



LOT 157

CONFEDERATE FLAG FROM THE CSS ALABAMA

The flag, composed primarily of 9 pieces of wool bunting roughly stitched together with cotton and linen thread, with a field of white and a canton of red with blue saltire emblazoned with 13 white cotton stars applied to both sides of the flag; with linen/cotton hoist. Bunting is thin, with some scattered stains, including reddish brown stains, possibly blood, and diffuse overall staining possibly due to smoke exposure. Light insect holing.

Measuring 39 ½ inches (101 cm) at the hoist by 64 ½ inches (164 cm) at the fly.

ESTIMATE 200,000 - 400,000 USD

PROVENANCE

Given to Hugh Rowland Beaver in 1864. Inherited by his brother, Robert Atwood Beaver, and then by direct descent to the present owner.

CATALOGUE NOTE

Rare Second National Confederate Flag from the *CSS Alabama*, held by family tradition to be the flag struck during the 19 June 1864 battle with the *USS Kearsarge*.

On 21 December 1863, the *CSS Alabama* sailed into Singapore, worn down from 16 months at sea, with her copper bottom coming apart in pieces and her boilers encrusted with mineral residue. Her captain, Raphael Semmes, knew that she needed repairwork desperately and perhaps, knew that she was past her prime; yet the naval commerce raider was the pride of the Confederacy, the terror of Union merchants, the most frustrating menace faced by the United States Navy, and a legend throughout the world.

Built by John Laird and Sons of Birkenhead, England, the *Alabama* was commissioned as a Confederate naval cruiser on 24 August 1862 and manned with 120 crewmen, mostly British, and 24 officers, most coming directly from the *CSS Sumter* with Semmes. By the time she stopped in Singapore, the *Alabama* had burned 47 prizes, captured and released nine on bond, and despite some of the wild rumors circulating in the American states, claimed only two enemy lives, both taken in the sea battle with the US cruiser *Hatteras* in early 1863. Due to the *Alabama's* predations, later that year 18 US warships were pulled from the blockade to hunt the lone *Alabama*; northern marine insurance companies doubled and tripled their war-time rates to unsustainable percentages; and the New York Chamber of Commerce sent resolution after resolution to the Navy, demanding to know why the *Alabama* remained on the seas.

In Singapore, the crowds that gathered to see the *Alabama* and her (in)famous captain were formed "by all nations of the world" from England to China to New Zealand. The most welcome of these spectators was Hugh Rowland Beaver of Cumming, Beaver and Co., described by Semmes as "a clever English merchant [who] came on board, and offered to facilitate us all in his power in the way of procuring supplies." (Semmes, *Memoirs of Service Afloat, During the War Between States*, 1869, p. 714). Fifth Lieutenant Arthur Sinclair further details Mr. Beaver's generosity: "Nothing was left undone for our amusement and comfort that could suggest itself. Our ship's affairs were in his able hands; and through him the labours of our industrious paymasters were reduced to a minimum, and all the intricacies of bargain and trade carried out. To the officers on pleasure bound he was adviser and guide ... his home was the haven where our rest and refreshment awaited us. Indeed we could not very well have dispersed with his care ..." (Sinclair, *Two Years on the Alabama*, 1895, pp. 199-200)

In friendship and gratitude for Mr. Beaver's hospitality during the *Alabama's* three day stay in Singapore, he was given the present flag, which has descended in his family and according to family tradition, is the "Stainless Banner" struck by Captain Semmes to signal his surrender to the *USS Kearsarge* on 19 June 1864.

The second national flag, known as the Stainless Banner for its field of white, was established by the Confederate Congress on 1 May 1863, replacing the original flag, known as the Stars and Bars. On May 26 or 28, the Navy specified: "The flag to be white, the length one and a half times the width of the flag, with the union to be square,



Fig. 1

Jean Baptiste Henri Durand-Brager the *Kearsarge* and the *Alabama*, 1865. courtesy of The Union League Club, New York

of two-thirds the width of the flag, having a ground red, thereon a broad saltier [sic] of blue, to the union as 1:4 4/5, bordered with white mullets, or five pointed stars ... corresponding in number to that of the Confederate States."

But news from home was inconsistent and often slow in reaching the *Alabama*, so it was not until late fall that the vessel flew their new ensign. On 11 November, the flag was raised, ostensibly for the first time, before the *Alabama* chased and burned the *USS Contest*. Just after their subsequent visit to Singapore, Sinclair notes that it is still "a strange flag to these skippers, as well as to the rest of our recent visitors; for we had only made and bent it since reaching the East and learning of the change" (Sinclair, p. 210). The crude stitching and patchwork quality of the present flag almost certainly attest to its manufacture on board of the *Alabama*, and as Sinclair states, they made their first white flag while traveling in the East.

On 19 June 1864, the sky above the port of Cherbourg, France was only slightly overcast, the sea calm, and one can imagine the white ensign waving in a gentle breeze. The *Alabama* flew the Confederate flag as she went to meet the *Kearsarge*, but Semmes reported that shortly into the 70-minute battle, "our spanker-gaff was shot away, and our ensign came down by the run. This was immediately replaced by another at the mizzen-masthead" (Semmes, p. 757). A short while later, Semmes ordered this new flag struck and thus the *Alabama* surrendered and disappeared beneath the water, ending her 22 long months at sea.

Interestingly, the *Kearsarge* reportedly fired five shots after the flag came down. Sinclair recalls that "The *Kearsarge* evidently failed to discover at once our surrender, for she continued to fire after our colors were struck. Perhaps from the difficulty of noting the absence of a flag with so much white in it, in the powder smoke" (Sinclair, p. 259).

Employing two of his best swimmers, Semmes salvaged his diary and ship-papers from the wreck, but otherwise most everything was lost, including Semmes's sword and the ensigns in the flag locker. (The *Alabama* had not only carried her own flags —English and US colors to deceive enemy ships, and Confederate colors, raised once the enemy was in closer range —but also kept the flags of her prizes.)

Semmes and 40 of his men were rescued from the water by the *Deerhound*, an English steam yacht owned by John Lancaster and captained by Evan Parry Jones. The yacht carried them to neutral London, where Semmes spent time with his friends, the Tremletts, and Sinclair stayed with the ever generous Mr. Beaver, who returned to London shortly after the *Alabama*'s sinking, ahead of his marriage to Mary Robins on 12 July 1864.

According to the story passed down by his descendants, it was during that later stay that Mr. Beaver was given the present flag. Sir Hugh Beaver, a cousin to Mr. Hugh Rowland Beaver and a significant industrialist later involved with Britain's post-WWII re-growth, reported in 1928 that the flag was saved from the wreckage, and that Semmes himself "presented [it] to Rowland Beaver in return for his hospitality in Singapore. The flag still exists, probably the only tangible relic of one of the great raiders in naval history" (*Transactions of the Angelsey Antiquarian Society and Field Club*, 1928, p. 59).

In fact, there are other surviving, tangible relics. A preliminary survey of extant Second National flags associated with the *Alabama* follows:

Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama. The silk presentation flag given to Semmes by Lady Dehogton after the *Alabama's* defeat, donated by Raphael Semmes III in 1929.

Bo Kaap Museum, Cape Town, South Africa. Purportedly given to a merchant, Mr. Anderson, during the *Alabama's* second visit to Cape Town, and donated by William Runciman in the 1920's.

Tennessee State Museum, Nashville, Tennessee.

The present flag, privately owned by Mr. Beaver's descendants in England, was previously unknown.