

# THE RUNNER



## Newsletter of The Cape Fear Civil War Round Table

November 2003 P.O. Box 10535, Wilmington, N.C. 28404 Editor: Bob Cooke

**Our next meeting will be Thursday, 6 November at St. Andrew's On-the-Sound**

**Social Hour 7:00 p.m. Meeting 7:30 p.m.**

### Steering Committee Contact Numbers:

Dr. Chris E. Fonvielle (792-9091) Mike Budziszewski (458-1370) Dan Geddie (799-5338) Bob Cooke (792-1601) Steve Gunter (686-4025) John Moore (256-6328) Ross St. George, Dale Lear, David Norris.

**Our guest speaker for November will be John David Smith.** Among the Civil War community he needs no introduction! Dr. Smith is currently the Graduate Alumni Distinguished Professor of History at N.C. State University. He has written and edited many books on diverse subjects such as African-Americans and slavery as well as Lincoln, Kentucky Governors, Yankee Ironclads and the health of Civil War soldiers. A complete list of his books, articles and pamphlets would take up about ten pages, so suffice to say he is very well versed in Civil War culture!

Dr. Smith attended Baldwin-Wallace College in 1971, the University of Kentucky in 1973 (A.M. degree) where he also received his Ph.D. (1977). His topic will be *Black Soldiers in Blue* (published in 2002). Dr. Smith's latest book, due this year, is entitled *The Negro in the American Rebellion* by William Wells Brown.

**Winners of our raffle:** Ed Gibson, *Listening to Old Pete*; Bob Cooke, *Tumult and Silence*; Chad Johnson, *Hampton Legion*; David Norris, *Sacrifice at Gettysburg*; John Craft, *Gods and Generals* (CD). The next time you are at a garage, library or yard sale, keep an eye out for those Civil War books. If you can pick up a few of them for our RT's raffle, it would be greatly appreciated!

Remember the cutoff date for our spring trip is February 19, 2004. We will tour Fredericksburg (December 1862) and Chancellorsville (May 1863). Our itinerary is as follows:

- ✓ Friday March 19th.....Check into Motel.
- ✓ Saturday March 20th.....Breakfast on your own; 8:00 a.m. buses pick everyone up at the Wingate Inn; 8:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. Tour Fredericksburg battlefield site; 12:00-1:00 p.m. Box lunch will be provided; 1:00 p.m. -5:00 p.m. Tour Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville battlefield sites; 7:00 p.m. Everyone drives to the Sky Tavern for supper.
- ✓ Sunday March 21st.....Breakfast on your own; 8:00 a.m. Bus leaves Wingate Inn; 8:00a.m. -12:00 p.m. finish tour of Chancellorsville battlefield. Remember, you can pick up an envelope (to remit dues or trip monies) at the next meeting.

### Fork's Road

Well, the weather has turned a bit cooler and that means it's getting close to the time when we'll ask for volunteers to help out at the Fork's Road earthworks. The really tough work was done last year but the site has become overgrown and needs a "trimming." Any help will be appreciated. A date will be set shortly and if you are able to come, wear your work clothes, bring some yard tools and have a good time!

It doesn't get any better than this! At our last meeting held at the Cape Fear Club and after a great dinner (fried chicken, barbecue, salads and desert) William C. "Jack" Davis held court! Speaking of the last days of the Confederacy and the last-minute politics that continued, he held us all enthralled. Opening with the statement that not much attention has ever been paid to those halcyon days. "It is a political story...of internal politics," we were informed. Although Davis had his faults, he was probably the most dedicated Confederate in the South, he had "invested" in an independent country and refused to see that dream slip away. The government at Richmond was not a two-party system, Jefferson Davis controlled not only the Executive, but the Legislative branch as well; of his 32 vetoes, only one was overturned. The control over his cabinet was nearly absolute, with the exception of the last Secretary of War, John Cabell Breckenridge, who was appointed 4 February 1865.

Something of a cabal developed early in 1865. With the addition of Breckenridge, who saw the coming demise of the Confederacy, tried to maneuver Davis into calling for a negotiated peace, but even he ran into the likes of R.M.T. Hunter, Robert Toombs and Robert B. Rhett. All of them disliked Davis, but even at the end they couldn't work together. Breckenridge, who had served as Vice-president under James Buchanan, realized the coming importance of North Carolina as the authorities would soon have to abandon Richmond. In early April, when Lee's lines around Petersburg were breached, Davis was notified (while at Sunday Service). The government seemed to be taken by surprise as the various departments scrambled to destroy their records by hauling boxes into the streets and burning them (and destroying a good portion of the city as well!) After the last cabinet meeting was held at Danville, Va. (known today as the "Last Capital of the Confederacy") Davis' cabinet melted away. As they fled the Federal forces sent to capture them, the cabinet heads met with various fates. Davis moved south, into North Carolina. At several stops along the way, he was refused entry into homes and was forced to sleep in a railway car. He was captured in Georgia and was imprisoned at Fortress Monroe. Removing about an inch of his huge mustache in an attempt to disguise himself, Breckenridge escaped to Cuba. There, performing the last official act of the Confederacy, he ordered all Southern soldiers to lay down their arms.

