



The Fighting Joe Wheeler

Dispatch

Volume XXXVI, Issue 2

February, 2016

Camp Officers:

Commander: David Rawls

1st Lt Commander: David Fisher

2nd Lt Commander: Hank Arnold

Adjutant: Pat Acton

Secretary/Treasurer: Pat Acton

Chaplain: Jeff Young

Color Sergeant: Bill Hass

Quartermaster: Tristan Dunn

Commander Emeritus: Dr. Ira West

Chaplin Emeritus: Dr. Charles Baker

Sergeant At Arms: Sam Nelson

Camp Surgeon: Rick Price

Dispatch Editor: Jim Darden

Fighting Joe Wheeler Camp 1372, Inc.
C/O Adjutant
P. O. Box 43362
Vestavia Hills, AL 35243

The Next Camp Meeting will be at 7:00 pm, Tuesday February 9. Al Lassiter will present a program on Black Confederates.

SCV Calendar

February 9..... Camp Meeting - Black Confederates.....Al Lassiter
February 20....Ala Division Executive Counsel Meeting....Montgomery

March 5.....Alabama Educational Conference.....Prattville
March 8.....Camp Meeting - CSA Constitution.....David Rawls
March 19-20.....Alabama Gun Collectors Show.....Birmingham

April 12.....Camp Meeting - Ft Blakely.....Hank Arnold
April 25.....CSA Memorial Day.....Elmwood Cemetery
April 29-30.....Living History.....Confederate Memorial Park

May 10..... Camp Meeting - Battle of Bentonville.....Tim Kent

June 3.....Jefferson Davis' birthday
June 10-12.....Alabama Division Reunion.....Cullman
June 14.....Camp Meeting - Program TBD.....Jim Darden

July 12.....Camp Meeting - CSS Shenandoah.....Jeff Seymor

August 9.....Camp Meeting - Southern Culture.....Walter Dockery

September 13.....Camp Meeting – Program TBD.....Dr. John Killien

Visit the Camp Website - www.fightingjoewheeler.org

Please send articles or other information for inclusion in "The Dispatch" to
Jim Darden - Editor
645 South Sanders Rd
Hoover, Alabama 35226
or e-mail: km4qr@bellsouth.net

Alabama: We Dare Defend Our Rights

"The principal for which we contended is bound to reassert itself, though it may be at another time and in another form." - Jefferson Davis, May 1865

Commander's Report

February 2016

Compatriots:

Before beginning the substance of my initial report, I would like to personally thank everyone for both the honor and opportunity to serve as Commander of Camp Fighting Joe Wheeler. I shall do my best in this role and with your help keep us on the right track.

On January 16th we held a wonderful Lee-Jackson Banquet at which the Division 2nd Lieutenant Commander (and former FJW Camp member) Carl Jones gave a stirring presentation regarding the numerous Constitutional issues which served as a foundation for the War. Afterwards, Compatriot Jim Carroll received his award as the 2015 winner of the Robert E. Lee Award, followed by the 2016 award being given to our hard-working Adjutant Pat Acton. Pat stepped up into an unenviable position and has served the Camp well.

Now, to my soapbox: Over the past year those who call themselves "politically correct" have ramped up their attacks against both our ancestors as well as us personally for refusing to knuckle under to what we know to be wrong. Words such as "honor" and "truth" are meaningless to them as they re-write history, portraying themselves as morally and intellectually superior by telling us the War was entirely based upon the issue of slavery and labeling our ancestors as "traitors" while they themselves whittle the Constitution away before our very eyes. We must realize and act upon the fact now that it is our duty to not only defend the honor and integrity of our common Southern heritage, but also our rights as American citizens before they vanish away, never to return. Despite what we are told over and over, our ancestors understood this and were willing to sacrifice so much; who are we to deny ourselves and future generations the rights, privileges and blessings so freely given us? Actions, compatriots, speak far louder than words. One action we all can do is attend the meetings; learn all the truth we can and together coordinate our efforts to spread the truth and ensure it will remain for future generations. So I ask you: please come and bring a friend if you can. Let us follow the doctrine as presented by General S. D. Lee and re-establish truth and honor as guiding principles for our nation.

