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# The Cape Fear Civil War Round Table

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## A Flag's Journey: The Flag of the Beaufort Plow Boys

by **Edward Harding** and **Terry W. Tersigni**

In August 1861, the company known as the Beaufort Plow Boys was raised by Captain Henry Harding. The unit became Company B, of the 61st Regiment North Carolina Troops. A special flag was made for the new company from Beaufort County by the ladies of Chocowinity, North Carolina. Miss Julia Harding, sister of Captain Harding, Miss Julia Wilson, Miss Sarah Crawford, Miss Olivia Patrick, Miss Julia Hill, Miss Hattie Perry, and Miss Mary Winfield were all responsible for its creation.

The flag's overall size was 33  $\hat{A}$ <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches by 67 inches. The flag was designed with a field of three horizontal bars; red, white and red. It was edged on three sides with white fringe that was 1 inch deep.



The red bars were made from cotton. The white bar was comprised of cotton flannel. The fringe was made of silk. The canton was dark blue. It was 22  $\hat{A}$ <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> inches on the staff by 23  $\hat{A}$ <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches on the fly. Thirteen stars were added with each having points 3  $\hat{A}$ <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches in diameter. Eight of the stars were set in a circle 16  $\hat{A}$ <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> inches in diameter surrounding a single center star. The

remaining four stars were placed in each corner of the cotton cambric material. The name of the company, "Beaufort Plow Boys," was added to the flag in the red bars with each white block letter being 4" high.

Upon the completion of the flag, a ceremony was held in November 1861, at the home of Reverend Nicolas Collin Hughes in Chocowinity, North Carolina. The flag was presented to the company by Miss Mary Winfield on the piazza of Reverend Hughes' home.

On March 15, 1862, the Union forces under the command of General Ambrose E. Burnside set their sights on the town of New Bern, North Carolina. The Ninth New Jersey Volunteers, also known as "The Jersey Muskrats," under the command of Captain James Stewart, Jr. from Warren County, N.J., held the extreme left of the line that faced the elaborate earthworks of Colonel Zebulon Vance's 26th North Carolina Mountaineers. Colonel Vance's redoubt was directly in front of Stewart's Company H and had two field pieces within the works. Captain Stewart's company was comprised of about 130 troops including Private Spencer A. Hagaman and Sergeant John W.O. Creveling. Directly facing the troops from New Jersey were the Beaufort Plow Boys under the command of Captain Harding. Harding had been a teacher prior to his enlistment. Henry Harding was the grandson of Israel Harding who served as a Sergeant and later as a Major in General Nathaniel Green's Army during the American Revolution.

During the battle, Captain Stewart found himself to be the marked target for a Confederate marksman. Captain James Stewart decided to "fix his field glasses and find the Confederate marksman "who had

just put a bullet through his new eighteen dollar high-crowned slouch hat." After locating his adversary, Stewart used his "Davy Crockett" techniques and placed his hat on the muzzle of his weapon. He elevated his rifle a foot or two above where he was laying on the ground. His ploy deceived the Confederate sharpshooter. It caused him to fire and expose the upper half of his body. Before the sharpshooter could lower his still smoking musket or withdraw from the open port-hole where he was positioned, Captain Stewart shot his rival through the head whereby ending the exchange.

An hour or so after the encounter, Stewart and his company charged and captured the Confederate stronghold. After the remaining Confederate troops fled the earthworks, Captain Stewart decided to try and find the sharpshooter who had been his adversary during the battle. To his horror and amazement, he found his opponent to be Captain William P. Martin. Captain Martin was his boyhood friend from his hometown of Washington, New Jersey. Still shaken from the discovery of his fallen companion, Captain Stewart reformed his company and began the pursuit of the retreating Beaufort Plow Boys for two miles into the town of New Bern.

The following day, Stewart decided to retrace his steps on the blood-stained battlefield to the redoubt. During the reconnaissance, Sergeant David C. Bradford, from New Brunswick, New Jersey, recovered the flag of the Plow Boys. Just prior to their retreat, Second Lieutenant William Stevenson "with his pocket knife, while running up the hill from the works cut the cord that bound the flag to its staff and hurriedly placed it in the folds of his knapsack." During their retreat, the Plow Boys were "so hard pressed that they were compelled to throw off all encumbrances except their guns to escape alive." Thus, the flag of the Beaufort Plow Boys had been lost.

