

# **A 2021 BGES Civil War Field University Program: To the Bitter End: North Carolina in 1865**

Presented by Wade Sokolosky

October 9-13, 2021, from Fayetteville, 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 and additional manpower 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.

**Read more on the BGES Blog: "[Tour Talk: To the Bitter End: North Carolina in 1865, with Bert Dunkerly and Wade Sokolosky](#)," published in January 2020.**

## **Itinerary**

### **Saturday, October 9, 2021**

7 PM. We'll meet at the headquarters hotel where your historian, Wade Sokolosky, 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.

You will 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—Smithfield's (SCNB) is a popular chain.

### **Sunday, October 10, 2021**

8 AM. Our early start at 8 AM will let us get to Cheraw, South Carolina, by 9:30, where the Confederates made their last stand and Sherman prepared his troops to enter the Tar Heel State. We will first stop at the Confederate defensive line along Thompson's Creek, checking out Powder Ravine. We will then discuss the skirmish for the bridge over the Great Pee Dee River and also visit the site of the pontoon crossing site of Sherman's right wing and the XX Corps. Moving away from the river, we will visit several hospital sites in the old downtown. Our three-hour sortie to Cheraw ends with a drive by of Sherman's

headquarters at the John Craig House and O. O. Howard's headquarters at the Enfield House and lunch in town. Hopefully, we will get in before church lets out.

Our afternoon travels will bring the rest of the Union force into North Carolina, and we start at Chesterfield, South Carolina, where we will see additional Confederate fortifications still along the extended length of Thompson's Creek. Here, Confederates would potentially contest other elements of the XX Corps; there actually is firing at the Chesterfield Court House, and Wade will describe that action. While there, we will see that Sherman showed a preference for headquarters owned by the Craig Clan—this one in town was owned by W. E. Craig. We will then have a photo op at the Chesterfield County Court House, site of the first secession meeting in South Carolina. We then head over to Mount Croghan to march with the Federal XIV Corps into North Carolina and pick up an unexpected cavalry engagement at Phillips Crossroads near Wadesboro—here the Confederate cavalry under Joe Wheeler hit the unsuspecting Judson Kilpatrick's disordered force. The remainder of the day takes us through Aberdeen, North Carolina, to see the Malcolm Blue House and Bethesda Presbyterian Church, as we follow Kilpatrick's route to what would end up being the battle of Monroe's Crossroads.

We should end the day by 6:30 so you can get dinner on your own. Lunch is included.

## **Monday, October 11, 2021**

A major reason to come on this tour is our access to Fort Bragg Military Reservation and the Monroe's Crossroads Battlefield. We have tentative approval to visit the site this morning, as it is on an active ordnance range and one of America's most important military installations (Home of the Green Beret and the 82nd Airborne Division). The Army has extensively examined and indexed the battlefield, and you will be fortunate to meet one of the leaders of this effort, Mr. Bill Kern. Bill and Wade will share the interpretative duties of the day, as Kilpatrick gets licked and is literally caught with his britches down.

*Please note that real-life military requirements could shut down our access to the site and/or the base real time as our modern warriors prepare for their mission. If this happens, we have a B plan in downtown Fayetteville. Either way, you will have a wonderful treat.*

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. We will have lunch there and then 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, Oak Grove, which served as a field hospital. The site, closed to the public, will be open to you.

We will return to the hotel by 6 PM, where you can get dinner on your own. Lunch is included.

## **Tuesday, October 12, 2021**

Following the encounter at Averasboro, Johnston was able to build off the limited success he achieved to prepare to hit Sherman in a major engagement such as he had force left to fight with. We will start today taking an hour to get to Newton's Grove, following in Sherman's footsteps as he moved toward Goldsboro, only to find the Confederates waiting for him. Wade Hampton fights an effective delaying action as Johnston prepares to receive Sherman assault. We will stop at Cole Plantation and see the Confederate trenches built to help shield Johnston's sparse force. We will discuss the Union attack and then highlight the Confederates major charge seeking to break the Federal force. We will finish the morning discussing General Morgan's heroic stand.

Following a great buffet lunch at Eddie's BBQ, the afternoon will be devoted to the battle of Bentonville. Even as desperate as this engagement was for the Confederates, there will be much to see and discuss over the balance of the day.

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. 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. We will be back by a quarter past 6.

### **Wednesday, October 13, 2021**

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 tendered and the second major Confederate army was surrendered.

Today will take us to the last shot marker, Johnston's headquarters in Hillsborough and Bennett Place. 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. We will be back at the hotel by 5:30 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*.

### **Hotel Information**

We will base this program out of Fayetteville, North Carolina. The hotel will be announced by August 18<sup>th</sup> and added to this form shortly after that.

### **Transportation**

The servicing airport is Fayetteville (FAY), but Raleigh Durham (RDU) is the closest major airport, 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\*](#)

Eric Wittenberg: [\*The Battle of Monroe's Crossroads: The Civil War's Last Campaign\*](#)

**Registration Form**  
**To the Bitter End: North Carolina in 1865**  
**A 2021 BGES Civil War Field University**  
**Program**

With Wade Sokolosky

October 9-13, 2021, from Fayetteville, NC

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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

Registration includes four lunches, handouts, the academic program, support of a professional historian, and transportation by passenger van or bus. We also will provide snacks and bottled water.

Registration \$875

Current BGES member \$799

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 \$\_\_\_\_\_.

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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).