



Battle Cry

Founded 1961,
Newsletter of the Sacramento Civil War Round Table
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Volume 45, No. 10
October 2005

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Battle Cry deadline is
1:00PM Wed. two weeks
before the regular
meeting. Items can be
given the editor by hand,
mail or e-mail.

President's Message:

Kudos to George Beitzel for his highly entertaining and most interesting presentation on presidential military experience and Jubal Early's march on Washington. George kept us captivated pointing out how many of our Commanders in Chief actually had military service, how many were elected because of it, and how many, (or was it how few of us?), knew all or most of the answers.

The story of Early's threat in 1864 is one of the fascinating events of the war. How seriously it was taken by the powers that be, how it was practically ignored by Grant, how Lincoln carelessly exposed himself, Holmes admonition, Lew Wallace's role, and how it prompted Sheridan's Shenandoah Campaign are all of great interest. George kept it exciting, entertaining and informative. Well done!

I hope to see a good turnout for Bud Robertson's talk in October. Remember it's Tuesday the 18th and we'll meet at the Studio Theater at 1028 R. Street, downtown. The Fox and Goose is across the street if you wish to eat first. Lets give him a well deserved welcome for crossing the country to speak to us.

SCWRT SPECIAL PROGRAM OCT. 2005

The Sacramento Civil War Roundtable is pleased to announce a special October presentation in lieu of its regular monthly meeting to be held October 18 at 7:PM

FEATURING

DR. JAMES I. "BUD" ROBERTSON, JR.

Alumni Distinguished Professor in History
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

The Life and Times of Stonewall Jackson

**STUDIO THEATER
1028 R STREET
SACRAMENTO, CA**

Treasurer's Report

The cash balance following the September 14, 2005 meeting was \$1,282.96. Thanks to members and guests, the raffle brought in \$60.00.
George W. Foxworth

MINUTES
SACRAMENTO CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE
SEPTEMBER 7, 2005
HOF BRAU RESTAURANT 2500 WATT AVE, SACRAMENTO

Attendance-33

Members-32

Don Hayden-President
Susan Williams-Vice President
George Foxworth-Treasurer
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Dudley Albrecht
Joan Beitzel
George Beitzel
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Kirk Fujikawa
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Kyle Glasson
Dennis Kohlmann
Mary Lou Lentz
Grace Long
Sharon McGaughey
Leslie Michaels

Jim Middleton
Betty Mitchell
Maurice Mitchell
John Nevins
Ruben Orozco
Paul Rudd
Richard Sickert
James Taff
Drew Van Winkle
Robert Williams
Maxine Wollen
John Zasso
Guest-1
Vivian Miller

1. Meeting started at 7:00. President Hayden announced our October meeting will be on Tuesday, October 18th at 7 pm. The meeting will take place at the Studio Theater at 1028 R Street Sacramento. Our speaker will be Dr. James "Bud" Robertson Jr. who will present "The life and times of Stonewall Jackson."
2. Our guest speaker was George Beitzel, a fellow member. He gave a little quiz on presidents who served in the military. His presentation was Early's raid on Washington D.C., Ft. Steven's defense and Lincoln's presence at the fort. He had maps and photos printed to hand out. Thank you George-that was great! (and short too)
3. Raffle was held and meeting ended at a very "Early" 8:15.

Eddie Keister
Secretary

COMING PROGRAMS		
Month	Speaker	Topic
October	"Bud" Robertson	The Life and Times of Stonewall Jackson
November	Ray Bisio	Meade at Gettysburg: Making Friends into Foes
December	Maurice Mitchell	Reconstruction: 1867, 1870, 1965, 2007?

James I. Robertson, Jr.
Alumni Distinguished Professor in History

Personal Background:

Great grandson of a Confederate soldier, Dr. Robertson has had a lifelong interest in the Civil War. Today his Civil War Era class, with approximately 250 students each semester, is the largest of its kind in the nation.

