

# FORT MACON RAMPARTS

A publication of the Friends of Fort Macon

Volume VIII, Issue 1 Summer 2001

## THE CONFEDERATE DEFENSE OF FORT MACON

### PART II - THE BATTLE BEGINS

by Paul Branch

In the previous installment of The Fort Macon Ramparts (Fall, 2000), the first part of the Confederate Defense of Fort Macon recounted the problems faced by Colonel Moses J. White and the Confederate garrison of Fort Macon during the siege operations of Union General John G. Parke against the fort in March and April, 1862. Now, on the eve of battle with Union guns ready to open fire on the fort, the Confederate defenders waited to see what dawn of April 25, 1862, would bring.

On the eve of battle, it is not known what was happening in Fort Macon, but Colonel Moses J. White and his garrison knew that the enemy was now ready to open fire at any time. They must have readied their guns and ammunition, and made last minute preparations for whatever the morning of April 25, 1862, would bring. At some point they protected the three eastern walls fronting the parade ground inside by positioning stacks of railroad rails taken from Morehead City up-

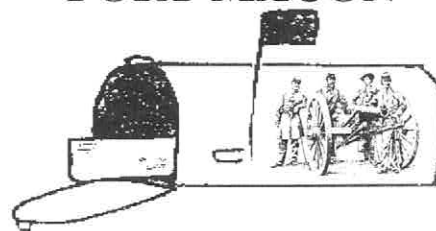
right against the walls to ward off enemy projectiles flying over the wall from the opposite side.

Dawn came. At 5:30 a.m. on the morning of April 25, 1862, the usual morning roll call of the garrison showed 263 men present for duty out of 403. The rest were sick.

At 5:40 a.m., the Union batteries opened fire on Fort Macon for the first time. At 6 a.m. the fort began to return fire with at least 21 of its guns which could bear on the landward side. Just before 9 a.m., four gunboats of the Union Blockading Squadron in the ocean off Beaufort Inlet joined in the action with their guns from offshore. Confederates turned some of the fort's guns to face them and hit two of them with cannon fire. One of these was the squadron commander's ship which had an 8-inch columbiad shot pass almost completely through the ship, missing the engine and main steam line by only six inches. After less than an hour and a half the ships had had enough. They retired out of range and did not return to the fight

*Continued on next page*

## LETTERS FROM FORT MACON



This is part of a series of letters written by soldiers stationed at Fort Macon. The writer of these letters, James A. Graham, was a member of the 27th North Carolina Infantry, Company G (Orange Guards). This unit arrived at Fort Macon in April 1861. It remained there until the following January when it was ordered to join in the defense of New Bern against an expected attack by the Union forces of General Ambrose Burnside.

*Fort Macon  
July 21st 1861*

*Dear Mother*

*As Mr Lynch is going up in the morning I will write by him.*

*Please send me some writing paper and envelopes as I am very near out of paper. Please send me about half a quire of foolscap paper among the rest. Tomorrow is Johnny's birthday. I wish that we could all be at home then. Tell Willie that I think he owes me a letter. The Rev Mr Wiley, Presbyterian preacher, preached for us this*

*Continued on page 7*

***Don't forget the Ice Cream Social  
April 29th - See Page 5***

again. The fort had won the first round. Northeast of the fort, efforts to get Burnside's two floating batteries into action in the sound were largely unsuccessful due to wind and choppy seas. One battery was able to deliver some long-ranged fire against the fort but the effort was soon given up as ineffective. It was all up to the land batteries. During the morning, the Union 10-inch mortar battery suffered great damage from the fort's fire. By 11 a.m. so much of the embankment protecting its gunners had been shot away the gun crews were exposed from the waist up and were forced to take cover. The battery was thus silenced for a time. The Parrott Rifle battery and the 8-inch mortar battery continued to fire but for much of the morning their shots had been missing the fort. The heavy smoke from the fort's guns obscured the fort so that Union gunners could not tell where they were hitting. Many of their shots were overshooting the fort and hitting in the inlet. This might have gone on all day had not Union officers manning a signal station on the top story of the Atlantic Hotel in Beaufort taken it upon themselves to signal range corrections to the batteries to help their shots zero in on the fort through the smoke. These men were lucky enough to be in a perfect position to see where the artillery fire was falling and kept the Union guns on target. Their actions marked the turning point of the battle.

