

[BlogThis!](#)

BLOGGING CIVIL WAR GHOSTS

Covering NEW BERN'S fall by KAYAK: correspondent FREDERIC A. MORITZ paddles back to 1862

Friday, November 19, 2004

MONITORING THE REBEL RETREAT BY KAYAK



[bridgeweb](#)

Originally uploaded by [fmoritz](#).

posted by Frederic A. Moritz : 5:48 AM

Saturday, July 19, 2003

Thank you,

DEAR AMBROSE,

*for the part you played
on your road to "COLD MOUNTAIN"*

"They're taking New Bern town."

Careful now, them's YANKEE gunboats in the harbor.

There is chaos in the air, wounded, bandaged men on flat cars and hand cars. I can hear the moans, the screams.....as I paddle my 13 foot red plastic kayak quietly beneath the rail bridge.

Who could have guessed?

It begins peacefully enough!

On Wednesday, July 16, 2003 I am down to "Union Point," with my 13 foot Osprey kayak car topped, ready to unload and launch at the public landing.....

Next I face the mildly choppy waves, paddle round that park point, waving to the pleasure craft, under the turning harbor bridge, in toward the Sheraton hotel boat docks -- and on toward the low, dark railroad bridge spanning the harbor from downtown New Bern to James City.

I have every reason to look forward to a nice paddle. Who would guess that as I paddle forward I will open a gateway toward the moaning wounded of the past?

GHOSTS UPON THE BRIDGE

What's this.....?

Mystery ghosts saunter across the railroad bridge as I paddle my Osprey up under close....peering up at the movement above....

Off to the side I see creaky barges and smoke belching ferries scurry across the harbor....

I hear rumbling guns in the distance.....

Must be the marines at the Cherry Point Air Station, a dozen miles to the south. Ever since those guys returned from Iraq, they've been making lots of noise. I wonder if they're getting ready for the "next one....."

This sounds closer -- less than five miles in the distance.....I think it's cannonading, just a bit of musketry.how those guns boom! And those ghosts, by God, they're dressed in the garb of the Sixties -- the 1860's, that is.

Ever since 9/11 I've been pretty much caught up in the 21st Century. It's been a long time since I've heard booms from a Civil War battlefield.

Courier riders on horseback arrive on the bank across from New Bern, spooked and tired they seem.....one chugging smoking train flees north crossing the bridge I am nestled under....that train slowly retreats to New Bern.....the screeching of the wheels, the moaning of the wounded.

The telegraph is down. The courier ponies look saggy, shaggy, tired....timid...and frankly I'm feeling a bit that way myself.

It's March 14, 1862 -- the Yankees commanded by General Ambrose Burnside seem to be carrying the day in a battle less than five miles south of New Bern.....

One hundred and forty years later virtual visitors could explore the battle by website at:

<http://www.hiddencoast.com/content/civilwarbattle.htm>

STUCK WITH THE MISSION....WHY ME, OH LORD?

In 1862 no such thing is possible. It takes a red plastic kayak to penetrate, to explore where others cannot go.

I have the kayak. It looks as though I am stuck with the "mission." Why me, Oh Lord?

I pinch myself, sponge out my kayak cockpit, and whisper, "Stay on mission, Fred."

Could it be that this journalist with his Osprey will play a crucial part? Will bring alive this battle to the world?

To witness the scene, take out the cell phone, to phone it in -- an "EXTRA."

To post it as a "blogger."

True, I'm not exactly "embedded."

That gives my Osprey and me a bit more freedom to tell the story, to tell it "like it is." I can file the real "scoop." I can dig in deep and let my powers of analysis, such as they are, range far.....No Pentagon censorship today. No one I've talked to here has even heard of George W. Bush.

Hmmm....what's the outside world to think?

When the British read this "blog" to learn the Yanks are expanding in the South, will they still dare support "Johnny Reb?" Will news of this Yank victory stimulate pro-war morale in the cities of the North?

Am I helping old Abe to play his game? Will news of this dramatic victory encourage him to raise up his war goals, to avoid a quicker negotiated peace with the South?

What effect will this victory have on the strength of those who favor emancipation?

Hey, let the chips fall where they may!!! I'm paid "to file," not to think

about the consequences.

I'VE HAD LOTS OF EXPERIENCE -- BUT MOSTLY IN THE FUTURE

Way off in the future, by 2003 I will come to think of myself as "semi-retired," teaching journalism part-time. That will be before I paddle back to 1862.

True, I will have lots of experience in the future, but will the future prepare me for this mission in the past?

Most of my reporting will be more than one hundred and ten years in the future, as a correspondent for *The Christian Science Monitor*, which will be founded in 1908 by Mary Baker Eddy (1821-1910).

