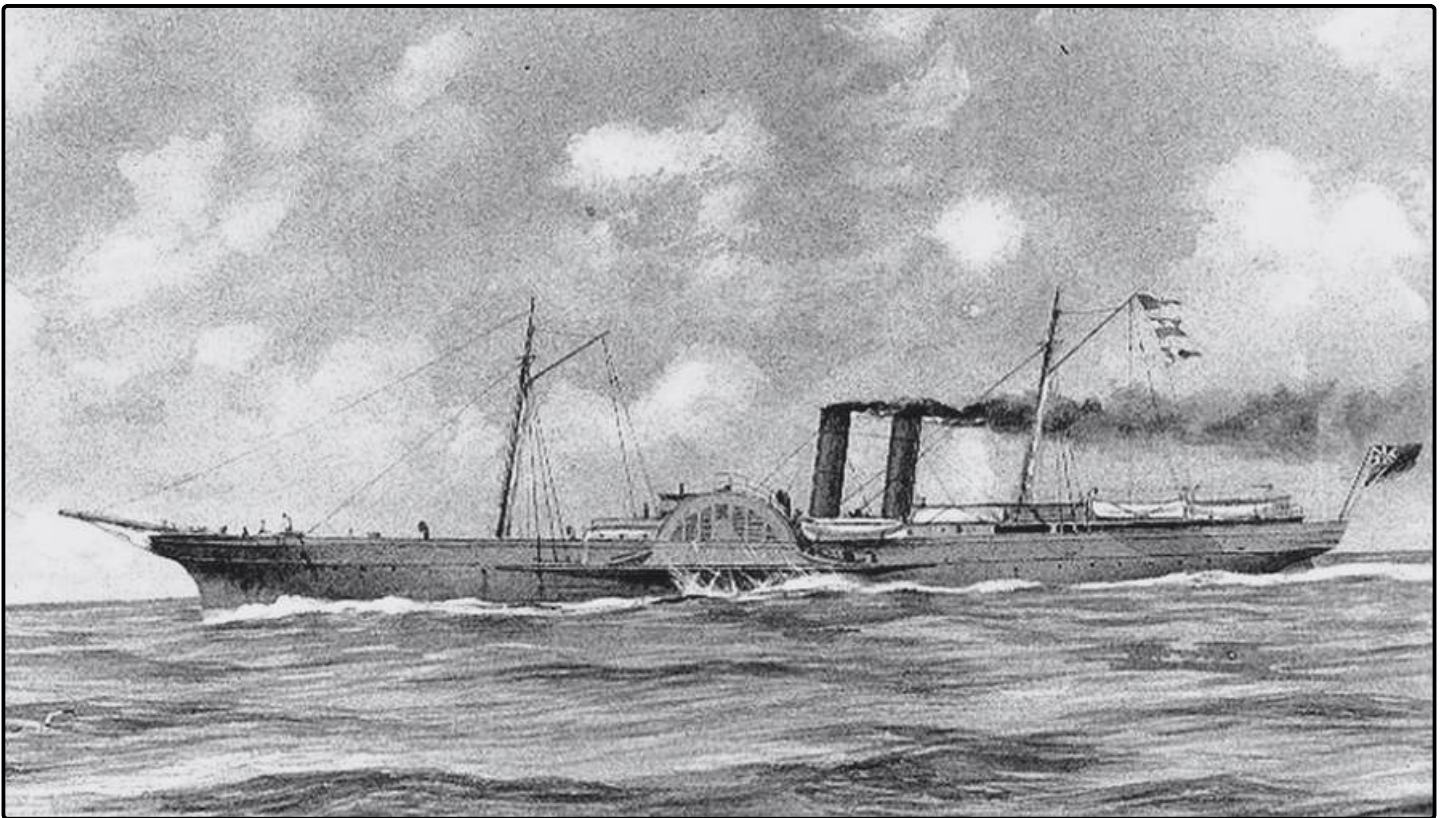


# The Runner

The Official Newsletter of the Cape Fear Civil War Round Table



April 2025 | Volume 31 | Number 4

## Table of Contents

- 1 - President's Address**, Yelena Howell
- 2 - Membership Report**, Kim Berger
- 3-5 - CFCWRT April Meeting**, Bill Jayne
- 6-11 - CFCWRT March Meeting**, Archibald Gracie Jr.
- 12 - Concluding the Storm**, Matthew Howell
- 13-15 - War & Weather Pt. 5**, Brandon Carter, Esq.
- 16 - Local Events**, Yelena Howell
- 17-19 - Opinion**, Roman Berger
- 20 - BCWRT April Meeting**
- 22 - Lifetime Sponsors**
- 23 - 2025 Corporate Sponsors**
- 24 - Organizational Chart**

## Letter from the Editor

As spring arrives along the Cape Fear, the air turns gentler, and the landscape begins its annual transformation. Daffodils brighten gardens and old homesites, quietly marking the passage of time.

Azaleas burst into color, and the purple of redbuds and wisteria weaves through the trees and hedgerows. Cherry blossoms and dogwoods drift on the breeze, and the hush of early spring gives way to birdsong and brightness.

It's a time of renewal, a season I've always found both restorative and reflective.

Spring also brings a sense of motion, of stories reawakening. In history, this season reminds us that even the darkest chapters of the past are filled with change, consequence, and complexity.

Like the landscape around us, the study of the Civil War era continues to evolve. Fresh perspectives emerge, familiar narratives are challenged, and long-forgotten voices find new life.

I hope you enjoy this month's edition of *The Runner*, and find some time to savor all that this glorious season has to offer.

Wishing you a bright & thoughtful spring,




Matthew Howell  
Editor

Cape Fear Civil War Round Table

---

## President's Address

---

By Yelena Howell



Dear members and friends of the Cape Fear Civil War Round Table,

Happy April—my favorite month if I had to pick one. All is lovely and new, and here I am failing to come up with a fresh and tasteful April Fool's Day number to fit the date! With 29 days left to wrap up my doctorate, there is too much competition for what bandwidth remains. If you have a favorite Civil War joke, a humorous story, or a fun prank to share, please feel free to send them to me at [CapeFearRT@gmail.com](mailto:CapeFearRT@gmail.com)

A fellow Howell, James (1594?-1666) of Wales, remarked, “All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.” While you and I take our work seriously, we would be fools to take *ourselves* too seriously. We would be fools not to play, laugh, and enjoy simple pleasures as one day succeeds another. We would be fools not to let the spring sun warm our faces, not to take time out for people, places and events, not to keep moving forward with hope and joy.