With the Union artillery projectiles now falling steadily into the fort, it was the Confederates' turn to be driven to cover. The fort's fire slackened and the smoke began to clear. By noon every Union shot seemed to hit the fort or explode over it. Particularly destructive were the three 30-pounder Parrott Rifle cannons. Even from almost 1500 yards away, their phenomenal accuracy was greater than what smoothbore cannons could have accomplished at half that range. They caused great damage to the fort's walls and knocked out a number of the fort's guns. One single Parrott projectile hit three of the fort's largest guns in succession, knocking out two of them, killing three men and wounding five. Another actually went through the stacks of railroad iron leaning against the fort's walls. Some of them were able to break through into some of the fort's casemates and wound some of the men inside. One of these took off the leg of a man lying sick in his bunk. Of greatest concern to the Confederates in the fort, however, was the fact the rifled guns had the pinpoint accuracy to enable Union gunners to concentrate fire at specific sections of the fort's walls where the fort's gunpowder magazines were located. Since the fort was a former U.S. Army installation, the

Union gunners knew the layout of the fort and exactly where to concentrate their cannon fire to reach the magazines. Colonel White had been active all morning, encouraging his men and directing the battle. Unmindful of the enemy fire, he made rounds visiting each of the fort's batteries repeatedly, including the heavily exposed batteries on the outer wall. By 1 p.m., his frail health had failed him and he was forced to retire to his quarters to regain his strength. Captain Guion assumed command of the fort during his absence.

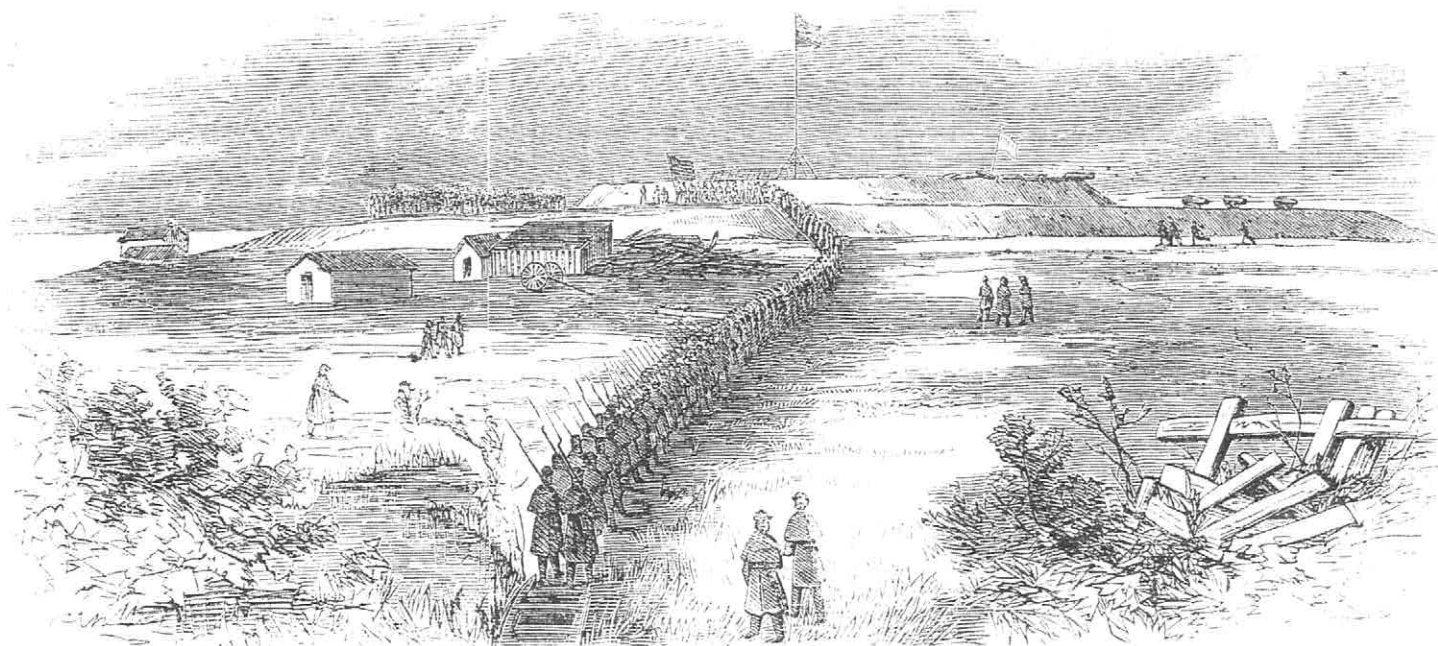
By mid-afternoon, it was clear the Confederate defense had spent itself. Such a concentration of fire was being poured onto the fort that by 2 p.m. only two or three guns were returning fire at intervals of every five minutes. Later, this increased to every fifteen to twenty minutes. Union observers could see Confederate cannoneers rushing up to the ramparts to fire two or three guns during these intervals until the Union fire drove them back to cover again. During one of these lulls, a Union soldier working on top of the 10-inch mortar battery to reset aiming stakes was unable to get to cover in time when the fort suddenly began firing again. He was hit squarely in the chest with a 32-pounder cannonball and killed instantly. About 3:30 p.m. a seemingly last ditch effort was made by the fort garrison to return fire with all guns which had not been knocked out. One of the Parrott rifles was temporarily disabled by a Confederate shot which shattered one of its wheels. By 4 p.m., most of the fort's guns were silent once again.

