



The Musket Report

Newsletter of the Wiregrass Chapter, ALSSAR
Enterprise, Alabama
"Home of the Boll Weevil Monument"



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December, 2007

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Christmas Chartering Banquet And Installation of Officers

The Wiregrass Chapter's annual Christmas Chartering Banquet and Installation of Officers will be **Thursday December 13th** at the **Rawls Hotel** - social time at **6:00 PM** with the **Banquet starting at 6:30 PM**. The cost is \$12.00 per person and is a **by reservation only event**. Please get your reservations in **NLT 9 December 2007** to President John Fuller. A reservation slip has been provided.

At the November meeting the following compatriots were elected to the positions noted for 2008:

President - Dr. Jack Oden
Vice-President - Joe Graves
Secretary - Jim Gilmer
Treasurer - John Kelsoe
Registrar - John Wallace
Historian - Charles Dye
Sgt-at-Arms - Andy Spann

These gentlemen will be installed at our December banquet. Make sure to come out to support our new leadership - it promises to be a great evening with awards, door prizes and some great camaraderie.

The chapter wants to extend its appreciation to Bob McClendon who presented our November program on various uniforms and weapons used during the War of 1812 period. For those who were unable to attend, Bob is a SAR member from Troy and part of the new provisional ALSSAR chapter being started in Pike County. He is both a War of 1812 and Civil War re-enactor and has participated in numerous documentary films of these periods. If you are ever in Troy, make sure you stop by Bob's museum at the Conecuh River Depot Museum where he has a wide variety of items from World War I through Iraqi Freedom on display.



November CAAH Jug = \$13.05

DUES

Compatriots John Kelsoe and Bruce Taylor want to thank the members for their prompt submission of 2008 dues. The chapter is awaiting the arrival of one check that is in the mail, which will then give the chapter a 100% renewal rate. President Fuller extends his appreciation to everyone for their continued support of the SAR activities undertaken by the Wiregrass Chapter. We will be setting our rolls with 47 members for 2008 along with one dual member. This is down two from 2007 due to the death of Judge Brunson and the transfer of Mark Steetle to the chapter in Dothan.

As we enter into 2008, the chapter needs to concentrate on expanding our membership base in the local area. Chapter Registrar Wallace will be more than willing to assist any new potential member, and prepare the application in final format.

ALSSAR State Convention

It is not too early to start thinking about the ALSSAR State Convention to be held the 29 Feb - 1 March 2008 in Huntsville. A registration form and information about hotel reservations may be found on the state website at www.alssar.org. The chapter would like to have a good representation at the meeting. Dead line for submitting both the reservation form and making hotel reservations is **1 Feb 2008**. Color guard members are encouraged to attend with their uniform.

For those who have never attended a state convention it is an excellent time to meet the leadership of the state organization and compatriots from around the state. It is anticipated several NSSAR General Officers will also be in attendance. Make your plans now to attend!

William Wicker Grave Marking

At the November meeting, President Fuller appointed a committee to be chaired by Dr. Jack Oden to organize the grave marking of the Revolutionary War Soldier, William Wicker who is buried in the Josie Community of Pike County. The cemetery continues to be an active burial place, so the chapter will not have to be involved with clearing the area. A VA headstone has already been placed by two Pike County historians, but no formal program has ever been held at the grave site. Bob McClendon has volunteered to assist, and the chapter is anticipating a date sometime in April or May. The first order of business will be to contact the local church to obtain permission for the program and set the exact date. It is anticipated the DAR chapter in Troy would like to get involved, and some of junior members who are scouts can probably be utilized with the color guard..

Delaware River Defenses



In the early years of the Revolution, three forts were erected on the lower Delaware to stave off a possible British naval assault upon Philadelphia by way of the river. Two of the forts, Billings and Mercer (named in honor of General Hugh Mercer who was killed at Battle of Princeton), were on the Jersey side in Gloucester County; the third, Fort Mifflin, was a short distance below the mouth of the Schuylkill on the Pennsylvania side. The chief strategic function of the South Jersey strongholds was to guard the chevaux-de-frise that had been laid across the navigable channel of the Delaware River. This deterrent to the upriver movement of enemy vessels, of a design attributed to Benjamin Franklin, was constructed in the summer of 1775. It consisted of rows of mammoth logs, secured in stone cases at the bottom of the river, and extending upward toward the surface at a forty-five degree angle. Their ends, concealed just beneath the surface, were capped with iron points that could tear apart the wooden hull of any unwary ship that passed over them.