A recent road trip to the country to spend time with two of my favorite North Carolina historians took me through fields of such vibrant vernal green that any Welshman would weep. Riding by old battlefields and homesteads, farms and townships stirred many reflections, chief among them the thought that we fool ourselves in seeing our lives as anything other than a union with those who have gone before us and those who journey with us today: our families, friends and communities. Still, why don't we look beyond the negative connotations of the word “fool”? Be a fool for an idea. A fool for people. A fool for love. A fool for a good joke and a fool for a good life.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Yelena".

---

# Membership Report

---

By Kim Berger

We were thrilled to welcome 48 attendees to our March meeting, including guests, visitors, and several new faces! The energy in the room was fantastic, and we're excited to see our community continue to grow.

So far this year, we've welcomed five new members and received three renewals through the website, an encouraging sign of our expanding reach. Please join us in welcoming the newest members to the Round Table:

- James Anderson returns to his Wilmington roots after over 30 years away. A lifelong student of Confederate history with deep genealogical ties to the war, James brings a keen interest in Fort Fisher, the defense of Charleston, and the H.L. *Hunley*. Outside of history, he enjoys bowling, live music, and family time with his two grown daughters.
- A.C. "Carl" Ward is a retired military veteran, local author, and seasoned consultant. Carl's academic and professional résumé spans from Appalachian State to Yale, and he brings a wealth of knowledge as a certified U.S. Army Military History Instructor. He and his wife, Jolene, reside at the beach with their cat, Heidi.
- Zack Bacon and Ken Keast joined us through the website. Welcome! We look forward to getting to know you better at upcoming meetings.

We are grateful for the continued enthusiasm and support of our members, new and returning, and we look forward to another great year of fellowship and learning.

## **Name Tags**

Name tags are an amenity that facilitates communication among all attendees. Please be sure to return your badge at the end of each meeting or plan to bring it the next time you join us in person. If you need a new tag, just let me know.

## **Membership Renewals**

Your renewal month is printed on your name tag. Please feel free to check with me in person or by email at CapeFearRT@gmail.com if you have a question about your renewal month. There are several easy ways to "reenlist":

- See membership options and renew online: <https://cfcwrt.org/>
- Mail a check to CFCWRT, 1008 Heron Run Dr., Leland, NC 28451
- See Ed Lestrage at the next meeting with a check or cash.
- See Yelena Howell for Venmo.

## **Spread the Word**

Remember, we are all ambassadors for the Round Table. Please invite your family, friends, co-workers, and neighbors to join us. We will ensure every guest feels welcome.

Sincerely yours,

Kim Berger  
Membership Chair, Cape Fear Civil War Round Table

---

## CFCWRT April Meeting

---

By Bill Jayne



### NC's Confederate Hospitals Topic of Cape Fear Round Table

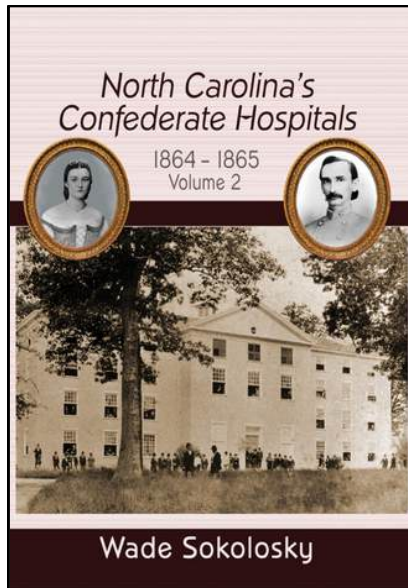
Our round table welcomes back a highly respected favorite of the membership, Wade Sokolosky, Col. U.S. Army (Ret.). Wade will present a program titled “North Carolina’s Confederate Hospitals” at the Thursday, April 10 meeting of the Cape Fear Civil War Round Table. As usual, we meet at centrally located St. John’s Episcopal Church, Wilmington, NC.

The meeting offers an opportunity to engage with the speaker both before and after the presentation and to ask questions in a friendly, informal setting. The doors open at 6:30 p.m. and the meeting begins at 7:00 p.m.

A resident of the sound-side town of Beaufort, NC, where he grew up, Col. Sokolosky is a graduate of East Carolina University and a 25-year veteran of the U.S. Army. He is one of North Carolina's leading experts of the 1865 Carolinas Campaign, the name given to Union General William T. Sherman's audacious march across both South Carolina and North Carolina in the winter of 1864-65. Wade has lectured throughout the country speaking to Civil War round tables, various clubs and organizations, and at historical sites. He is a top-notch battlefield guide.

Col. Sokolosky's topic, “Confederate Hospitals in North Carolina,” is based on his recently published book, *North Carolina's Confederate Hospitals, Vol. 2: 1864-65*. Volume 1 of Col. Sokolosky's study covered the years 1861-63 and was published in 2022. Dr. Chris E. Fonvielle, Jr., Professor Emeritus, UNC Wilmington, and one of the founders of the Cape Fear Civil War Round Table, wrote, “Wade Sokolosky, one of the leading historians of the Civil War in the Old North State, has turned his keen research skills on exploring the Confederate health care system.” Moreover, “he examines the organization and administration of care facilities on both the home front and the battlefield. Sokolosky's study is a constructive reference work and a captivating narrative of an overlooked but important aspect of North Carolina at war.”

## CFCWRT April Meeting Cont.



In an informative and very positive review of Volume One the Civil War Books and Authors website wrote: “As Sokolosky abundantly demonstrates, management of the hospital system in North Carolina during this period mirrored many other aspects of the Confederate war effort in that it was subjected to frequent and often intense States Rights versus centralization clashes. With North Carolina governor Vance being one of the most ardent defenders of state prerogatives, that tug and pull between Richmond and Raleigh was present at all levels of medical department leadership and management. Who should manage, supply, and fund general hospitals in North Carolina was an ongoing subject of debate. As the war progressed, however, the forces of centralized integration gathered momentum, and by

December 1863 the Confederate Medical Department was in charge of all of North Carolina's general hospitals and the majority of its wayside hospitals.”

