

BRUNSWICK CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

MEETING: APRIL 3, 2012

WILLIAM BARKER CUSHING---NAVY SEAL #1

Speaker: Chris Fonvielle

He was wild, exciting, courageous, daring, driven and just a bit crazy. How else can you describe the “Forrest Gump” of the Civil War, asks our own Chris Fonvielle?

Let us start right here at Fort Johnston to show “Navy Seal” Cushing to be a good gamble for a reluctant but wise Gideon Welles. Cushing’s bold heroism, good luck and pluck outweigh his pranks and poor scholarship at the Naval Academy. Kicked out at 18, he is buried there with honors 13 years later, notes Chris. He tells us a “Cushing Caper.” It seems William did a sneak attack to capture General Louis Hebert, CSA, as he slept at his command post – Fort Johnston, Smithville, N.C. The plan went well but Hebert wasn’t home. Cushing whisked away Captain Kelley (still in his PJ’s) instead. The next day Kelly asked that his clothes and personals be delivered to him in captivity. The request was granted but Cushing could not help sending a note to a very red-faced Louis Hebert that started something like this: “Dear General, my regrets that I missed you last night, etc.” You get the flavor. Chris goes on to tell us many more fascinating stories of this man who became known as Lincoln’s “Commando.” YA JUST HAD TO BE THERE. Gideon Welles calls the General Hebert event, “A damn splendid affair.” He made Cushing the youngest Lieutenant in the Navy at age 19.

Chris shares Cushing’s defining military moment. He is charged with the task of destroying a powerful Ironclad, the *CSS Albemarle* that dominates the Roanoke River and threatens the town of Plymouth in 1864. The short version can’t hold a candle to Chris Fonvielle’s vibrant retelling, but here it is. Cushing’s capture plan goes well until a barking Confederate dog spoils it. Plan B successfully plants a lanyard detonated torpedo below the waterline of the *Albemarle* immediately sinking her but losing all her attackers, save two. Our hero, Commander Cushing, is one. Chris calls him a cross between Brad Pitt and Rambo.

Now Cushing is given full charge of the Fort Fisher attack. You know the rest of this story. Chris tells us what you don’t know. The Commander can’t help securing a buoy in the middle of the Cape Fear River with a large message attached. The message, specifically for General Hebert, was two words—“I’m Back!”

Thanks again Chris for another serendipitous evening chronicling, for us, that wild and crazy “man of action” who gave new meaning to the “Gumpian” phrase, “That’s all I have to say about that.”

Submitted by Dan Fink