In the report given by Lieutenant Colonel Charles A. Heckman, of the Ninth New Jersey Volunteers, he stated, "We charged, and under difficulties (without securing a shot) planted our colors on two redoubts, capturing two officers and several privates, and a rebel flag with the inscription, Beaufort Plow Boys. It is in a good state of preservation, and will be kept by the Ninth, if agreeable to you."

Captain Stewart carried the captured flag with him till the end of the war. He brought it back to New Jersey where it was placed in a vault at Trenton, N.J. The flag remained there for forty years.

On March 1, 1904, a bill appropriating the sum of five thousand dollars for the purpose of erecting and dedicating a monument in memory of the Ninth New Jersey Regiment was introduced by Senator William J. Bradley of Camden County, New Jersey. It was unanimously passed by both Houses and signed by Governor Franklin Murphy. The granite monument was erected at New Bern National Cemetery in honor of the Ninth New Jersey Volunteers. Fifty-three members from that regiment are interred near the monument. In addition, funds were allocated to locate and transport the surviving veterans of the Ninth New Jersey to New Bern so they could be present at the dedication. In a gesture of good will, approval by the New Jersey State Legislature was given to return the captured flag to the surviving members of the Beaufort Plow Boys.

Upon the evening of their arrival at New Bern on May 17, a public reception was held for the visitors from New Jersey. The people of New Bern hosted a banquet in the beautiful Court House. The flag of the Beaufort Plow Boys was returned by the Hon. J. Boyd Avis who represented New Jersey Governor E.C. Stokes. The flag was handed to Governor Glenn of North Carolina amidst a scene of wild enthusiasm from both Northerners and Southerners alike who packed the building. The opening address was delivered by the Hon. M. D. W. Stevenson, of New Bern, a Confederate veteran and

member of the New Bern Camp No. 1162, U.C.V. He was introduced by New Bern Camp chairman J.J. Wolfenden.

On the part of himself, his comrades and his townspeople, Mr. Stevenson warmly welcomed the representatives of the great State of New Jersey, survivors of their Ninth New Jersey Regiment, and their friends. He referred to the fact that he was present at the Battle of New Bern when the town was taken by General Burnside and his troops. He stated that "the long period since the war has changed and softened all feelings." Mr. Stevenson called attention to the "beautiful ladies and gallant men of the South and the New Bern Camp of Confederate Veterans who had come to welcome New Jersey's representatives and soldiers."

He referred to the Spanish-American War commenting "we marched shoulder to shoulder President Roosevelt and General Joe Wheeler were together at San Juan and Ensign Bagley, a North Carolina boy gave his life for his country on a ship in one of the harbors of Cuba."

He spoke of the gallant Fitzhugh Lee, the nephew of the illustrious Robert E. Lee, who helped to reunite the fractured country.

Stevenson continued,

"there is now no part of this great country more true, loyal or devoted, than the South, and in case of necessity, it would respond to the proper call with its brains, blood and treasure to defend, protect and preserve it from all enemies and ever assist to build up and make greater this land of freedom. More than forty years ago some of the New Jersey boys came here in time of war. The Southern boys did not want them, and tried to keep them away, but now they come in time of sweet peace, on a noble mission, sent by a great State of New Jersey to do honor to the memory of their comrades who have passed over the river. It gives me great pleasure to welcome the representatives of the State of New Jersey, survivors of the Ninth Regiment and their friends, and to take full charge of the city."