**Updated Speaker Schedule:**

- 11 December.....Debbie Blanton.....*Women Soldiers*
- 8 January.....Ray Flowers.....*Southern Exposure*
- 12 February.....Ross St. George.....TBA.
- March.....Spring Trip.
- 8 April.....Greg Biggs.....*Confederate Flags*
- 13 May.....Gordon Rhea.....*Cold Harbor*: This meeting will be our second "eatin' meetin'" and like our October meeting, will be held at the Cape Fear Club.

**The Secret of General Butler's Removal**

(From the *Herald of the Union*, quoting the *New York Ledger*)

Many people suppose that the removal of General Butler was caused by his failure to take Fort Fisher. That is not so. The true reason is this: when General Butler was in command in this city, previous to the last presidential election, a certain article appeared in the *New York Herald* which the General did not like. As soon as he read it, he at once dispatched one of his aids to the *Herald* office, to summon the managing editor (Mr. Hudson) to appear at his headquarters. Mr. Hudson obeyed the summons, and on appearing before the high military official he was informed that the *Herald* must retract the article, or he (General Butler) would suppress the paper. General Butler was not aware when he made this threat that the relations of Mr. Bennett, the responsible editor of the *Herald*, with the administration were of a very friendly and confidential character, and therefore, in making this exhibition of his "brief authority," he "put his foot in it." Mr. Bennett, of course, never forgave him; but on the contrary, managed to have him removed just as soon as the General's superiors could assign a reason that would seemingly justify his decapitation. General Butler is himself aware of this now, although he did not know the secret of his removal at the time it took place. The offer of the French Mission by our late President to James Gordon Bennett and the endorsement of the offer by Horace Greeley must have opened General Butler's eyes. He will probably let the newspapers alone hereafter.

Member **Walt Bullard** has generously shared the story of his ancestor with us: Private **Dennis L. Carlisle** was Walt's maternal great-great-grandfather. While his story is that of the 51<sup>st</sup> Regiment N.C. Troops, it is also a story of many men, both north and south, who spent their last days in prison. Private Carlisle's story is about the camp at Elmira, but there were other prisons that were every bit as bad; we know most of them by name, Salisbury, Fort Delaware, Florence, Point Lookout and Camp Douglas. It is fitting that all POWs be remembered. The site at Andersonville, Georgia now houses the National POW Museum; it was there that one man said, "...it takes 7 of its occupants [sic] to make a shadow."

### One Soldier's Story

Private **Dennis L. Carlisle** enlisted in a company of Cumberland and Robeson County volunteers on 7 April 1862. Calling itself the "Scotch Tigers," in recognition of the Scottish heritage of many members, the unit became Company "D" of the 51<sup>st</sup> Regiment, N.C.T. Commanded by Wilmingtonian **John L. Cantwell** (who was a cotton broker and County Court clerk) the regiment boasted about 800 men at its peak. When surrendered in April 1865 at Durham Station, it mustered only 36 men fit for duty. Initially the men were used as laborers, helping to construct the forts around Wilmington and unloading blockade runners. After a reorganization in October, the unit received its baptism of fire at Kinston when it encountered Union Major General **John Foster's** men making their way towards Goldsboro.

Pvt. Carlisle was in that battle and shortly after was promoted to Corporal. The Regiment's next meeting with Federals was in Charleston when it was sent to Battery Wagner. Here the men endured constant cannon and rifle fire and it was here that the men manned the parapets to throw back an attack by the 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts (you know that regiment from the movie "Glory"). Did you know that three assaults were made that day? The 51<sup>st</sup> occupied the center of the Confederate line and received the brunt of the attacks. Battery Wagner held out, but was abandoned later that year. The 51<sup>st</sup> returned to North Carolina, taking part in General **George Pickett's** ill-fated effort to recapture New Bern. Their next tour of duty brought them to Petersburg, Virginia. After a quiet winter, there was **Drewry's Bluff**, **Bermuda Hundred** and **Cold Harbor**. While on the defensive, the unit lost only a few men, but when a Confederate attack was mounted (at Cold Harbor) the luck of the 51<sup>st</sup> ran out. They came up against the new seven-shot Spencer repeaters; close-range blasts of canister and grapeshot killed and wounded many. Both armies continued to struggle in the Virginia heat, with some 7,000 Union dead accounted for the next day. It was at this point that Pvt. Carlisle was captured. Gathered together, the prisoners were sent to Point Lookout, Maryland, thence to Elmira, N.Y. In September 1864, a New York newspaper said of the prison at Elmira:

There are about eight-thousand rebel prisoners at Elmira, and more are coming up daily. They are most able-bodied men, evidently of good families at the South. They are orderly and respectful in their deportment....

