

Figure 1: 'Head Quarters, Department of So. Ca., Ga. and Fla.' semiofficial cover (CSA Catalog WD-ZA-24). The back of the cover docket receipt: 'Received October 19th by way of P.R. (Port Royal) Ferry JAD.' (Courtesy James Taff)

A Charleston Harbor Flag of Truce Letter

By Thomas Lera

While at TEXPEX in February 2016, James Taff showed me the Figure 1 semiofficial cover (CSA Catalog WD-ZA-24).

The cover, from, "Head Quarters, Department of So. Ca., Ga. and Fla." is addressed to Rear Adm. J.A. Dahlgren. The back of the cover docket receipt: "Received October 19th by way of P.R. (Port Royal) Ferry JAD"

The cover and its enclosed letter were interesting enough to do a little research about Charleston Harbor prisoner exchanges. I turned to, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Series I - Volume XXXV-in two parts*.

I found what I was looking for in Chapter XLVII—"Operations in South Carolina and Florida, and on the Georgia Coast. January 1-November 13, 1864."¹

The men involved in the correspondence regarding the exchange of McIntosh County, Georgia, citizens were John A. Dahlgren, William J. Hardee, Samuel Jones, and John G. Foster.

Dahlgren headed the U.S. Navy's ordnance department and designed several guns and cannons that resulted in a tactical advantage for the Union, for which he became known as the, "Father of American Naval Ordnance."

In February 1863, Dahlgren was promoted to rear admiral and took command of the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron.²

Figure 2 shows a Rear Adm. J.A. Dahlgren portrait taken by Mathew Brady. This image is available from the United States Library of Congress's Prints and Photographs Division under the digital ID CWPB.05803.

Hardee, known as "Old Reliable," was among the first Confederate officers given the rank of lieutenant general on October 10, 1862.

He assumed command of the Department of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida on October 5, 1864.³

Figure 3 shows Lt. Gen. William J. Hardee's half-length portrait, facing slightly left (the Library of Congress image is cropped, straightened, and clarified). The Library of Congress reproduction number is LC-USZ62-14973 (from a black and white film copy negative).

Samuel Jones was in command of the Department of South Carolina, Georgia and Florida, from April 16 until October 1864 when Hardee relieved him.

Abraham Lincoln, in Special Orders No. 168 dated May 5, 1864, from Headquarters of the Army, appointed Maj. Gen. J.G. Foster to command the Department of the South.



Figure 2: Rear Adm. John A. Dahlgren.
(Library of Congress)

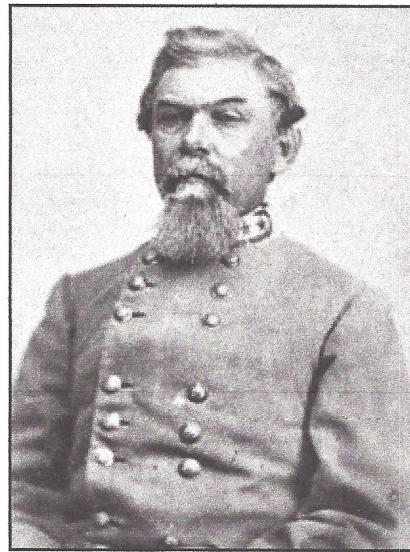


Figure 3: Lt. Gen. William J. Hardee.
(Library of Congress)

**HEADQUARTERS
DEPARTMENT OF THE SOUTH**
Hilton Head, S.C., June 16, 1864.
Maj. Gen. SAMUEL JONES,
Comdg. Confederate Forces, Dept. S.C., Ga.,
and Fla.:

GENERAL: I have the honor to request that flags of truce covering official communications may be instructed to meet our pickets at Port Royal Ferry, at which point only is it convenient to receive them.

*Very respectfully, your obedient servant,
J.G. FOSTER,
Major General, Commanding⁴*

On August 26, 1864, from his flagship, J.A. Dahlgren wrote:

FLAG STEAMER PHILADELPHIA
Port Royal Harbor, S. C., August 26, 1864.
Maj. Gen. J. G. FOSTER,
Comdg. Department of the South, Hdqrs. Hilton Head:

GENERAL: In a recent expedition several citizens of McIntosh County, Ga., were brought away, who it appears were not engaged in any hostile operations against the Government, but were pursuing their ordinary vocations; 2 of them were small farmers and 5 were engaged in making salt. From what 2 of them tell me they have never taken an active part at any time, in defending the rebels, and the 2 farmers are men

of over sixty years of age. They were found at their homes and were probably brought away as a measure of precaution. Will you please inform me whether you have instructions from the Government in relation to persons so situated, and who may fall into your hands?