Meanwhile, about 2:30 p.m. Captain Guion met with the other company commanders and held a council of officers to review the situation. It was not good. Many of the fort's most important guns had been knocked out. Enemy fire was so hot Captains Manney and Pool had withdrawn their gun crews from the exposed batteries on the outer wall. The garrison was exhausted as a result of its poor state of health and there was no one to afford reliefs to the gun crews. The fort's walls had provided shelter against the bombardment so that only seven men had been killed, but the lives of everyone else in the fort were about to become in jeopardy. The enemy had concentrated so much fire on the wall adjacent to the southwest gunpowder magazine that the wall was cracking and would soon be breached. Then the magazine and the 10,000 pounds of gunpowder it contained would be completely exposed to the enemy fire. A magazine detonation would, of course, cause the complete destruction of the fort and its garrison.

It was clear the fort could not hold out, especially

when faced with the explosion of its magazines. The officers then met at Colonel White's quarters where the conclusion was reached there was no choice except surrender. Burnside's previous conditions for surrender had been that the garrison would be paroled and allowed to return home to await exchange. White and his officers could only hope the offer was now still good. At about 4:30 p.m., a white flag was displayed from the fort, bringing the bombardment to a stop. Thereafter, Captains Pool and Guion and a detachment of men left the fort under a flag of truce and met with Union officers in front of the lines. General Parke was only willing to demand an unconditional surrender, which was unacceptable to

killed and awaited what dawn would bring. During the early morning hours of April 26, Generals Parke and Burnside conferred over the situation and decided to grant the Confederates the terms of capitulation previously offered, namely, that the garrison would be released on their parole of honor to return home to await exchange, carrying with them their private effects. About daylight two of Burnside's staff officers went over to the fort in a boat under a flag of truce and announced the surrender terms to Colonel White. Since these were the best which could be hoped for, White and Captain Guion returned with the Union officers to General Burnside's flagship, the *Alice Price*, anchored off Shackleford Banks.



