BRUNSWICK CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

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HOW THE NAVIES AFFECTED THE OUTCOMES OF THE CIVIL WAR

SPEAKER: DR. CRAIG SYMONDS

Craig spoke with accurate compass and easy breeziness to the BIG STORY of Naval impact. It had three propellers. First, the single biggest event was the blockade. Second place had to go to the Confederate commerce raiding. Third would be the battle against the shore – both rivers and the ocean. Here is where history was changed by technology. Following I list a few: A. steam power. B. propellers C. armored warships. D. submarines (The Hunley) E. ships versus forts. F. torpedoes & G. better bullets.

Craig credits Lincoln for using blockading as an answer to ending this war early with as little bloodshed as possible. Lincoln proved he "was not adrift" by ordering the Union blockade of all southern ports. General Winfield Scott devised the famed Anaconda Plan to control and eventually capture all 189 harbors and inlets of the Confederacy. He started with four ships in his battle against the shores. Craig reminds us that public opinion wanted Richmond first. This gave Gideon Wells, of the Navy, time to order 24 steam-powered sloops.(steam power was a technological advantage that changed the whole game.) He eventually amassed upward of 400 converted merchant ships. Not many guns were available or really needed. "Greenhorns"—not seasoned Union sailors tended the boilers. Craig says: "The first thing they learned was to keep the "pointy end" in the front.

More than just technical innovations, the Civil War was the start of the industrial revolution. Lincoln used the same thought all of us have exercised at some time in our lives: "It sounded like a good idea at the time." He claimed ignorance of a rule called "The Law of Nations" BUT IT WORKED! Other nations were respecting his blockade. Shipping dropped dramatically and insurance rates skyrocketed.

The Confederate Navy was even more dismal than the Union. Jeff Davis cabinet adopted Gypsy Rose Lee's mindset—you need to have a "gimmick." They built ironclads, woodclads and even a thing called a submarine. "Merchant" ships were built for the Confederacy in foreign ports then sailed to Bermuda or the Bahamas

to be converted into warships. A fleet numbering about 130 was assembled. Not many saw active duty. It seems the Confederate sailor was to be well paid in Confederate money---after they won the war. The exit door was used more than the entrance. By 1861 the Anaconda Plan was tightening the belt, controlling South/North Rivers and East /West Railroads. "King Cotton was dead." The South was able to export about 10% of the crop.

Did the blockade work? YES! A few sleek, fast blockade runners, under cover of darkness made it about 77% of the time. Craig finds evidence of about 1300 attempts. Eventually 300 runners made it about 4 times each. About 220 ultimately were sunk or captured. Some captains made enough to go home to a very comfortable retirement.

Confederate commerce raiding worked like this: you capture the merchant vessel then take it to a neutral port attempting to sell both ship and contents. What you get you keep. Does this sound like a license to steal? The problem was to find a NEUTRAL port. You simply offload the cargo and burn the ship. It worked for a short while.

Lincoln wanted and got the powerful weapon he needed to ruin the Southern economy without losing many lives. Guns got through but butter did not. The home front economy struggled mightily. Craig reminds us that it was not the few who got through but the thousands that never tried. Foote and Walk (pun intended) are two Union Navy captains whose ships carried Grant across the Mississippi without getting his feet wet. Admiral Farragut ran Confederate forces to the ground at New Orleans effectively closing the Mississippi in 1862. Ya just had to be there as all 315 members reverberated Farragut's famous statement involving torpedoes and the battle of Mobile Bay. PRICELESS!

Clearly, says Craig, the Army and Navy hate each other but worked together enough to put a strap (blockade) around the Confederacy not forgotten to this day. Charleston mounted a two year siege, Wilmington held out the longest and the buckle on the strap was Vicksburg. On July 4, 1863, it buckled. The town did not celebrate that holiday for the next 80 years.

Submitted by Dan Fink