The current volume will cover the period of more centralized control and the period of greatest stress as the forces of the Union penetrated into the state from four directions: General Sherman driving up from the south with his powerful veteran army of more than 60,000 men, Union naval and ground forces reducing the “Confederate Goliath” of Fort Fisher and closing the port of Wilmington, powerful ground forces moving up the railroad from New Bern to Goldsboro and General Stoneman’s 6,000-strong cavalry raid that wreaked havoc in the western part of the state.

Wade is the co-author (with Mark A. Smith) of *To Prepare for Sherman's Coming: The Battle of Wise's Forks, March 1865*, chosen as the winner of the Civil War Books and Authors Best Book of the Year for 2015.

The battlefield of Wyse Fork (contemporary spelling), just east of Kinston, has been largely saved from imminent threat of destruction by the NC Department of Transportation, thanks in great part to the efforts of Wade Sokolosky and a dedicated group of Civil War historians and preservationists centered on Kinston, who garnered support from the American Battlefield Trust and the federal Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. Our round table was a “consulting party” in the pivotal U.S. Army Corps of Engineers review that ended with the saving of crucial parts of the battlefield.

## CFCWRT April Meeting Cont.

Fought over three days in March after the fall of Wilmington and just before the Battle of Bentonville, Wyse Fork saw two hastily formed armies of heterogenous troops—the Confederates under Braxton Bragg and the Union under Jacob Cox—clash as part of a plan to halt Sherman’s northward march toward Goldsboro and, ultimately, the battlefields of Virginia. More than 2,500 casualties were sustained. In the early 1990s the Federal Civil War Sites Advisory Commission surveyed some 10,500 armed conflicts during the Civil War and published a report that classified the encounters according to their historical significance. Of the 10,500 sites surveyed, Wyse Fork was listed as one of the 384 most significant clashes in the Civil War.

Wade Sokolosky and Mark Smith are also the authors of *No Such Army Since the Days of Julius Caesar: Sherman's Carolinas Campaign from Fayetteville to Averasboro*. *Books Monthly* wrote of the volume that “Smith and Sokolosky are military historians with a particular interest in what happened in the Carolina States. What they bring to the table regarding Sherman and Johnston is remarkable, a revelation.” Wade is also the author of *Final Roll Call: Losses during the Carolinas Campaign*.

The April 10, 2025 meeting of the round table will be held at Elebash Hall at the rear of St. John’s Episcopal church at 1219 Forest Hills Drive, Wilmington. The church parking lot, close to the entrance to our meeting room, is easily accessed via Park Avenue off of Independence Boulevard. Bring a friend! For more information about membership in the Cape Fear Civil War Round table, go to <http://www.cfcwrt.org> and click on “Join/Rejoin.” There is no charge for admission. See you there!



Confederate General Hospital Number 5 was previously the U.S. Marine Hospital for Seamen, located in Wilmington on S. 8th St.

# CFCWRT March Meeting Recap

By Archibald Gracie, Jr



## Si Harrington Delivers Fast-Paced Presentation on North Carolina and the Confederate Navy

With swift delivery and quick wit, North Carolina historian Sion “Si” Harrington III brought to a large audience of members and friends an informative overview of North Carolina and North Carolinians in the annals of the Confederate States Navy (CSN) in the “War Between the States.”

Si is a retired U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel with service from 1970 to 2009. He had service on active duty, in the reserves and National Guard, including assignments in Grenada and Bosnia. He is a graduate of UNC Chapel Hill and holds a Masters in History from N.C. State. He worked as a teacher, ROTC instructor and military collection archivist with the NC Division Historical Resources. He is also the vice president of the N.C. Military Historical Society, which operates a very interesting and educational museum on the grounds of the Blakeslee Air Force Recreation Area in Kure Beach, near the Fort Fisher State Historic Site.

A native of Erwin, NC, a small town in Harnett County about half way between Raleigh and Fayetteville, Si is a lifelong student of history and has dedicated years of concentrated study and effort to documenting the history of the military in North Carolina and the history of Erwin and Harnett County, including the Civil War battle of Averasboro fought just before the battle of Bentonville. He is the author of numerous articles and the book-length *Roster of North Carolinians in Confederate Naval Service*.

Si began with an overview of the daunting challenges faced by the Confederate Navy at the beginning of the war and throughout the conflict. He thanked Andrew Dupstadt, the Education & Interpretation Supervisor for the North Carolina Division of State Historic Sites and Charles Hawks for much of the material about the CSN’s challenges. Charles Hawks retired from the U.S. Navy (reserve) as a Commander and was a founder of the Raleigh Civil War Round Table.

One great asset of the CSN was former U.S. Senator Stephen Mallory who had served as the chair of the U.S. Senate Committee on Naval Affairs. Mallory was a knowledgeable, sagacious leader who greatly contributed to the CSN’s record. Si pointed out that, of course, the Confederacy had no navy at the beginning of the war. There were no warships and virtually no merchant ships available to the Confederacy that could be converted into military vessels.



## CFCWRT March Meeting Recap Cont.



In addition, the skilled work force needed to build and convert ships was not available except in very small numbers. There were only two navy yards, only three rolling mills to produce iron sheeting, no heavy machine shops and only one foundry for heavy guns. Coal and iron ore were also available only in very small quantities. With about 3,500 miles of shoreline, there were only ten “major” southern ports and three of them—New Bern, Beaufort and Wilmington—were in North Carolina.

The U.S. Navy only had 42 ships available at the beginning of the war to blockade the vast coastline of the South and the blockade was not effective at first. Si reported that early in the war about five out of every six runs into southern ports were successful. By the end of the war, however, more than 600 U.S. ships were much more effective. Of the ten southern ports, by 1865 all were closed except Wilmington, which was closed after the fall of Ft. Fisher. New Bern and Beaufort were taken by the Union early in the war and, in fact, Beaufort became the major support station for the force blockading Wilmington.

Many U.S. Navy officers resigned their commissions and offered their services to the nascent CSN. Si quoted from one North Carolinian, James Iredell Waddell, who wrote “In thus separating myself from association which I have cherished for twenty years, I wish it to be understood that no doctrine of the rights of secession, nor wish for disunion of the States impel me, but simply because my home is the home of my people in the South, and I could not bear arms against them.”

About 373 U.S. Navy officers out of a total of 1,554 at the beginning of the war, resigned and moved to the South. Many, including Admiral Samuel Phillips Lee, a cousin of Robert E. Lee, remained with the U.S. Navy. Still, the number of officers who “went south” was more than the CSN could use at first. Si also pointed out that few enlisted men went south, largely because they did not have the privilege of resigning. They could be apprehended and charged with treason.

