

Cape May Civil War Round Table



August 2019 Newsletter

Meeting Dates

Meetings are at 7pm at the Cape May County Museum and Historical Society, in the Military Room in the old barn.

August 15 = Presentation by Andy Waskie as General George Meade.

September 19 = Presentation by Michael Wunsch on *In the gift of the people: Abraham Lincoln, Andrew Johnson and the National Union Party Convention, Baltimore, June 7- 8, 1864*

October 17 = Herb Kaufman will be speaking about the battle of Little Round Top

November 21 = TBA

PLEASE, friends, send me articles, book reviews, etc to help me fill up the newsletter!

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President's Update

Our upcoming August speaker will be a real treat for all Civil War fans and enthusiasts. The Union "Hero of Gettysburg", General George Gordon Meade will be portrayed by the nearly as famous (in some circles) well known Civil War authority and public speaker, Dr. Andrew Waskie. Andy will use General Meade's own words and his extensive research to bring Meade "back to life". He will describe his career and services to the nation by telling his story in a "first person" presentation format. You will see and hear General Meade, be able to ask him questions and interact with the most famous Pennsylvanian of the Civil War. This is the fifth in a series of eight speakers presented by the Civil War Round Table of Cape May County this year.

Our Round Table has been treated to a number of highly entertaining and informative speakers this year. In April we learned about the Union Ironclad, the "USS Monitor" from Mike Kochan. How it was designed, built, funded, deployed, utilized and ultimately destroyed. We heard about some of the remarkable innovations developed and used in this revolutionary new ship design. In May Bob Holden gave us new insights into the life and times of Abraham Lincoln with numerous handouts and reference documents. In June, Don Ernsberger talked about the "what If" scenario of what a possible battle in Philadelphia would have looked like if General Lee's Confederate army had

bypassed Gettysburg and gotten to Philadelphia ahead of Meade's Union force. In July Hugh Boyle treated our group to new details of the unanticipated consequences and repercussions of the Lincoln assassination that most had not heard before, in a folksy and entertaining way. Based on the success of the speakers to date, I encourage you to bring your friends and family to our meetings. These speakers really are too good to miss!.

Our record of outstanding speakers will continue in September and October. In September, Michael Wunsch will be speaking on the election of Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson in 1864 with new insights and implications of the nomination and election. Michael is actively involved in numerous Civil War related groups in the Philadelphia area including the GAR Museum and the General George Meade Society. In October, Herb Kaufmann who is also very active in these and other Civil War historical organizations and has been a frequent speaker at our round table in the past will be exploring some of the misunderstandings and misconceptions about the importance of the "Little Round Top" battle at Gettysburg. I have heard this presentation. It is thought provoking and well worth attending. Our November meeting is still open.

Bring your friends and family to the upcoming meetings. We are only half way through the meetings for 2019. Four down and four to go. The CMCCWRT needs new members to survive and carry out our mission of Civil War history preservation and information exchange. There is still time to add to our membership this year. We have 16 members enrolled to date. Lets see if we can get to 20 by the end of the year.

Want to travel to a couple of upcoming interesting events in nearby South New Jersey? 1) On August 24 and 25 the Hancock House (in Salem County) will be presenting its Civil War weekend including tours, displays and exhibits from the Civil War era. Although the Hancock House is best known for the massacre of "patriots" during the Revolutionary War, many Civil War volunteers were recruited from this area

and their heritage will be on display. Google or Facebook Hancock House for more details and directions. 2) On Tuesday, September 10, at 7 PM, the Old Baldy CW Round Table will host Joseph Wilson who will present "Following the Ghost of Corporal George Garmin". This is the story of a soldier (Joe's great-great grandfather) in the Pennsylvania Reserves who spent much of his time under General Meade's command. Garman eventually ended up in Andersonville prison. This is a story worth hearing.