The Hon. John Boyd Avis, Speaker of the New Jersey House of Assembly, was introduced next. His admirable address was frequently applauded. He presented the flag of the Beaufort Plow to North Carolina Governor Glenn. Speaker Avis related,

"Governor Glenn, ladies and gentlemen representing the Governor of the State of New Jersey, I desire to express my sincere thanks, for the hearty and enthusiastic welcome that we have received from the people of North Carolina, not only in New Bern, but ever since we crossed the State line. I regret that Governor Stokes is not here to speak to you tonight, but I am advised by telegram that he will surely be with us tomorrow. The legions of Jerseymen are again invading the State of North Carolina. Not, thank God, in a warlike spirit; not as a hostile army, marching to the tune of martial music; not with a feeling of enmity, for we are enemies no longer. No, Jerseymen and Jerseywomen invade your soil tonight we are friends, brothers and sisters, on a peaceful mission; to unveil a monument in the memory of our illustrious dead; to those who loved their country and its cause, and who gave up their lives in its service. North Carolina and New Jersey have between them common bonds of fellowship and unity. Both States were of the original thirteen colonies, who threw off the yoke of British oppression, and both had representatives in the Continental Congress on that memorable day when the Declaration of Independence was signed, and proclaimed to all people, declaring that these United States are and of right ought to be free and independent. The soldiers of our States stood shoulder to shoulder in the struggle that followed, and fought valiantly to maintain the

principles of that declaration. After the Revolution all went well between the two States for many years; the people prospered; business increased, and the Nation became a power in the world. Eventually, the North and South differed in their construction of our Constitution; the South declaring that each State was a sovereign and independent unit; the North maintaining that we were a union of States, one and inseparable. These opinions were honest ones on both sides, and finally led to the secession of the Southern States from the Union. Then, instead of being allies, instead of sympathizing with each other's views, instead of fighting shoulder to shoulder, we find the men of New Jersey and those of North Carolina fighting face to face, each bent upon the destruction of the other, and the maintenance of their views by force. Would to God that day had never come, and may the day be now past when the deeds of devotion and valor in that great war shall be spoken of as Northern prowess and determination, or Southern bravery, but may we hereafter speak of the heroism and courage of American soldiers, fighting for ideas, each believing themselves to be right, as their training and surroundings gave them the power to see and distinguish. The call came from Lincoln in the North; a call for seventy-five thousand volunteers, and the answer came. We came coming, Father Abraham, three hundred thousand strong. New Jersey's boys donned the blue and responded to the call in large numbers; some joined the Ninth New Jersey, and in the early part of the year 1862, under the command of General Burnside, found themselves on this battlefield, face to face with soldiers of North Carolina, who in their suits of gray had loyally responded to your Confederacy. The battle was fought, and the boys in blue gained a victory; not a victory cheaply won, however, for they were fighting men of their own Nation, of their own blood, and of equal bravery. At toll call, after the battle, it was found that about eighty of the Ninth New Jersey had answered their last roll call, and most of these found a final resting place on the battlefield in this vicinity. The great Civil War came to an end, and again peace reigns over this land of ours. We have no apologies to make, for we believe we were right, but the old differences between North Carolina and New Jersey are matters of history now. The people of these two great States, parted by a difference of opinion and the war, are once more shoulder to shoulder as in the early days, never to separate, and willing and glad to defend the honor and integrity of our united country. There is no enmity now; there can be no enmity at the grave, and tomorrow the soldiers of the North and the soldiers of the South will meet in harmony, to do honor to the dead who died in the discharge of their duty. When Grant, on that memorable day, said "Let there be peace," there no longer remained a reason for estrangement between the two sections, and this sentiment has grown until tonight there are no sections, but a re-united country, whose people have but one aim; one object, and one intention, to make it the greatest, noblest and best in the world, and one glad, the Stars and Stripes, which we all love, and which we are all willing to serve. The period of sectional feeling has passed. The soldier and citizen of the South is as loyal to the flag now as the soldier and citizen of the North. The good faith of the reconciliation is attested by the loyalty of many, who during the war fought with the South. In our recent difficulty with Spain, there were no more loyal defenders of the flag than Lee, who fought with Shafter at Santiago, and Wheeler, who climbed the hills of San Juan with Roosevelt. We come to you, to-night, with words of congratulations, and feelings of friendship and love. The North has forgiven and forgotten all; across the chasm of the war we stretch our hands and grasp you as brothers, grateful and glad that the time of strife is over, and that peace reigns between us now and always. As an evidence of the good will and esteem of the people of our State, and in accordance with a resolution adopted at the last session of our Legislature, of which Legislature I was a member, I present to you, or rather I return to you, representing the people of North Carolina to whom it belongs, the flag of the Beaufort Plow Boys, taken from them in battle by the soldiers of New Jersey."