Deo Vindice,

David L. Rawls
Commander



2nd LT Commander's Report

February 2016

Compatriots

I am pleased to be returning to my role as 2nd LT Commander. This takes the pressure off me as I focus on working as long as I'm able. I love my work and I love the SCV and all things that honor our Confederate past.

January was a great month. On the 16th the Camp celebrated our Lee Jackson Banquet. We were honored to have Alabama Division 2nd LT Commander Carl Jones speak to us about the Confederate Constitution and what it meant to General Lee. I have always been a strategy guy studying the battles and campaigns. Carl brings the issues to light I haven't studied. Excellent presentation.

On the 23rd we celebrated Robert E. Lee Day at Montgomery. Commander Carlyle did an excellent job of officiating the event. David Chantis of Kentucky Portrayed General Lee. Those who missed this will never know how good it really was. The looks, dress, mannerisms, and character brought tears to my eyes. Excellent, just excellent.

Our monthly Camp meeting is Tuesday the 8th. Col. Al Lassiter will speak on Black Confederates. I hope to be able to change my travel plans to be there.

The Fighting Joe Wheeler Camp will join the Forrest Camp for the AGCA show March 19 – 20. We will host a recruiting table, please be a part of it.

One last note. The attendance of the Camps Lee Jackson banquet was off by 30+%. Sad the horse holders didn't show up. Very Sad!! Not a good showing of support for the cause. We will continue to hold this event. If we need to downsize it due to your lack of support we will need to address the issue. Bill Arnold missed it and advised that his wife was sick before the event. I have to assume the rest that missed it were hiding behind a tree rather than making the charge. The bright spot of this is we had 2 members assume the loss the camp had on the banquet. They were Sam Nelson and Bill Haas. Thank you gentlemen!!

Please support our new camp officers. They signed up to do the job. Please do your part for Your Confederate Veteran.

Hope to see you Tuesday.

Thanks,
Hank Arnold
2nd LT Commander





Alabama Education Conference



Abbeville
Institute

Vindicating the Cause, one mind at a time

*Doster Community Center
Prattville, Alabama*

*March 5th 2016
10 am to 4 pm*

Name _____ Title _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Guest _____

Telephone Numbers: Home: () -

Office: () -

Cell: () -

E-mail Address: _____

SCV Camp Name & Number: _____ Division: _____

Alabama Division Members ,Seminars including lunch \$30

Non Alabama Division Members Seminars inc. lunch \$30

Registration postmarked after February 21, 2016 or at door will not include lunch..... \$30



Please send this form, or a copy thereof, completed, together with a check or money order in the amount of the total shown above, made payable to **Alabama Division SCV**

**PO Box 375
Capshaw, Al 35742**

FOUR great lectures planned. Dr. Brion Mcclanahan, Donald Kennedy, Ronald Kennedy, and James Rutledge Roesch. Q&A from 3pm to 4pm.

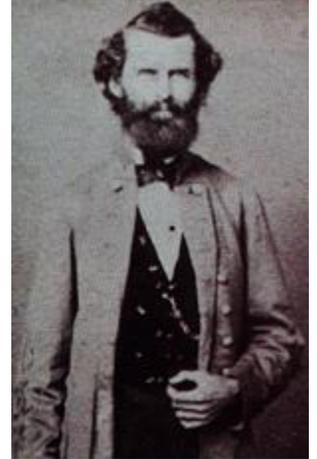
The Confederacy's Bomb Brothers – Part 1.

George and Gabriel Rains had a knack for blowing things up during the American Civil War between 1861-1865. They were the Confederacy's "Bomb Brothers."

By Peggy Robbins (edited for the Fighting Joe Wheeler Camp 1372 *Dispatch* by Jim Darden)
(see <http://www.jmu.edu/cisr/journal/6.1/notes/robbins/robbins.htm>)



George Rains (right) and his older brother Gabriel (left) created explosive solutions to the Confederacy's problems during the war. George created the gunpowder, and Gabriel used it to create landmines lethal to Federal soldiers.