Respectfully;

John Herr
President
Cape May County Civil War Round Table



Civil War Milestones September

1861

6 – Union troops take Paducah (KY)

1862

1 – Battle of Chantilly, VA

5 – Lee crosses the Potomac into Maryland

14 – Battles at South Mountain, MD

15 – Harpers Ferry falls to Confederates

17 – Battle of Antietam

22 – Lincoln issues preliminary Emancipation Proclamation

1863

7 – Ft. Wagner (SC) occupied by Union troops

19 – 20 – Battle of Chicamauga (GA)

1864

2 – Union troops occupy Atlanta

19 – Third battle of Winchester

22 – Battle of Fisher’s Hill, VA

29 – Battle of Ft. Harrison/Chaffin’s Farm, VA



Civil War Related Events September 2019

1 **VA** Anniversary living history camps and demonstrations at the Manassas National Battlefield. Free. [nps.gov/mana](https://www.nps.gov/mana)

6 **VA** Walking tour, “The Valiant Stand of the 8th Vermont Infantry and Thomas’s Brigade,” at the Battle of Cedar Creek. Begins at the Cedar Creek and Belle Grove NHS visitor station, 7712 Main St, Middletown. 6 pm. Free. [nps.gov/cebe](https://www.nps.gov/cebe)

14 **WV** Living history, hike, “The Assault on Maryland Heights, the Naval Battery,” at the Harpers Ferry NHP. Hike to Maryland Heights with artillery living history. 2-4 pm. Free with park admission. [nps.gov/hafe](https://www.nps.gov/hafe)

14 **DC/PA** Bus tour, “A War Correspondent at Gettysburg; A Reporter’s Mission, a Father’s Search,” Smithsonian tour leaves from 550 C St SW, Washington. 8:45 am-6 pm. \$205. [smithsonianassociates.org/ticketing/tickets/war-correspondent-at-gettysburg-reporters-mission-fathers-search](https://www.smithsonianassociates.org/ticketing/tickets/war-correspondent-at-gettysburg-reporters-mission-fathers-search)

14 **VA** Lecture, “Samuel Dana Greene, Hero of the USS *Monitor*,” at the Mariners’ Museum in Newport News. 2:30 pm. Free with \$1 museum admission. [marinersmuseum.org](https://www.marinersmuseum.org)

14 **MD/VA** Bus tour, “John Wilkes Booth Escape Route,” all-day trip leaves from the Surratt House Museum in Clinton. \$85. [surrattmuseum.org/booth-escape-tour](https://www.surrattmuseum.org/booth-escape-tour)

14-15 **MD** Anniversary programs at the Antietam National Battlefield near Sharpsburg. Ranger tours, living history camps and demonstrations. Free with park admission. [nps.gov/anti](https://www.nps.gov/anti)

17 **MD** All-day anniversary ranger-guided hike at the Antietam National Battlefield near Sharpsburg. Begins 6:45 am. Free with park admission. [nps.gov/anti](https://www.nps.gov/anti)

20 **VA** Ranger program, “Colonel John S. Mosby and his Partisan Rangers in the Shenandoah Valley,” meets at Chet Hobart Park, 225 Al Smith Circle, Berryville. 5 pm. Free. [nps.gov/cebe](https://www.nps.gov/cebe)

20-22 **MD** Living history, “Aftermath of Battle,” at the Antietam National Battlefield near Sharpsburg. Sanitary Commission camp plus wet-plate photography demos. Free with park admission. [nps.gov/anti](https://www.nps.gov/anti)

21 **MD/VA** Bus tour, “John Wilkes Booth Escape Route,” all-day trip leaves from the Surratt House Museum in Clinton. \$85. [surrattmuseum.org/booth-escape-tour](https://www.surrattmuseum.org/booth-escape-tour)

21 **MD** Special programs, “Mystery & Myths of Lee’s Lost Orders,” at the Monocacy National Battlefield in Frederick. 9 am-3 pm. Free. Schedule: [nps.gov/mono](https://www.nps.gov/mono)

21 **VA** “Potomac Blockade Boat Tour” includes river views of Confederate fortifications. Begins at Leesylvania State Park, 2001 Daniel K. Ludwig Drive, Woodbridge. 10 am-1 pm. \$50. Reservations, more info: 703-792-4754.

21-22 **PA** Reenactment at Ridley’s Creek Colonial Plantation, 3900 N Sandy Flash Drive, Edgemont. Camps and demonstrations with battles noon and 4 pm Saturday, 2 pm Sunday.