Notably, we learned that no U.S. Navy ships were commandeered and taken south even though some were commanded by southern officers who resigned their commissions. CSN Secretary Mallory was faced with the need to decide on what sort of navy the Confederacy would try to create with this cadre of proven leaders but virtually no navy to command. Si broke down the decision as one that would decide if it would be a “Blue Water” navy that would serve on the high seas, the oceans and gulfs



## CFCWRT March Meeting Recap Cont.

bordering the Confederacy, or a ‘Brown Water’ navy suited for the rivers, sounds and harbors. Most CSN ships were ultimately “brown water” vessels.

Nonetheless, Mallory devoted a great deal of attention to developing a force of privateers, “legalized pirates,” in Si’s words, and commerce raiders. The commerce raiders such as the *Alabama*, *Florida* and *Shenandoah*, were ships that were acquired in Europe and planned from the first as warships but by subterfuge portrayed as commercial vessels to preserve the neutrality of the European powers. The damage done to U.S. maritime trade was substantial and Si contended that the U.S. merchant trade did not fully recover until WWII. The CSN also displayed great ingenuity in building everything from ironclads to “tinclads,” cottonclads” and “timberclads,” as well as submarines, floating batteries and torpedo boats such as the “Davids” and the “Squibs.” Much credit was given to John Luke Porter, a U.S. Navy constructor who became the Chief Constructor of the CSN, based in Wilmington for much of the war.



Eventually, the Confederacy cobbled together a naval establishment that was high on ingenuity if a bit low on capacity. North Carolina, at one time or another, had at least nine shipyards or other naval activities. Some, such as the Fayetteville Naval Ordnance Depot, was very short-lived and others such as the “Edwards Ferry Shipyard” where the CSS *Albemarle* was built, were very primitive facilities. The *Albemarle* was known as the “cornfield ironclad” because it was primarily built in a field alongside the Roanoke River. One shipyard was located in Charlotte, far from the blue water. The Charlotte yard once employed 1,500 men and boys and using machinery taken from the U.S. Navy yard in Norfolk, produced nearly all the propellers, propeller shafts, anchors, gun carriages and many other parts needed by the CSN. Manufactured items were then shipped to the navy yards and other locations by rail. It remained in operation until 1865.

Si then turned to some of the naval engagements and campaigns in the waters of North Carolina.

First came the “Mosquito Fleet” of five light craft commissioned by the state to oppose the invasion under U.S. General Burnside early in the war. The Mosquito Fleet was “swatted” aside and Burnside’s joint force took control of the sounds inside the Outer Banks as well as key points such as Roanoke Island, New Bern and Beaufort.

## CFCWRT March Meeting Recap Cont.

A quick review of North Carolina personnel revealed that at least six Tar Heels served on the CSS *Virginia* (nee *Merrimack*) in the pivotal battle of Hampton Roads. J.B. Cunningham of Madison County is “said to have piloted the *Virginia* in her battle with the USS *Monitor*. William Francis Drake of Northampton County is “thought to have been the last survivor of the battle.” James M. Sheffield also served on the *Virginia*. Si estimates that more than 2,800 North Carolinians served in the Confederate Navy and Marine Corps.

Tar Heels were well represented among the commanding officers of the successful commerce raiders. John Newland Maffitt captained the CSS *Florida* as well as other Confederate ships. He settled in Wilmington after the war. The aforementioned James Iredell Waddell captained the CSS *Shenandoah*, the only Confederate ship to circumnavigate the globe and the last Confederate unit to lower the flag. In the remote North Pacific preying on whalers in 1865, the ship did not learn of the surrenders of Lee, Johnston and others until the fall of 1865. Captain Waddell then disarmed the ship and sailed it to Liverpool, England, where he lowered the Confederate flag on November 5, 1865.

There were four North Carolina built ironclads: the *North Carolina*, the *Neuse*, the *Albemarle* and the *Raleigh*. Like all Confederate ironclads, they were underpowered and handicapped by other weaknesses related to construction materials and techniques. The *North Carolina* was built with green lumber and succumbed to nautical “worms” that destroyed the integrity of the hull. She was sunk off Smithville (Southport) as a “floating battery.” The CSS *Raleigh* was also based in the Cape Fear River. An effective ironclad she engaged USN blockaders on May 5, 1864, but returning to the river she hit a sandbar near New Inlet and “broke her back.” The CSS *Wilmington* was more of a “monitor” in design with cannon to be housed in two casemates on low-freeboard deck. She was never completed and destroyed “on the stocks” in January 1865. The *Neuse* (or “Nuisance” as one crewman termed her) was built on the Neuse River above Kinston but saw little service and was burned by Confederate troops to prevent her capture in March 1865. Si talked briefly about the CSS *Neuse* museum in Kinston and the full-scale reproduction of the ship nearby. It’s an extremely educational exhibit well worth seeing.

## CFCWRT March Meeting Recap Cont.

Then there was the *CSS Albemarle*, built in a cornfield in Halifax County, the construction of the vessel was under the direction of 19-year-old soldier Gilbert Elliott. It was captained by James Wallace Cooke, born in Beaufort. He was North Carolina's highest ranking CS naval officer. In the Battle of Plymouth, April 19, 1864, the *Neuse* rammed and sank the *USS Southfield* and damaged the *USS Miami*. Captain Charles W. Flusser of the *Miami* was killed in the engagement. The *Neuse* rammed the *Southfield* and the sinking U.S. ship dragged the *Neuse* under where she was unable to evade the *Miami*. Flusser placed his ship as close to the *Neuse* as possible and was killed when a shot ricocheted off the *Albemarle*. A few weeks later, the southern ironclad ram again engaged U.S. ships, this time in Albemarle Sound. The ironclad fared well in the battle but damage to her smokestack compelled her to retreat. Still a great threat to the wooden U.S. ships in the sound, the Confederates repaired the ironclad and the U.S. Navy hatched a plan to sink her at her anchorage. On October 28, 1864, in a daring attack with a spar torpedo boat, U.S. Navy lieutenant William Cushing, a close friend of Lt. Commander Flusser, braved tremendous small arms fire to detonate his torpedo under the *Albemarle*, sinking her at the anchorage in Plymouth. He escaped by diving into the cold river waters and swimming downstream.