President Jefferson Davis studied the small, odd-looking object. A heavy, black iron casting, it resembled a lump of coal. What it was, however was a bomb fresh from the drawing boards of the Confederate Torpedo Bureau. This device, experts told Davis, could be spirited aboard a Union steamer and dropped into the ship's load of coal. When heated in a boiler, it would explode and cripple the vessel. Turning the weapon over in his hands, Davis exclaimed, "Perfection herself!"

One of the first victims was the steamship *Greyhound*, headquarters of the Union Army of the James's commander, Major General Benjamin F. Butler. As the ship steamed along Virginia's James River on November 27, 1864, crewmen unwittingly threw one of the "coal lump" devices into one of the boilers. In moments, the *Greyhound* erupted into flames and sank. Among her startled passengers, none of whom was seriously injured, were Butler and Rear Admiral David D. Porter. Union investigators declared, "Confederates dressed as roughly-garbed stowaways [had] slipped aboard and planted explosives, then fled." Confederates who knew the truth only laughed.

The new weapon was the invention of Gabriel James Rains, whose munitions experiments were known throughout the South. But he was only part of the Confederacy's success at developing and using explosive devices. Gabriel's younger brother, George Washington Rains, undoubtedly provided the powder that filled the bomb. The younger Rains was instrumental in creating much of the struggling South's gunpowder. These two munitions experts were the Confederacy's "Bomb Brothers," and without them the South would likely have fallen far sooner than the spring of 1865. President Davis and other Confederate leaders considered them among the South's greatest assets.

The "Bomb Brothers" were born in Craven County, North Carolina, Gabriel in 1803 and George in 1817. Gabriel entered West Point, from which he graduated 13th in the class of 1827. As a lieutenant in the 5th U.S. Infantry, Gabriel served in Florida and Louisiana, fighting in the Second Seminole War, and later recruited troops for the Mexican

War, in which he also took part. During his years in the Regular Army, Gabriel earned a reputation for experimenting with explosives. By May 1861 he had risen to the rank of lieutenant colonel, but when his native North Carolina seceded, he resigned his commission and entered the Confederate army as a colonel; by September he was a brigadier general.

George followed his brother to West Point, graduating third in the class of 1842. He began his military career as a second lieutenant in the Corps of Engineers, then transferred to the artillery, his true interest. George taught chemistry, mineralogy and geology at West Point from 1844 to 1846 before serving as a first lieutenant at Port Isabel, Texas. He got his first taste of combat in the Mexican War. George continued to pursue his longtime interest in perfecting guns and gunpowder throughout his army career.

George was a captain when he resigned his commission in 1856 and headed north to become president of the Highland Iron Works in Newburgh, New York. There, he honed his powder-making skills, inventing efficient steam engines and boilers, until the outbreak of war drew him home to join the Confederate army. Commissioned a major of artillery in July 1861, he was soon chilled to the Ordnance Bureau and assigned to establish powder mills. He would rise to the rank of lieutenant colonel in May 1862 and colonel in July 1863.

Both brothers were enthusiastic about their munitions work. Gabriel, however, began the war unsuccessfully as a brigade commander. His failure to attack Federal troops of Major General George McClellan during the May 31-June 1, 1862, Battle of Seven Pines, Virginia, drew criticism from Confederate Major General Daniel H. Hill. Rains would hold no further field command in the war. But Jefferson Davis had something bigger and louder in mind for him.

At the war's outset, the South's harbors were largely defenseless against the threat of Union attack. The old brick forts were nearly useless in preventing Union ships from steaming up Southern rivers. Officials of the Confederate War and Navy departments discussed the use of "torpedoes"—exploding mines. The technology was not yet developed, and there were controversial ethical issues to resolve, but the experimenting began.