\$12/adult. [colonialplantation.org/show_page.php?pid=21](https://www.colonialplantation.org/show_page.php?pid=21)

28 **MD/VA** Bus tour, “John Wilkes Booth Escape Route,” all-day trip leaves from the Surratt House Museum in Clinton. \$85. [surrattmuseum.org/booth-escape-tour](https://www.surrattmuseum.org/booth-escape-tour)

28 **MD** Ranger program, “Enslavement in the Free State: The Story of L’Hermitage,” the history of a French/Caribbean plantation on what became the Monocacy battlefield at the Monocacy National Battlefield in Frederick. 10 am at the Best Farm. Free. [nps.gov/mono](https://www.nps.gov/mono)

28-29 **VA** Living history, camp and demonstrations at the Manassas National Battlefield. Free. [nps.gov/mana](https://www.nps.gov/mana)

The Blockade Runners of the Civil War

From “The Navy in the Civil War, Vol. I”

James Russell Soley, USN

The Confederate war effort relied on the bravery of the “blockade runners,” a small group of sailors who sailed goods in and out of Southern seaports under the guns of Northern ships. James Russell Soley, former Assistant Secretary of the Navy, tells a story of speed, cunning, and wild fortune.



Blockade runners like the "Robert E. Lee" were generally sleek, fast steam-ships. (Library of Congress)

During the early part of the war blockade-running was carried on from the Capes of the Chesapeake to the mouth of the Rio Grande. It was done by vessels of all sorts and sizes. The most successful were the steamers that had be-hinged to the Southern coasting lines, which found themselves thrown out of employment when the war broke out. The rest were small craft, which brought cargoes of more or less value from the Bahamas or Cuba, and carried back cotton. They answered the purpose sufficiently well, for the blockade was not yet rigorous, speed was not an essential, and the familiarity of the skippers with the coast enabled them to elude the ships-of-war, which were neither numerous nor experienced in the business. By April, 1861, the greater part of the last year's cotton crop had been disposed of, and it was estimated that only about one-seventh remained unexported when the blockade was established. Cotton is gathered in September, and shipments are generally made in the winter and spring, and considerable time must consequently elapse before a new supply could come into the market. The proclamation of the blockade caused for a time a cessation of regular commerce; and it was only after a considerable interval that a new commerce, with appliances specially adapted to the altered state of things, began to develop. Meantime illicit trade in a small way flourished. The profits were considerable, though not comparable to those of later years; and the work required neither skill nor capital.

This guerilla form of contraband traffic gradually decreased after the first year, though there was always a little going on from the Bahamas, and on the coast of Texas. By the end of the second year it was only to be found in out-of-the-way nooks and corners. Little by little the lines were drawn more tightly, as Dupont threw vessels into the inlets below Charleston, and Goldsborough into the Sounds of North Carolina, while the blockading force grew from a dozen vessels to three hundred. In all the squadrons the burning and cutting out of schooners gave frequent occupation to the blockading forces, and the smaller fry were driven from their haunts. As these vessels were captured or destroyed one by one, there was nothing to replace them, and they gradually disappeared.

Meantime the blockade was beginning to tell both upon friends--or, to speak with exactness, upon neutrals--and upon enemies. The price of cotton decreased at the South, and advanced abroad. The supply was short, the crop of 1861 being about half that of the previous year; East India cotton

had not yet come into the market, and the demand was great. The price of manufactured goods at the South advanced enormously. The time was ripe for judicious action; and the Liverpool cotton-merchant, who in the winter of 1861-62 had found ruin staring him in the face, suddenly awoke to the fact that the ports of the South were an Eldorado of wealth to the man who could go in and come out again in safety.

With cotton at fourpence a pound in Wilmington and two shillings a pound in England, the Liverpool merchant was not a man to hesitate long. Blockade-running from Europe had already been attempted, but the profits had not been sufficient to outweigh the risk of capture during the transatlantic voyage. Now, however, when half-crowns could be turned into sovereigns at a single venture, capitalists could afford to run almost any risk; and as it happened, at the very time when the profits increased, a plan was devised to lessen the danger. Attempts had already been made to obviate the risk by a fictitious destination to Nassau or Bermuda; but the capture and condemnation of one or two vessels proved this device to be a failure. The plan of transshipment was then adopted, and two vessels were employed, each specially fitted for its peculiar service, one for the long and innocent passage across the ocean, the other for the short but illegal run to the blockaded port; and liability to confiscation was thus reduced to a minimum. Capital was invested in large amounts in the new industry; shrewd north-countrymen embarked in it, and companies were formed to carry on operations on a large scale. Officers of rank in the English navy, on leave of absence, offered their services, under assumed names, and for large compensation, to the owners of vessels in the contraband trade, and met with distinguished success in their enterprises. Doubtless there were few of these last; but the incognito which they preserved has been respected, and neither their names nor their number have been generally made known.