While none of the Confederate ironclads were capable enough to raise the blockade of U.S. Navy ships, they did a great deal to make the blockade more difficult and to challenge joint operations from closing various harbors, especially Charleston. Another example of southern ingenuity was the submarine *Hunley*. It was ultimately lost in Charleston Harbor when sinking the *USS Housatonic* on February 17, 1864. One of the crew was James A. Wickes of North Carolina.

Si also touched on blockade runners, the fall of Ft. Fisher, and the employment of "naval infantry" in the waning days of the war, especially at the Battle of Saylor's Creek in the Appomattox Campaign. He wound up his very educational talk with some concluding points. It would be hard to dispute Si's contention that the "CS Navy and Marine Corps did the best they could under the circumstances." Almost always understrength and lacking proper equipment, they "gave a good account of themselves in every engagement in which they participated."



The *CSS Albermarle*

## CFCWRT March Meeting Recap Cont.

Graciously answering many questions from the audience, Si also displayed one of his most prized possessions: an authentic Civil War summer-weight sailor's jumper with reinforced cuffs and back flap. One Internet source says that the back flap was part of the uniform because "until the early 1900s there were no haircut requirements for sailors, and sailors normally let their hair grow long. To keep their hair from getting caught up in the ship's rigging or equipment, they tied it back in a ponytail and dipped the ends in tar to hold it together. To keep the tar off their jumper shirts, sailors started wearing a button-on flap which was easier to wash. Especially when the sailors might only have one or two shirts anyway." Sounds plausible. Following tradition, U.S. Navy enlisted uniforms still have the back flap.

Study of the Civil War seems to be very much centered on the dramatic and large-scale land battles but the role of the naval forces, it can be argued, was pivotal. The U.S. Navy took New Orleans on their own early in the war, depriving the South of its largest city and by far the most important port. Grant's audacious and decisive Vicksburg campaign would not have been possible without the contribution of the U.S. Navy. Similarly, his "Overland" campaign in Virginia ultimately depended on U.S. control of the sea lanes and riverine system of Tidewater Virginia. The Confederate Navy showed great ingenuity, elan and sagaciousness in attacking U.S. maritime trade, resisting the blockade and challenging joint Army-Navy campaigns to close southern harbors.



Si Harrington holds a Jim Horton print.



Quartermaster William Jordan (left) presents a Mission BBQ gift basket to raffle winner Doug Kesling.

# Concluding the Storm

By Matthew Howell



Dale Gallon's "Coming Rain"

To My Fellow Round Table Members,

With this issue of *The Runner*, we conclude our five-part exploration of Brandon Carter's *Coincidence or Chemistry: Civil War Combat and its Effects on Weather*. This final section offers a summary of Carter's findings and lays out the broader theories that have been proposed to explain the frequent appearance of rain or other precipitation in the wake of battle. Drawing on both 19th century speculation and modern meteorological knowledge, Carter closes his study with a reflection on the relationship between warfare and the natural world.

We are grateful to Brandon for sharing his full manuscript with the Cape Fear Civil War Round Table, and for allowing us to present it in serialized form. His work, regardless of one's conclusions, is a reminder of the many creative ways Civil War history continues to inspire inquiry and debate. I also want to thank our readers for following along with this unique series over the past several months.

For a broader discussion of weather's influence on war, I once again recommend Kenneth Noe's *The Howling Storm: Weather, Climate, and the American Civil War*.

With appreciation,

Matthew Howell  
Editor, Cape Fear Civil War Round Table

## Coincidence or Chemistry: Civil War Combat and its Effects on Weather

By Brandon Carter, Esq.; Serialized by Matthew Howell



*A Harvest of Death*

### Part 5: Theories and Conclusion

Of course, some post-combat rain could be coincidence. But it occurred far too frequently to be dismissed so easily. To demonstrate this, we must look at the annual precipitation averages of the battlefield areas.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Agency has kept daily rainfall and snowfall records for many cities for as far back as the 1890's. Though these records do not date back to the Civil War, it is reasonable to assume that the weather patterns of today's United States are not extremely different from those of the war era. Appendix II contains a partial list of those records that are relevant to the locations of Civil War battlefields. For example, the Manassas, Virginia, area played host to at least four major Civil War battles: First and Second Manassas, Ox Hill (Chantilly), and Bristoe Station. All four were either followed by or fought during rain. One each occurred in July, August, September, and October.

Precipitation histories have been kept at the Washington National Airport for sixty-five years. The airport is only about twenty-five miles from Manassas, so it is safe to assume that the weather between the two locations is extremely similar. The month of July there averages only nine days of rainfall. Thus, the odds of rain would be nine out of thirty-one, or roughly 29 percent. Nine days of rain is also the average for August, again 29 percent. The average in September is eight, or just under 26 percent. In October it rains on average only seven days, less than in any of the other twelve months. The percentage is less than 23 percent. In other words, it rains less than one out of every four days in October in Washington, D.C., and Northern Virginia. Yet 100 percent of the battles produced or at least preceded rain.

## War & Weather Cont.

Although much more investigation is needed pending a definitive conclusion, the percentage of major Civil War battles that were followed by rain appears to be far greater than one should expect from the percentage of average daily rainfall in their respective locations (<http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/oa/climate/online/ccd/prgeo1.txt>).

### Theories for Post-Combat Rain

The idea of weather modification is not new. Many experiments have been done with clouds in hopes that someday man will be able to control the frequency of precipitation. Since the late nineteenth century, no studies have been done comparing combat and weather, but weather modification itself has been an important topic. Compounds have been discovered that are capable of “seeding” clouds, artificially causing rain. Some farmers have even implemented methods to turn hail into rain in an effort to prevent damage to their crops. The weather modification techniques of today are closely related to the accidental weather modification that occurred during the Civil War.

Powers offers a number of possible explanations or theories concerning why battles induced precipitation. Most center on the effects of the vibrations of a firing cannon, not the chemical makeup of black powder. He begins by describing the work of another scientist, a Professor Espy. Espy believed that large fires could create rain. He wrote that an ascending column of air created a vacuum, drawing air in other areas to it from all directions. Then, water vapor was condensed as the rising, expanding air cooled. A large fire could heat the air and cause it to ascend. Powers noted that a similar process occurred when moist Pacific air currents, which move from west to east in the Northern Hemisphere, strike the Sierra Nevada Mountains. The lower, warmer current rises and is then pressed into the cooler current above, causing a storm. This is now known as adiabatic cooling, and we know it to be fact.

