

THE GREATEST BATTLE IN THE WESTERN THEATER

By Bill Jayne

Your Voice Correspondent

Wilmington's Cape Fear Civil War Round Table invites you to a presentation on Thursday, March 12 at Harbor Church at 4853 Masonboro Loop beginning at 6:30 p.m.

Everard H. Smith, Ph.D., will discuss the pivotal battles of Chickamauga and Chattanooga in the fall of 1863. Dr. Earl H. Hess, author of *The Civil War in the West*, pronounced Chickamauga as "the greatest battle in the western theater" of the Civil War. In spite of the size of the forces involved and the great strategic value of the sites, the battles are relatively little known.

Dr. Smith, a native of Washington, D.C., received his B.A. from Yale and a Ph.D. in history from UNC Chapel Hill. He has been a resident of North Carolina for more than 45 years and has lived in Wilmington since 1991 when he joined the staff of UNCW. He later became a senior networking analyst for the N.C. Department of Information Technology.

A highly acclaimed local speaker, Dr. Smith specializes in the history of the Civil War and World War II. He is a former member of the Wilmington Historic Preservation Commission and past chairman of the City Advisory Board of the Hannah Block Historic USO building. He is also a specialist in Shakespeare and has been the stage manager for several productions of the Cape Fear Shakespeare, Ltd., which presents the annual summer Shakespeare festival at Greenfield Lake.

Why are the battles little known? For one thing, the topography of the battlefields is very complicated. William Glenn Robertson, retired from the staff of the US Army Command and General Staff College at Ft. Leavenworth, KS, wrote that at Chickamauga "the woods limited maximum visibility to 150 yards...and made it almost impossible to control linear battle formations. Similarly, the terrain provided few fields of fire to the armies' artillerymen." Additionally, both commanders were ultimately relieved and come down to history as failures.

General Braxton Bragg, who would later preside over the fall of Wilmington in 1865, commanded the Confederate Army of Tennessee. Maneuvered out of Chattanooga and into nearby northwestern Georgia, he gathered reinforcements and struck the Union Army of the Cumberland commanded by Major General William S. Rosecrans.

The Battle of Chickamauga on October 18-20, 1863, resulted in more than 34,000 casualties to the two armies and saw the Union forces nearly destroyed. Yet a little more than a month later, a reinforced Union army now led by Major General Ulysses S. Grant, routed Bragg's forces and pushed them back into north Georgia opening the road to Atlanta.

The Cape Fear Civil War Round Table (CFCWRT) meets the second Thursday of every month. Enter at the rear of the church through the doors marked "Lighthouse East." Doors open at 6:30 and the program starts around 7:15. Refreshments and a book raffle are offered. Guests are welcome. Yearly membership is \$30.

For more information, contact Bill Jayne at jayne.bill@gmail.com or [Cape Fear Civil War Round Table](#)



Southern Women Feeling the Effects of the Rebellion, and Creating Bread Riots.
Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <www.loc.gov/item/2007683044/>.



Robert M. Dunkerly