Now, in 1862, while I watch the Rebs retreat from New Bern, Mrs. Eddy is in New England experimenting with unconventional therapies for her chronic ailments.

She is yet to "discover" Christian Science.

Soon she will read in the Yankee press of just how New Bern fell.

If I "stay on mission," perhaps she will read MY dispatch.

But the legacy of her newspaper is still in the future. You can move forward a bit to look back at her legacy at:

<http://www.worldlymind.org/conscience.htm>

BEGINNING OF END FOR SOUTH? WINFIELD WINS HIS GAME

It is March 14, 1862.

It would seem to be the beginning of the end for the South.

'Ol Winnie is about to win his game.

A major Union occupation tightens its noose along coastal North Carolina. The Union presence will help cut shipping by Britain to the Confederacy by tightening the Union blockade and squeezing rail communications north to Confederate armies in Virginia.

"Old Fuss and Feathers" Winfield Scott came up with this "Anaconda" strategy to squeeze Confederate supply lines until Union armies could build their battlefield strength. The 75 year old general-in-chief, Indian fighter, hero of the War of 1812 and the 1847 taking of Mexico City, was criticized as senile for his blockade plans. Lots of hot heads thought they could win the war faster.

It didn't much help things that Scott's six foot five inches and 300 pounds of gout and vertigo made it impossible for him to mount his horse.

So Abe Lincoln accepted Winnie's offer to resign in December of '61, just four months before the attack on New Bern. The old soldier will live to see his "Anaconda" blockade strangle the Confederacy before his own death at West Point in 1866.

At New Bern, even though 'Ol Winnie no longer holds command, his brilliance will show. The guy was around long enough to understand the "big picture." Now, under supreme commander George McClelland, Rhode Islander General Ambrose Burnside, he with a checkered future, will carry out 'Ol Winnie's plan.

Future web surfers can survey the panoramic sweep of Scott's career, including the 1838 removal of the Cherokee to Oklahoma during the "Trail of Tears," at:

<http://ngeorgia.com/people/scott.html>

The noose of Union occupation and blockade will begin its long, slow strangling move to hang the Confederacy. Later battles will spring the gallows trap. New Bern will be Union occupied with as many as 20,000 troops 'til the end of the war. New Bern and the battles nearby are hardly decisive, but they all play their part.

March 14, 1862.

Today New Bern seems almost uninhabited.

In the distance I see men and women packing into buggies. Many of the city's streets and shops are empty, but there are wild folk (both black and white) smashing windows: signs that looting is about to begin.

When I was back in the future, I checked out New Bern's 1860 census and found a readout of about 5,000.

I must confess I will not truly understand the brilliance of 'Ol Winnie nor the historic significance of this four hour battle until 1885, when I will read a detailed history of the Union blockade. So many battles will follow this one -- far grander in both their glory and suffering, far more complicated in military strategy and tactics.

Most folks will be dazzled by Lee, by Grant, by Sherman -- and, if they at all remember the Union commander at New Bern at all, it will be as a wierd, whiskered guy who later screwed up really big time!

From my kayak today on March 14 the tumult seems all encompassing. In my mind it seems almost overwhelmingly large. In the future, when I realize how small New Bern was in comparison with what followed, I will lose sight of its true enduring strategic significance. Truly what I watch today from my kayak is part of a chain of events which will change world history.

In the future I will learn the states will re-unify, that the Yanks will toss the Spanish out of Cuba and go on to set up bases all over the world. Even to those Bible lands where guys eat dates and run around on camels.

How hard it is to keep perspective when covering a war by kayak!

LET'S HYPE IT UP A BIT, BOYS! LOOTING! RACE TALK!!

Paddling beneath the bridge in the choppy water I hate to speculate on

things I cannot predict, on things I cannot see. From my kayak I CAN see a few Rebs sally forth toward battle, but most of them come the other way in straggling, bloody retreat.

The battle is miles away --- and who knows what the death toll may be?

I would hate to exaggerate casualties on either side, for my *Monitor* background stresses balance and accuracy. Still, let me hype it up just a bit -- so as not to bore you, you consumer of blogger news.

The air is pungent with the odor of black powder. Over the town the sky is showering acrid smoke. Is it an accidental fire or Yankee terror tactics? I have heard rumors the Yanks are organizing the slaves to rise up and slit the throats of whites, to kidnap women and children.

My future was lived in "politically correct" times, so it makes me wiggle in my kayak to report the race talk of the Sixties.

