

*A 2020 BGES Civil War Field University Program:*

*The Final Days, Sherman in NC*

*Presented by Wade Sokolosky and Bert Dunkerly*

*March 25-28, 2020, from Garner, NC,*

After nearly nine months of tedious siege and repositioning, Union armies were poised to end the Civil War in the spring of 1865. As Sherman entered North Carolina with his four corps, he expected logistics support from the North Carolina coast as he maneuvered to join Meade and Butler near Petersburg. Together they would crush Robert E. Lee's diminishing force and capture the Confederate capital in Richmond. But the Confederates were not yet "Up the Spout," and a seasoned but greatly reduced force under the command of Gen. Joseph E. Johnston assembled to resist him.

This study will give you an in-depth look at two of the largest battles fought in North Carolina, Averasboro and Bentonville, as well as an opportunity to examine the significant events and places that preceded the largest Confederate surrender of the Civil War.

**Wednesday, March 25, 2020**

6 PM. We'll meet at the headquarters hotel where your historians, Wade Sokolosky and Bert Dunkerly, will provide a detailed overview of the events leading to Sherman's operations in North Carolina. Wade is the author of two books that cover Sherman's entry into the state and the support operations resulting in the battle at Wise's Forks and the Federal occupation of Goldsboro. Bert is the expert on the war's end in North Carolina and the surrender in Greensboro. You will then be free to find dinner on your own. This is eastern North Carolina, and its distinctive BBQ is some of the best in the country.

**Thursday, March 26, 2020**

Following the engagement at Monroe's Crossroads, Sherman began his move north, expecting to refit his worn forces around Goldsboro before entering Virginia. However, Johnston had consolidated his forces with those under Gen. Braxton Bragg and was prepared to meet Sherman and hopefully dismantle him in detail—frankly, he did not have the forces to fight a toe-to-toe engagement. The man Johnston selected to pick off the left wing of Sherman's army was Lt. Gen. William J. Hardee, who would anchor his flanks on the Black and Cape Fear Rivers near the small hamlet of Averasboro.

Realizing his limitations, Hardee dusted off the tactics from a great American military victory during the Revolutionary War—the battle of Cowpens in South Carolina. Mixing newly fielded but untried coastal battalions with his veteran infantry and cavalry, he

created a defense in depth of three lines. Each would take some of the starch and energy out of the Federal advance, until it ran into the third and most experienced line of Confederate troops. Ironically, as had happened during Cowpens, it was friendly (Confederate) cavalry that stabilized the combat zone. The two-day engagement purchased deployment time for Johnston's main force near Bentonville.

This program will start at the William Smith house, where the battle started, and advance in a manner similar to the way the battle unfolded over 2 miles of attack, defend, and fall back. After a visit to the battlefield museum, the highlight will be a trip to the John Smith plantation home, which served as a field hospital. The site, closed to the public, will be open to you.

Following a great buffet lunch at Eddie's BBQ, the afternoon will be devoted to the battle of Bentonville. This last major engagement in North Carolina delayed Sherman's arrival and access to the supply network set up at Goldsboro. At Bentonville, Johnston fought 20,000 Confederates in an effective and efficient way that bloodied Sherman's nose and reminded the Federals that there was still much life left in the Confederate armies.

The Bentonville battlefield is well-preserved and has an excellent field interpretation. You will walk in the footsteps of the men who fought there and examine well-preserved Confederate trenches. What is most interesting is the Confederate battle plan in which Johnston hammered at isolated Federal units on the first day, forcing the Federals to fall back into a defensive crouch that they sprung out of on the second day, thus forcing the pugnacious Confederates to adopt a more conservative defensive posture on the second day of the fighting. By the close of the third day of fighting, Johnston realized he could do no more good here and withdrew to Smithfield, conceding Goldsboro to Sherman. Lunch is included, but dinner is on your own.

## **Friday, March 27, 2020**

Sherman now had some 85,000 men, while Johnston's force of approximately 20,000 dictated there would be no more battles, and so we will move the two armies into cantonment areas—Johnston moving toward Raleigh, Hillsborough, and Greensboro; and Sherman pressing toward Raleigh. Sherman soon would travel to Virginia to meet with Grant and Lincoln to get final instructions for the end of combat operations and the peace to follow. Lee's surrender and the flight of the Confederate government set the stage for the surrender of Johnston and the Confederate forces under his command. First the drama of the assassination of Abraham Lincoln would play on the negotiations. That would be followed by the drafting of a peace treaty that far exceeded Sherman's authority and resulted in much hard feelings between Sherman and the Johnson Administration. Finally, a suitable surrender document was rendered and the second major Confederate army was surrendered.

Today will take us to the last shot marker, Johnston's headquarters in Hillsborough, Bennett Place, and the Company Shops Railroad Museum. There is much pathos in these final scenes, and you will sense the moment as these warriors turned to issues of peace.

Lunch is included, but dinner is on your own.