The port of Nassau, Bermuda became a thriving hub for illicit dealers. (Library of Congress)

The Confederate Government did not hesitate to enter the field and take a share in the business. Vessels adapted to the purpose were bought by agents in England, and loaded with munitions of war, and Confederate naval officers under orders from the Department were placed in command. These vessels cleared under the English flag, taking out a sailing captain to comply with the requirements of law. Later they were transferred to the Confederate flag, and caused on a

regular trade between Nassau or Bermuda and Wilmington or some other blockaded port. The Government owned three or four such vessels, and was part-owner in several others. These last were required to carry out cotton on Government account, as part of their cargo, and to bring in supplies. Among the vessels wholly owned by the Government was the *Giraffe*, a Clyde-built iron side-wheel steamer, of light draft and considerable speed, which had been used as a packet between Glasgow and Belfast. She became famous under a new name, as the *R. E. Lee*; and under the efficient command of Captain Wilkinson, who had formerly been an officer of our navy, and who was now in the Confederate service, she ran the blockade twenty-one times in ten months, between December, 1862, and November, 1863, and carried abroad six thousand bales of cotton. The cotton was landed at Nassau, the Government not appearing in the transaction as shipper or owner. Here it was entrusted to a mercantile firm, which received a large "commission" for assuming ownership, and by this last it was shipped to Europe under neutral flags. The firm employed for this purpose is reported to have obtained a handsome return from its transactions.

The trade was now reduced to a system, whose working showed it to be nearly perfect. The short-voyage blockade-runners, destined for the passage between the neutral islands and the blockaded coast, began to make their appearance. In these every device was brought into use that could increase their efficiency. Speed, invisibility, and handiness, with a certain space for stowage, were the essentials; to these all other qualities were sacrificed. The typical blockade-runner of 1863-4 was a long, low side-wheel steamer of from four to six hundred tons, with a slight frame, sharp and narrow, its length perhaps nine times its beam. It had feathering paddles, and one or two raking telescopic funnels, which might be lowered close to the deck. The hull rose only a few foot out of the water, and was painted a dull gray or lead color, so that it could hardly be seen by daylight at two hundred yards. Its spars wore two short lower-masts, with no yards, and only a small crow's-nest in the foremast. The deck forward was constructed in the form known as "turtle-back," to enable the vessel to go through a heavy sea. Anthracite coal, which made no smoke, was burned in the furnaces. This coal came from the United States, and when, in consequence of the prohibition upon its exportation enforced by the Government, it could not be obtained, the semi-bituminous Welsh coal was used as a substitute. When running in, all lights were put out, the binnacle and fire-room hatch were carefully covered, and steam was blown off under water. In the latest vessels of this class speed was too much studied at the expense of strength, and some of them were disabled before they reached their cruising-ground.

The start from Nassau or Bermuda was usually made at such a time that a moonless night and a high tide could be secured for running in. A sharp lookout was kept for cruisers on the outside blockade, and the blockade-runner, by keeping at a distance, could generally pass them unobserved. If by accident or carelessness he came very close, he took to his heels, and his speed enabled him to get away. He never hove

to when ordered; it was as hard to hit him as to overtake him; a stray shot or two he cared nothing for. Even if his pursuer had the advantage of him in speed, which was rarely the case, he still kept on, and, by protracting the chase for a few hours, he could be sure that a squall, or a fog, or the approach of night would enable him to escape. Wilkinson describes a device which was commonly employed under these circumstances. In running from Wilmington to Nassau, on one occasion, he found himself hard pressed by a sloop-of-war. His coal was bad, but by using cotton saturated with turpentine, he succeeded in keeping ahead. The chase had lasted all day, and at sunset the sloop was within four miles, and still gaining. The engineer was then directed to make a black smoke, and a lookout was stationed with a glass, to give notice as soon as he lost sight of the pursuer in the deepening twilight. The moment the word came, orders were given to close the dampers, and the volumes of smoke ceased to pour out; the helm was put hard-a-starboard, changing the course eight points; and the blockade-runner disappeared in the darkness, while the cruiser continued her course in pursuit of a shadow.