There's lots of scare of what Africans may do when they get their hands on southern women. Everyone has a horror story of what happened earlier in the countryside. I hate to blog in anything which I have not seen. Lots of rumour and propaganda during a war. Hard to dig out fact from "spin."

It's four in the afternoon, March 14.

Evacuating Confederates have warned citizens away and fired the larger storehouses. Federal navy officers have scrambled ashore to organize fire teams among their own crewman and residents remaining behind. The commander of the first battalion into New Bern looks around him at the burning warehouses, homes, and stockpiles of flaming tar and turpentine -- and confides in me, "This reminds me of Sodom and Gomorrah."

NO INTERVIEW WITH 'OL AMBROSE

As I watch from my kayak, a mutton chopped whiskered man resembling Ambrose Burnside disembarks from a rowboat at New Bern's wharves. Looks like he's arranging ferry service for Union soldiers on the other side. By golly, it's Ambrose himself!!!

I paddle toward him -- but can't get his attention for an interview.

"Are you press?" a nervous blue coat beside him asks me, gazing down at my shiny red plastic.

"What in hell are you doing in that damn thing?"

He is Daniel Larned, one of Burnside's private secretaries, like his boss a Rhode Islander. Dan seems eager to confide:

"Lots of the blacks are pilfering," he says. "It will take me days to recover loot, to rummage through the dank hovels where these people live."

"Why I just saw one black girl, ten or eleven years old, scurrying away with a serving dish on her head, with a pail, a pitcher, and a box of notions balanced on top of it. She also carried a card table in front of her, with a basket of pilfered items on that, and a bundle of things under her arm."

In after battle reports Burnside will tell the War Department, "nine-tenth of the depredations on the 14th, after the enemy and citizens fled the town, were committed by negroes before our troops reached the city....They are now a great source of anxiety to us."

Ah, the needy. Burnside was to make army rations available to them, among whom were numerous formerly wealthy planters

This class, Burnside will write, had only Confederate money which was now worthless, untilled land, and "negroes who refuse to acknowledge any debt of servitude."

(The Federal act emancipating slaves will not be enacted until September 1862, enforced January 1863.)

Many prosperous white New Bern folk have already fled by rail to Kinston.

After the battle I will paddle around a bit.

Sleeping in a kayak is tough journalism duty.

The next morning I will awake to see that Burnside has sent out Southern prisoners to bury their dead, while Union details will reciprocate. Within a week quiet will descend on New Bern town.

Once again I will run into Daniel Larned. He will be kind enough to brief me on the living quarters he is arranging for his boss 'Ol Ambrose.

It will be in a big Georgian manse built in the 1780's on the corner of New and Middle Street, the so called Stanly house. (Up in the future it will be moved to George Street, right across from the Tryon Palace) There are gas lights in every room, eight black servants, a white steward, and expansive yards in front and back.

Dan will tell me General Burnside is a creature of the night, and that his hospitable personality will attract visitors until well after midnight on most evenings. generals Foster, Reno, and Parke will frequently play [euchre](#) with their commander until three o'clock of a Carolina morning.

It is only after his guests choose to leave that Burnside will turn to his correspondence, dictating letters and orders at a furious pace, sometimes until the verge of daybreak.

So it will be until the first mornings of spring -- when roses, crocuses, hyacinths, lilies in bloom, and tall sycamores will open the shade for the hot days of midsummer....

See William Marvel, [Burnside](#) for details on what I observed.

WHERE FORMER SLAVES WILL LEAVE A MARK

In the months ahead that area to the south of the rail bridge (known as James City in the future) will fill with thousands of slave refugees who stream in from coastal North Carolina.

They will take refuge outside of New Bern, just inside of Union lines. Their lanes of shanties will be known as the Trent River Settlement.

Just after the battle 'Ol Ambrose will be puzzled by what to do with with these "footloose blacks." The War Department will offer little guidance.

So Burnside will make a choice: to employ men and older boys on the building of fortifications and women as laundresses -- all on small government stipends.

If we gaze far, far ahead to the beginnings of the 21st century, we'll see a motel, an "Outback Steak House," a marina and a posh residential development sitting on the site. Huge highway bridges spanning both Neuse and Trent rivers will dominate the area.

One hundred and forty years in the future you may download some .pdf files to look back at the archeological history of the area:

<http://www.worldlymind.org/jamesc.pdf>
<http://www.worldlymind.org/jamesc1.pdf>

(Horace James is not here yet. This Massachusetts clergyman and Union Army officer will take on the job of educating, assisting ex-slave refugees. He will not be popular among the region's poor whites.)

