and sold for scrap, but was lost at sea while being towed to the United States.

The Yankees had their own U.S.S. North Carolina! Launched in 1821, she was a 102-gun Ship-of-the-line, formerly the Flagship of the Pacific Fleet. The ship served in the Pacific until she was returned to New York in 1839, where she continued to serve until decommissioned in 1865. Her figurehead, a bust of Sir Walter Raleigh, was presented to the *North Carolina* in 1909.

Other "iron" warships to bear the name North Carolina in service to the United States include:

U.S.S. North Carolina, ACR-12. An armored cruiser launched in 1906 and served through WWI until being scrapped in 1930.

U.S.S. North Carolina, BB-52 (you didn't know we had two battleships, huh?) This ship was ordered in 1918 and the keel was laid in 1920. Work however, was halted in 1922 because of the treaty limiting Naval Armament. Yep, the same treaty the Axis ignored! BB-52 was sold for scrap in 1923 (and probably came back as the Japanese aircraft carrier *Ryujo*!)

U.S.S. North Carolina, BB-55. The battleship we all know and love was laid down in 1937, launched in 1940 and served with distinction throughout WWII. In her first action in the Solomon Islands campaign, she sunk the *Ryujo* (that'll teach 'em!) She was decommissioned in 1947 and in 1961 was sold to her namesake state. Some of us remember sending in our cards full of pennies [It was asked that children send in ten cents and the money poured in with over 700,000 students contributing. The campaign raised \$330,000! ed.] and for those who don't, you might not know that the "Fighting Lady" did not go to her final berth quietly. She sunk one more vessel before retiring. As tugs were turning her into her new home, her stern slammed into a floating restaurant called Fergus Ark. It is the only known restaurant to be sunk by a U.S. warship!

Gettysburg Revisited

Judging by remarks made at our last meeting, we were on target when we said the trip was one of the best ever. Once more, thanks to Dr. John Krohn, Tommy King, Dan Geddie and all who made the trip possible! See below!



Dr. Krohn leads the (very cold) group at the Railroad Cut.

Some more photos, these from Fort Anderson, taken January 19, 2002



Front row (l to r): Dale Lear, Richard Bellows, Chris Fonvielle, Bob Quinn, Bob Cooke, Ed Russ. Back row: John Krohn, Sam Daniluk, Palmer Royal, John Moore, Mike Budziszewski, Bruce Patterson, Dan Geddie, Walter and Majel Reinheimer.

Answers to last months quiz on the Confederate Monument at Oakdale: He's holding an Austrian "Lorenz" rifle; probably the second most imported arm of the war (behind the British Enfield.) May 10 is Confederate Memorial Day because it is the day Stonewall Jackson died. This year it will be May 5 (at 2pm.) The United Daughters of the Confederacy (Cape Fear Chapter 3) will lay a wreath to honor the Confederate dead.

Confederate History Month

[from *Confederate History Month 2002*]

The Cape Fear Museum and Wilmington's historic community honor the 137th anniversary of the end of the Civil War with special programming for May 2002. Call the Museum (910-341-4350) for more details, but here are some of the upcoming programs (please note that the various programs will be held all around town!):

Sunday May 11-**War Between the States Symposium**. For information call Dr. Robert Rand, (910-350-3667; e-mail rand1124@aol.com)

Friday May 3- CFM staff member Sue Miller discusses the **UDC Cape Fear Chapter #3** and preservation "of America's treasures."

Sunday May 19-**Preserving a Southern Heritage**, Robin Reed, Smithsonian Institution. Beverly Tetterton, NHC Public Library, **Researching Confederate Ancestors**.

Friday May 10-**Confederates of the Lower Cape Fear**, Henry Mintz.

Saturday May 25-**The Last Living Confederate Veteran Tells All**.

Sunday May 26-Dr. William C. Davis "shares how the war is preserved in historic research and literature."

Last but not least, this will be our last meeting (and newsletter) until the season begins anew in the fall. Have a safe and happy summer and we will see you in September!