

BRUNSWICK CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

2013 TOUR – MAY 10 AND 11

PETERSBURG AND APPOMATTOX

On May 10, members and friends of the BCWRT made their way to Petersburg, Virginia to meet with Will Green, noted writer and historian. The following day, they gathered at the Pamplin Park Museum to hear Will give a synopsis of the Civil War in and around Petersburg, leading up to Appomattox.

The siege of Petersburg lasted for 291 days. In April, when the Federals finally broke Lee's defenses around the city, he retreated to Appomattox. The Civil War continued for another two months until June 23, 1865 when the last army surrendered.

In 1937, a large two dimensional terrain map was created by the WPA. It was the main Civil War exhibit in Petersburg until the 1950's. Later, the map was loaned to another museum, and then to a college before it was restored at a cost of \$20,000. It is now permanently displayed at the Pamplin Park Museum.

Early May was the time of the Wilderness Battle. Afterwards, Grant decided to move to Petersburg June 15-18, 1864 but was not successful. It was the RR center for all supplies coming to the South. Richmond would be on a starvation battle. Lee would have to surrender. City Point was a 292 day campaign with 100,000 soldiers and was command central. After the June 15-18 failure, Grant mounted eight additional offenses; there were many battles. He went around to the west and stretched Lee's army out until it was very thin.

July 30 was the Battle of the Crater. It failed and Grant continued his westward movement. It was enormous in terms of territory; Lee's army was spread out 37 miles.

Grant took the RR at Petersburg so Lee's train had to stop at Stoney Creek and had to be off-loaded onto wagons to be taken to Petersburg.

The 6th Corps broke the line at Petersburg. Lee sent a message to Davis to warn Jeff Davis to get out of Richmond as he could not hold his army. The President did not throw in the towel until he was captured.

By the first part of 1865, the desertion rate was high. It was planting time....time to go home. They got letters from home saying, "I'm proud of you being a soldier, but I'm going to starve and the baby will die." One of 12 or 13 deserted. 92% did not desert.

At this point, our group boarded the bus and headed for City Point, site of Grant's headquarters.

There were 20 tobacco companies in Petersburg, second only to Richmond. Roads had been built to roll the "hog's heads" to market, so the armies used the roads.

At City Point, the Appomattox River was in front. Petersburg was 8 miles away. The group stopped to see the Epps house. He was one of the largest slaveholders in the area. The land was in the Epps family from 1635-1979 when 23 acres were sold to the National Park Service. Epps was a reluctant secessionist....things were going well for him with trade he was doing with the north and internationally. The house was abandoned by the family and all but 120 slaves ran away; they did eventually get it back. There were rows of tents across the front and to the left of the house. Grant had 280 huts built to replace them. All are gone except for one, and it was shown to the group, outfitted as it had been when Grant occupied it as his headquarters. 10% of it is original, and was the only one with 2 rooms. Grant's hut had been taken to Philadelphia to show, but was vandalized. It was brought back to the park in 1980. In the 3rd week of June in 1864, Lincoln arrived by ship. He came back in March of 1865 on the "River queen." Sherman also came there and met with Grant, and Mrs. Grant was there some. The final days of the Civil War were planned where the group was standing!

The bus headed toward The Crater and saw several points of interest along the way. We passed the Taylor house ruins. Only the chimney still stands. The house was in the way of a battle, so the Federals burned it down.

At The Crater, we learned that the federals were the 48th Pennsylvania, and they had been coal miners. One soldier looked at the fort and voiced a thought to dig a mine. Henry Pleasants heard that comment and decided it was a great idea. He was from coal country and went to Potter to suggest a coal mine. It went up the line to Burnside, who went to Gen. Meade. Meade liked Burnside the least, but he took the idea to Maj. DeWayne. He also didn't like Burnside and said it was nonsense. With Burnside's urging, Meade went to Grant, who thought it might work and gave Burnside permission. On June 25, Pleasants got the green light. The tour group saw the actual trench, 500' from what had been the Confederate line. The Federals built a fire at a hole dug at the top of the hill, which created a draft to pull fresh air into the shaft. The Confederates thought they were just cooking and paid no mind. There were 3-men teams working in 2 hours shifts, round the clock. They had only their shirts and drawers on and some had no shirts. They got an allotment of whisky, and only hardy miners could do this. They had to make sure the mine went in the right direction. Pleasants had an assistant who took quick readings. A couple of times his assistants were shot in the face and killed. The black powder was ordered, and it arrived in 25 lb. cases, for a total of 8,000 lbs. It took 6 hours to load the mine, tamp it down, and close the door. They had ordered a miner's fuse, but had been sent regular blasting fuses, which they had to be spliced together. The plan was for the troops to rush up the hill after it blew. The fuse was lit at 3:30AM on July 30 but nothing happened. Dowdy and a volunteer eventually went into the tunnel to find the fuse had burned out. They relit the fuse and ran...at 4:30AM it blew. Over 300 men were immediately blown toward the heavens. The black Union soldiers got beyond the crater, further than the white troops, but were turned back. Confederates lobbed mortar shells into the crater. Hot blood was running down the crater walls...most had been shot in the head. The troops were 3 or 4 deep. Wounded men were on the bottom crying out. All this time, Lee and Beauregard were watching from the Gee house. Men numbering 632 from Alabama, under John Sanders, moved into the ravine with fixed bayonets and stormed the crater. They shot down into the open ravine and then bayoneted the Federals. No quarter was given. Some whites but very few of the colored troops were spared. Those that surrendered or were captured were killed. It was one of the worst scenes of the entire Civil War. Lee told Beauregard to answer a request for a cease fire to bury the dead. Two days after the battle, on Aug. 1, bloated, maggot riddled men were thrown into the crater and covered up.

