

FLAGS of WAR

This article was written for the Heritage Library magazine.....I thought members of the Lowcountry Round Table might be interested in the history of the flags of the War Between the States.....

The battle of Port Royal took place on November 7, 1861. As battles go, especially in the War Between the States, it could be described as a minor battle with monumental consequences:

- Subsequent to the capture of the Fort Walker and Fort Beauregard, the Union forces occupied Beaufort and Hilton Head Island.
- The occupation then moved northward and expanded up to Charleston, resulting in the siege of Charleston, which continued until the last days of the war.
- The South Atlantic Blockading Squadron was created and directed naval operations against the coast from North Carolina to Florida.
- Extensive works were set up at Port Royal Sound and Hilton Head for maintaining the fleet, including coaling, provisioning, and repair facilities.
- The battle was the beginning of freedom for the slaves. Port Royal and the fall of Hilton Head are considered by many to be the single greatest event on the road to emancipation.
- The town of Mitchellville was created for the escaped slaves and was developed as an actual town, most likely the first of such in the South.

One of the great things about the study of the War Between the States is that there is so much that is known and yet there is so much to know. This is especially true in the Low country. It is with this thought in mind that members of the Lowcountry Civil War Round Table planned a major event with a focus on the battle of Port Royal as part of last year's Sesquicentennial Commemoration.

Last year the Coastal Discovery Museum at Honey Horn Plantation asked me to do a painting for a poster to commemorate the battle of Port Royal. They also asked me to paint an image that could be displayed on commemorative items. I

choose the flags that were flown the day of the battle together with an outline of the Union flag, ship the SS Wabash. I was unable to find a photograph taken during the battle (it only lasted about one and a half hours). That does not mean that one does not exist because new artifacts are constantly being discovered.....so I had to create the painting from photographs of ships and prints made by artists at the time for newspaper articles. I have a wonderful collection of Currier and Ives prints of various scenes in the war in the style of the mid-nineteenth century.

This painting has been donated to the Museum and is part of their permanent collection.

For the commemorative image I chose to show the Union naval ensign which is the Union flag of 1861 with 34 stars representing the number of states in the union in 1860-61. President Lincoln refused to remove the stars of the seceding states for symbolic reasons. The Confederate states chose to create a flag that displayed the number of states that had seceded. This flag changed many times as more states joined the Confederacy and later to distinguish it from the flag of the Union States.

It was therefore important for me to determine the exact flags that flew on November 7, 1861.

The image shows what is known as First National flag with eleven stars and was flown from July 2, 1861 to November 28, 1861.

The flag of the state of South Carolina dates back to 1765. It had a blue flag bearing three white crescents. The Palmetto tree was added in 1861 to honor Moultrie's heroic defense of the palmetto log fort on Sullivan's island against the

the attack by the British fleet in 1776. On January 18, 1861 the newly seceded state decided to adopt a modification of the existing flag with an upward facing crescent and a simple white palmetto tree on the blue background.

When South Carolina seceded from the union in December 20, 1860, she was followed by six other states: Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas. The first flag that flew over the new Confederate capital in Montgomery, Alabama has seven stars representing the first seven.

FIRST NATIONAL FLAG



This is the first national flag of the Confederacy and flew March 4, 1861 – May 21, 1861 and is thought to have been designed by Polish artist, Nicola Marschall.

As more states entered the Confederacy, more stars were added...the next states were Virginia and Arkansas, and this became the First national flag with 9 stars. The next two States were North Carolina and Tennessee that became 11 stars. Eventually, a total of 13 stars would be shown on the flag, reflecting the Confederacy's claims to have admitted Kentucky and Missouri.



May. 21, 1861 – July. 2, 1861.



July. 2, 1861 – Nov. 28, 1861.



Nov. 28, 1861 - May 26, 1863.

The design of the flag was based on the symbolism of the flag of the United States. The political intent was to validate the concept that it was the seceding states that faithfully held to the principles of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution created by the founding fathers. This flag was known as the Stars and Bars

The symbolism however, did not work on the battlefield. The similarities of color and design did not differentiate it clearly from the Stars and Stripes of the Union. During the first major battle of the war at first Manassas (July 21, 1861) great confusion over the flags resulted in unnecessary casualties on the battlefield. Following the battle, General P.G.T. Beauregard demanded a new flag and ordered that the official battle flag of his armies to be known as the "Battle Flag".....also known as the Southern Cross, the Battle Flag was officially made part of the National Flag of the Confederacy on May 1, 1863.



SECOND NATIONAL FLAG - THE STAINLESS BANNER"



May 26, 1863 – March 4, 1865

By May of 1863 a new design was embraced. This flag was pure white with the battle flag prominently displayed in the upper left corner. It was named the "stainless banner" to indicate the purity of the southern struggle for independence. However, the rectangular shape coupled with the use of heavy cotton made the flag hang in such a way as to almost hide the Confederate flag in the upper corner. It was easily mistaken for a white flag of surrender especially when the air was calm and the flag hung limp in no wind. This had the effect of hiding the battle flag so it could mistakenly appear all white.

THIRD NATIONAL FLAG "THE BLOOD STAINED BANNER"



The third national flag was adopted March 4, 1865, a short time before the collapse of the Confederacy. This design was an adaptation of the second flag by adding a broad bar of red on the end of the white background.

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