CAPE FEAR ROUND TABLE DISCUSSES "SUCCESS IS ALL THAT WAS EXPECTED; THE FAILED EFFORT TO TAKE CHARLESTON"

Wilmington's Cape Fear Civil War Round Table invites the public to attend a presentation by Robert M. Browning, Jr., Ph.D., talking about the Union's herculean efforts to close the harbor and take the city of Charleston, S.C., in 1863. The round table meets at centrally located St. John's Episcopal Church in Midtown Wilmington near Independence Mall. Doors open at 6:30 and the meeting begins at 7:00 p.m.

Dr. Browning, retired chief historian of the U.S. Coast Guard, is the foremost scholar on the Union blockade and has authored three books centered on the activities of the U.S. Navy's various blockading squadrons. A native of North Carolina, he earned his Ph.D. at the University of Alabama. He is the author of six books and more than four dozen articles relating to the Coast Guard, the Civil War, and U.S. naval and maritime history.

President Lincoln proclaimed a blockade of the 3,500-mile coastline on April 19, 1861, soon after the fall of Ft. Sumter. In all the years since, the role of the U.S. Navy in putting down the rebellion has received little attention compared to the monumental clashes of the armies at places like Gettysburg and Chickamauga.

Yet, the role of the navy was crucial to victory. When the blockade was proclaimed, there were only three armed vessels ready for service on the Atlantic coast. By the end of the war, however, the U.S. Navy comprised 671 ships of all kinds from the revolutionary new ironclad monitors to shallow draft wooden gunboats. Enforcement of the blockade was never airtight but by 1864 only custom built blockade running ships could effectively evade the noose that was strangling the Confederate economy. In addition, the navy provided essential logistical, transport and gunfire support for army operations.

In 1993 Dr. Browning published *From Cape Charles to the Cape Fear,* which chronicles the establishment of the crucial blockade from the entrance to Chesapeake Bay south to the mouth of the Cape Fear River. It was crucial to control this stretch of the coast and the inland waters of Chesapeake Bay, James River and the North Carolina sound country.

In 2002, he added *Success is All That Was Expected*, a history of the South Atlantic squadron that sailed the coast from the Cape Fear to Florida. This story covers the harrowing engagements between ships and forts, daring amphibious assaults, and the evolution of submarine warfare in the form of the *CSS Hunley*. In *Lincoln's Trident*, he continued his magisterial series to chronicle the squadron that operated in the Gulf of Mexico.

Charleston, of course, was the "seat of rebellion," the most important city in South Carolina, the state that led the way in secession and the place where the most destructive war in the nation's history erupted when southern forces fired on Fort Sumter dominating the entrance to the harbor.
By 1863, Charleston remained a potent symbol and was also the most important blockade running port in the Confederacy. Its railroads connected the port to the primary Confederate armies in both Virginia and Tennessee.

The summer of 1863 seemed even at the time, the most fateful of the war. Vicksburg fell and "the father of waters once again goes unvexed to the sea," and the Army of Northern Virginia reached its "high water mark" at Gettysburg, and then receded. What would have happened if Charleston had fallen in that summer?