After his speech, Speaker Avis unfurled the flag and presented it to Governor Glenn. The Sons and Daughters of the Confederacy immediately broke into an enthusiastic and long applause. Governor

Glenn then clasped the hands of Representative Avis with the unfurled flag gently swaying on the arm of the Governor.

Upon receiving the flag, Governor Glenn said:

"The Honorable John Boyd Avis, representative of His Excellency Edward C. Stokes, Governor of New Jersey, R. Heber Breintnall, Adjutant General of New Jersey, survivors of the Ninth Regiment, ladies and gentlemen of New Jersey and of North Carolina: It is with a feeling of profound pleasure and a becoming sense of the significance of the occasion upon which we are here met, that I may greet you. The representative of one great State of the Union and the valorous soldiers of that State imbued with a magnanimous heroic spirit, fulfilling the mandate of the Legislature of their State, have come to us of North Carolina upon a mission of love and peace. To dedicate a monument to their beloved dead, and to return to us this beautiful flag consecrated by the blood of the sons of our State who died in its defense. As the Chief Executive of this State, I desire to express my thanks and the thanks of all its citizens for this evidence of the friendship which tends to bind closer the people of the two states. The reconciliation between us is complete, the wounds of the war are healed, yea, its scars even are removed, and as brothers and sisters of this great Republic, we here dedicate ourselves to advance its material interests and to increase its power for good among the nations of the earth. The lady who helped make this flag, and who presented it to Captain Harding of the Beaufort Plow Boys Company, has come to this city from Columbia, South Carolina, to receive it from me, and to present it to Captain Harding, to whom she first presented it forty-four years ago; and tomorrow evening the presentation will take place in this Court House. Now as so many of you are anxious to go to the rooms of the Daughters of the Confederacy and the headquarters of Camp No. 1162, United Confederate Veterans, where our New Jersey friends will be entertained, and where the survivors of the Ninth Regiment will present a National flag to the Confederate Veterans, these exercises here will close."

Major (Captain) Henry Harding chose not to attend the ceremony because he felt, "on account that cattle, furniture, and many precious items were stolen by those damned Yankees, they may as well keep the flag."

Representing Major Harding was his son, Fordyce Cunninggim Harding who accepted the flag on behalf of his father.

In addition to Mrs. Mary Winfield Joyner who had traveled from Columbia, South Carolina for the ceremony, a number of the other ladies who had been instrumental in the making of the flag were in attendance as well.

In his acceptance speech, Mr. Harding stated,

"On behalf of the survivors of the Beaufort Plow Boys, permit me to express the deepest feelings of love and veneration for the battle flag you have placed in my hands tonight, and to assure you that it is received with great pleasure. As the son of the Captain of that heroic company, the Beaufort Plow Boys, who fought in the gallant defense of your city by the sea, I accept this flag as the emblem of their devotion to their country's cause. I am glad that I am the son of a Confederate veteran. I am glad that I am an American citizen, and I am glad that after the wild whirlwind of battle is ended, peace reigns supreme. Forty-three years ago this honored flag was waving in the defense of your beautiful city, but in the raging battle, torn by shot and shell and baptized in blood, it was wrested by the force of superior numbers from the brave hands that bore it and through the ever-changing vicissitudes of war found its way into the State of New Jersey. But today peace smiles upon our great united country, and

through the softening influence of many intervening years the honored flag finds its way "back to home again." While we rejoice in a reunited country and welcome the return to the breast of every American citizen that feeling of brotherly love and friendship which prompts the return of the flag, yet we love to think of the Plow Boys that flag represented in the days gone by, and we will continue to love and honor the heroic bravery of those boys in gray as long as time shall last."

