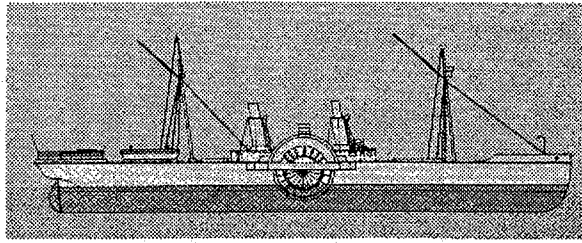


The Runner



Cape Fear Civil War Round Table

February 2005 P.O. Box 10535, Wilmington, N.C., 28404 Editor: Bob Cooke

**Our next meeting will be Thursday, 10 February 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) Dan Geddie (799-5338) Bob Cooke (792-1601) Steve Gunter (686-4025) John Moore (256-6328) Dale Lear (686-2418) Ross St. George (254-4385) David Norris.

Please send all correspondence to the Round Table at the above address.

Member David Norris will be our speaker for February. Preparing us for our spring trip, he will discuss the battles of the Wilderness and Spotsylvania. David is well-versed on the subjects. A native of Charlotte, he spent "a long time" in Greenville before finally settling in Wilmington. David has written numerous articles for magazines and encyclopedias on various topics, mainly on the Civil War. Most recently, David has contributed two articles to Coastal Chronicles II, ("And They All Rest Together: Beaufort's Old Burying Ground" and another entitled "Burnsides Military Trains of the Albemarle.") David will discuss the Campaigns in Virginia, as well as the implications in North Carolina!

Spring Trip

Our trip this year will be to the "first battle of the Overland Campaign." We will board the bus at the hotel parking lot at 8:00 a.m. on Saturday, March 19. Please note that we were unable to get a block of rooms at the original hotel and will be staying at the **Hampton Inn in Stafford, Va.** (Tel. No. 540-657-0999). A box lunch will be provided and we will return to the hotel at 5:00 p.m. The cost is \$135.00 and the money needs to be in by February 19. When making reservations, please be sure to tell them you are with the Cape Fear RT (for the \$78 per night rate).

Winners of the Raffle: *Confederate Goliath*- Ed Hickmon; *Guidebook to the Outer Banks*- Steve Gunter; *Naval Strategies of the Civil War*- Dick Covell; *All Things For Good (Stonewall Jackson)*- John Moore; *Soldiering*- Steve Gunter; *Compact History of the Civil War*- Kitsy Lackey; Civil War videotape- Bruce Patterson; Civil War (2005) Calendar- Ed Gibson. Member Bob Maffitt has found a new music CD entitled "Stone Grey Day" which features the song "The Lily Ann." The song, he reports, is about his ancestor's (Captain J.N. Maffitt) adventures on the vessel of the same name. See Bob for details!

In and Out: During one of the fiercest battles of the Western Theater, a celebrated Tennessee regiment drove back the Yankee lines, when suddenly they came under fire from a half-dozen enemy batteries; at the same time, several Union regiments added their musketry to the surprise. The Confederates, as brave as they were, found it expedient to retreat to a ridge some 200 yards to their rear. At this juncture, a noted Mississippi regiment came upon the scene and the men shouted to the Tennesseans, "Make way there and let Mississippi in!" The "way" was promptly made and the newly arrived Rebels rushed at the foe. Soon, they reached the deadly point and a similar greeting was given them. They reeled back as their predecessors had done and seeing them return, the Tennesseans rose as one and yelled, "Make way here, and let Mississippi out!" [Gregory A. Coco, *Rebel Humor*.]

Salisbury, N.C. *Watchman* has the following: Three Irishman, deserters from the Federal army, entered our lines, and when asked how they avoided the pickets, replied:- "Sure and were we not the pickets themselves."