The entrance to Charleston harbor—through a narrow channel— was guarded by two powerful forts Ft. Moultrie on Sullivan's Island and Ft. Sumter in the middle of the passage. The distance from Ft. Moultrie to Ft. Sumter is only 1800 yards. On April 7, 1863, Admiral Samuel F. DuPont took a fleet of nine U.S. Navy ironclads, including seven monitors, into that narrow space and attempted to reduce the forts or run through the gauntlet into the harbor. An effective barrier in the channel and the overwhelming volume of accurate fire from the forts stopped the attempt although more effective planning and joint Army-Navy operations might have led to success.
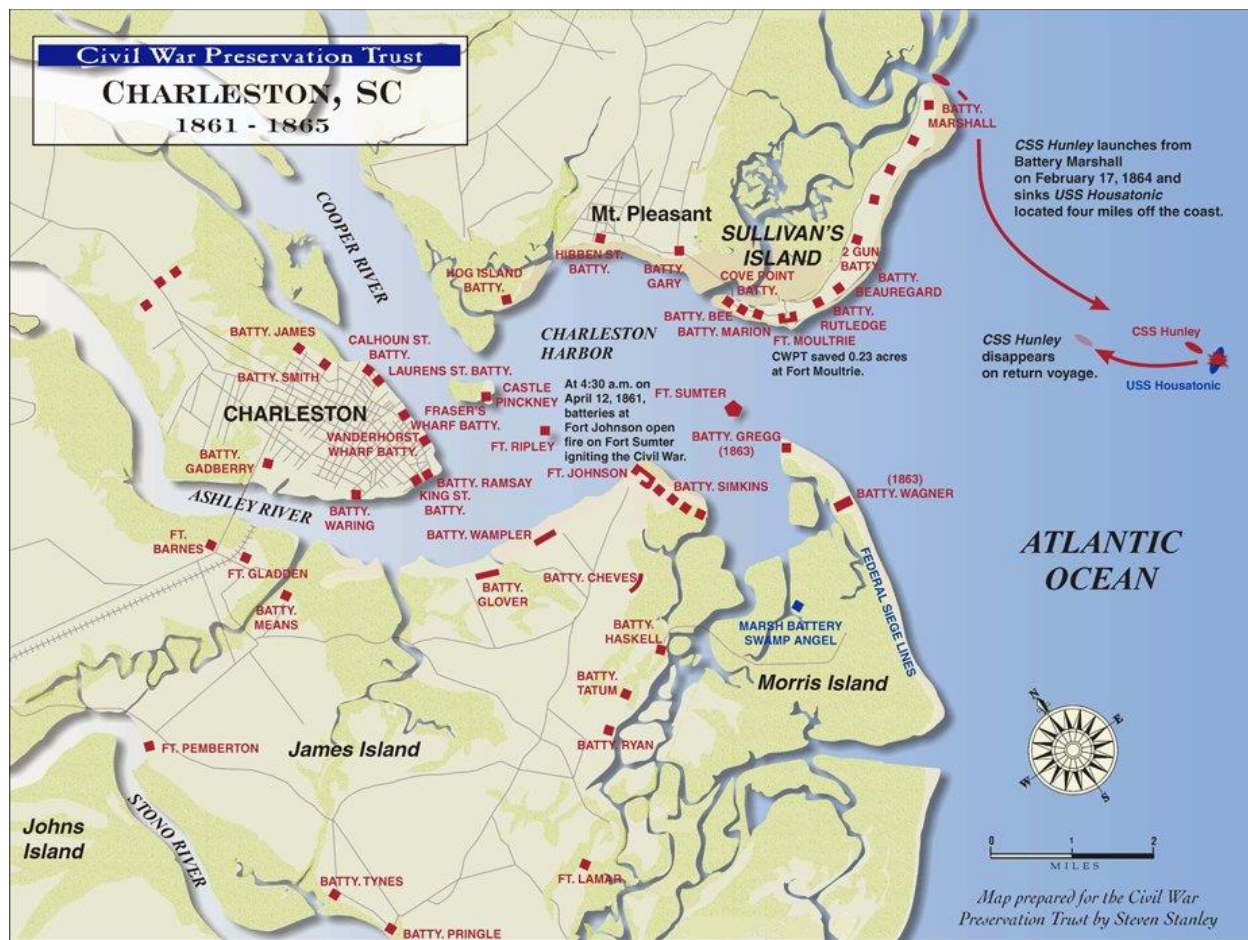
The campaign then shifted to the fragile barrier island known as Morris Island. Most of the island has since washed into the ocean but in 1863 it was the scene of fierce fighting in which the Union army eventually reduced Battery Wagner and other Confederate positions, allowing them to virtually close off the main shipping channel, which ran parallel to Morris Island and

batter Ft. Sumter into a pile of rubble that was no longer effective as an artillery platform but as a lightly manned infantry post anchored the obstructions that prevented Union warships from steaming into the harbor.

Although the Confederates didn't abandon the fort and the city until 1865 when Sherman advanced through South Carolina, it was no longer the premier blockade running port in the south. That distinction fell to Wilmington.

Knowing the Navy's role in isolating the Confederate economy and preventing the movement of troops and supplies within the South is crucial to understanding of the outcomes of the Civil War, as well as the importance of naval power in military conflicts.

The meeting will be held in Elebash Hall, at the rear of the church, which is located at 1219 Forest Hills Drive. The church parking lot, close to the

Civil War Preservation Trust
CHARLESTON, SC
1861 - 1865

Map prepared for the Civil War
Preservation Trust by Steven Stanley

entrance to the meeting room, is easily accessed via Park Avenue off of Independence Boulevard. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. and there is ample time to browse our used books table, talk to members of the round table and meet Dr. Browning. For information about membership in the round table, go to our website at http://cfcwrt.org and click on "Join".   See you there!

Success Is All That Was Expected

ROBERT M. BROWNING, JR.