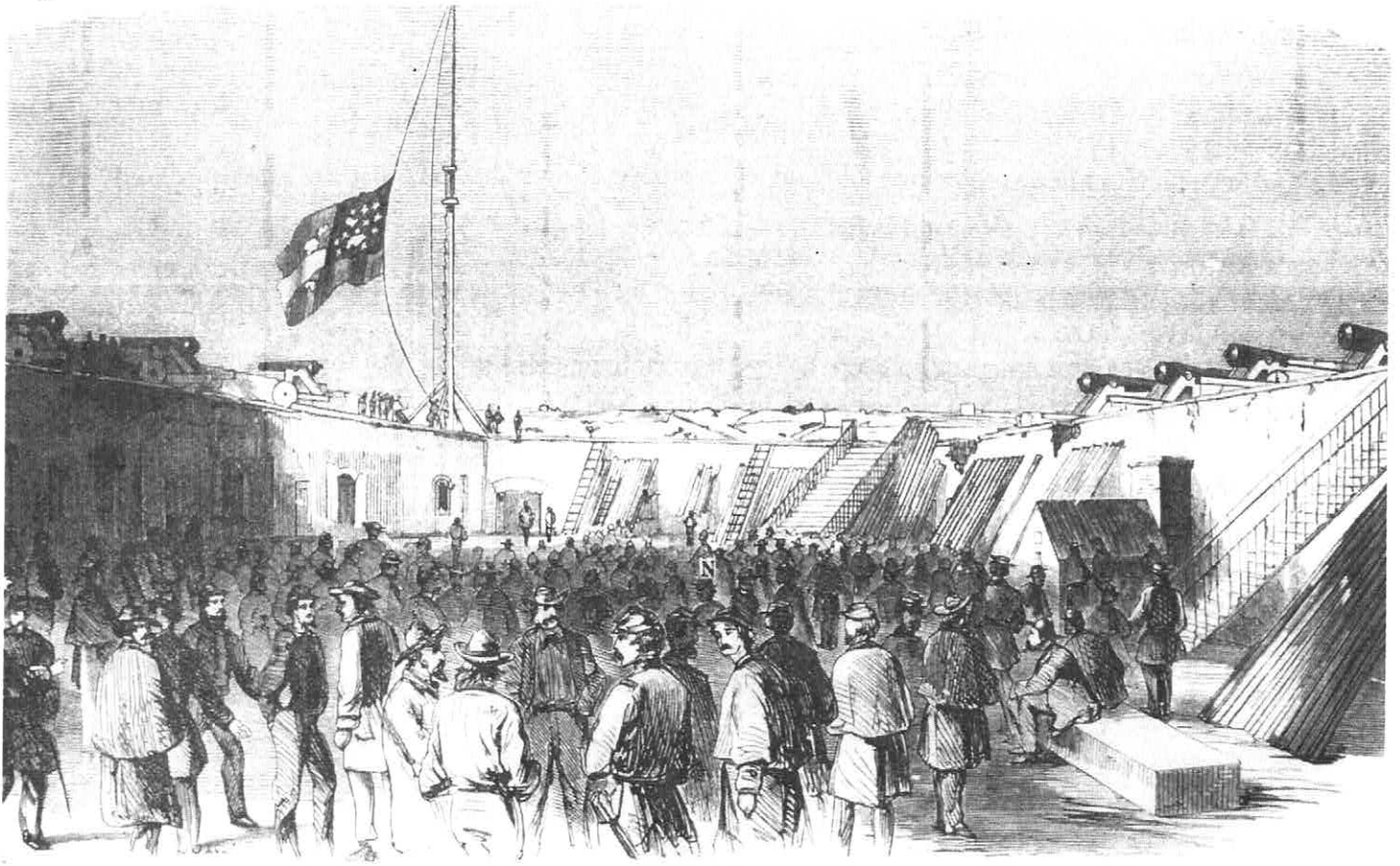
**The Fifth Rhode Island Regiment entering Fort Macon**

Pool and Guion. After much discussion it was agreed to suspend hostilities for the night, leaving everything as it was, until General Burnside could be consulted as to whether the old terms of capitulation would be still offered. Although the Confederates honored the stipulation of leaving everything as it was, the Union battery commanders repaired their batteries and hauled up more ammunition. It was not an easy night in the fort. If Burnside insisted on unconditional surrender rather than honor the terms he offered previously, what then? Everyone expected to have to renew the battle in the morning. How long could the fort last? A magazine explosion notwithstanding, Colonel White estimated two more days of bombardment would "reduce the fort to a mass of ruins." The men of the garrison constructed crude wooden coffins for their seven comrades who had been

Here the surrender terms were formally drawn up and signed.