It was difficult to tell the white soldiers from the colored troops after two days lying in the sun. After the war, the bodies were exhumed and moved by the U.S. Govt.

On Sunday, after a good rest, the group boarded the bus again and pointed it toward Appomattox. On the way, we paralleled the Confederate west flank at Five Forks. Gen. Custer, yes that Gen Custer, had ridden around the right flank. The Confederates attacked left, front, right, and rear. The site is at an intersection on White Oak Rd and is not interpreted yet but is very well documented. The Park Service has acquired 1,500 acres. Pickett got away, and Lee dismissed him for poor performance. He was picnicking at Hatcher's Run and that led to his troops' defeat. He was away from his lines, and is blamed for the South's defeat at Five Forks.

On April 2, 1865, the 6th Corps broke thru Lee's thin line and Lee sent a telegram to Davis: "Our lines have been shattered - will evacuate tonight. Suggest you evacuate Richmond." Lee fought and hung on. The night of April 2 and the 3rd, Lee evacuated Petersburg on four separate routes, not just one. All headed for Amelia's Courthouse; it is the closest point to the Richmond RR. He expected trainloads of provisions to resupply so he could then proceed down the line to link up with Gen. Johnson. Lee's goal was also to unite the armies at Amelia's Courthouse and consolidate his army. The Federals knew that Lee was moving west and Grant decided not to follow Lee's army, but instead to march parallel. He knew they were headed for the RR and thought if he could beat him to Burkeville, he would cut Lee off. On April 3, Lee had 55,000 troops and Grant had 76,000. Skirmishing between Confederate and Union Cavalry was the only action. Two Confederate wagon trains were moving parallel and north of the marching Confederates. They were attacked by Union troops and the wagons burned; they never hooked up with Lee.

The tour group then exited at the site of Amelia's Courthouse, beside the RR tracks. In 1865, there was a depot for the Richmond-Danville RR there. It is where Lee expected to resupply his army. On April 4, Lee arrived. They had marched all night April 2nd and 3rd, and on the morning of April 4 the hungry men finally arrived. The train from Richmond pulled in; they opened the boxcars and found only horse tack....no food. Reports are that Lee's face was shadowed. There had

been mass confusion on April 2. Lee's orders to Richmond misfired somewhere. A soldier by the name of Walter Taylor had been given permission to go to Richmond to get married, so he was not there to carry out Lee's wishes. Taylor normally would have done it but someone filling in for him failed. The train was supposed to have been loaded down with food from Richmond. Prior to their retreat, Lee appealed to the citizens of Amelia's Courthouse for meat, cattle, corn and sheep and asked them to give to the extent that they could. Basically, Lee squandered a day in that town because his army was starving. When they were not looking for food, they were waiting for the rest of the army to arrive so they could all leave in concert.

Back on the bus, the tour group headed for Jetersville. On April 5, in the afternoon, they were met by cavalry, and Longstreet arrived. On the next ridge over, 25,000 Federal troops waited in earthworks. The Union 5th Corps of 25,000 came next so there were as many as 50,000 troops over there. Lee reluctantly decided to withdraw and go north on a little side road which intercepted another road that cut back to Amelia Springs. They marched all night on April 5 & 6 and turned toward Farmville, where Lee learned provisions were waiting on him via the Southside RR. By April 6, they were all headed toward what would become the battles at Sailor's Creek. There was an extremely long column of men and wagons marching and they ran into skirmishes, causing a 5 or 6 mile gap between Longstreet's and Anderson's men. The wagon train turned off and went to the right, up Jamestown Rd. Gordon's men followed them the wrong way. There followed 3 battles: Marshall's, Battlefield Park, and Double Bridges/Lockett House.

We were now headed for the site of the definitive battle of Sailor's Creek. There, the group saw the 1770's Hillman House where twelve family members and neighbors huddled in the basement. It became a field hospital after the fighting stopped, and the bloodstains are still on the floors. Sailor's Creek was a rout; nine Confederate generals were captured. The tour stood in the vicinity of the privately owned Lockett house where bullet holes are still visible. A monument placed in front by the UDC unfortunately has incorrect information, as none of the men mentioned were actually there. The hillside had been littered with everything you can imagine from a retreating army. Lee crossed the Appomattox River, which was a mistake because it slowed him down. On April 7 & 8, Lee marched west of Appomattox, and the Union got in front of him. Grant penned a letter to Lee to

surrender his Army of Virginia. He received it and on April 8 asked for terms. Meanwhile, General Gordon tried to make an assault, but as they crested the hill, they saw two divisions of Federals. Truce flags went up. Grant sent another note to Lee. The McLean house was chosen as the meeting point. Joshua Jones took the reins of Traveler. In more modern times, the original house was torn down with the idea of taking it to the Chicago World's Fair, but it lay in ruins and nature and souvenir hunters destroyed it. The house was reconstructed in 1950, with only the bricks on the immediate sides of the front door, and part of the front walk containing the original brick. McLean had gone bankrupt and lost everything; a very few pieces inside made their way back and are original.

At Clover Hill Tavern, the Union Army cranked out thousands of paroles. There were three different ceremonies April 10-12. Lee sent out General Order #9 to various brigades. Many had nothing to go home to. Almost all of the Union army had left Appomattox by then...war was still raging in other parts of NC and they had to go fight. Griffin's Division of the 5th Corps was the only one left behind.

With our day completed, we headed back to Petersburg. Many thanks to all who made the weekend possible.

BY: Linda Lashley