

After Action Report: Hampton Roads Tour (15 October 2005)



Group picture in front of the 15" Dahlgren "Lincoln Gun" inside Fort Monroe
(Photo courtesy of Ken Jones)

We saw the guns of the Monitor!

Fifteen members of the BRCWRT enjoyed perfect weather on our fall tour of Fort Monroe and the Battle of Hampton Roads. The group assembled at the McDonald's restaurant in Phoebus just outside Fort Monroe where we were met by our guide and expert local historian John Quarstein.

John came highly recommended to the group (thanks to Lyle Lovell for the initial contact information) and he exceeded our expectations. He has written seven books on the history of the area including volumes on Fort Monroe, the Peninsula Campaign and the battle of the Ironclads.

John's credentials are impeccable. He grew up as an Army brat and lived in quarters at Fort Monroe. He has obviously visited every inch of the old fort. Where else could we find a guide who has swum in the fortress moat? John was even married in the Chapel of the Centurion (dedicated in 1858) inside the fort. His incredible knowledge of the sites and local events combined with an enthusiastic presentation made for one of the most enjoyable tours I have ever attended.

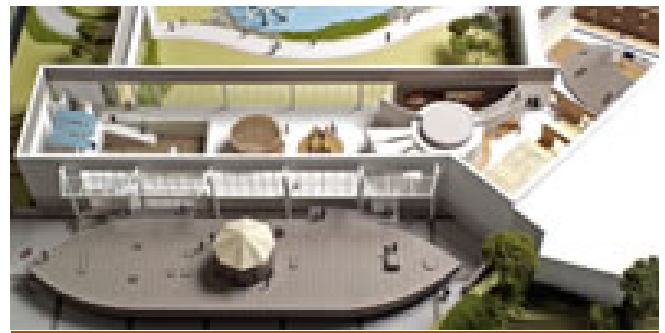
The tour began at the east sally port of the fort. We walked the various ramps and parapets of the fort and observed how the seven bastions and seven walls were designed to cover all approaches. No one in the group was surprised to hear that the Confederates never attempted to storm the defenses. We toured the Casemate museum and viewed Jefferson Davis' prison cell. Upon leaving the museum we walked to the beach and enjoyed a picnic lunch while watching ships enter and leave the Roads under the guns of the fortress.

Our next stop was Congress and Cumberland Overlook. At this stop John described how the CSS Virginia made short work of the two federal ships on the 8th of March 1862. We could see the nuclear carrier USS George Washington tied up at the Newport News Shipyard just upstream from our position.

The next stop took us to Monitor-Virginia Overlook. We stood within several hundred yards of the location where the USS Minnesota lay helplessly aground on the 9th of March awaiting certain destruction by the Confederate raider. Instead, the USS Monitor steamed to the rescue and fought the rebel ship to a draw. By the end of this day all wooden navies of the world were obsolete.

Our final stop was the Mariner's Museum. John showed us the actual plans of both the Monitor and the Virginia. We also viewed a number of artifacts that have been recovered and preserved from the wreck site. The most awe inspiring artifacts were the two 11 inch Dahlgren guns from the turret of the Monitor. These weapons (one named "Ericsson" and the other "Wordon") are currently undergoing conservation and will be on display when the new museum opens for business. The full scale replica of the Monitor is currently under construction outside the new building.

I cannot say enough about the wonderful presentation John Quarstein gave us. He is a world class historian who helped us understand what the sailors on both sides felt at this watershed action in Hampton Roads. We all look forward to another visit to the area when the Monitor Center opens in 2007.



Model of the Monitor Center opening in 2007

Very Respectfully,

Kevin Anastas
BRCWRT Field Trip Coordinator

Tour Attendees (Members and Guests)

Kevin Anastas

Dom Bumbaca

Effie Bumbaca

Bryce Cumbie

Alan Houpt
Cynthia Houpt
Ken Jones

Mark Knowles
Harlan Lenius
Sharon Lenius

Randy Moller
Rose Nelson
John Pearson

Mary Sereno
Ed Wenzel