Having passed the outside blockade successfully, and arrived in the neighborhood of his destination, the blockade-runner would either be off at a distance, or run in close to the land to the northward or southward of the port, and wait for the darkness. Sometimes vessels would remain in this way unobserved for a whole day. If they found the place too hot and the cruisers too active, one of the inlets at a little distance from the port of destination would give the needful shelter. Masonboro Inlet, to the north of Wilmington, was a favorite resort for this purpose. At night the steamers would come out of hiding and make a dash for the entrance.

The difficulty of running the blockade was increased by the absence of lights on the coast. In approaching or skirting the shore, the salt-works in operation at various points served as a partial substitute. Temporary lights were used at some of the ports to aid the blockade-runners. At Charleston, there was a light on Fort Sumter. At Wilmington, in the first year, the *Frying Pan* light-ship was taken inside the entrance, and anchored under Fort Caswell, where she was burnt in December, 1861, by two boat's crews from the Mount Vernon. At New Inlet, a light was placed on "the Mound," a small battery that flanked the works on Federal Point. In the earlier blockade, the lights of the squadron served as a guide to blockade-runners. After the general practice was discontinued, the plan was adopted of carrying a light on the senior officer's vessel, which was anchored in the centre of the fleet, near the entrance. This fact soon became known to the blockade-runners; indeed, there was little about the squadron that was not known and immediately disseminated at Nassau, that central-office of blockade-running intelligence. Thenceforth it served as a useful guide in making the channel. After a time the blockading officer discovered his error, and turned it to account by changing his position every night, thereby confusing many calculations.

The run past the inshore squadron was always a critical moment, though by no means so dangerous as it looked. It was no easy matter on a dark night to hit, much less to stop, a small and obscure vessel, going at the rate of fifteen knots, whose only object was to pass by. But the service nevertheless called into action all the faculties of the blockade-runner. It required a cool head, strong nerve, and ready resource. It was a combat of skill and pluck against force and vigilance. The excitement of fighting was wanting, as the blockade-runner must make no resistance; nor, as a rule, was he prepared to make any. But the chances, both outside and inshore, were all in his favor. He had only to make a port and run in, and he could choose time, and weather, and circumstances. He could even choose his destination. He always had steam up when it was wanted. He knew the critical moment, and was prepared for it; and his moments of action were followed by intervals of repose and relaxation. The blockader on the other hand, was in every way at a disadvantage. He had no objective point except the blockade-runner, and he never knew when the blockade-runner was coming. He could choose nothing, but must take the circumstances as they happened to come; and they were pretty sure to be unfavorable. He was compelled to remain in that worst of all situations, incessant watchfulness combined with prolonged inaction. There would be days and nights of anxious waiting, with expectation strained to the tensest point, for an emergency which lasted only as many minutes, and which came when it was least expected. There was no telling when or where the blow would need to be struck; and a solitary moment of napping might be fatal, in spite of months of ceaseless vigilance.



William Cushing went on to win great fame for his daring attack on the CSS Albemarle in 1864. (Library of Congress)

At New Inlet, which was a favorite entrance, the blockade-runners would frequently get in by hugging the shore, slipping by the endmost vessel of the blockading line. Even on a clear night a properly prepared craft was invisible against the land, and the roar of the surf drowned the noise of her screw or paddles. Having a good pilot and little depth, she could generally run well inside of the blockaders. After passing the line, she would show a light on her inshore side; this was answered from the beach by a dim light, followed by another, above and beyond the first. These were the range-lights for the channel. By getting them in line, the blockade-runner could ascertain her position, and in a few moments, she would be raider the guns of the fort. When the practice of blockade-framing was reduced to a system, a signal-service was organized on shore, and signal officers and pilots were regularly detailed for each vessel. After the fall of Fort Fisher, and before the fact was known, the duties of the signal-service were assumed by the officers of the Monticello, under the direction of Cushing; and two well known blockade-runners, the *Stag* and the *Charlotte*, were helped in by range-lights from the shore, only to find themselves prizes when they were comfortably anchored in the river.

Vessels passed so often between the squadron and the shore that special inclosures were taken to stop it. The endmost vessel was so placed as to leave a narrow passage. When the blockade-runner had passed, the blockader moved nearer and closed the entrance, at the same time sending up signal rockets. Two or three of her consorts were in waiting and closed up, and the adventurous vessel suddenly found herself hemmed in on all sides, and without a chance of escape.