Through my research, I have put together a theory on the relationship between Civil War combat and the precipitation that often followed. Civil War gunpowder contained three main components: charcoal, sulfur, and saltpeter, or potassium nitrate. Through correspondence with Dr. Bruce Boe of North Dakota-based Weather Modification, Inc., I have learned that potassium nitrate is an oxidizer. Oxidizers are used in cloud seeding to cause ice nuclei within clouds to have a hygroscopic effect, or to absorb moisture and create cloud droplets faster. Similar salts are used to create large cloud droplets, which accelerate the “warm rain” precipitation process. In other words, these oxidizers are used to hurry the process of raining, causing a cloud to rain before it normally would.



## War & Weather Cont.

Precipitation followed many Civil War battles, and the war's participants were aware of that phenomenon. Many even put in writing their beliefs that the two were related. Weather modification itself is not a new topic, and millions of dollars are spent on it every year, mainly for agricultural reasons. In the first study of the relationship between combat and precipitation, Edward Powers offered theories in order to help farmers during times of drought and flooding. Powers, however, based his study on the concussion of cannon, not on the actual chemical makeup of black powder. After over a century of technological advancement, we can now offer new theories to explain this phenomenon. If a salt is formed from the combustion of black powder, then it is nearly certain that Civil War rifle and especially cannon fire caused rain to fall on or near the area of the fighting. Along with this revelation would come the putting to rest of a 140-year-old curiosity.



**Brandon Carter, Esq.**

**Founder, Wilmington True History Tours and Savannah True History Tours**

Brandon Carter is a seasoned historian, interpreter, and tour leader with nearly two decades of experience uncovering the stories behind America's past. A graduate with distinction from the Virginia Military Institute, Brandon honed his skills as a Park Ranger at Richmond National Battlefield Park and has since guided thousands through the Civil War's most compelling sites. He is the founder of both Wilmington True History Tours and Savannah True History Tours, where he was named Best Tour Guide in Savannah in 2022, 2023, and 2025.

An active member of the Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation and the Friends of Honey Hill, Brandon is also the co-founder of Richmond Beeristoric, a nonprofit that combines historic interpretation with Virginia's brewing heritage.

Outside of touring, Brandon practices law, advising breweries, bars, and fellow attorneys on legal ethics and regulatory matters.

# Notable Events in the Cape Fear Region

By Yelena Howell

**Tuesday, April 1, doors open at 6 pm, program at 7 pm. Hatch Auditorium, Caswell Beach.** Brunswick Civil War Round Table welcomes **Sarah Bierle** of Emerging Civil War and American Battlefield Trust with "**John Pelham: Trained at West Point but Aiming Artillery for the Confederacy**". The visitor fee is \$10 and can be applied toward the \$25 annual membership dues, which can include a spouse. Info: <https://brunswickcivilwarroundtable.com/>

**Thursday, April 3, 1:30-3:30 pm, or Tuesday, April 8, 9-11 am. Wilmington True History Tours** presents **Wilmington History Walk**. Tickets are \$25 for adults or \$22 for Veterans and First Responders: <https://www.wilmingtontruehistory.com/our-experiences-1/>

**Friday, April 4, 3-4 pm. NHC Public Library, Oak Room at Northeast Branch, 1241 Military Cutoff Rd., Wilmington. Past Tense: Historical Fiction Book Club.** Info: <https://libcal.nhcgov.com/event/12795758>

**Friday, April 4, 8-9 pm, Burgwin-Wright House, 224 Market St., Wilmington. Candlelit Night Tour of the museum.** Tickets \$15 (+tax). Please call (910) 762-0570 to reserve your spot.

**Saturday, April 12, 10 am-4 pm. Brunswick Town/Fort Anderson State Historic Site. America 250th: Women of Brunswick.** History/cultural presentations, tours, demonstrations, family fun. This is a free event. Info: <https://historicsites.nc.gov/news/events/america-250th-women-brunswick>

**Saturday, April 19, 6:45-7:15 am. Brunswick Town/Fort Anderson State Historic Site. 18th Century Easter Litany.** Period Anglican service in the ruins of St. Philip's. You are welcome starting at 6:15 a.m. Please bring your own seat as desired. Info: <https://historicsites.nc.gov/news/events/18th-century-easter-litany-1>

**Saturday, April 19, 8:30-10 pm. Latimer House Night Tour** featuring a scholarly discussion of gaslight. 126 S. 3rd St., Wilmington; \$22: <https://latimerhouse.org/tours/#night>

**Friday, April 25, 7-9:30 pm. Bennett Place. 4409 Bennett Memorial Rd., Durham, NC. The Promise of Peace: Slavery's End in North Carolina.** Storytelling, music and luminaries commemorating the lives of >330,000 North Carolinians enslaved during the Civil War. Info: <https://historicsites.nc.gov/news/events/promise-peace-slaverys-end-north-carolina>

**Saturday, April 26, 10 am-3 pm. Bennett Place. 4409 Bennett Memorial Rd., Durham, NC. Uneasy Peace: Bennett Place Surrender's 160th Anniversary.** Info: <https://historicsites.nc.gov/news/events/uneasy-peace-bennett-place-surrenders-160th-anniversary>

**Sunday, April 27, 10-11:30 am. Wilmington Water Tours** presents **Dr. Chris E. Fonvielle Jr.** with "Pirates, Colonists, and Gullahs". Info and more of Chris's upcoming programs: <https://www.chrisfonvielle.com/events>

# Opinion

By Roman Berger

## The Town With Charity For All – A Visit to Appomattox, 160 Years Later

April will mark 160 years since the epochal Battle of Appomattox in Virginia. While Civil War enthusiasts might argue about when the war's outcome became inevitable (I'm open to the Fort Fisher theory myself), Appomattox is indisputably the scene where the inevitable became reality. Robert E. Lee's inability to resupply his men after the fall of Richmond and his subsequent surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia to Ulysses S. Grant signaled the collapse of the Confederate war effort, as Southern armies laid down their arms over the following weeks while the remnants of the Southern government dissolved. Four years of war effectively ended.

Recently, I took a quick road trip to Appomattox to glimpse this most pivotal of sites in American history—the spot where the United States became singular once again and definitively. It remains a remarkable excursion, one that anyone with even a slight interest in the Civil War should take at least once in their lives.