He is a native of Danville, Virginia, and the recipient of every major award given in the field of Civil War History. He is the author of such award-winning books as **General A.P. Hill**, **Soldiers Blue and Gray**, and **Civil War! America Becomes One Nation**.

He appears regularly in Civil War programs on the Arts & Entertainment Network, the History Channel, and public television; he also does a weekly broadcast carried by eleven public radio stations.

His latest book, **Stonewall Jackson: The Man, The Soldier, The Legend**, was a main selection of two major book clubs and has won eight national awards; movie rights for the book have been sold.

He is presently an Alumni Distinguished Professor at Virginia Tech (one of eight selected from the University's 2,200 faculty).

Educational Background:

B.A., Randolph-Macon College, 1955
M.A., Emory University, 1956
Ph.D., Emory University, 1959
Litt.D., Randolph Macon College, 1980

There will be a raffle as usual at this meeting.

The 21st Annual West Coast Conference will take place on November 4-6, 2005 at the Veteran's Building in Clovis, CA.

For further contact, either use their address, SJVCWRT P.O. Box 5695 Fresno, CA 93755 or Program Chair David Davenport: davidpauldavenport@yahoo.com or President Brian Clague: bclague@netptc.net

The Capture of Fort Fisher

The Union Navy had the leading role in implementing General Winfield Scott's Anaconda Plan, and its cabinet secretary Gideon Welles, took the assignment very seriously. After the abortive 7 April 1863 Navy only attack on Charleston Harbor (See "*Battle Cry*" article of March 05), he recognized that certain endeavors had to be joint Army-Navy operations. However, the Army had its own priorities of importance and could not always accommodate at the time the Navy wished. Prime example was the capture of Mobile Bay, which occurred 5 August 1864, some 28 months after the capture of New Orleans on 25 April 1862. (See "*Battle Cry*" articles of Sept 04 and Sept 05). Welles had hoped to follow up with Mobile immediately after New Orleans, but the Army simply had many other duties to attend to. Such was not the case with the Fort Fisher-Wilmington joint operations for which planning commenced almost immediately after the Mobile closure.

Wilmington, N.C. was the last remaining port useful to blockade runners, and, "...the last gateway between the confederate states and the outside world". It was 20 miles up the Cape Fear River where deep draught vessels could not go, with two river entrances protected by the very strong and massive Fort Fisher (refer to drawing). Fort Fisher was a weird looking affair built in the shape of an "L", with a sea-face of nearly one mile and a land-face of 0.4 mile across a peninsula. In front of the land-face were deeply set palisades and further in front was an electrically detonated minefield. The Fort was built of sand and sod on a timber frame with steep walls up to thirty feet high and twenty-five feet wide at the top. It would absorb artillery shot and shell like a pillow and, unlike a masonry fort, was easily and rapidly repairable. The Fort had 47 guns, two of which were large-bore English-made Armstrong rifles that could fire a 150-pound shell five miles. It had been built in 1862 by slave labor under the supervision of CSA BG W.H.C. Whiting and Colonel William Lamb, who were in command at the time of its capture. The total garrison then was 1,800 men. The rebel commander of the Wilmington Department at the time was J. F. Davis' buddy Braxton Bragg. Bragg had Hokes' 6,000 men division available in the area, but he consistently refused Whiting and Lamb's numerous requests to either augment the Fort or to attack the union assault forces from the rear. His actions were unexplainable, unconscionable and despicable. Once again, Bumbling Braxton had served the union cause well.

Secretary Welles had asked Farragut to serve as navy commander for the joint operation, but the admiral declined due to ill health, whereupon Admiral David Porter was ordered to take command of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron, replacing Admiral S. P. Lee, who was sent to the Mississippi River Squadron. Porter accumulated an armada of some 60 vessels, the largest to that date in U. S. history. It included the old line broadside warships such as USS *Colorado*, *Minnesota*, and *Wabash* carrying some 50 guns each, plus four *Cononicus* (third generation) Class Monitors, and the massive casemate ironclad USS *New Ironsides* carrying 16 eleven inch Dahlgren cannons. Total armament of the fleet was 619 guns.

