

Nicholas Bellantoni to speak at April Meeting of Friends of Fort Trumbull



Welcoming back old friends is always a delight. Therefore, the members of the Friends of Fort Trumbull, who remember the first presentation of Nicholas Bellantoni, some years ago, will affirm what an exciting night that attendees can expect.

On April 26, 2012, at 7 p.m., at the Fort Conference Center at 90 Walbach Street, New London, CT, Dr. Bellantoni, the Connecticut State Archaeologist, will return to kick-off the 2012 program series of the Friends of Fort Trumbull on Connecticut in the Civil War. His topic will be the mysteries surrounding the *Hunley*, a confederate ship, which became the first submarine ever to sink an enemy ship—the Union's *USS Housatonic*. Stealthily, on the evening of Feb. 17, 1864, the *Hunley* rammed her spar torpedo into the hull of the *Housatonic*. Then, she immediately surfaced to signal to her comrades a successful mission. Minutes later, she vanished into the sea with all hands onboard. What caused her disappearance? Why had she suddenly sunk? These questions have remained unanswered until 2002, when archaeologists uncovered the *Hunley* on the seabed off Charleston Harbor.

On April 21, 2002, during the excavation of the interior of the submarine, the scientists found on board an ID tag of Ezra Chamberlain, a union soldier from Killingly, Connecticut. The discovery of this artifact from a Connecticut Yankee leads to many more unanswered questions. Why would a Union ID Tag be found in a confederate Submarine? Theories abound. Was it a souvenir taken from Chamberlain's body during the battle of Fort Wagner? Was Chamberlain a defector to the Confederate cause? Was he a spy sent to disrupt the *Hunley's*

mission? Was he a prisoner of war, forced to man the *Hunley*? These are the fascinating questions which Dr. Bellantoni will discuss.

After the ship was discovered, the State of South Carolina formed the *Hunley* Commission to acquire, recover, and preserve the H.L.*Hunley* submarine for public display. One of their goals was to conserve one of the greatest, most sought-after artifacts in the history of naval warfare. More information is available at www.hunley.org.

Senator Glenn McConnell, Chairman of the Hunley Commission, poetically expressed the importance of this Union Soldier's artifact. He said, "When you actually see Ezra Chamberlain's ID Tag, it speaks to you in an extremely emotional way about the human side of a tragic time of war in our nation's history. When you think of this artifact's travels from Connecticut to a South Carolina battlefield, and ultimately lay to rest for almost 140 years at the bottom of the sea, the saga that the ID Tag represents is overwhelming".

In addition to being the Connecticut State Archaeologist, Dr. Bellantoni also teaches archaeology at the University of Connecticut in Storrs, where he is a very popular lecturer. One of his colleagues was quoted as saying, "People come to Nick's classes who aren't signed up for it and stand in the doorways and sit in the aisles". That comment is a harbinger of what an entertaining and informative evening awaits those who attend the April presentation.

The program is open to the public and new members are always welcome. For more information visit our website at www.fortfriends.org.