In 1952, through the generosity of Fordyce C. Harding, the flag was donated to the high school in Chocowinity, North Carolina where it remained on display for nearly 20 years. After the donation of the flag to the school, the Senior Class raised money and donated a beautiful mahogany frame specially built for the banner. During a presentation ceremony, Milford Hill, President of the Senior Class presented the framed flag to the school. Principal H.B. Mayo accepted the old relic on behalf of the school and it remained on display until 1970. At that time the flag was sent to the North Carolina Museum of History in Raleigh to be displayed so all North Carolinians could view the sacred and battle worn flag where it remains today. Unfortunately, the reverse side of the flag is shown instead of the front side which bears the name of the company.

The two Captains in this story, Henry Harding and James Stewart, Jr., both had notable ancestry and were distinguished citizens after the War.

Captain Harding was later promoted to Major of the N.C. 61st Regiment and after the war served in the North Carolina Legislature. He also served as Register of Deeds in Pitt County, N.C., as Superintendent of the Pitt County Board of Education, and was also a Justice of the Peace. His father was a Captain in the N.C. Militia from 1812-1815 and his grandfather was a Major under General Nathaniel Greene during the American Revolution.

Captain James Stewart, Jr. rose to the rank of General due to his superior leadership during his military career. He was the son of James Stewart, Sr. Upon completion of his military career, Stewart served as Chief of Police for the City of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. His grandfather, Lieutenant Thomas Stewart also served in the American Revolution. The town of Stewartsville, in Warren County, New Jersey was named in his honor. Lieutenant Stewart was assigned to Valley Forge and eventually became one of General George Washington's secretaries. Washington attended Stewart's wedding and upon the completion of his military service became one of New Jersey's first Civil Engineers and surveyed most of the farms in Warren County.

Colonel Zebulon Vance of the 26th North Carolina "Plow Boys" served as Governor of North Carolina both before and after the war. He became a famous trial attorney after the war. One of his defendants, Tom Dula, became the inspiration for the folk ballad Tom Dooley.

Lieutenant Charles A. Heckman eventually became a general in the Union Army. General Heckman was captured during the Battle of Proctor's Creek. He was returned to duty after a prisoner exchange. Following the war, Charles Heckman returned to his hometown of Phillipsburg, NJ. and worked for the railroad and became a member of the Phillipsburg Board of Education. A Street in that town is named in his honor. Lieutenant William Stevenson was promoted to the rank of captain with the Beaufort Plow Boys on September 5, 1862. He was captured at Fort Harrison, Virginia on September 30, 1864. Lt. Stevenson was first confined in the Old Capital Prison in Washington, D.C. William Stevenson was transferred to Fort Delaware, Delaware where he was released on June 16, 1865, after signing the Oath of Allegiance. Captain Stevenson returned to North Carolina after the war. He died at the age of 82 on July 12, 1922. He is buried in Oakdale Cemetery in New Hanover County, North Carolina. Sergeant John W. O.Creveling returned home to Broadway, N.J. after his discharge. He worked as a boatman on

the Morris Canal before settling in Ringgold County, Iowa. Sergeant David C. Bradford, the soldier who retrieved the flag on the battlefield, was captured and released later in the war. He returned to New Jersey and died on July 11, 1897. He is buried in the Juliustown Cemetery in Burlington County, NJ. Private Spencer Alpaugh Hagaman, of the "Jersey Muskrats," was the great grandson of Sergeant Abraham Hagaman (1751-1836), a Revolutionary War Veteran who was at Sandy Hook, N.J. during the British invasion of Long Island, N.Y. Spencer Hagaman's brother, William H. Hagaman was a Civil War Veteran as well. Private Spencer A. Hagaman was hospitalized in the New Bern Academy Hospital after the Battle of New Bern. He died there about one month after the battle on April 17, 1862. He was originally buried in Cedar Grove Cemetery in New Bern. He remained there from 1862 until 1867 when he was reinterred in New Bern National Cemetery near the Ninth New Jersey Monument.

Captain William P. Martin of the 26th North Carolina has his name enshrined on the battle monument honoring his regiment. The monument is located close to where he died in battle.

***The information in this story was written and compiled by Edward Harding and Terry W. Tersigni, December 2009.***

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