General Grant, then at City Point directly overseeing the Armies of the Potomoc (Meade) and of the James (Butler) in the Petersburg Siege, recognized the urgency of the joint operation since nearly all of the limited new supplies that R. E. Lee could receive were arriving by rail from Wilmington. He also was aware that the Army of the James was not under strong leadership and was being under utilized. He ordered that

the Army's part of the cooperative operation was to be a 7,000 man provisional Corps comprised of AOJ units to be under command of MG Godfrey Weitzel, a 29 year old Corps Commander, West Point 1855 (2-34), and former AOJ Chief Engineer. MG Ben Butler was not specifically invited. However, Butler, as army commander and in whose military district Wilmington was, chose to "tag along" so to speak, and he had the legal right to do so; much to Grant's chagrin. Butler's interests were two fold: 1) He was a glory seeker, and 2) He had a "grand idea" of exploding an old ship loaded with 215 tons of powder near the Fort which he thought would destroy it. Grant did not buy the idea; but, surprisingly Porter did and he implemented it with enthusiasm.

Porter's fleet arrived from anchorage at Beaufort on 20 Dec 64 and immediately formed for attack in arcs of concentric circles, placing the Fort under intense fire at a rate of up to 115 rounds per minute. A serious problem developed, however, in that the fleet's 100 pounder Parrott guns were exploding injuring the gun crews. Porter ordered that all be taken out of service. Butler/Weitzel's 20 army transports left Hampton Roads on 16 Dec but were delayed due to bad weather, arriving 25 Dec. In the interim, Porter had exploded the powder boat at night, making a loud noise but doing absolutely no damage to the Fort. "It was terrible", one rebel defender said later. "It woke up nearly everyone in the Fort". The thought is that due to an error of the pilot in the darkness the ship was exploded some 600 yards from the Fort rather than the planned 300 yards. Would it have done significantly more damage if it had been closer is problematical.

Upon arrival Weitzel conducted a ground reconnaissance-in-force from which he concluded that the Fort could not be taken by assault, rather a siege would be required.(Butler had remained aboard ship). Many subordinate commanders disagreed with Weitzel, including Lt. Col. Cyrus Comstock, Grant's staff engineer. But Butler did agree and, with very little notice to Porter, withdrew the troops and sailed back to Hampton Roads. It was a hell of a way to cooperate! Moreover, he departed leaving an entire regiment stranded on the beach without adequate potable water, rations, blankets or ammunition. They were rescued by the Navy two days later.

Grant was infuriated, and with Lincoln's concurrence, removed Ben Butler from command of the Army of the James. Most everyone has agreed with Grant's decision. Although possessing administrative talent, Butler was indeed an inept military commander. But some believe that while Grant's decision was right, it was based upon the wrong specific reason. Weitzel had been named by Grant to be the combat commander, so it can be argued that he was the actual ad hoc decision maker in the matter. Butler's role was only as endorser? Moreover, Weitzel's conclusion also raises questions. Is it that he either had or developed "cold feet"? Was he one of the several West Point high academic achievers who became excellent staff officers, but later proved to be flawed line commanders? (See "*Battle Cry*" article of July 04).

Porter sent dispatches to the Navy Department in which he complained bitterly of having been abandoned by the army just when the Fort was (in his view) "nearly in our possession", and begged that troops be sent back again to cooperate, but with a different commander. Grant sent a messenger to Porter with a letter asking him to hold on, and that he would send the same troops back with a new commander, with some reinforcements to offset those which the enemy had received. He then selected BG Alfred H. Terry to command the Army of the James.