The remains of the blockade runner "Ruby," run aground in 1863. (Library of Congress)

Whenever a blockade-runner was hard pressed in a chase, it was a common practice for the captain to run her ashore, trusting to favorable circumstances to save a fragment of his cargo. Communicating with the forces in the neighborhood, he would obtain the co-operation of a detachment of infantry, often accompanied by one or two pieces of artillery, which would harass the parties sent from the blockading vessels to get the steamer off. At Wilmington, lunettes were thrown up

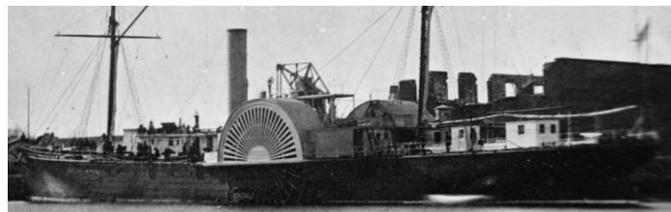
along the shore, large enough for two guns, and a field-battery of Whitworth 12-pounders was kept in constant readiness to run down and occupy them. Sometimes the blockaders were aide to command the land approaches, and so prevent the people on shore from doing mischief; but at other times the latter had it all their own way. It was no easy matter in any ease to float off a steamer which had linen beached intentionally under a full head of steam, especially if the tide was running club; and the fire of one or two rifled guns placed close by on the beach made the operation hazardous. The only course left was to burn the wreck; and even then, if the work was not done thoroughly, the chances were that the fire would be extinguished, and the damaged vessel ultimately recovered. In July, 1863, the *Kate*, one of the new English-built craft, after running to Charleston and being chased off, put into Wilmington. She attempted to pass the fleet off New Inlet, but choosing her time badly, she was sighted about five in the morning, and, after a chase, she was run ashore on Smith's Island, and abandoned. The troops came down, but did nothing. A party was sent in from the *Penobscot* to get her off; but this failing, she was set on fire, and the officer in charge of the boat-party reported that he had disabled her so effectually that she would be of no further use. Three weeks later, however, she was floated off by the Confederates, and anchored under the batteries; a position from which she was cut out with some difficulty.

The *Hebe*, a Bermuda steamer, was run ashore a fortnight later on Federal Point, under circumstances generally similar, except that it was blowing a gale from the northeast. A boat sent in from the *Niphon* was swamped, but the crew succeeded in getting on board the *Hebe*. A second boat was driven ashore, and the crew were taken prisoners by the cavalry on the beach. The *Hebe* was covered by a two-gun Whitworth battery and fifty or more riflemen. Other boats put off, and rescued a few of the men on board the steamer. The last boat capsized; and the remaining men of the first party fired the ship, and making for the shore were captured. This time the vessel was destroyed. A few days later the large vessels of the squadron came in, silenced the battery, and finally sent in a landing-party, and brought off the guns.

One night in October of the same year the *Venus*, one of the finest and fastest of the vessels in the Nassau-Wilmington trade, made the blockading fleet off New Inlet. She was first discovered by the *Nansemond*, commanded by Lieutenant Lamson. Lamson was always on the alert, and his work was always done quickly and thoroughly. After a short chase, he overhauled the *Venus*. When abeam he opened fire on her. Four well-directed shells played havoc with the blockade-runner. The first struck her foremast; the second exploded in the cabin; the third passed through forward, killing a man on the way; and the fourth, striking near the water-line, knocked in an iron plate, causing the vessel to make water fast. This was good practice, at night, with both vessels making nearly fourteen knots. The blockade-runner headed straight for the shore, and she was no sooner lard and fast, than the boarders had taken possession, and captured her officers and crew. As

it was impossible to move her, she was riddled with shells and finally burnt where she lay.

One of the prettiest captures made off Wilmington was that of the *Ella and Anna*, by Acting Master J. B. Breck of the *Niphon*, in the following November. Breck was an officer of pluck and resource, and he won a name for himself by his dashing successes on the Wilmington blockade. About five o'clock on the morning of the 9th of November, as he was returning along the shore from a chase near Masonboro Inlet, he discovered a side-wheel steamer to the northward, stealing along toward the entrance of the river. Outside of her lay a blockade-runner, which opened on her with grape, and the blockade-runner, finding herself intercepted, steered directly for the *Niphon* with the intention of running her down. Breck saw the intention, and fixed on his plan in an instant. Heading for the steamer, he formed his boarders on the bow. The blockade-runner dashed on at full speed under a shower of canister, and struck him a blow that carried away his bowsprit and stem. In a moment, his boarders were over the rail and on the deck of the blockade-runner; and a few seconds made her a prize. She had on board three hundred cases of Austrian rifles and a quantity of saltpetre; and the prize-sale netted \$180,000. The *Ella and Anna* was taken into the service, and in the next year, under her new name of the *Malvern*, became famous as the flagship of Admiral Porter.