Afterward, White and Guion returned to the fort while Burnside, Parke and staff officers walked up the beach to the Union trenches to bring up their troops. The Fifth Rhode Island Battalion, on duty in the trenches that morning, was marched up the beach to the fort to receive the surrender. At 10:10 a.m. the Confederate flag was lowered from the flagstaff. Twelve minutes later the U.S. flag was raised in its place. Fort Macon now belonged to the United States once more. The Confederate garrison filled out their paroles and awaited transportation home. That afternoon, the local men from the area were transported across the harbor to Beaufort to return to their homes. On April 27 part of the garrison was carried back to New Bern with General Burnside





SURRENDER OF FORT MACON, NC, APRIL 26TH, 1862--LOWERING THE CONFEDERATE FLAG.

aboard his flagship *Alice Price*. The remainder of the garrison and Colonel White boarded the Union gunboat *Chippewa* and were returned to Confederate lines under a flag of truce at the mouth of the Cape Fear River. The siege of Fort Macon had passed into history.

With the capture of the fort, Burnside took 396 prisoners, the armament of 54 cannons, 20,000 pounds of gunpowder, ammunition, supplies, forty horses and about 500 small arms. The fort had taken quite a battering during the bombardment. Of 1150 shots fired by the Union batteries, 560 hits were counted. The walls and grounds were scarred with craters and pock marks, and littered with thousands of fragments of exploded shells. Seventeen of the fort's guns had been knocked out or damaged. The Parrott Rifle cannons had caused the most astounding damage. Some of the Parrott projectiles had penetrated two feet through solid masonry. Others passed through the stacks of iron railroad rails which the Confederates had leaned against the walls for protection. One passed through one of the solid stone stair steps. Of course the damage they caused in cracking the 4-foot thick upper section of the outer wall adjacent to the magazine was the primary reason for the fort's surrender. Despite the pounding the fort had taken, only

seven Confederates had been killed and eighteen wounded. Union losses were one man killed and three wounded.

Burnside had taken the final objective of his expedition. Beaufort Harbor was now in his possession and would be used extensively by both the Union Army and Navy for the remainder of the war. The damage to the fort was repaired and it was continuously occupied by the Union Army for the remainder of the war. General Burnside went on to have a tumultuous career in both the eastern and western theaters of the war. Parke also served with distinction for the remainder of the war. The Confederates comprising the garrison of Fort Macon were exchanged in August and September, 1862, and served for the remainder of the war in eastern North Carolina. Colonel White battled health problems for the remainder of the war and died only three months before the war ended.

*The author, Paul Branch, is a Park Ranger and the official historian of Fort Macon. He has authored the definitive book on the history of Fort Macon. He is also a frequent contributor of articles to the Fort Macon Ramparts.*

## FINANCIAL RESULTS SUMMARY FOR 2000

### INCOME

Member Dues .....	\$9,590
Gifts & Grants .....	12,521
Fort Donation Box .....	6,792
Interest on Deposits .....	2,423
Sales Tax Refund .....	<u>919</u>
<b>TOTAL INCOME .....</b>	<b>\$32,245</b>

### EXPENDITURES

Membership Support	
Printing & Mailing .....	\$4,161
Computer/Office Ops .....	76
Annual Meeting .....	739
Tour Guide Uniforms, etc .....	1,366
Other Op. Expenses .....	73
Computer Purchase .....	1,490
Fort Exhibits .....	30,067
Fort Audio/Visual Systems .....	<u>8,072</u>
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURES .....</b>	<b>\$46,044</b>

NET DEFICIT ..... (\$13,799)

### 2000 FUNDS

January 1, Balance .....	\$60,800
December 31, Balance .....	47,001
Decrease for 2000 .....	(\$13,799)

### COMMENT

2000 has been the Friends most successful year in terms of the total support that we have been able to provide for Fort Macon. We have funded several wonderful new educational exhibits, and provided state-of-the-art audio/visual equipment for use by the Fort staff in conducting programs for the public. We have also provided Friends tour guides with needed uniforms and equipment. Although expenditures exceeded revenue in 2000, we are well positioned to provide more new exhibits in 2001 and beyond.

In 2000, the Friends were the recipients of very generous donations from the Carteret County Commissioners, the Town of Atlantic Beach, the Atlantic Beach Merchants Ass'n., John Kilroy, James Garner, Karl Weiss, George Ipock, Herman & Margaret Jennette, and Jane Thompson. Even though our policy dictates that we never ask our members for money, quite a few of our members do send us unsolicited contributions in addition to their annual dues. We want to thank all of them as well as our thirty new Lifetime members.