Terry was a 37-year-old alumnus of Yale Law School. He started his military service as a militia officer at First Manassas, and ended it 27 years later as one of

the very few non-West Point graduates to become Major Generals in the Regular Army. It was said of him that "...pomposity, arrogance, cowardice, and self-conceit are foreign to his nature".

It was 6 Jan 65 before the transports could be readied and the troops aboard. They sailed from Fortress Monroe on that day. They arrived off Beaufort 8 Jan 65. A heavy storm, however, prevented a landing at Fort Fisher until 13 Jan. Grant instructed Terry to communicate freely with Porter and have entire harmony between army and navy. This was done and high praise was heaped upon both Terry and Porter (and by each other!) for this close cooperation.

Terry deployed his men across the peninsula as had been done before, and at two o'clock on the following morning moved up within two miles of the Fort, and with a "respectable" abatis in front of his line. His artillery was all landed on that day, 14 Jan. Again, Curtis' brigade of Ames' division had the lead. By noon, they had carried an unfinished work some 800 yards from the Fort, and turned it so as to face the other way. BG Newton M. Curtis had been one of the strongest critics of Weitzel's conclusion that the Fort could not be taken by storm.

Terry now saw Porter and arranged for an assault on the following day. The two commanders organized their signal systems so that they could better communicate with each other. At day light, the fleet commenced its firing. The time agreed upon for the assault was the middle of the afternoon, and BG Adelbert Ames who commanded the assaulting column moved at 3.30 p. m. against the Fort's land-front.

Porter landed a force of 1600 sailors, all volunteers armed with pistols and cutlasses and 400 marines with Spencer rifles to provide covering fire to move against the sea front in cooperation with Ames's assault. They were under Commander Breese of the Navy. These sailors and marines had worked their way up to within 300 yards of the fort before the assault, but this remaining distance was over open sand upon which it was hard to walk and even more difficult to run. The signal was given and the assault commenced; but the sailors and marines were badly repulsed by the enemy sharpshooters, losing 70 killed and 210 wounded. Two of the killed in action were Lieutenants B. H. Porter and S. W. Preston, promising young stars in the Navy and members of Admiral Porter's personal staff at the time. A survivor was Lieut. Comm. William Cushing of *Albemarle* fame (See "*Battle Cry*" article of May 05), because he apparently had nine lives?

Some consider Porter's land assault over a total of some 800 yards down the beach with pistols and cutlasses to have been ill conceived. On the positive side, it was a diversion of enemy attention from Terry's assault, but on the negative, it was a costly affair.

Curtis's brigade charged successfully though met by a heavy fire, some of the men having to wade through the swamp up to their waists to reach the Fort. Many were wounded, of course, and some killed; but they soon reached the palisades. These they cut away, and pushed on through. The minefield failed to detonate, due to the naval artillery cutting electrical wires. The other troops then came up; Pennypacker's following Curtis, and Bell, who commanded the 3d brigade of Ames's division, following Pennypacker. But the Fort was not yet captured though the parapet was gained.

The works were very extensive. The large parapet around the work would have been but very little protection to those inside except when they were close up under it. Traverses had, therefore, been run until the work was really a succession of small forts enclosed by a large one. The rebels made a desperate effort to hold the Fort, and had to be

driven from these traverses one by one, requiring extensive hand-to-hand combat. The fleet kept up a continuous fire upon that part of the Fort, which was still occupied by the enemy. By means of new signal system, they could be better informed where to direct their shots. The fight continued till long after dark. Union troops gained first one traverse and then another, but by 10 p. m. the place was carried. During this engagement the sailors, who had been repulsed in their assault on the bastion, rendered the best service they could by reinforcing Terry's northern line—thus enabling him to send a detachment to the assistance of Ames.

An after-battle tragedy occurred the next day when two union sailors wandered into the Fort's darkened main powder magazine with torches. The resulting explosion of some 700 tons of powder killed and wounded 200 plus union soldiers and a number of rebel POW's.