The USS Malvern, formerly the *Kate and Anna*. (Library of Congress)

The warfare on both sides was accompanied by a variety of ruses and stratagems, more or less ingenious and successful, but usually turning out to the benefit of the blockade-runner. When a steamer was sighted, the blockading vessel that made the discovery fired signals in the direction she had taken. This was at best an uncertain guide, as the blockaders could only make a rough guess at the stranger's position. The practice was no sooner understood than the enterprising captains at Nassau sent for a supply of signal rockets, and thereafter they were carried as a part of the regular equipment. Running through the fleet, and finding himself discovered, the captain immediately fired his rockets in a direction at right angles to his course; and the blockaders were sent on a wild-goose chase into the darkness. If there were many of them, they were apt to get in each other's way; and more than once serious damage was done by a friendly vessel. The *Howquah*, off Wilmington, on a dark night, in September, 1864, had nearly succeeded in making a prize, when the concentrated fire of the batteries, the blockading squadron, and, according to the belief of the commander, of the blockade-runner, proved to be too much for him, and caused him to draw off.

One of the blockade-running captains relates that, on a certain night, when he found himself alongside a vessel of the fleet

and under her guns, he was told to heave to. Accordingly, steam was shut off, and he replied that he had stopped. There was a moderate sea, and the boat from the cruiser was delayed. As it reached the side of the blockade-runner, the captain of the latter gave the order, "Full speed ahead," and his vessel shot away toward the channel. A deception of this kind, whatever may be thought of it abstractly, was one that would be likely to recoil on the blockade-runners. A vessel or two might avoid being sunk by pretending to surrender, but a blockader would hardly be caught twice by such a trick. The next time, instead of hailing before he fired, he would fire before he hailed; and he would be perfectly justified in so doing. Indeed, it is a question whether in a blockade so persistently broken as that of Wilmington, the ordinary rules of action for belligerent cruisers should not be modified, and vessels found in *flagrante delicto*, whether neutrals or not, be destroyed instead of being captured. Certainly, if destruction and not capture had always been the object, fewer blockade-runners would have escaped, and possibly fewer would have undertaken the business. There is always a possibility that a vessel met at sea, however suspicious the circumstances, may be innocent; but when found running through the blockading fleet, her guilt is established, and if there is any question about bringing her to--and at Wilmington there was always rather more than a question--the blockader is not far wrong whose first thought is to inflict a vital injury.

As it was, blockade-running was not an occupation involving much personal danger, and little apprehension was felt about running through the fleet. Calcium lights were burned, and shot and shell flew thickly over and around the entering vessel, but they did not often hit the mark. At Wilmington it was perhaps not so much the inshore blockade that killed the

trade as the practice of keeping fast cruisers outside. Until near the end of 1864, when the stringency of the blockade became extreme, the captures were not numerous enough to take up more than a slight margin of the enormous profits that it netted. These profits were made both on the outward and the inward voyages, and it is hard to say which were the more extraordinary. The inward cargoes consisted of all kinds of manufactured goods, and especially of "hardware," the innocent name under which arms and ammunition were invoiced. The sale of these brought in from five hundred to one thousand per cent. of their cost. The return cargo was always cotton, and the steam-presses at Wilmington, reducing it to the smallest possible bulk, enabled the long, narrow blockade-runners to carry six hundred, eight hundred, or even twelve hundred bales, of five or six hundred pounds each. Even the upper deck was piled up with two or three tiers of bales. As a clear profit of £30,000 each way was no uncommon result, it is easy to believe that owners could afford to lose a vessel after two successful trips. It was the current opinion in the squadron off Wilmington, in the early part of the last year, that two-thirds of the vessels attempting to enter were successful; and it has been estimated that out of the sixty-six blockade-runners making regular trips during the war, forty were captured or destroyed, but only after a successful career for a shorter or longer period. Gradually, in the last few months, too many vessels were caught to make the trade profitable; and it was slowly declining, though it did not cease altogether until the blockade was raised.

Cape May County Civil War Round Table

