



The Cape Fear Civil War Round Table

The *RUNNER*

Newsletter of The Cape Fear Civil War Round Table

Editor **Bob Cooke**

October 2007

Our next meeting is Thursday, 11 October at St. Andrew's On-the-Sound
Registration desk opens at **6:30**, the social (half) hour begins at **7:00** and the program starts at
7:30.



Our speaker for October will be **Jonathan Sarris**, who “hails from the border state of Maryland. He grew up in the suburbs of Washington D.C. and attended Washington College in Chestertown, Maryland. ‘After a blessedly short career in government’ (his words) he returned to graduate school. In 1998 he received a PhD in history from the University of Georgia, where he studied with Robert E. Lee biographer, Emory M. Thomas. He has taught at the University of Georgia and Appalachian State University. He is currently an Associate Professor of History at North Carolina Wesleyan College in Rocky Mount, N.C. In addition to his book, *A Separate Civil War: Communities in Conflict*, (his topic for our October meeting) he has written several articles and book reviews on Civil War topics. His book looks at two counties in northern Georgia, where a ‘local Civil War’ was taking place as mountaineers became ‘disaffected’ with Confederate policies.” [The above taken from [The Knapsack](#) newsletter of the Raleigh Round Table.]



Some forty or so attendees (which included the speaker's mother, Linda Rhodes!) at our September kick-off meeting were treated to a great presentation by Mr. Jeff Bockert who talked about: *Lessons Learned in Battle: The Mexican War as a Precursor to the Civil War*. Beginning with a quick summation of the events which led up to that conflict, Mr. Bockert went on to note the similarities between the two wars.



When trouble with Mexico seemed imminent, General Zachary Taylor was dispatched to the disputed region. When war began, Taylor marched into Mexico and the first battle (and American victory) soon followed. Taylor, who often dressed in common soldier's garb, used the strategy of continuing to pursue the enemy, to give him no time to rest and reorganize. On his staff was a young officer by the name of U.S. Grant. Grant, who would also dress as a common soldier, would use those same tactics against the Confederates.

Also sent to Mexico was General Winfield Scott, who mounted the largest amphibious operation at that time, to attack the coastal city of Vera Cruz. Scott, (who was a meticulous dresser) planned the landing and subsequent movement inland very carefully. On his staff was a young officer named George McClellan. "Little Mac" would also recall his Mexican War experiences and not attack until

everything was in place.

Mr. Bockert also compared the role of the Presidents: James K. Polk (born in Mecklenburg County) "directly managed the day-to-day operations" of the military; he appointed Colonels and argued with the generals. Lincoln (as did Polk) expanded the role of the Presidents; they became "subservient" to their Commander-in-Chief. Both were "party" men and while Polk argued with General Scott during the Mexican War, it was Lincoln who went head-to-head with McClellan during the Civil War. Interestingly, Mr. Bockert also pointed out that Confederate President Jeff Davis was very much like Polk; both men "distrusted competitors" and were more than willing "to sacrifice military success for loyalty."

Other innovations were seen during the Mexican War. The role of the Navy changed as ships were now put on blockade duty (against Mexican ports); at Vera Cruz offshore bombardment and a beach assault were developed (which would later be used by Union forces at Fort Fisher); the role of the volunteer soldier was expanded; at the battle of Palo Alto, new artillery tactics (for example, the use of "Flying Artillery") were developed which made that arm the "King of Battle."

In short, many officers who were of junior grade during the Mexican War recalled their experiences when called upon to serve in the American War. Captain Robert E. Lee, who might have been termed General Taylor's engineering "scout" learned the value of flanking maneuvers with Scott as he battled his way to Mexico City: "Good intelligence and outwitting the enemy wins battles". He also remembered to never overestimate the strength of the enemy. Judging by the numbers of questions that were asked of Jeff, interest in this subject remains high!

Please note that the meeting date in February is the THIRD Thursday of that month. It was necessary to change the date due to a conflict. Also, a date for the March meeting has not yet been determined.