Look closely at that rail bridge as we paddle under itand see those former slaves --- laundry women with their baskets.....They saunder back and forth across the bridge to pick up the dirty clothes of the city whites, return them clean again from the hot, steaming tubs where ex-slaves make their living as laundresses in the post-war, defeated South.

THIS IS NO TIME TO "FLASH LAMINATE"

it's still March 14, 1862.

Who would expect my red plastic Osprey to paddle into this mess?

Do you think those boys in gray can tell I am a Yankee? I hope they know the difference between a journalist and a spy. Better keep my driver's license and "social" at the ready! Uh oh, them things won't be around 'til

way up in the future. I'm likely to get a quick pistol ball to the head if I flash laminate!

As for my Osprey, these Johnnie Rebs know little of ironclads -- let alone of a snappy, high speed vessels made of shiny plastic. By Golly, if they could get their hands on kayaks, they might win this war!!

Uh oh, I spy one gray clad Johnny Reb wrapped in bandages and brandishing a musket. He yells down at me from the railroad bridge to ask why I am sitting on, paddling on a red torpedo.

He looks down at me too scared to fire -- lest he blow that red torpedo -- and, now, he turns to flee. The musket drops, clatters down into the water.

Once again, I pinch myself. "Stay on mission, Fred."

THE ROAD TO BATTLE: THE SHADOW OF VERACRUZ

The boys in gray seem in disarray; stragglers on the shore.....some on barges, some on ferries, dishevellednot far behind are the Yankees under Ambrose Burnside, officered by George Armstrong Custer, fiery, daring, dashing, just out of West Point last year. I heard a rumour Custer almost flunked the Point.....and barely escaped court martial after graduation.

Today is his day to begin to prove himself. From what I hear, young George is doing much better against the boys in gray than he later did against Indians.

http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/people/a_c/custer.htm

<http://www.clubofwestern.com/7thandcuster.htm>

The Yanks appear to have approached the city from the south along the Neuse River -- with black smoke belching gunboats backing them up with cannonades just off the river shore. I can hear those guns boom. Troop ships and gunboats make a mighty powerful combination.

Later I will piece it together to learn the flotilla left Roanoke Island up north near the Outer banks on the 12th, steamed down Pamlico Sound and up the Neuse River. On the morning of the 13th big gunboat smokers began bombarding the river shore and landing troops below New Bern at Slocum's Creek.

The blue boys marched up toward the Croatan Woods. Delayed by bad roads and bone drenching rains, Federal infantry did not close for combat with Confederates until today, March 14.

I will learn later Ambrose Burnside had 12,000 men on the smokers steaming up the Neuse. Could it be that Ambrose learned a bit about amphibious landings from what Old Man Winfield did back in the Mex War? My sources tell me the shadow of Mexico hung heavy in the planning of this war.

Thousands and thousands of boys in blue. Many as 8,000 of the 12,000 troops on board are making the amphibious landing, historians will later say. That's almost as many as the 12,000 Scott landed at Veracruz in '47 for the long, dusty march to take Mexico City.

'Ol Winnie put his men ashore south of Veracruz -- to spare them from bombardment. Then softened up the 'Mex fortress by cannonade from land and naval guns.

Fifteen years later the Feds use similar tactics: landing at a safe spot, Slocum Creek, some nine miles south of Reb defended Fort Thompson. Staying away from enemy guns, until the time is right.

This reporter will later go through letters and documents from Federal combatants in the battle for New Bern.

He will learn the fierce rains will disable many of the Union muskets by soaking the powder. Heavy downpours will also swell up the wooden stocks of British made Enfield rifled muskets. That will jam in place the ramrods and make fast loading frequently impossible for this badly designed weapon. It will not be an easy "slog" north toward Fort Thompson!

The boys with American made Springfield muskets will be the lucky ones!! Lots of those stuck with imported Enfields will have only bayonets to fight with. They will beg their officers for working rifles.

'OL AMBROSE WILL TAKE RISKS TO GET HIS WAY SCHOOLED BY A QUAKER IN HIS DAY

As I kayak in red plastic here at New Bern on March 14, ironclads are in the news.

The battle between the Fed's MONITOR and the Reb's MERRIMACK has just taken place at Hampton Roads, Virginia on March 9, 1862.

Union intell has "connected the dots."

It concludes the Confederates plan to slip ironclads down through the Dismal Swamp Canal from Virginia's Chesapeake Bay to harass Union forces in North Carolina's Albemarle Sound. That's the next sound north of the Pamlico Sound.

'Ol Ambrose orders his boys to make sure the Rebs will NOT get a chance to use this 22 mile engineering miracle, planned by George Washington, dug in 12 years by slave labor and opened in 1805.

