

March 2009

The Cannon Report

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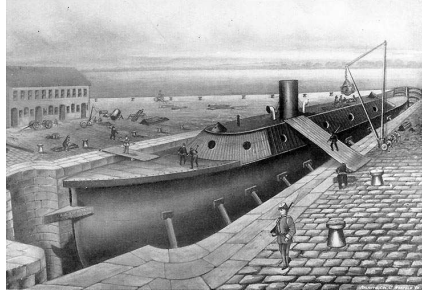
Gordon Drumheller
Judge Advocate

**DEO
VINDICE**



The Powhatan Troop, SCV Camp 1382

Photo # NH 42222 CSS Virginia fitting out in drydock at the Norfolk Navy Yard, circa early 1862



The Battle of Hampton Roads

One hundred and forty seven years ago, on March 8th and 9th 1862, the Battle of Hampton Roads was fought by the CSS Virginia and several supporting vessels against the USS Monitor and several Union Ships. The battle was the most noted and, arguably, the most important naval battle of the War for Southern Independence from the standpoint of the development of navies. The battle was a part of the effort of the Confederacy to break the Union blockade, which had cut off Virginia's largest cities, Norfolk and Richmond, from international trade. The battle received worldwide attention, and it had immediate effects on all navies. The preeminent naval powers, Great Britain and France, halted further construction of wooden-hulled ships. Although the battle failed to break the Union blockade of the harbor, the Confederate Navy inflicted heavy casualties on the Union Navy (2 wooden frigates sunk, 1 wooden frigate damaged, 261 killed and 108 wounded). The Confederate losses were negligible, with only 1 ironclad damaged, 7 killed and 17 wounded.

The end came for the USS Virginia because the blockade was unbroken. Norfolk was of little strategic use to the Confederacy, and preliminary plans were laid to move the ship up the James River to the vicinity of Richmond. Before adequate preparations could be made, the Confederate Army abandoned the city of Norfolk on 9 May 1862, without consulting with anyone from the Navy. The Virginia's draft was too great to permit her to pass up the river. She was trapped and could only be captured or sunk by the Union Navy. Rather than allow either, the Captain, Josiah Tatnall, decided to destroy her. He had her towed down to Craney Island, where the crew was taken ashore, and then she was set afire. She burned through the rest of the day and most of the following night; shortly before dawn the flames reached her magazine, and she blew up.

More than 10 years after the end of hostilities, on 30 May 1876, the wreck of the CSS Virginia was raised and transported back to the shipyard at Portsmouth where it was broken up. Portions of the Virginia, including her armor, anchor, and guns, are displayed at the Norfolk Naval Shipyard in Portsmouth and the Mariners' Museum in Newport News. The anchor of the CSS Virginia sits on the lawn in front of the Museum of the Confederacy.

The name of the warship, which served the Confederacy, has been a continuing source of confusion. She was originally a screw frigate in the United States Navy, and as such was named USS Merrimack. She decommissioned at Norfolk on 16 February 1860. On 20 April 1861, retreating Union forces burned the Merrimack to the water line and sank her to preclude capture. She was never re-commissioned by the Union Navy; therefore, the USS Merrimack did not exist as a US Naval ship at the time of her demise. When her conversion into an ironclad ram was almost complete, she was commissioned as CSS Virginia. Despite the specifics, Union accounts persisted in calling the CSS Virginia by her original name. The alliteration of Monitor and Merrimack has persuaded most popular accounts to adopt the familiar name, even while it is acknowledged to be technically incorrect.



Commanders Comment:

I hoped you enjoyed reading the March history about the Battle of Hampton Roads and the CSS Virginia.

For those of you that were unable to join us at our last meeting, our guest speaker, Dr. William E. Thompson, and the topic, The Battle of Rich Mountain was very enlightening. Our guest speaker this month will be Mr. Joseph H. Lively. He will lecture on “The Second Reconstruction.”

I hope to see more of you at the meetings. There is a great deal of effort in bringing you our guest speakers with informative topics and I know a large turnout is always appreciated by our guest speakers. Family and guests are always welcome.

*Paul M. Houser,
Commander*

The Cannon Report

The March meeting will be on the 22nd at the *Village Garden Café*; luncheon at 1:00 and meeting at 2:00. The cost of the lunch will be \$10.00, plus, please feel free to tip our Hostess. The Proprietor and hostess, Mrs. Wanda Long, opens up on Sunday just for our Camp meetings. For those of you that have not attended a meeting at the Village Garden Café, believe me when I tell you that this is by far the nicest atmosphere, the best food, and the most gracious host I have experienced in the seven years that I have been a member of this Camp. With that said, I would like to emphasize that the Cafe is in business to make a profit and it is advantageous to our Camp to see that this happens at our meetings. Please try to attend **your** meetings and join your fellow compatriots in enjoying the excellent foods, the camaraderie and the outstanding atmosphere.



As mentioned in the “Commander’s Comments,” our guest speaker at this month’s meeting will be Mr. Joe Lively. Compatriot Lively is a member of The High Bridge Camp # 1581. Compatriot Lively is a former chemist, military officer and recently retired chemistry teacher. He is the author of “*OUR FORGOTTEN FOLK HERITAGE*,” a book about survival skills from our Southern heritage. More details on Joe’s book can be found on his web site at www.forgottenheritage.net. Joe will be addressing our camp on the 2nd Reconstruction. Compatriot Lively is the Heritage Defense Coordinator for the Virginia Division. He also serves on the Virginia Division Sesquicentennial Committee and Education Committee.

*Paul M. Houser
Cannon Report Editor*