During the succeeding days, the enemy blew up Fort Caswell on the opposite side of Cape Fear River, and later abandoned other works. Fort Anderson later fell and the river route to Wilmington was then wide open. Union captures in all amounted to 170 guns, besides small arms, with full supplies of ammunition, and 2,100 rebel prisoners. There were about 700 dead and wounded Confederates. Both Whiting and Lamb were wounded. Whiting died 3 months later, but due to other causes (dysentery). Federal army losses were 115 killed and 550 wounded, excluding the magazine explosion. Navy casualties, in addition to those of the land assault force, were about 100. In this assault on Fort Fisher, Bell, one of the brigade commanders, was killed, and two, Curtis and Pennypacker, were badly wounded. Both received the Medal of Honor and Curtis, also with Terry, the Thanks of Congress. At age 20, Galusha Pennypacker was soon thereafter promoted to BG USV to become the youngest general officer in the War.

Secretary Stanton, who was returning from Savannah, arrived off Fort Fisher soon after it fell. When he heard the good news, he promoted a number of officers for their conspicuous gallantry. Terry was confirmed as major-general of volunteers and soon after Grant recommended him for BG in the regular army.

Thus ends the story of the Capture of Fort Fisher, the most heavily defended fortification taken by amphibious assault during the Civil War. It happened so near the end of the War that the great victory or defeat, depending on one's viewpoint, was not then well realized by the American people. But the resulting loss of the Cape Fear River defense system and the City of Wilmington, the only remaining importing depot of the South, effectively ended all blockade running. Implementation of General Scott's Anaconda Plan was fully complete. And Admiral Porter and General Butler continued to hate each other until 1891 and 1893, respectively.

References:

- “Confederate Goliath-The Battle of Fort Fisher” by Rod Gragg, 1991
- “Personal Memoirs” by U. S. Grant, 1885
- “Battles and Leaders” V4 P2, 1887
- “War for the Union” Vol.4 1864-65 by Allan Nevins, 1971
- “ORN's” S1 V11 and S2V1
- “ORA's” S1 V42

Bob Williams; 10-01-05

Graphic for Article "The Capture of Fort Fisher"

RAW: 10-01-05



D. D. Porter



A. H. Terry



G. Weitzel



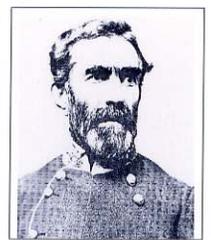
B. F. Butler



Wm. Lamb



W.H.C. Whiting



B. Bragg



K. R. Brees



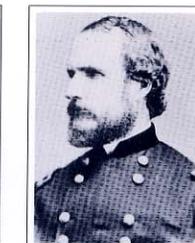
W. B. Cushing



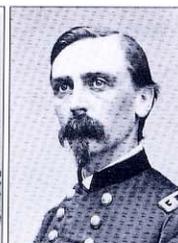
B. H. Porter KIA



S. W. Preston KIA



C. B. Comstock



A. Ames



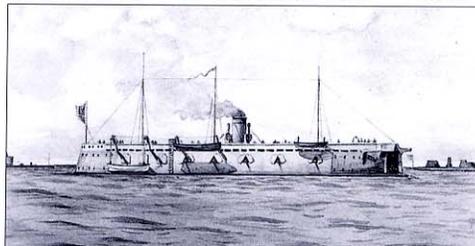
N. M. Curtis



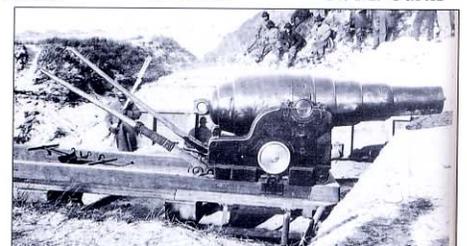
G. Pennypacker



T. O. Selfridge



USS New Ironsides



Armstrong Cannon 150 pdr