Driving to Appomattox is itself a rather stunning endeavor. In my case, I drove through dozens of miles of rural and small-town America, trekking down roads with few of the “creature comforts” I’ve come to expect living in suburbia. It brought to mind the overwhelmingly agrarian landscape of the region during the war and how much of it was compromised by the sheer scale of destruction. Reaching Appomattox, one senses both the aura of history and the attempts to capitalize on it side by side. The town itself is quintessentially small-town America: local

stores, national chains, and hotels, all of which cater to those who return the favor by visiting. And then you turn onto Route 24, and the world shifts a little bit. The streets, the path to the park, the dirt ground—all of it hints that this little part of Virginia means more.

It means the nation.

## Opinion Cont.



Walking up the path from the parking lot to the visitor center—the reconstructed courthouse, a replacement for the original which burned down—I felt that this small historic town was as hallowed as promised. But it was where I went afterward that validated that feeling: the dirt road to the reconstructed McLean House. An attempt to move the dwelling to Washington around the turn of the 20th century failed. I'm thankful that it did. The McLean House, the home of a former grocer where Grant and Lee met on that spring day, belongs here.

It's unassuming, but that's what makes it so powerful. The nation's greatest conflict effectively ended not in a glamorous mansion or somber courtroom, but in a rather standard Virginian house. It feels very American, very salt-of-the-earth, and a bit idealistic. To think that these two men—whose strategies and philosophies are examined to the most minute level and who have often been treated as gods among men—would converse and undertake the most powerful military meeting in American history in an ordinary living room is humbling.

Of course, there are plenty of reminders of Antebellum society. Not only did the McLean House have slave quarters, consistent with the South's slave-driven economy, but the building next to the Clover Hill Tavern Kitchen was formerly used to house enslaved people. The building in question was being de-converted from a restroom—a sign of the increasing calls to acknowledge the impact of slavery on America, particularly during the Civil War. In that spirit, Appomattox tells multiple stories of the Civil War, stories being written and refined then and now.

## Opinion Cont.



The site also stands as a notable testament to how the war ended and the path the nation would take toward reconciliation. There were casualties in the battle: 164 Union dead, 195 Confederate. Yet the nearby Clover Hill Tavern, an inn that had fallen on hard times during the war, became the site where scores of parole passes were printed. Grant allowed Lee's men, staring down military defeat and returning to land likely damaged by war, to be paroled immediately with their sidearms and

horses. This largely agricultural fighting force was permitted to return to tend their lands and was even granted free rail transportation. And in that tavern, the printing press allowed for the start of a long, complicated healing process. Men who had taken up arms against their brethren were allowed to return to something resembling a normal life as smoothly as possible. Not forgotten, of course, but at least there could be a path to repairing the nation.

I suppose that's what makes Appomattox so striking: the absence of vindictiveness after so much pain in this one moment. But should we expect any less? It was Abraham Lincoln who, in his second inaugural address, proclaimed that peace postbellum should be sought "with malice toward none, with charity for all," a hope that, while justice was necessary, we must not act with ill will toward our brethren. It felt as though Grant and Lee held that spirit in mind while conversing in that parlor room. Tragically, five days after Lee's surrender, Lincoln would pay dearly while watching *Our American Cousin*, his words sullied by an assassin's bullet. The full promise of Appomattox was gunned down 142 miles from where it had sprung up.

But the gravitas of that moment still stands. After four years of brutal conflict, after the destruction of infrastructure, the deaths of hundreds of thousands of men, the devastation of towns and cities, to think the Civil War effectively ended with two men conversing about their military histories, Lee dressed for possible imprisonment and Grant walking in with mud on his boots, is still captivating. And it remains relevant. Even amid our deepest divisions, we can still find paths to our common humanity, show respect for our fellow man, and find the stories that unite us as Americans.



## Brunswick Civil War Round Table



### **John Pelham: Trained at West Point but Aiming Artillery for the Confederacy**

Guest speaker Sarah Bierle will give her presentation on John Pelham on Monday, April 1<sup>st</sup>. Pelham became known as “The Gallant Pelham” for his bravery in the “horse artillery,” and left a legacy as being one of the most skilled Confederate artillery officers of the Civil War.

In 1861, Pelham decided to resign from West Point just weeks prior to his graduation. He joined the Confederate army of Gen. Joseph E. Johnston as a lieutenant in the artillery. Despite his young age, Pelham’s well drilled and disciplined battery caught the eye of Gen. J.E.B. Stuart, who provided horses for his men and transformed the battery into “horse artillery,” making it more mobile than conventional artillery. Pelham was involved in over 60 military engagements over a two year period. He was eventually mortally wounded leaving a very emotional and envious legacy.

Sarah Bierle is the former managing editor of Emerging Civil War, and works for the Education Department at American Battlefield Trust.



For more information, email president John Butler at [Brunswickcwrt@gmail.com](mailto:Brunswickcwrt@gmail.com) or call him at (404) 229-9425. Visit BCWRT online at <https://brunswickcivilwarroundtable.com/> or <https://www.facebook.com/brunswickcivilwarroundtable>

## TRIP TO VICKSBURG WITH CLEVELAND CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

Last year the Cleveland Civil War Round Table invited members of our round table to participate in their annual battlefield tour and trip. The destination was Gettysburg and the experience was top-notch in every way. Five members of our round table plus two guests went to Gettysburg in September and reveled in a two-day guided tour of the battlefield plus a moving and enlightening tour of the Spangler Farm field hospital site.

This year, our friends in Cleveland have invited us to participate in a tour of the Vicksburg Campaign from Bruinsburg to Vicksburg on 25-28 September, 2025. The trip includes expert guidance provided by Capt. Rick Martin, USAF (Ret.) who is also a retired Chief Ranger for Vicksburg National Military Park. On Friday, September 26, the tour will focus on Grant's movement across the Mississippi and the battles leading up to his investment of the fortress city of Vicksburg from the east. The next day will focus on the Union assaults and siege operations leading up to the capitulation of the Confederate command on July 4, 1863.

The cost of the trip is \$175 which will cover the cost of the guide, any entrance fees and boxed lunches each day. Rooms have been reserved at the Courtyard by Marriott Vicksburg and breakfast is included in the room rate. The cost of the room and the cost of transportation to and from Vicksburg is at your own expense, as will be the cost of dinners.

Full details are available at:

<https://www.clevelandcivilwarroundtable.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Field-Trip-2025-movement-order.pdf>

Feel free to contact Bill Jayne at [jayne.bill@gmail.com](mailto:jayne.bill@gmail.com) or (910) 386-9203 if you have questions.