## FOOD, FUN, AND HISTORY!

Yes, another year has flown by, and it is time for our Annual Meeting and Ice Cream Social inside the Fort. Every year at this time we commemorate the Battle of Fort Macon. This will be the 139th anniversary of the battle which took place on April 25, 1862. We will gather in the Fort on Sunday, April 29 at 2:00 PM. You had better mark your calendar, because this will be too good to miss.

This promises to be the best program ever. There will be an outstanding group of musicians playing period music. There will be a demonstration of Civil War ladies attire, and a team of Confederate cannons will demonstrate the loading and firing of our six-pounder cannon. And of course there will be all the ice cream and brownies you can eat.

Above all, come see the new exhibits that have been added this year. They are sure to delight you. Read all about them on page 6.

We intend to use this event to kick off a membership drive. So bring some guests with you to share the fun, and we will encourage them to join us as we SUPPORT THE FORT!

## FRIENDS BOARD OF DIRECTORS FOR 2001

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Board members serve without compensation for a one year term beginning January 1.

## WAVE THE FLAG FOR GUNS AND BREAD

Many people have grown up believing that anything new is always better than something old. For these poor souls, there is no category of things best described as new-old. But this is precisely what excites the Friends of Fort Macon. Our heritage is our history. When we can restore and protect the artifacts of our history, we are keeping our heritage alive.

When you come to our annual meeting and ice cream social on April 29, you will see some wonderful replicas of the early years at Fort Macon. The first thing that you will notice is a huge (36ft x 20ft) flag, flying atop a flag pole which rises 80ft above the top of the Fort.

Sitting on the gun platforms on the top of the Fort will be two replicas of 32- pounder coastal defense cannon, including a new cannon donated to the Friends by Dean and Mickey Proper. One cannon is rifled, and the other is smooth bored. Both cannon are accurate replicas of cannon used by the Confederate soldiers defending the Fort during the battle of April 25, 1862.

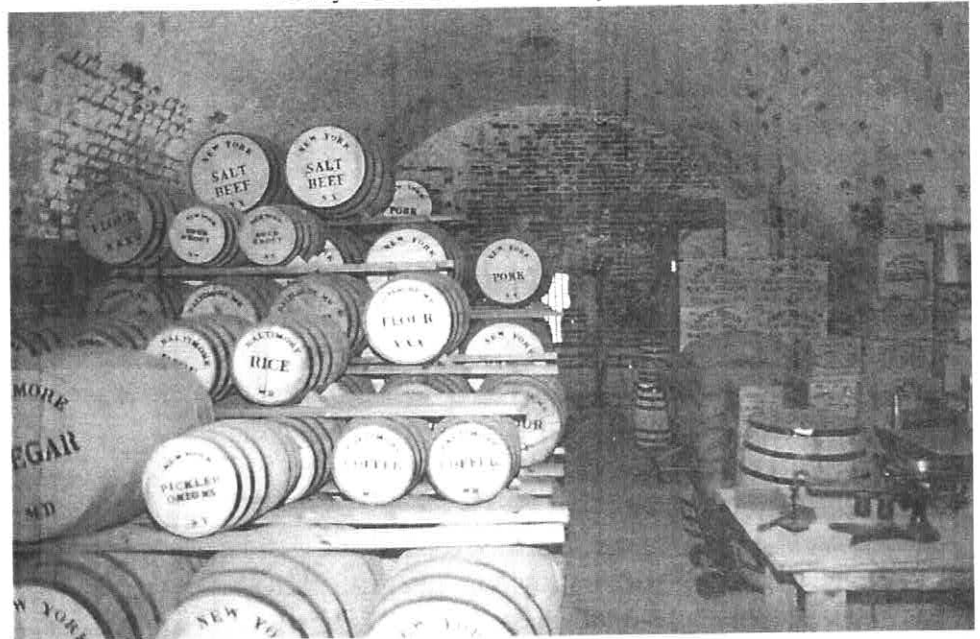
Soldiers could neither work nor fight on an empty stomach. From the earliest years, a large bake oven provided the garrison with fresh bread - the "staff of life". When the oven was more than one hundred years old, the World War II soldiers occupying Fort Macon demolished the oven in order to free up more storage space. Now, 60 years later, the oven is back! The Friends are indebted to Terry Edwards, who donated his time and skills to build the oven with materials supplied by the Friends. We will always be grateful to Terry for his generous contribution to the educational exhibits at the Fort. While Terry was working on the bake oven, his crew were busy restoring and repairing the deteriorated masonry throughout the Fort.

