

At Play on the Field of Battle

Written by Mark Shaffer

Wednesday, 16 January 2013 09:30

Frampton Plantation's Unique Civil War Sesquicentennial



"We were raised Methodists," Sue said. "But we converted to the Confederacy. There wasn't time for both."

"War is hell," Ed deadpanned. "And it just might send us there."

– from *Confederates In The Attic*, by Tony Horwitz



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For thousands of Americans on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line the Civil War still rages. For that matter, so does the controversy that still follows this fascination with our bloodiest, most divisive conflict like carrion birds to a battlefield. Sue and Ed, a pair of "hardcore" re-enactors Horwtiz' encounters during his ten state adventure in Civil War culture, may be funny – but they aren't really joking. This is religion for some, a lifestyle for others, and an obsession for many. At the very least, as one reenactor tells me, "it's a damned expensive hobby."

Last December, reenactors converged on Frampton Plantation, in what is now called Point South, for a Sesquicentennial reenactment like no other. This would be the first recreation of The Battle of Pocatigo and it would take place on the actual site of the original fight.

"This is rare. Very rare," explains Bruce Blackmon. "It isn't often that you get to recreate history



on original ground. Most National and State parks prevent that from happening." Blackmon is Colonel of the Palmetto Battalion, a non-profit reenactment organization with 28 years of experience in these matters and one of the organizers of this event.

POCATALIGO, SC

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October 21, 1862. 4400 Union troops sail out of Hilton Head and up the Broad River with orders to destroy the tracks and bridges of the Charleston to Savannah Railroad. Such a hammer stroke would severely cripple the Confederate war effort, cutting key supply lines. The next morning, a force of 675 Confederates engage the Federals and hold them off until the Charleston Light Dragoons provide reinforcements.

December 2012, 150 years and a few weeks later. The air around Frampton Plantation (now home to the Lowcountry Visitors Center & Museum) is thick with the scent of wood smoke and bacon. On the eve of the first reenactment, a small tent city of "sutlers" (merchants and victualers who follow the armies, trading in the field) has sprung up behind the grand old house. Hand painted signs point the way to the Federal and CSA camps sequestered in the woods around the battlefield. Women in hoop skirts glide across the lawn, others in simple Calico dresses poke cook fires and set cast iron to coal. A tall man sporting an elegant top hat and waistcoat strolls the sutler promenade, picking each deliberate step with an ornate cane. Bearded soldiers in blue and grey wander among the campsites catching up with old friends, swapping stories, discussing the finer details of what took place on these grounds a century and a half ago. And what's to come tomorrow. Along with the smoke, a palatable sense of awe hangs in the air.

Long before the first shot is fired, the mundane issues of insurance, sanitation, parking, concessions and such must be sorted out. T



here's a whole lot more to staging a reenactment than just turning loose a bunch of guys on a battlefield. This is not simply a "reenactment," Blackmon explains. This is interactive history.

"There are original [earth] works that run all through the woods that haven't been touched or seen in years," he says. "We went all the way back to the site of the original bridge a

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