The South Atlantic Blockading Squadron during the Civil War
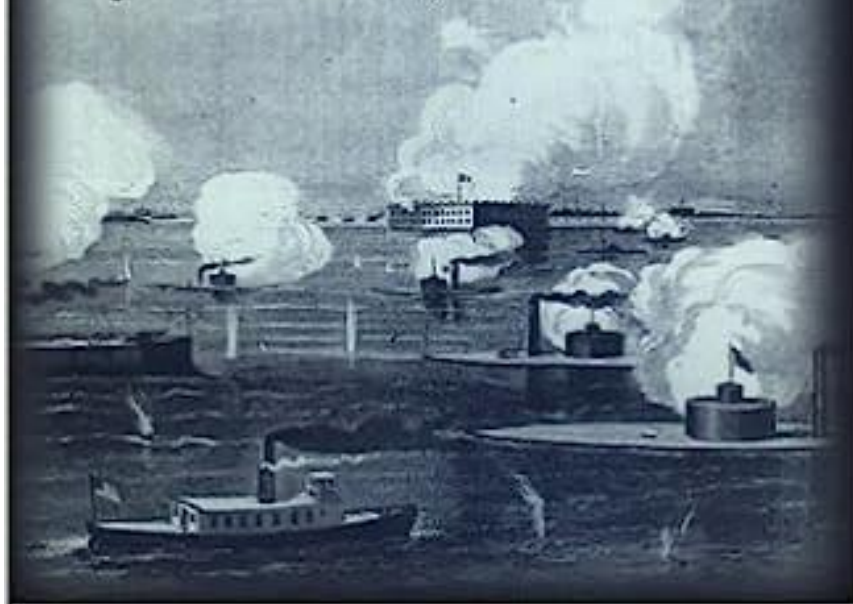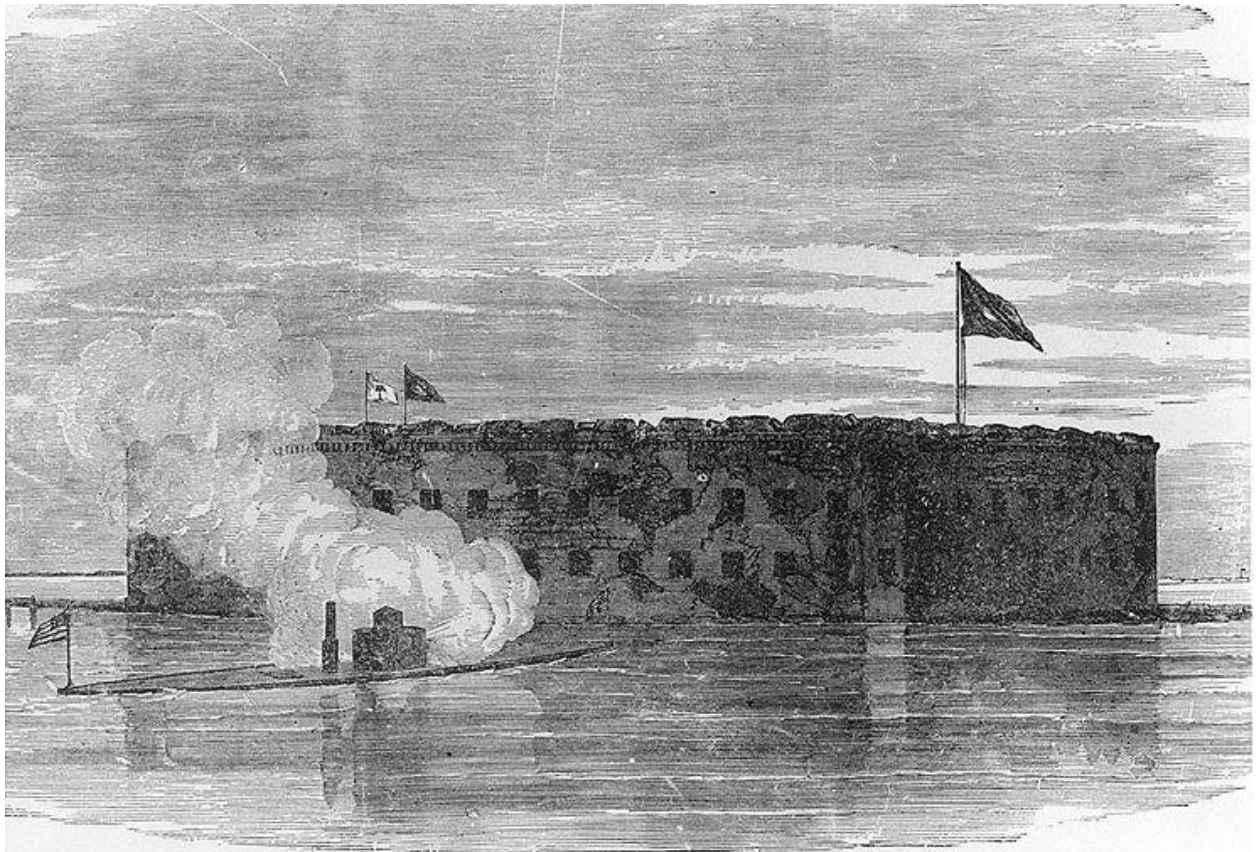
THE FEDERAL IRONCLAD "WEEHAWKEN" ATTACKS FORT SUMTER, APRIL 7TH, 1863.
FROM A SKETCH BY W. T. CRANE.