Three thousand Union troops will ship north to Elizabeth City once the amphibious assault for New Bern ends. Their mission will be to disable the locks on the Dismal Swamp Canal.

Part of the force will move out from New Bern and part from Roanoke Island. The battle for the locks will take place at South Mills on April 19.

Meanwhile 'Ol Ambrose will keep right on 'a 'movin.

He's a a risk taker, a man who in his youth loved to try his hand with river boat gamblers. No matter that his childhood teacher was a Quaker, that his Indiana father was influenced by Quaker teachings.

Burnside could pour it on, up the ante, send in wave after wave to be shot down -- as he later did when commanding the Union defeat at Fredericksburg, Virginia in December 1862. As he was to do again at "[The Crater](#)" disaster before Petersburg, Virginia on July 30, 1864.

But today in North Carolina his star is still on the rise.

South from New Bern to seize Fort Macon, the only entrance from the Outer Banks to the inner sounds not yet in Union hands. I hear tell the Yanks already have cruisers off Beaufort Town.

Between March 18 and March 23 an advance Federal force will move south from New Bern to Beaufort, via Havelock Station, Carolina City, and Morehead City. Two-masted scows will float heavy guns to the Bogue Banks. Artillery batteries will be formed twelve to fourteen hundred yards from Fort Macon. Rifle pits will be dug about 2000 feet from the Rebel stronghold.

On the night of April 22, 1862 local slave fishermen will pilot Union troops in row boats through the shoals of the Bogue Sound right under the unsuspecting guns of Fort Macon ---- for the surprise peaceful seizure of Beaufort Town.

Not a shot will be fired. The townsfolk will wake up under Federal occupation.

At dawn April 25th Union artillery finally will begin an eleven hour bombardment on Fort Macon.

It will crumble the casemated mortar proof masonry construction of this fort built way back when -- in 1826-1834 -- before hi tech long range rifled artillery made masonry defenses obsolete.

Macon will quickly fall. The waterways of eastern North Carolina will be almost completely under Federal control.

'Ol Ambrose will have his way.

Web surfers of the future can explore the battle for the Dismal Swamp Canal at:

<http://www.albemarle-nc.com/camden/history/cvlwar01.htm>

For an eyewitness account by a Union soldier of this battle of South Mill:

http://www.espd.com/letters/1862/Letter9_4_22_62.htm

Or just surf on over and enjoy the waterway in a time of peace:

<http://www.albemarle-nc.com/camden/history/canal.htm>

For the capture of Fort Macon:

<http://www.crystalcoast.com/civilwar/civilwar.htm>

<http://www.crystalcoast.com/fortmacon/>

<http://www2.cr.nps.gov/abpp/battles/nc004.htm>

**'OL AMBROSE KNOWS HOW TO MOVE;
WINNIE'S DREAM IS UNDERWAY!**

Amidst all this talk of hi tech ironclads up north in Virginia waters, it seems the whole world converges on New Bern, this sleepy riverside trading town, sometimes called the "Athens of the South." Where Neuse and Trent Rivers converge. Where slaves and free Africans often man the ferries, small steamers, and cargo vessels which ply the inlets of coastal North Carolina.

Abe Lincoln's Burnside already knew lots of tricks. Guessin' from talk I overheard in New Bern taverns, Ambrose sure did a number on the Rebs back in February when his amphibious force invaded Roanoke Island up near the Virginia border.

By golly, that man with the whiskers knows how to move! Working with the Navy guys, he came up with a strategy which knocked the pants off the secess. The Union Navy came around to the inside of the island, caught the rebs by surprise, landed troops, and Ambrose rolled up those secess.

For battle summary:

<http://www2.cr.nps.gov/abpp/battles/nc002.htm>

In August to December of '61 the Union Navy and amphibious landing units had already wreaked havoc by assaulting and taking the strategic outer bank Rebel forts on or near Hatteras.

'Ol Winnie Scott's dream was underway!

For future web surfers:

<http://www.hatteras-nc.com/history/civilwr2.htm>

Battle summary:

<http://www2.cr.nps.gov/abpp/battles/nc001.htm>

"SHOCK AND AWE:" MOVIN' AND BOOMIN'

Back to March 14. Remember, I'm still stuck here in my red plastic kayak under the rail bridge.

And 'Ol Ambrose still has got that black smoker flotilla down from Roanoke boomin' off the Neuse River coast less than five miles south of New Bern. Once again he's been working with the Navy guys to think up tricks. Lots of firepower, rapid moves, and amphibious landings. I heard that in the future they will call it "shock and awe." Damn fancy name for lots of movin', lots of boomin.'