*Very respectfully, your obedient servant,
J.A. DAHLGREN,
Rear-Admiral, Comdg. South Atlantic
Blockading Squadron⁵*

Maj. Gen. Sam Jones responded on September 16:

**HDQRS. DEPT. OF S. CAROLINA,
GEORGIA, AND FLORIDA**
Charleston, S. C., September 16, 1864.
Maj. Gen. J. G. FOSTER,
Commanding U. S. Forces, Hilton Head, S. C.:

GENERAL: In reply to your communication of the 25th instant, I have the honor to say that by the next flag of truce I will return to you all medical officers confined in this department, in accordance with the cartel and the precedents established between ourselves, but I do not understand that sutlers {a merchant who sells goods from his wagon to the army on the move] and assistant sutlers (a person who followed an army and sold provisions to the soldiers) are comprehended in this arrangement (see Article 3, Cartel, General Orders 142, War Department, Washington, September 25, 1862).

HEAD QUARTERS,
Department of South Carolina, Georgia and Florida.
Charleston, S. C. October 13th 1864.

Admiral

The communication addressed by you to certain citizens of the United States, Georgia, captured and held as prisoners of war has been forwarded to me by Flag of Union. These citizens are not regarded by me as proper subjects of exchange under the cartel, but I am willing nevertheless to give in exchange for those of the party, twenty in number, I believe, who may, under our laws become liable to military duty, an equal number of soldiers or seamen whose terms of service may have expired, or men, who in consequence of ill health are unfit for present duty. This it seems to me would be a fair equivalent for the citizens in your possession, & if the proposition meets your approval I will, at once, take measures to carry it into effect.

I have the honor to be,
Very Respectfully,
J. O. Hardee,
Major General.

Rear Admiral
J. A. Dahlgren
Commanding U. S. Squadron

Figure 4: A letter from Lt. W.J. Hardee to Rear Adm. J.A. Dahlgren. (Courtesy James Taff)

[Art. 142. stated: An armistice is not a partial or a temporary peace; it is only the suspension of military operations to the extent agreed upon by the parties.] I will, however, exchange them for citizens captured recently in McIntosh County, Ga., by your naval forces.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,
SAM. JONES,
Major General, Commanding⁶

On October 13, 1864, Lt. Gen. W.J. Hardee, Comdg. Confederate Forces, S. C., Ga., and Fla., wrote to Rear Adm. J.A. Dahlgren, Comdg. the South Atlantic Blockade Squadron (Figure 4):

ADMIRAL: The communication addressed to you to certain citizens of McIntosh County, Georgia captured and held as prisoners of war has been forwarded to me by Flag of Truce. These citizens are not regarded by me as proper subjects for exchange under the cartel, but I am willing nevertheless to give in exchange for those of the party, twenty in number, I believe, who may under our laws become liable to military duty, an equal number of soldiers or seamen whose terms of service may have expired, or men, who in consequence of ill health are unfit for present duty. This it seems to me would be a fair equivalent for the citizens in your possession, & if the proposition meets your approval I will, at once, take measures to carry it into effect.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully,
your obedient servant,
W.J. Hardee,
Lieut. General

On November 12, J.G. Foster responded to Hardee's letter:

**HEADQUARTERS
DEPARTMENT OF THE SOUTH**

Hilton Head, S. C., November 12, 1864.

Lieut. Gen. W. J. HARDEE,
Comdg. Confederate Forces, S. C., Ga., and Fla.:

GENERAL: In relaying to your letter of October 13, proposing an exchange of the prisoners of war in our several departments, I have the honor to inform you that I have received information from Washington that no exchanges

will be made (except on the field of battle, as provided in the cartel) without special authority therefore from the War Department.

I have the honor to remain, very respectfully,
your obedient servant,

J.G. FOSTER,
Major General, Commanding⁷

The story of the McIntosh County, Georgia, citizens ends here, as I could find no further information about them. I hope they returned safely home.

Endnotes

- 1 *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (OR), Series I—Volume XXXV—in Two Parts, Chapter XLVII—Operations in South Carolina and Florida, and on the Georgia Coast. January 1–November 13, 1864. Part II—Union and Confederate Correspondence, etc.*
- 2 Robert A. Siegel Auctions, Steven C. Walske Collection of Civil War Special Routes, Sale 988, May 27, 2010, Lot 305
- 3 <http://www.sonofthesouth.net/> accessed March 15, 2016. This site has more than 7,000 pages of original Civil War content, and is full of incredible photographs, original illustrations, and eyewitness accounts.
- 4 *OR, Series I—Volume XXXV, Chapter XLVII, Part II, 135.*
- 5 *Ibid.*, 259.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 291.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 328.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank James Taff for showing me this correspondence and encouraging me to write this article.

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