Fort Macon's history has been closely examined by Paul Branch (who, in addition to being the fort's historian, also gives tours of the site) spoke to our RT about his passion...Fort Macon! The first fort built on Bogue Banks, completed in 1809, was washed away in 1820. By 1826, a five-sided work was finished, at a cost of nearly \$500,000. The fort was unique in that it was built below ground, on a slope; hence, it was nearly invisible from the sea. When war came, local militia troops seized the fort from Ordnance Sgt. William Alexander. It was more strongly fortified (eventually fielding 54 guns of varying caliber) but when the attack came, it was garrisoned by only 450 men, commanded by Colonel Moses J. White. The garrison watched and waited: Forts Hatteras and Clark, Roanoke Island, New Bern and Morehead City, all fell to the Union steamroller. With the capture of New Bern, the fort's fate was sealed. Three offers to surrender were rebuffed by White and soon the fort came under siege by a Union investment. When the attack came on 25 April 1862, Union gunboats, floating batteries and land batteries pounded the fort for more than eleven hours. The major defect, Mr. Branch pointed out, was the lack of mortars, which might have prevented the Bluecoats from digging in, closer and closer to the walls of the fort. "There was such extensive damage, Col. White was forced to surrender the following morning." One of the stories that we found interesting was that of Sgt. Alexander, who had turned the fort over to the Confederates; he waited patiently for orders in Morehead City until the town was taken by the Federals. Alexander then promptly reported for duty the following day! He helped recapture the fort and was stationed in Morehead City until the end of the war when he finally resigned.

Fort Fisher...After the Fall.

(Part III, Conclusion)

In 1940, with the threat of war looming, the U.S. Government took over most of the southern end of Federal Point, by leasing the property from the owners, T. & L. Orrell as well as another tract from Hugh McRae. The post was an adjunct of Camp Davis in Holly Ridge, some 50 miles to the north and Fisher was one of five locations selected for a firing range for anti-aircraft artillery units. At Fisher, buildings were constructed and a small airstrip built (directly through several of the land-face traverses!) Known to the army as the Fort Fisher Firing Point, locations at which gun batteries were placed for practice were south of the entrance (the two columns lining Highway 421) and east of the highway, along the ocean front; utilities and living quarters were located on the opposite side of the road.

Troops spent several weeks there, live-firing 37 mm, 155mm seacoast guns, .50 and .30 caliber weapons and it was, as one veteran recalled, "strictly a no-nonsense place designed to put grit and fire in the bowels of its trainees." Indeed, the men training there were faced with many of the same problems the fort's original garrison faced: sand and mosquitoes! Three weeks before the attack on Pearl Harbor, the fort again resounded with gunfire when the first Coast Artillery Regiment arrived to practice with their big guns! It is interesting to note that the last U.S. troops to leave the fort after the Civil War were US Colored Troops and the first troops to return when the fort was activated, were from the 54th Coast Artillery, an all-Black unit! As one newspaper reported:

Almost eight decades earlier, African American troops had served on Federal Point as part of the Union expeditionary force....With the arrival of the 54th Coast Artillery in 1941, black soldiers were once again in the area for military service.

When on the firing range, the guns were emplaced facing seaward and shot at aircraft-towed as well as floating targets. On a cold January evening in 1942, a young soldier sat down by a fire built by his mates. They had used some old Civil War shells as "props for a makeshift fireplace" when suddenly one of the shells began "spewing hot embers on the soldier," burning his face and hands. The old shell had been heated just enough to disintegrate and injure the man. Nineteen forty-three was said to be the fort's busiest year. That year a British anti-aircraft unit joined in conducting exercises with U.S. troops; it was at this point in the war that saw the Woman's Airforce Service Pilots (WASPSs) not only ferrying aircraft around the country, but also saw them at the controls of tow planes, pulling target sleeves attached to long cables along the beaches at Fort Fisher. Training was carried on at night as well. Searchlight units (given the name "Moonlight Cavalry") scanned the dark skies to pick out the target aircraft. As much of the firing was out to sea, no vessels were allowed in the danger zone, which extended some five to seven miles when firing was in progress. The area quickly saw the construction of barracks (frame buildings plus frame tent stands) several mess halls, gas station, post exchange, storage buildings and tent sites, service club (at the site of the Fort Fisher Pier Restaurant) theater and chapels were constructed; anything to help ease the boredom induced by the absence of polite society:

There was volleyball, horseshoes and golf, but boxing was by far the most popular. Throngs of spectators gathered for the matches....The fervor reached its peak in January 1944, when boxing champ Joe Louis arrived for a visit.