## **Saturday, March 28, 2020**

While many people have visited Appomattox and Bennett Place, the final acts in the theater took place nearly 40 miles from the convention site, the final surrender ceremony being in Greensboro. We will depart early and head to Greensboro, where our walking tour takes in many of the details of this extraordinarily historic city. From here, Jefferson Davis provided instructions for his peace commissioners before continuing his southern flight. Here Stoneman's Federal cavalry came within an hour of capturing the fleeing Confederate cabinet, and they came down from Danville.

We will visit the Greensboro History Museum and the Centre Hill Meeting House before heading to the Confederate Camp site and a special graveside stop. This is the first such tour since Bert Dunkerly finished his book on the surrender in Greensboro, and no historian knows more about what happened in and around Greensboro as the Confederacy disappeared. While there you will also surely learn of the great and important 1960 Greensboro Woolworth Lunch Counter sit-ins, where black students from North Carolina A&T refused to leave "white only" seating despite being denied service. The movement spread across the country and was one of the catalysts of the civil rights movement. Lunch is included, but dinner is on your own, or you can head for home. The program will end at the hotel between 6:30 and 7 PM.

### **About the Faculty**

**Wade Sokolosky** is a retired United States Army colonel and an expert on military operations in eastern North Carolina. We met Wade when he collaborated with Stephen Wise on our Eastern North Carolina program in 2018. He is the coauthor with Mark A. Smith of two books on this final campaign: "*No Such Army Since the Days of Julius Caesar*": *Sherman's Carolinas Campaign from Fayetteville to Averasboro*; and "*To Prepare for Sherman's Coming*": *The Battle of Wise's Crossroads, March 1865*.

**Bert Dunkerly** is a National Park Service ranger based at the Richmond National Battlefield Park. A Revolutionary War expert, he has written numerous books and pamphlets related to the both the Revolutionary War and the Civil War. His most relevant publications for this program include: *The Confederate Surrender at Greensboro*; *The Finals Days of the Army of Tennessee April 1865*; and *To the Bitter End, Appomattox, Bennett Place and the Surrenders of the Confederacy*.

### **Hotel Information**

We will base this program out of Garner, North Carolina, with the [Wingate Inn](#) (1542 Mechanical Blvd.) being our headquarters. We will not set up a block, as the best and most effective way to get a great price will be to go to [www.Trivago.com](http://www.Trivago.com). They can route you to the online company with the best rates for the dates you want to stay. The [Hampton Inn](#) is within a mile of the Wingate.

## **Transportation**

The servicing airport is Raleigh Durham (RDU). Garner is about 20 miles from RDU, and there is a large selection of ground transportation companies in addition to the standard rental car options.

## **Recommended Reading**

You will be provided with a handout upon arrival. The following books are suggested to enhance your readiness for the program. Amazon.com has a program to support non-profits IF YOU SIGN UP to support Blue and Gray Education Society (EIN 54-1720582) at [AmazonSmile](#). When you sign up there rather than the normal Amazon site, one-half of one percent of your purchase price will be provided to BGES as a donation from Amazon. This will apply not only on this purchase but others you may make at other times.

Mark A. Smith and Wade Sokolosky: [\*"No Such Army Since the Days of Julius Caesar": Sherman's Carolina's Campaign from Fayetteville to Averasboro\*](#)

Mark A. Smith and Wade Sokolosky: [\*"To Prepare for Sherman's Coming": The Battle of Wise's Forks, March 1865\*](#)

Mark Bradley: [\*The Battle of Bentonville: Last Stand in the Carolinas\*](#)

Mark Bradley: [\*This Astounding Close, The Road to Bennett Place\*](#)

Robert Dunkerly: [\*To the Bitter End: Appomattox, Bennett Place, and the Surrenders of the Confederacy\*](#)

Robert Dunkerly: [\*The Confederate Surrender at Greensboro: The Final Days of the Army of Tennessee, April 1865\*](#)

*Registration Form*  
*The Final Days, Sherman in NC*  
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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Registration includes three lunches, handouts, the academic program, support of two professional historians, and transportation by passenger van. We also will provide snacks and bottled water.

\_\_\_\_\_ Registration \$775

\_\_\_\_\_ Current BGES member \$725

\_\_\_\_\_ I am not a member but would like to join so that I can get the member's rate or I am a member who is past due to renew. Please accept my donation of \$\_\_\_\_\_ (must be \$75 or more, which is tax deductible).

\_\_\_\_\_ I am sending a deposit of \$250 per person and or memberships. Total enclosed is \$\_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_ I will pay the balance due before the event.

\_\_\_\_\_ Check enclosed

Charge my (circle one) MC VISA AMEXP Discover \$\_\_\_\_\_

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Exp: \_\_\_\_\_ CVV: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to BGES Seminars, P.O. Box 1176, Chatham, VA 24531; or fax credit card registrations to 434-432-0596. You may also register online at [www.blueandgrayeducation.org](http://www.blueandgrayeducation.org).