We were lucky to hear Terry Winschel's excellent presentation on Vicksburg in February and this is a great opportunity to actually see the ground and learn more about this most pivotal campaign.



## CFCWRT Lifetime Sponsors

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our strategic partners, whose generous support through discounts and services sustains the Cape Fear Civil War Round Table. Your ongoing contributions play an invaluable role in helping us preserve history, foster education, and connect our community. Thank you for standing with us in our mission!



### Savas Beatie

We find and develop outstanding original military and general history manuscripts and bring them to you in the form of quality books you will be proud to read, own, and keep for a lifetime.



### Queensboro

Specializing in custom logo apparel & promotional products since 1982.  
[www.queensboro.com](http://www.queensboro.com)



**Best Western Hotels & Resorts**



### Cape Fear Seafood Company

Specializing in regional American seafood, signature dishes, hand cut fish, steaks and chicken along with freshly made desserts.



## 2025 Corporate & Individual Sponsors

A corporate membership adds your business or organization to our list of valued sponsors. Sterling (\$50), Gold (\$100), and Platinum (\$250) annual sponsorships are available. Contact [CapeFearRT@gmail.com](mailto:CapeFearRT@gmail.com) to join.



*Yelena Howell, BSN, RN*



**Doctoral Candidate in Nursing**

# Cape Fear Civil War Round Table

## Executive Committee

President: **Yelena Howell**

Vice President: **Chris Langlois**

Secretary & Membership: **Kim Berger**

Treasurer: **Ed Lestrangle**

Quartermaster: **William Jordan**

Programs: **Fred Claridge**

Audiovisual/Computer Support: **Roman Berger**

At Large: **Tom O'Connor**

At Large: **Mike McDonald**

Immediate Past President & Publicity: **Bill Jayne**

## Advisors

**Dr. Chris E. Fonvielle Jr.**, Professor Emeritus, Dept. of History, UNCW

**Mr. Jim McKee**, Site Manager, Brunswick Town/Fort Anderson State Historic Site

**Mr. Jim Steele**, Site Manager, Fort Fisher State Historic Site

**Dr. Angela Zombek**, Associate Professor of History, Dept. of History, UNCW

## Webmaster

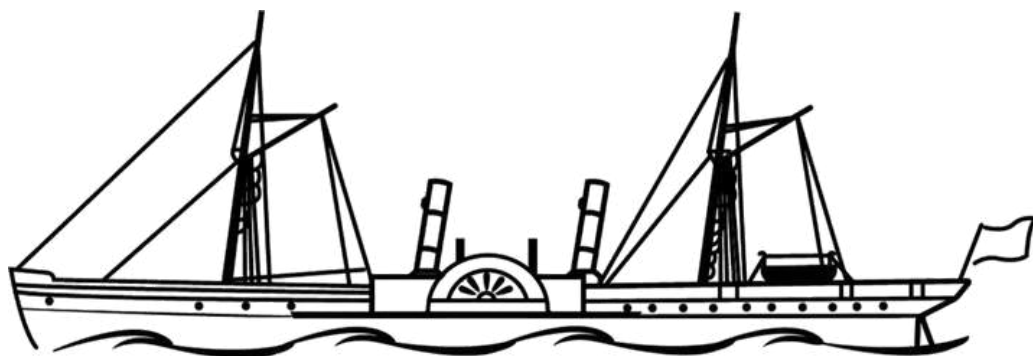
Richard Buggeln

## Editor

Matthew Howell

## Contact

[CapeFearRT@gmail.com](mailto:CapeFearRT@gmail.com)



# CAPE FEAR CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

The Cape Fear Civil War Round Table is a voluntary, not-for-profit association of people with a common interest in the history of the American Civil War and Reconstruction.

Based in Wilmington, our group is devoted to broadening the knowledge, understanding and interpretation of the era.



[www.cfcwrt.org](http://www.cfcwrt.org)



[www.youtube.com/@cfcwrt](http://www.youtube.com/@cfcwrt)



[CapeFearRT@gmail.com](mailto:CapeFearRT@gmail.com)



[www.facebook.com/groups/cfcwrt](http://www.facebook.com/groups/cfcwrt)

## You Are Invited!

Join us at our monthly meetings featuring acclaimed authors, esteemed professors, and passionate historians from sites like Fort Fisher.

Held at **St. John's Episcopal Church, 1219 Forest Hills Drive, Wilmington, NC**, these events are a chance to explore fascinating Civil War topics and connect with fellow enthusiasts.

**Doors open at 6:30pm and the meetings start at 7pm.**

**4/10/25 - Col. Wade Sokolosky**  
**"NC Confederate Hospitals Vol 2: 1864 to 1865"**

**5/8/25 - Dr. MaryBeth Allison & Christina Grazer**

**6/12/25 - Dr. Angela Zombek**  
**"Civil War History of Fort Jefferson Florida"**

**7/10/25 - Civil War Fair**

**8/14/25 - Fred Claridge**  
**"Civil War Historians"**

**9/11/25 - Dr. Robert M. Browning Jr.**  
**"I Am Fighting for the Union: the Civil War Letters of Naval Officer Henry Willis Wells"**

**10/9/25 - Clint Johnson**  
**"A Vast & Fiendish Plot: The Confederate Attack on New York City"**

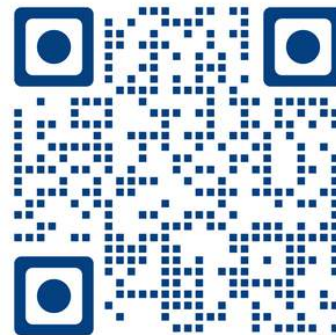
**11/13/25 - Sarah Kay Bierle**  
**"John Pelham: Trained at West Point but Aiming Artillery for the Confederacy"**

**12/11/25 - Brad Gottfried**  
**"The Best & Worst Generals at Gettysburg"**



Discover more with our engaging tours, trips, and special events that bring Civil War history to life in unforgettable ways. Stay informed with our monthly newsletter, packed with insights, updates, and stories from the past.

**Want to help?** Explore our corporate & individual sponsorship options to support our mission while gaining meaningful recognition for your organization. There's something for everyone—join us and be part of the adventure!



Scan This QR Code to See  
Our Membership Options



*A Gun Crew at Fort Fisher* (2024), James C. Horton, oil  
<https://hortonart.net>