Also constructed were bunkers meant to thwart an enemy landing along the beaches. Three observation towers were built along the oceanfront and the concrete bases are still to be seen today (one of the towers was taken down in 1982). The chief engineer of construction was Major Charles H. Foard, who would later co-own and operate the Blockade Runner Museum in Carolina Beach. When the war came to a close, there were 1,000 buildings (including a 350-bed hospital) worth more than \$2,500,000. Much like after the Civil War, an auction was held to sell the property (the Orrells failed to negotiate a purchase of the buildings on the property) and many of the 16' by 48' buildings were bought and moved to new locations. Today many of these "cottages" can still be seen throughout the beach communities. It was hoped that the new hospital, finished the very day the fort was deactivated, could be taken over and either used by the county or as a VA hospital. In the 1950s, when the Sunny Point Military Terminal became active, most of the WWII buildings that were left were knocked down. In 1982, the last of the WWII buildings (the PX) was demolished, but remnants remain. Today a diligent visitor can still discern an ammunition bunker (from WWII) north of Battery Buchanan.

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NOTE: The recent Government C.P.A. order does not include or apply to used building materials.

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An Anniversary And Growing Threat




By 1962, the State had taken an interest in Fort Fisher.

FORT FISHER

AN OLD-FASHIONED FOURTH OF JULY

COL. WILLIAM LAMB

1812-1862



Wednesday Afternoon, July 4, 1962

will be followed by

A BAND CONCERT 26th REGIMENTAL BAND

Also will be

AN ADDRESS BY NORTH CAROLINA REPRESENTATIVE OF HONORABLE

EDMUND HARDING

CONGRESSMAN WITH

DEMONSTRATION OF MILITARY DRILL - MUSKET FIRING - AND ARTILLERY FIRING

To Be Followed By

Introduction of Distinguished Guests

SPEAKER - MR. EYON G. TYLER, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, VIRGINIA COLLEGE

CONCLUSION WITH

GIANT PYROTECHNIC DISPLAY

8:30 - Commencement at half past four

Col. William Lamb Day, 1962.

An Auction was held on an all-cash basis after the war.

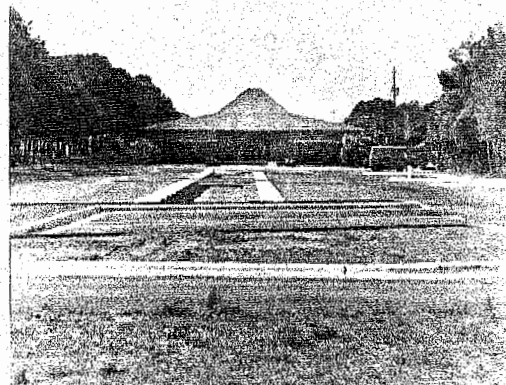
In 1948, the Baptist Seaside Assembly leased 24 acres from the Federal Government for a term of 6 years, but they later moved across the river and purchased Fort Caswell as their permanent assembly area. In 1954, hurricane Hazel tore into the Carolina coast, washing away much of the fort's sea face batteries, but (unlike 1865) help was on the way! As author Rod Gragg recorded (in *Confederate Goliath*), as the Civil War Centennial approached, North Carolina took an interest in the Fort Fisher site. "In 1958...the State did what the federal government had failed to do a half-century earlier." The State gained control of what was left of the old fort and designated it a State Historic Site. In 1965, officiated by Governor Dan Moore, a Visitor's Center and Museum was opened (at a cost of \$96,000) and within the first twelve months of operation, counted more than 220,000 visitors, quickly becoming one of the State's most popular sites. Even with its increased popularity, the old fort was still in mortal danger, not only from the sea, but from developers as well. In the summer of 1968, a bulldozer suddenly began grading the area. Residential lots were being marketed directly on what remained of the fort's sea face. Four major batteries would have been destroyed, including the telegraph station and the Mound Battery. Citing a need for the "preservation of the historical value of the area known as Fort Fisher", the State moved quickly to halt the 450-acre Ramsgate subdivision by condemnation proceedings. Unfortunately, two of the traverses had already been demolished. State archaeologist Stanley South reported that the "land seized...by the State was 'rich in artifacts.'" He continued, "There have been shells, buckles, buttons and eating utensils recovered during the past few months." South also indicated that it was relic hunters who first notified the State of their find. The case would