Purchase of planks for the erection of a redoubt at Billingsport was authorized by the Continental Congress in June, 1776, two weeks before the adoption of the Declaration of Independence. In July, ground was purchased and the fort begun. About four miles upstream, at Red Bank, Fort Mercer was constructed the following spring on land confiscated from an elderly Quaker couple, James and Ann Cooper Whitall. It was situated on a high bluff overlooking the river. Late in September 1777, Philadelphia was captured by British General William Howe, but the extensive American river defenses blocked the shipping of food and supplies to the British army and citizens of Philadelphia.

Washington, cognizant of Howe's predicament, ordered a shoring up of the defenses along the lower river. He was prompted into quick action when Fort Billings was taken without a struggle by one of Howe's officers in a surprise attack on September 30. The British demolished the fort and opened a seventeen-foot passage between the shore and the chevaux-de-frise. Through this, and a wider passage cleared later, British ships penetrated to within firing range of Fort Mercer, but were repelled by cannon fire from gun emplacements along the shore and American floating batteries stationed in the river.

General Washington dispatched a letter to Colonel Christopher Greene of the First Rhode Island Regiment on October 9, informing him that he had been placed in command at Red Bank. Washington reminded him that, *"the post with which you are now entrusted is of the utmost importance to America, and demands every exertion you are capable of, for its security and defense. The whole defense of the Delaware absolutely depends upon it, and consequently all of the Enemy's hopes of keeping Philadelphia and finally succeeding in the object of the campaign."* Greene (cousin to General Nathaniel Greene) was no stranger to the war having been with Montgomery at Quebec, captured and held prisoner for eight months before being exchanged. The sprawling fortification at Red Bank was much too extensive to be defended, even with this increased manpower so the fortified area within the outer stockade was reduced by two-thirds. A pentagon-shaped redoubt was erected at the lower end, protected by wooden pickets and an abatis, a barricade of brush and fallen trees with spiked branches. Heavily loaded cannon were trained on the upper end of the enclosure.

The anticipated attack on Fort Mercer was launched when a Hessian colonel, Count Carl von Donop, was selected by the British commander-in-chief to lead his 1200 picked Hessian mercenaries against the fort. Early in the morning, on October 21, 1777, von Donop and his army crossed to Cooper's Ferry. Meanwhile, the British ships Augusta and Merlin had moved into position within range of Fort Mercer. During the ensuing battle their cannon balls landed in the mud banks below the fort. By afternoon of Oct 22, the Hessians, hidden among the trees, were within 400 yards of the fort. An American sentry alerted the 400 defenders within the enclosure to the impending attack. Around 4:30 P.M., Von Donop sent one of his officers to Greene and demanded the American garrison to surrender. The threat of "no quarter" was also made, but Green decline and ordered his men to hold their fire until they sighted the Hessian soldiers' belts, and then to shoot below them. The strategy was effective, for in the ensuing battle, although von Donop and his men breached the abatis, crossed the ditch beyond it, and some even mounted the parapet, 400 or more of the Hessian mercenaries were killed or severely wounded to include von Donop who was mortally wounded. Many of the wounded, including Von Donop, were taken to the Whitall house where they were tended by American doctors and Ann Whitall, who had remained in her home. The American losses were twenty-eight wounded and eleven dead. Within forty minutes of the time the Hessians had commenced the assault, those who remained of von Donop's disordered ranks fled.

The British took a different approach at Fort Mifflin. Beginning in late October, they began a protracted bombardment of the American position. Some of the British ships had managed to get by the submerged iron horses with the aid of a spy within the American ranks. Efforts were made each night to repair the damage inflicted by the day's shelling, but the American garrison was slowly being reduced. Following a major bombardment on November 10, Washington accepted his lieutenants' advice and sent word to evacuate the fort. That withdrawal took place on November 17.

The following day, Lord Charles Cornwallis landed 2,000 British troops on the New Jersey shore near Fort Mercer. The American commanders quickly decided to evacuate the garrison, torching the structures and all the supplies they could not carry away.

The fall of Forts Mifflin and Mercer assured that Howe and his officers could enjoy a warm winter in Philadelphia. Washington and his troops, however, were not so blessed and proceeded to winter quarters at Valley Forge.

In 1778 Colonel Christopher Greene and his regiment were detached for special service in Rhode Island, and was placed under the command of General John Sullivan, whose headquarters were in Providence. Early in 1781, while in command on the Croton River, Greene's headquarters were surrounded by a party of loyalists, and he was killed.



*Wishing you and yours a Very Merry Christmas
And a
Happy New Year!*