

Fort Fisher's *Above the Scenes* tour provides unique perspective of fort history

At the outbreak of the Civil War in April of 1861, Wilmington was North Carolina's largest city; by the middle of 1863, it was rapidly becoming the second most important city in the South. For the next year and a half, Wilmington would be the Confederacy's primary port-of-call as the overwhelming majority of the foreign commerce that fed and fueled the Rebel war machine was funneled into the Cape Fear River. Conducted by blockade-runners, this smuggling operation soon became the main artery in the "Lifeline of the Confederacy" and for the remainder of the war, the fortunes of the Confederate States of America would be moored to the docks of Wilmington harbor. To defend the port, a chain of fortifications and batteries perched down both sides of the river from the port city above to the inlets below, making it the second most fortified harbor in the South.



Fort Fisher was the anchor in that chain. Standing twenty miles downstream commanding New Inlet, it mounted forty four heavy guns, boasted nearly a mile and a half of earthworks and was the Confederacy's most formidable seacoast fortification. There on Confederate Point beneath the new nations' star-crossed banner a drama of epic proportions unfurled. Numerous stirring events both bitter and sweet would leaven the tale with romanticism. But at the climatic conclusion, with the plight of the Confederacy hanging in the balance, Fort Fisher would be assailed by the most ambitious army/navy amphibious expedition of the war, bear witness to the largest United States flotilla ever assembled and become the target of the heaviest naval bombardment in American history. For the South it would prove to be a forlorn hope in the face of an irresistible force. Immersed in a hurricane of fire, a desperate last stand in a fated hour would fail to stem the flood tide of the great blue wave that rose out of the Atlantic and stormed down upon Confederate Point. Over time the elements have continued the assault on Fort Fisher and like sand through an hour glass much of the fort has sifted away. Today there is little tangible evidence left to convey the magnitude of what once occurred here.

To gain a better appreciation for the property and this pivotal moment in American history we suggest spending a little time with our Site Interpreter Ray Flowers. When you purchase a \$10 tour ticket, Ray will lead you on a special 45 minute tour from the floor of the fort to the top of the traverses affording the visitor a different perspective from a unique vantage point. Ray is a native to the area and a lifelong enthusiast of the Civil War in general and the Civil War on the Lower Cape Fear in particular.



Raised just 12 miles up the road in the neighborhood of Battle Park (where the streets were named for Civil War battles) he was a frequent visitor as a child and claims to have wanted to work at Fort Fisher for as long as he can remember. A graduate of UNCW and 25 year+ employee of the site, he feels blessed to combine vocation with avocation. In pursuing the subject Flowers has made an extensive study of the topic, his research has taken him to numerous repositories, historic sites, forts, battlefields, cemeteries, residences, etcetera, where he has acquired a wealth of information.

Without question, Flowers delights in his role as a seasoned ambassador of the site who shares a treasure trove of knowledge and historical gems to enrich the visitor's experience. The tours are normally held twice daily. Children under 12 are free. A limit of 25 tickets will be sold per tour. No advance tickets available. The tour is weather dependent. Proper shoes, water and sunscreen are recommended.