"A statesman is a politician who's been dead for fifteen years."

Harry Truman



Newly Restored Commissary Room



## MUSIC IN THE FORT IV

For the past three years, the Friends of Fort Macon have sponsored a Summer Concert Series inside the Fort. These free concerts have been so popular among visitors and residents alike that they have become an annual feature at Fort Macon.

Five concerts are held on alternate Friday evenings during June and July. This year's dates are June 1, 15, 29, and July 13, & 27. All performances begin at 7:00 PM.

Each concert features a different group of performers with a different style of music. All of the music has been chosen to appeal to folks of all ages.

The acoustics inside the Fort are excellent, and there is always a soothing breeze. Most listeners bring beach chairs or blankets to sit on. Many also bring picnic baskets.

If you are in the area on one of our concert evenings, you should make a point of joining us.



*Continued from page 1*

evening. We have preaching almost every Sunday, but still it is nothing like Sunday at home. I hope that this war will end soon, for I am getting tired of it. I have been appointed Orderly Sergeant of our company. Tom Whitted is 4th Sergeant in my place. As it is Sunday I will write no more.

Tell Cousin Kate I wish she would answer my letter. Love to all.

Write soon to your affectionate Son.

James A. Graham

Fort Macon  
Sept 6th 1861

Dear Mother

The enemy have not attacked us yet nor have we seen anything of them. I do not know when they will come if they come at all, but this I

do know that we are very well fixed for them and can give them the hardest fight that they have had anywhere yet.

I feel just as safe here as I would anywhere. I was in NewBern yesterday. Saw Gen. Gatlin and Johnny. Brother Joe is stationed at Fort Lane about 3 miles below NewBern on the river. I went down to his camp. They have cleared a place in the woods on the bank of the river large enough to pitch their camp and are hard at work clearing more. Col. Campbell's & Col. Singletary's regiments are there. They are well fixed up.

I did not see Cousin Laura. She has a baby about a week old. Uncle James Bryan and Aunt Ann have not been able to leave New York yet. Jimmy Bryan told me that he had a letter from his father dated Aug 20th

stating that Aunt Ann was not able to travel at that time. Yesterday was Father's birthday. I wish that we all could have been at home, but it could not be. I wish him many returns of it and that we may all be at home to enjoy them in peace.

I am getting tired of war and wish that it would cease, but am afraid that we will have more than enough of it before it does quit. There is no news.

Love to all. Write soon to Your affectionate Son.

James A. Graham

James A. Graham was a member of a politically prominent family of Orange County, North Carolina. This letter is part of a collection previously published by the University of North Carolina Press in 1928.

## ADVERTISEMENT

### DYSPEPSIA AND FITS

A new Cure for these distressing complaints is now made known in a "Treatise on Foreign and Native Herbal Preparations," published by DR.O.PHELPS BROWN. The prescription, furnished him by a young clairvoyant girl, while in a state of trance, has cured everybody who has taken it, never having failed in a single case. It is equally sure in cases of Fits as of Dyspepsia; and the ingredients may be found in any drug store. Those who are afflicted with Consumption, Bronchitis, or Asthma, may also be cured by my Herbal Preparations. I will send this valuable prescription free to any person on receipt of their name.

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From Harper's Weekly, July 19,  
1862

"No man will ever bring out of the Presidency the reputation which carries him into it."

Thomas Jefferson

"The troops will all carry Cooking Utensils, but no Rations; they will provide themselves with something to cook as they march."

Regimental Order No. 17,643,  
Army of Virginia (CSA)

## Membership Form

Check One: ☐ New Member(s) ☐ Renewal ☐ Gift Membership

Fee Enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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### Membership Categories and Fees

Individual/Family - \$10.00 Lifetime (Individual) - \$100.00

Business or Organization - \$25.00 Business Lifetime - \$500.00

**Friends of Fort Macon, P.O.Box 651, Beaufort, NC 28516-0651**