The South's first torpedoes were simple, powder-filled tin cans with trigger attachments. These offered little promise. But then Gabriel developed what came to be known as the "Rains Patent," a mine that could be used both on land and in water. These early torpedoes were made of sheet iron, and each had a fuse protected by a thin brass cap covered with a beeswax solution. If pressure were exerted on that cap, the torpedo would explode. Rains used these bombs with significant success both in the water and on the land.

In the spring of 1862, while Gabriel was still leading a brigade, he turned his "Rains Patent" into the "sub-terra explosive shell," known today as a landmine. In May, during the Peninsula Campaign, the Union Army of the Potomac was pressuring Confederate forces retreating from Yorktown in the outskirts of Richmond, Virginia, the Confederate capital. Rains' brigade was part of the Rebel rearguard. Some of Rains' men found loaded 8- and 10-inch Columbiad artillery shells equipped with sensitive fuse primers in a broken-down ammunition wagon near Richmond. Rains planted these shells inches beneath the sand of Richmond's beaches "simply as a desperate effort to distance our men from pursuing Union cavalry," he explained. Suddenly a series of shells exploded beneath the hooves of Federal horses. Pandemonium erupted as many whole Union companies bolted in panic. They were the victims of the first land mines ever used in battle. Rains had

originally buried four of them and was so impressed by the confusion they caused that he buried more. Their use around Richmond grew proportionately. Rains estimated that the approaches to Richmond were laced with more than 1,300 land mines by 1864, most of them operated by trip cords that could be pulled by hidden Confederates.

Union officers angrily denounced the mines as unethical and lambasted the Confederacy for using "sub-terra booby traps," but Rains continued to plant them. They were buried around houses, shops, and telegraph poles, and hidden in carpetbags and bags of flour. Army of the Potomac commander Major General George McClellan immediately threatened to use prisoners of war to clear minefields, and Union Attorney General Edward Bates spoke out indignantly about the "devilish devices." For two and a half years Major General William T Sherman railed against the use of the mines, like McClellan, vowing to force prisoners to march ahead of his troops, who knew the mines as "infernal machines."

Not all the opposition to the mines came from the enemy. Major General James Longstreet, who commanded a retreating division that had directly benefited from Rains' Richmond mines, furiously condemned them and forbade any further use of them. But Rains lobbied the Confederate government for approval of the mines. The dispute grew until Secretary of War George Randolph announced the South's official policy for employing the new weapon. "It is admissible to plant shells in a parapet to repel assault, or in a road to check pursuit," Randolph decreed. "It is not admissible to plant shells merely to destroy life and without other design than that of depriving the enemy of a few men."

Rains had won the squabble, and he was delighted. "No soldier will march over mined land," he predicted, "and a corps of sappers, each having two ten-inch shells, two primers, and a mule to carry them, could stop an army." His vision may have been a bit too optimistic, because once the first explosions occurred, the unhurt Union soldiers simply detoured around them. But Rains' mines were indeed useful, particularly in guarding fortifications. For instance, during the Siege of Charleston, South Carolina, in July 1863, the Confederates planted a large mine field with mines so close together and so near the surface that no soldier could step on the field without detonating one or two. The mines were used effectively around Battery Wagner on the South Carolina coast, at the northern tip of Morris Island, and just below Fort Sumter, allowing Charleston to withstand strong Union assaults. The Union suffered 1,623 casualties in the siege while the Confederacy suffered only 186. The experience was repeated elsewhere; Sherman wrote that in December 1864 "the rebels' land torpedoes at Fort McAllister, Georgia, killed more of our men than the heavy gun of the fort."

Even as Rains was placing mines along Richmond's roads, Davis urged him to begin his work on protecting the South's harbors. On October 31, 1862, the Confederate Congress authorized a Torpedo Bureau, a division of the War Department, to organize and improve torpedo and mine warfare and Rains was placed at its head. Immediately he closed off the James River to enemy shipping by lining it with hundreds of mines and torpedoes. It was not long before Union men were reporting that there were mines in the river, some of them 2,000 pounds in size. Several, fired by wires stretched from the banks, had blown up Northern ships, and no river vessel was safe. Bombs resembling coal, like the one used to sink the Greyhound, added to the North's confusion on Southern rivers.

