

## **BRUNSWICK CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE**

**MEETING – September 3, 2019**

### **“HARDY MAKES THEM IMMORTAL”**

**SPEAKER: Michael Hardy**

Former North Carolina Historian of the Year Michael Hardy thinks the number of Union regimental histories from the Civil War unfair to Confederate veterans. Even the survivors of Branch-Lane’s Brigade looked for a tale to be told. Former Confederate officer Riddick Gatlin, Jr. complained of the hole in the history of the Branch-Lane Brigade. “Who has ever written a line to tell of the sacrifices, the suffering and the ending of these more than immortal men?”, he asked. “Why has the history of that brigade not been written?” The dead and the living beg remembrance. Michael Hardy answered.

A regimental history demands a partisan view. How can you praise men in their carnage if you do not admire them? Mr. Hardy’s enthusiasm carried him on a tide of words in spite of the repeated distractions of emergency hurricane alerts seething in our audience. For we not only had the history of Branch-Lane’s Brigade brought before us, but also the foibles and moments deserving of fame.

He could have plied us with bare facts alone. But anyone can tell us that the Brigade fought with the Army of Northern Virginia in nearly every major engagement from 1862 to surrender at Appomattox, including: the Seven Days’ Battles, Second Manassas, Sharpsburg, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville (where its members mistakenly shot Stonewall Jackson), Gettysburg, the Wilderness, Spotsylvania, North Anna, Cold Harbor, the Petersburg Campaign, and the final retreat to Appomattox. Even I could recite the losses with 479 of the Brigade surrendered at Appomattox out of the 8,775 men who served in the Civil War. Three thousand fifty-one Brigade members died, a 35 percent mortality rate. A storyteller, however, reanimates the dead.

Lines such as, “And there goes Colonel Campbell with his sword in one hand and the flag of the 7<sup>th</sup> (regiment) in the other,” set a heroic scene for every mind in the audience. And sometimes Hardy waxed mythic as when Campbell is shot multiple times and he falls to the ground, “with the flag covering his body just as if someone placed it there.” Or, the bald general bent his head for the sergeant major to look at and asked, “Am I wounded up there?” “Naw, colonel,” the sergeant major replied, “just scorched a little,” belies the nonchalance of men facing death again and again. Then, too, generals have no business getting lost on

battlefields and threatened by Union pickets to then be saved by no less a Confederate soldier than Spiderman: Peter Parker. All of this Michael Hardy gave us with his storyteller's best mien, his dramatic pauses, his measured pacing from side to side of our stage as if weighing every word and which story to tell next. If historians spend their days with dusty ancient letters and books (or their modern digital versions) to write footnoted and annotated histories to prove their scholarship, the historian as speaker excels when he invites us into his imagination so we feel we have actually witnessed history. Michael Hardy took us there.

What? Mr. Hardy left you hungry for more stories of the gallant 2<sup>nd</sup> North Carolina Brigade? Well then, as he invited, check out the balance of his book in *General Lee's Immortals*.

Jim Medeiros