be tied up in litigation until 1971 when the courts awarded the owners \$1.3 million for the property. Ensclosed on the property was another "landmark." Robert Harrill, the "Fort Fisher Hermit," took up residence in a WWII bunker around 1955 and lived in it, entertaining tourists and other visitors until his death in 1972. (Harrell's "bunker" is visited today by tourists; the trail leading to it is on the south side of the Aquarium's parking lot.) The State also expressed an interest in the blockade-running wrecks laying along the coast and in 1968 the State Supreme Court concurred by declaring that vessels laying within a three-mile limit of the coast were the property of the State. A few years earlier U.S. Navy divers had gone down on the wreck of the *Modern Greece* and recovered many artifacts, which were put on display at the Visitor's Center. The military still maintained a presence in the area, for in 1965, an Air Force base was constructed just north of the fort. The station, which in 1974 was home to 300 officers and men, housed the 701st Air Defense Group, a radar squadron. Interestingly, in the control area, there was a two-foot thick wall to protect the men from radiation in the event of an atomic attack. In 1988, the base was closed, but remained a training center for National Guard units, as well as providing "a place at the beach" in the form of cottages and campsites for active and retired military personnel. Yet another military connection existed when the Landing Ship Dock-40 was named the *Fort Fisher* by the U.S. Navy. Decommissioned in 1990s a piece of the ship's planking was fashioned into a plaque and given to the fort.

Recently placed on the North Carolina Civil War Trails, a plaque now tells the story of "Fort Fisher's Last Stand" at Battery Buchanan. By 1979, the area was listed by the State as having the "most serious erosion problems in the State." Yet, it was not until 1995 that help came in the form of a seawall, to deter yet another "Last Stand" built to protect the fort. Consisting of 68,000 tons of granite and limestone, the wall spread over 3,000 feet and in some places was 15' high. The seawall would not have put in except for the untiring efforts of Mr. Paul Laird and the Fort Fisher Restoration Committee. Even though the wall "fended off the sea," in 1996 there was some damage from hurricane Fran and in 2001 the Civil War Preservation Trust placed the fort on its top-ten most endangered list. In 1992, the site was placed on the National Register of Historic Sites; Reverend Smith, H.C. McQueen, Edgar Williams, Louis T. Moore and all others who worked for Federal recognition and preservation could now rest easier. Future plans include a handicap-accessible walkway (since completed), restoration of a Civil War bombproof as well as a WWII gun emplacement. Preservation efforts are today being carried forward by not only the State, but by the Fort Fisher Restoration Committee and the staff and volunteers who now oversee North Carolina's most-visited Historic Site! Over 140 years after its construction, the fort is again serving the community it was built to protect. [Thanks to Dr. Chris Fonvielle, Barbara Hoppe (Director of the Ft. Fisher State Historic Site), Ray Flowers and other staff members of Fort Fisher for help with this article. Much of the information came from newspaper articles in the *Bill Reaves* Collection; additional information about Fort Fisher in WWII came from the *Island Gazette's 2004 Tour Guide*; David A. Stallman, *A History of Camp Davis and Fort Fisher During World War II*, by Dr. Kristin S. Bailey.



Remains of a WWII observation tower.



The Visitor's Center opened in August, 1965.