Never seen such darin' since Ol' Winfield Scott did the big one -- came off those special landing boats with 12,000 men at Veracruz in '47. Moved all those men and wagons, with Robert E. Lee's engineering skills, to take Mexico City. Taught that SOB tinhorn dictator Santa Anna a lesson the world should remember: there's a price to pay when you thumb your nose at Uncle Sam.

I remember reporting back in the '40's that the White House actually brought Santa Anna out of Cuba back to power in Mexico City. Didn't seem to matter that he slaughtered all those Tex boys at the Alamo. Prez Polk thought he could negotiate a peace with that damn butcher and get lots

of Mexican land out West. 'They'll deal with any butcher who gives them up a gain.

Dictators never seem to learn. And neither does the White House. When Santa Anna started waving the anti-gringo flag and bit the hand that fed him, the Prez finally wised up and sent Winnie down to give that Mex a grand shellacking. Even then they were slow to kick him out 'cause they thought they could deal with him.

<http://www.pbs.org/kera/usmexicanwar/>

HOW AMBROSE WILL SCREW UP BIG TIME

When I was up in the future, I found that almost no one remembered Burnside for his daring in North Carolina. I learned Ambrose will screw up big time later in December of this year, 1862, after Lincoln promotes him to be Yankee commander in chief for the assault up north on [Fredericksburg](#), Virginia. I heard the Rebs up on the hill will mow the Yanks down.

One thing to take and hold New Bern and dominate coastal North Carolina. Fredericksburg will be a different story. Some folks will say 'Ol Ambrose was never quite the same. Always seemed a mite cautious after that.

'OL ABE WANTS HIM A "TOP GUN:" THE ROAD TO [COLD MOUNTAIN](#)

This will happen even though Ambrose will warn Old Abe he wouldn't be much good in charge of a large command. But Old Abe just will not listen. He is so desperate to win this war quickly he will insist on pushing Burnside to the top. He will be so damned impressed by what Ambrose is doing right now in coastal North Carolina.

The Prez wants him a top gun who knows how to move!

But after Fredericksburg the Burnside star will keep on falling.

'Ol Abe will replace Ambrose with Joe Hooker after the January 1863 debacle known as "[the mud march.](#)" Burnside got his men, wagons, and guns all stuck in the mud when he tried to move them against Robert E. Lee.

There will be more hell to pay over Burnside's part in the disastrous attempt to blow up Reb defenses at "[The Crater](#)" during the siege of Petersburg, Virginia in July 1864. Burnside will resign from the army at the end of the war.

Way up in the future I will see a dramatic recreation of the "The Crater" in the movie *Cold Mountain*. Nothin' like that again 'til trench warfare in 1914.

AMBROSE REDEEMED -- A LITTLE OR A LOT?

We pressmen will find it really fascinating what these guys will do after the war. Hmm, despite all the fuss, Old Ambrose will return to Rhode Island a hero and will occupy numerous railroad and industrial directorships. He will be elected three times governor of Rhode Island ('66-'67-'68). In 1874 he will be elected a US Senator from Rhode Island and he will serve until his death on September 13, 1881.

Up in the future I found very few know his bushy whiskers are the origin of the term "sideburns."

When I reported from Mexico during the last war, the young Ambrose, born in Indiana in 1824, was a little known artillery officer. He graduated the Point in '47 and got some damn good engineering training there.

Ambrose arrived in Mexico too late to see much action. But the guy was always thinking ahead.

While carrying army dispatches near the war's end he got the idea for a nifty, fast breech loading carbine which might make the mounted horse dragoon a powerful fast moving instrument of offensive warfare.

The Yanks have been rethinking Cavalry ever since the Ruskies kicked lots of British ass during the suicidal saber charge of the Light Brigade at Balaclava, Crimea in '54. They have stepped up efforts to move dragoons safe and fast, using the element of surprise, then dismount them for firefights using short barreled carbines. I've heard tell that some Yankee thinking is that saber charges are a thing of the past. A crazy European thing.

Guess Ambrose also understood how vulnerable a guy could be on horseback -- unless he could load and reload fast. Damned if Ambrose didn't get himself wounded in '49 by Apache in what future folks will call New Mexico. When you're fighting in close guerrilla Indian style, you want a quick reload, a light gun which handles fast.

Many of us pressmen were surprised when Burnside resigned his army commission in '53 and headed for Rhode Island to organize the Bristol Firearms Company in the very same town where my Osprey kayak will be manufactured a century and a half later.

