



The Cape Fear Civil War Round Table

The *RUNNER*

Newsletter of The Cape Fear Civil War Round Table

Editor **Bob Cooke**

April 2009

Our next meeting will be 9 April 2009 at St. Andrew's On-the-Sound (Airlie Rd.)

Social Hour at 6:30 p.m., meeting at 7:30 p.m.



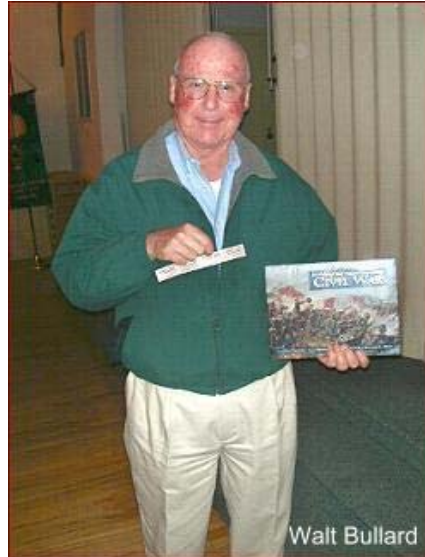
Our April speaker, **Guntis Goncarvos**, is a chemist by profession but a historian at heart! He has a BS in Chemistry from Charter Oak College in Connecticut and has worked in the nuclear power industry as a radio chemist and Chemistry Supervisor for over 28 years. He recently relocated from North Carolina, where he worked for Progress Energy, to New Hampshire where he now works for FPL Energy. He and his wife Joan have three daughters, one at Purdue University where she is a staff veterinarian, another is an attorney in Boston, and the youngest is attending the University of Rhode Island.

Convergence of Valor, published in late 2003 “was sparked by the recovery of the *H.L. Hunley* in 2000. **Mr Goncarvos** was particularly interested in the forensic reconstruction of the faces of the *Hunley's* final crew. While following developments, he learned that four of the eight sailors were recent European immigrants. Research into the men's lives revealed that two of the men, Miller and Lumpkin had mysteriously sparse backgrounds. Using known facts, he worked a story around the men and their parts in the events that led to the sinking of the *Housatonic* on February 17, 1864. Please join us Thursday evening for what promises to be yet another great talk!



Raffle Winners

Songs of the Civil War- **Richard Riano**
Glory in Thy Name- **Al Hines**
This Hallowed Ground- **Charles Watson**
The History of the 117th New York Volunteers- **Palmer Royal**
The Last to Die- **Ed Gibson**
Under Custer's Command- **Bruce Patterson**



Walt Bullard

Grand prize winner - *Don Troiani's Civil War-* **Walt Bullard** (welcome back Walt!)



Brian Kraus

At our March meeting, **Mr. Brian Kraus** did indeed set the stage for our upcoming trip to New Bern. Beginning with uniforms and accoutrements that were worn and carried by the Union and Confederate troops, he indicated that on the day of the battle in March 1862, the men of both sides looked quite similar. It had rained heavily the preceding day, so much so that many of the Northerners rifles failed to fire because they had not “kept their powder dry.” The rain also caused their wooden stocks to swell so much so that the ramrods could not be withdrawn. Many of the Union regiments went into battle knowing they could only fire one or two shots, so they were ordered to fix bayonets. With audience participation, he showed how the troops were aligned and sent forward, elbow to elbow.

Knowing that the successful attack of **Union General Ambrose Burnside** on the coast of North Carolina would lead to further incursions, the Confederates prepared to defend the deep-water port (and its two rail lines) of New Bern. The Confederate general in overall command was **Lawrence O'Bryan Branch**, a well-known pre-war politician. Branch had taken to military command and was good at it. Unfortunately, he erred in the placement of his troops (he had between 4,000 and 4,500 men) and

when the battle commenced, it was found that the untried militia was holding the center of the line. The militia were flanked by the 35th NC regiment. That unit had, according to Mr. Kraus, undergone a terrific bombardment by U.S. Navy gunships the day prior when they were sent to Fisher's Landing to oppose the Union amphibious assault. As they were quite "skittish" about being shelled again, the Confederate line began to waver as the first U.S. soldiers hit them.

Burnside's men numbered around eleven thousand, along with several gunboats that could ply up the Trent River and shell the Southern defenders. The militiamen withstood but two volleys from the attackers before fleeing from their position. In General Branch's report he wrote: "The militia had now abandoned their positions, and the utmost exertions of myself and my staff could not rally them. Colonel Sinclair's regiment [the 35th] very quickly followed their example, retreating in the utmost disorder."

While the center of the line was disintegrating, the 26th NC, commanded by future Governor Zebulon B. Vance, was holding back the attackers on the Confederate right flank. Soon however, they began to realize, as they took fire from their left, that they had been flanked. A general withdrawal ensued; one that soon became a rout. The Confederates finally reformed their line at Kinston. The losses were as follows: CSA- 64 dead and 89 wounded; USA- 88 dead and 370 wounded. Although the numbers listed are not like those of later Virginia battlefields, Mr. Krause pointed out that based on the lower numbers of men engaged, the percentage of killed and wounded is notably higher than other battles.

New Bern was lost to the Confederacy and although several attempts were made to recapture it, the city would serve the Union well as a strong enclave throughout the war. It would be from New Bern that raids were dispatched to strike the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad.



EXTRA ! EXTRA ! EXTRA !

Burnside Visits New Bern (and stayed a while)



(Images provided by **Ann Hertzler**)



Rain threatened throughout Saturday, 28 March 2009 when 25 members, friends and guests of your Cape Fear Civil War Round Table traveled by chartered bus to the New Bern Battlefield. The weather, in fact, was not unlike the conditions that existed in that strategic port city when Brigadier Ambrose E. Burnside landed his expeditionary force on the south bank of the Neuse River and approached New Bern.

Noted Civil War artist and historian Brian Kraus had set the stage for our tour with his splendid presentation to the Round Table earlier in March. At that time and again during the tour, Brian

emphasized his talk by showing the weathered uniforms of the North Carolina 33rd Infantry with their signature “black tabs”, soldiers field equipment and finally a Enfield rifle and bayonet.

The battlefield today consists of some 27 acres of the original site of the assault on New Bern. The redans built by the Confederate troops have (remarkably) been undisturbed for the 147 years and except for tree growth, look exactly as they did in 1862. Likewise, Fort Thompson, an earthen fort overlooking the Neuse and anchoring the Confederate left flank remains in pristine condition.

General Burnside led some 11,000 Union troops towards New Bern. Confederate forces numbering some 4,500 inexperienced and ill-equipped troops were led by General Laurence O’ Bryan Branch, a politician with little military experience. General Branch was determined to



defend New Bern at a line of entrenchments that ran from Fort Thompson on the Neuse, inland to the edge of a deep swampy backwater called Bullen’s Branch. This defensive line was cut (almost in the middle) by the



Atlantic & North Carolina Railroad tracks and it was in this sector that the Union troops broke through the Confederate line defended by the 33rd. The battle lasted some four hours. Casualties were high and although the 33rd Infantry Regiment was to fight many battles in the years to come, they rarely incurred losses as heavy as during this baptism of fire.

Our tour retraced Burnside's line of march. We were able to walk the defensive positions, stand at Evan's Hill Redoubt (where Branch had positioned a two-gun section of artillery anchoring his right flank) and visualize the battle that Brian had memorialized in his painting Baptism of Fire, a copy of which was provided to each member.

This was a most successful tour, thanks to the combined efforts of several members coupled with the professional expertise of our tour director. The best testimonial was from several members who want to know where we are going next year.

Bruce Patterson