The discipline in the camp is very rigid, and there is no intercourse between the prisoners and the public. Few civilians can even get a peep over the high fence...much less get within speaking distance.

The stockade was never meant to hold more than around 4,400 men. Ultimately, more than 12,000 prisoners were enclosed. It quickly became a very sickly place:

"If ever there was a hell on earth," wrote a Texan, "Elmira prison was that hell." No compound struck a deeper chill into the hearts of Confederate soldiers. Opened in July 1864, it occupied 30 acres along New York's Chemung River. Flooding of the river soon left a stagnant pool...in the center of the compound. Into the muck went garbage and thousands of gallons of camp sewerage [contaminating the water supply].

In addition to overcrowding, there were other problems; the wood used in constructing barracks began to crack, and "as new prisoners arrived they were crammed into hastily erected tents." So many

POWs came that many had to sleep outdoors. With the coming of winter, the poorly-clad Southerners suffered greatly; it is no wonder that Elmira "led all Northern prisons in its death rate, an average of about 10 a day." Indeed, one doctor at the camp boasted that "he killed more Rebs than any soldier at the front."

As prisoners died, their bodies were turned over to a black man, John W. Jones, who was the sexton of several cemeteries in the area. Jones, an escaped slave from northern Virginia, had located in Elmira and had become a respected member of the community and was known to be an honest and decent man. His pay was \$12 per month, plus \$2.50 per burial, and he employed up to 12 men. He and his crew were kept quite busy; he tolerated no horseplay disrespect for the dead, he and his men buried the bodies in individual coffins in neat rows, marking each grave with a wooden board on which was written each man's name, rank and unit. He meticulously recorded the same information in a ledger book that he diligently guarded.

In addition to the debilitating conditions, an observation tower further degraded the prisoners. In July 1864, a large wooden tower was constructed near the fence line and for fifteen cents, visitors could climb to the platform (after having refreshments below).

Since townspeople were strictly forbidden to enter the prison, the tower afforded them a perfect opportunity to see the prisoners... Many of the prisoners reacted with amusement to the zoo-like situation... and engaged in numerous ridiculous feats of acrobatics and ground tumbling[.]. Their performance was "really in derision of being regarded as curiosities." [The tower was such a success that a second tower was built.] Other men whiled away the hours by carving trinkets: rings, buttons, watch chains, chess pieces, pipes and bracelets. They carved the items from bone, gutta percha, shell, wood and even horsehair, sometimes selling their craftwork to guards or civilians.



Elmira- there were 17 escapes from the prison. (Photo taken from the observatory.)  
From "Prisons and Hospitals," *The Photographic History of the War.*

With disease rampant, men were dying by the hundreds. On 29 September, Corporal Carlisle succumbed to "chronic diarrhea" (dysentery probably). By the end of hostilities in the spring of 1865, more than 3,000 had died. Those wooden markers placed by Mr. Jones were replaced in 1904 by white marble gravestones and the Confederate Cemetery is now included within the larger U.S. National Cemetery at Elmira. New graves appear from time to time as the cemetery still accepts the burial of military veterans. Visitors can easily locate their forebears' graves by consulting a directory at the caretaker's office. The Confederates are bounded on three sides by a line of Federal graves, as if on eternal guard around their prisoners. Today the Stars and Stripes fly above all, the gravestones of the old enemies are identical except for the rounded tops of the Federal and the blunt points atop the Confederate. (In addition to Walt Bullard's contribution, the following works were consulted: *Time-Life Books*, "Tenting Tonight"; John Kaufield, "The Elmira Observatory," *Civil War Times Illustrated*, July 1977; "Prisons and Hospitals," *The Photographic History of the Civil War*, ed.)

Commenting on the inventiveness of Northerners, the *Wilmington Daily Journal* reported that a "Yankee has invented a machine to remove a boil from a tea kettle! (19 February 1862).

Thanks to this month's Refreshment Coordinator, David Norris!