If you wish, travel back to the future and check out the full features of my Osprey turned out by Heritage Kayak of, also of Bristol, Rhode Island, at:

<http://www.worldlymind.org/osprey.pdf>

I remember reporting the Army rated "The Burnside" as the best of those tested back in '57. They were the first small arms purchased by our government to use the metal cartridge. It looked like Ambrose had a good thing going even though in '60 a further trial decided Smith and Maynard carbines were more adaptable for military service.

Still, the brilliantly engineered "Burnside" is known for speed and accuracy, a "pigeon killer" at fifty yards. It is a single shotter, but from what I hear you can slip those metal cartridges in damn fast.

I haven't fired one yet.

I remember learning in the future that the Federals will buy some 50,000 Burnside's during the Civil War, making them the third most widely used

Union cavalry arm, just after the Sharps and Spencer. They will keep making 'em 'til '65. You'd think that would make old Ambrose happy. Except he went bankrupt, he had to sell his patents -- and will make, 'tis said, hardly a dime from all those wartime sales.

Hmmm, I find that hard to believe.

You surfers of the future can check out Burnside at:

<http://www.civilwarhome.com/burnbio.htm>.

<http://www.fredericksburg.com/CivilWar/Personalities/burnside.html>

You gun nuts come back in 140 years and enjoy the gunshows at the Craven County fairgrounds, on the site of the battle for New Bern, just across Highway 70 from the adult video store. Before you come on down, "know your Burnside" by checking:

http://www.civilwar.si.edu/weapons_burnside.html

<http://www.civilwarguns.com/9606.html>

<http://www.civilwarguns.com/9607.html> (part 2)

You won't find the now rare "Burnside" at the show.

You can be damn sure there are lots of them firing today, March 14, as old Ambrose tightens the noose on New Bern.....

Betcha George Custer's got one. Probably too busy prancin' and shouting orders to use the thing.

WHAT OF THE REBS?

The Rebs? From what I can tell the "glorious" defenders are a bit.....well, better be careful what I report, 'cause I got to live here in the South....when I retire in 150 years. Lots of men and boys have pitched in, but there cannot be more than 5,000. And God knows how many the Yankees bring to bear.

From where I paddle it seems many defenders are barefoot, hardly

dressed like soldiers. There is a fever pitch of excitement. In my kayak nestled beneath the bridge, I hear some Johnnies boasting overhead about miles of log fortifications they have erected. With any luck at all the grays will shoot down hundreds.

Hmmmm. it may take more than luck. It may take steady aim, training, strong discipline....modern weapons.

Surely dedication, love of home will help compensate for their lack of training, ragged clothes, their gangly ways, their ramshackle collection of sometimes ancient smoothbores, shotguns, fowling pieces.

Lots of youthful swagger, yep daggers in the belt....but are these Rebs up to face those fearsomely modern long range rifled Springfield and Enfield muskets? Not to mention those fast shooting Burnside carbines!! Will the Johnnies break and run under the booming barrage of Yankee gunboats and field pieces?

A BLOODY RETREAT

I can hear the cannonade from the Union gunboats raise hell in the distance. Future historians will have a grander, more accurate view than the vista from my red plastic kayak.

Down here really close to water I get lots of the sounds and smell. The confusion....and those bandaged wounded men retreating across the bridge in those small hand pumped rail cars.

Those poor lads in retreat. Many have bloody head wounds. I can hear their screams.....

As for the casualties, neither side is giving "body counts." I'll try to file on this later. Historians will make their estimates. In one hundred and forty years those of you with computers can surf out a few answers at:

<http://www.hiddencoast.com/content/civilwarbattle.htm>

Who would have guessed the Yanks will so quickly "out flank" these

southern boys, drawn out in a defensive rifle line behind wooden barricades along a defense perimeter from Fort Thompson by the Neuse River on the east to the rail line a mile to the west and then on to swamps towards Brice's Creek, three miles from the river. From my kayak it appears the grays boys are in full blown retreat. It appears the Yanks are winning, but it's still too soon to call.

A SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY

There will come a time, after these flames die down, when both Yanks and Johnnie Rebs write their memoirs, fill in the details of this engagement in letter to their families.....

Surely poetic liberties will be taken when these homesick lads put down their remembrances in sentimental prose. I have heard that in the future cell phones and email will eclipse the meandering, informal, loving communication of personal correspondence. Truly a soldier on parade or engaged in battle will have memories which eclipse both the imagination and precision of later historians.

Such letters the boys write home will be a treasure read in centuries ahead, sometimes even by surfers on the web.

Lots of competition from the porno sites, but still in one hundred and forty years those of you with computers can surf out such correspondence at:

<http://www.worldlymind.org/battleletter.pdf>

Hey, if these Confederates could just get their hands on just a few of those rapid fire M-16 assault rifles which will be sold in 140 years at gunshows on the county fairground -- the fairground which will be on the exact spot of the battlefield which shaped New Bern's fate!!!!