The underwater torpedo may have been the South's most effective defensive weapon. Confederates had used crude underwater torpedoes, most constructed from glass demijohns (large, narrow-necked bottles) or tar-covered beer barrels, as early as 1861. These were not very effective, but they were the forerunners of the very destructive instruments Rains helped develop in 1862 and 1863.

Problems delayed Rains' early work on underwater torpedoes. He needed wire for an electrical firing system, but wire was scarce in the Confederacy. The general corrected that by sending female "wire-stealing crews" into Union territory. The women's biggest haul by far was a cable the Union had abandoned in the Chesapeake Bay. Gabriel unraveled tile cable and used it in hundreds of mines. Still another problem was lack of funds. Despite Davis' support, Rains was often without his fair share of military appropriations. He began his torpedo work in 1862 with \$20,000. The allotment rose to \$350,000 in 1864 and later to \$6 million, when it was too late.

Despite these handicaps, Rains managed to establish torpedo manufacturing plants in Richmond and ports throughout the South, along with a so-called "munitions plant" along the Mississippi River. The last, unlike the others, was simply a shed under which three or four men packed powder into demijohns, attached ignition devices, and loaded them on a wagon. A slave named "Old Pat" drove the wagon, and his job was to place the mines in the river where they would explode beneath the invading Federal fleet. They didn't work very well, largely because Old Pat failed to anchor them properly. Most of the torpedoes floated away with the current.

Nevertheless, Confederate underwater torpedoes were having an effect. Torpedoes detonated from shore destroyed seven of 12 Federal vessels steaming up the Roanoke River to capture Fort Branc, North Carolina, on December 9, 1864. An electric torpedo sank the U.S.S. Commodore Jones, a converted ferry, on the James River on May 6, 1864, killing 40 men. Witnesses claimed the ship was blown 50 feet into the air. A Confederate soldier captured on the riverbank afterward refused to tell the location of other torpedoes until he was lashed to the bow of a Federal ship dragging the river for mines. Farther south, a large field of buried mines protecting Fort Fisher, North Carolina, helped stall the fort's capture until January 15, 1865.

Such incidents not only took lives and destroyed ships but also unsettled Union naval officers, some of whom began to exercise extreme caution that weakened their effectiveness. In April 1862, Captain Quincy Gillmore reported that at Fort Pulaski, near Savannah, Georgia, "the probability of encountering torpedoes, for which our vessels were not designed, determined a change of plan." On March 12, 1863, Federal Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles wrote in his diary: "The attack on Charleston will be delayed.... Little is known of obstructions and torpedoes, but great apprehensions are entertained." Confederates added to the confusion by dumping empty barrels into harbors, creating the appearance of floating mines.

As excellent as Rains' torpedoes were, they had one weakness: prolonged submersion could corrode them, rendering them useless. An example came in Mobile Bay, Alabama, on August 5, 1864, when Union Rear Admiral David Farragut steamed his fleet through heavily mined waters to capture Mobile. Farragut is famous for his command.

"Damn the torpedoes! Full speed ahead!" What seems like boldness, however, was actually recklessness. Many officers in the fleet heard the almost constant snapping of primers under the bottoms of the ships and wondered why only one torpedo exploded (the one that sank the monitor *Tecumseh*). They later learned that the torpedoes had been in the water so long they had corroded.

A postwar U.S. Navy report listed the loss of Union ships from torpedoes as much greater than all other causes combined. "The torpedo service of the Confederacy probably contributed more to its defense by far than all the vessels of the Confederate Navy," Russell Soley, a Northern observer and writer during the war, later wrote. Gabriel Rains had been sure of that all along. (to be continued next month)



Led by Gabriel Raines, the Confederacy's Torpedo Bureau created the explosives, like these newly cast torpedoes at the Charleston Arsenal, that linked key Southern rivers and ports.

Union sailors carefully remove torpedos from Mobile Bay after Federals captured the bay in August 1864.

