



The Cape Fear Civil War Round Table

A BILLY YANK IN OAKDALE

By **Bob Cooke**

When Federal forces under Major General A.H. Terry took Wilmington, North Carolina on 22 February 1865, chaos reigned for a good while. Confederates had slipped across the Northeast Cape Fear River, slowly withdrawing northward to link up with General Joseph E. Johnston's troops gathered around Smithfield. About a week later, a prisoner exchange was begun at Northeast Station (present-day Castle Hayne) with several thousand Union POWs ultimately being released. These men had survived Andersonville, Salisbury and the Florence prison pens and were in dire need of food, clothing and medical attention, but what they had in great abundance was spirit, as one observer recalled:

Before our paroled officers would receive food...they gathered beneath the tall pines and sang in tones that thrilled the soul, and with animation of countenance...the patriotic song, composed by one of their number, entitled 'When Sherman Marched down to the Sea.'

As the men passed into Federal lines, many of them shouted with joy, one exclaimed, 'We are once again in God's country,' another, 'I am going to fight again for old Uncle Sam,' a third, 'Thank heaven I am once again under the Stars and Stripes!' Some even retained their sense of humor, for when a bedraggled soldier was asked how he was doing, he replied, 'As well...as a man could expect who has been a year under *General Starvation*'. Over the course of a few weeks, over nine thousand came into Wilmington. The Federals moved quickly to provide care for these men with many being sent directly north on steamers, but quite a few required immediate hospitalization. There were others making their way to town also, refugees from Sherman's advancing army, then at Fayetteville, were sent to disencumber his army, many of these came down with typhus and also needed care. In addition to the several former Confederate hospitals already in operation, about ten more were established in and around Wilmington.

There is (unfortunately) little known about the POW's in the hospitals. One soldier's story, which has survived, is that of Sergeant William Broughton. Broughton was born in Lowesby, Leicestershire, England in 1840 and immigrated with his parents to the United States in 1846. The Family settled in Ohio, living in New Lisbon when the Civil War broke out. Although he attempted to enlist in Pennsylvania, he was sent instead to Wheeling (which would soon be in West Virginia) and was soon a member of Company F, 2nd Regiment Virginia Infantry (Union). After participating in several battles (none of which he was taken prisoner and later paroled) the unit found itself, in May 1863 in western Virginia. On August 26-27, they fought at Rocky Gap and it was here that Sergeant Broughton was captured (while assisting a wounded soldier off the

field) and sent to Andersonville, Georgia. He remained there until sent north for exchange, late in 1864. Arriving at Northeast Station towards the end of February 1865, he was one of those released at the end of that month. It was quickly determined that William needed to be in a hospital, so he was sent to Camp Jackson, a former Confederate post. It was here that he died of dysentery, on 10 April.

Like many of the POW's, his story might have gone unnoticed except for a photo in the possession of Ms. Wendy Steyn, a descendant of Broughton's. The photo and the words written on the reverse, 'Oakdale Cemetery, row 8, grave 5' led to Georgia, where Carl Broughton joined the family's search. Some twenty letters written by Broughton during the war still survive, they are filled with 'accounts of mud and rain that made writing so difficult, and the small details such as his diet of 'biscuit, port and beans and a little beef.' The search for Broughton turned to Wilmington and culminated on Sunday, 27 June at Oakdale. It was there that the several branches of Sergeant Broughton's descendants met to dedicate a tombstone to his memory. It was a very touching ceremony at which CFCWRT member **Wayne Carver** (who did much of the legwork and research locally) and Dr. Chris Fonvielle spoke about William Broughton and Wilmington. Mr. Eric Kozan, Superintendent of Oakdale informed the gathered group that over one thousand Union dead were buried in Oakdale, these men would eventually be reinterred in Wilmington's National Cemetery (on Market Street). While a bagpiper played appropriate tunes, a Union color guard composed of the 3rd U.S. Artillery and 2nd U.S.C.T. stood watch. An invocation given by the Reverend George Slaton (also a member of our RT) who read from *Services for the use of the Grand Army of the Republic, Dayton, Ohio--1879*, (passed down to him from a Union ancestor) was most fitting for the occasion. After a Benediction, three volleys were fired by the Union reenactors and finally, taps wafted across the burial ground. The ceremony as over and it was hoped that Sergeant William Broughton could finally rest easy.