How those Johnnie Rebs could use a few M-16's today!!!!

But let's "get real"....Forget the futuristic drivel. There's too much chaos on the battlefield for anyone to get into a gun show today.

LAST TRAIN TO KINSTON TOWN! WILL MY KAYAK BURN?

Enough of this postwar future. Let's get real.....Stick to the present.

Today is still March 14, 1862.

Musketry, cannon fire in the distance, Confederate stragglers on their barges and ferries hurrying past my Osprey. Some are rowing, some have sails, the larger spout wood and coal smoke.

Oh, by Golly, above me, what's that? The Rebs place kerosene soaked rags all around the tracks.....They're preparing to fire the bridge -- once that last train of flat cars evacuates the retreating army from the direction of the battle over the bridge toward New Bern.

And there it is: that "last train" full of licked men in gray, retreating slowing toward New Bern, back toward Kinston town.

It won't be long now. Abe Lincoln's boys will soon hold New Bern town.

Better call and blog that in

But the bridge above me is about to "explode" in flame -- and my plastic kayak could be my flaming funeral pyre.

A journalist's dilemma: to paddle fast away -- or call in the story now -- and feel my kayak melt right under me? First let's get some distance before the bridge soars up in flame.

Then call it in:

"EXTRA...EXTRA....THE YANKS HAVE COME....."

And soon there will be thousands of Yank retirees here: from Pennsy, New Jersey, and New York.

And I will not be the only Yankee with a cell phone.

THE YANKS ARE IN NEW BERN, FOR NOW

Enough of that, back to the present, March 14, 1862.....

I paddle furiously away from the bridge. I hear in the distance a voice across the water:

"Last call...up on the flat cars, Boys.....! Last train for Kinston town! Let's fire up the bridge, Boys"

Sabotage!!!! Damn stubborn, those rebs...There will be a New Bern bridge in flames when Yankee gunboats smoke into the harbor.

I will be there, with my kayak and cell phone, to cover the occupation. It's one thing to conquer New Bern -- another to run it!

As I paddle furiously away from the bridge, a final familiar thought comes to mind. I had a similar feeling once in the future.

The Yanks are here. I wonder if they will stay the course.

posted by Frederic A. Moritz : 7:36 AM

Thursday, June 19, 2003

THE SKIRTS OF YANKEE LADIES FLUTTER

(Thank you, Dear Ambrose, for the part you played on your road to [Cold Mountain](#))

It is a Thursday in New Bern, North Carolina. Amidst the lanes and lawns of Greenbriar, the skirts of Yankee ladies flutter....tea and lunch are served....

In almost a month (as described above) I will be kayaking back in time to witness, to report on the battle for New Bern.

A new life flourishes for many Yanks who have moved south. They are the retired -- and the only enemy they must now defeat is the gray of age. Their former homes in Pennsylvania, New York, Ohio, New Jersey seem as

distant in the past as the slain of Gettysburg.

To me it seems just yesterday, March 13,14, 1862 -- when Union gunboats steamed up the Neuse River to drive the Johnny Rebs from New Bern. Who but me is left alive to tell the story of the day you, Dear Ambrose Burnside, "drove old Dixie down?"

The County Fairgrounds hum today, less than five miles from New Bern -- on the spot where field artillery, musketry, and Burnside carbines once shook the leaves and limbs of Craven County trees.

AH, SWEET VICTORY

Dear Ambrose Burnside, my fellow Rhode Islander, you won that day. Ah, sweet victory, how brief thou dost hold sway...For at Fredericksburg in December of that same year you lost your heady laurels to meet disgrace. But I remember you back when I reported from New Bern -- then your daring won the day.

Ambrose, thou art gone, but the rustling skirts of Yankee ladies stay. You more than did your part, way back when you won the day.

New Bern survives. It is a warm and graceful place. Thank you, Dear Ambrose, for the part you played.

posted by Frederic A. Moritz : 3:45 PM



Links

- MORITZ PHOTO, PROFILE
- NEW BERN PHOTOS, LINKS
- DOWNLOAD BLOG .PDF FILE
 - KAYAKING
- AMBROSE BURNSIDE BIO

- BURNSIDE CARBINE
- HARPER'S: FLEET ADVANCES
 - CIVIL WAR BATTLE MAP
 - POST-WAR JOURNALISM
 - OVERSEAS CRIME BEAT
 - Google News

Archives

- 06/01/2003 - 06/30/2003
- 07/01/2003 - 07/31/2003
- 11/01/2004 - 11/30/2004