

The Randolph Hornets Flag



The Battle Flag Comes Home

By Joseph R. Suggs

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The battle flag of the Randolph Hornets – Company M, 22nd North Carolina Militia – has come home again to Randolph County, from whence it departed over one hundred years ago. In 1968, when the faded old flag was presented to the Randolph Historical Society by Dr. and Mrs. Marion B. Roberts, of Hillsborough, and was placed on permanent display in Asheboro,

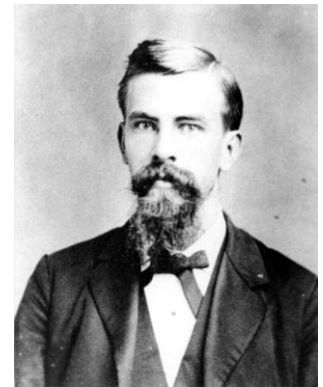
local historians gathered such information as was available about its origin and role in the War Between the States.

The flag is believed to have been made locally by the families of the men in the company that bore it. Originally the colors must have been red, white and blue. Many delicate stitches, the evidence of nimble handi-work, are plainly visible. The thirteen gold stars designating the original Confederate states are mounted on a background of blue. On one side, outlined in India, ink, are the letters "Randolph Hornets." The reverse side bears the appliqued motto "Onward to Victory."

It is known locally that the flag left Randolph County when the company was mustered into service in 1861. This company of Confederate soldiers was composed of men who lived principally in the eastern section of Randolph County, mainly the Liberty and Staley communities.

The Randolph Hornets were in the 22nd Regiment; and the company was commanded by John M. Odell, Captain, June 10, 1861; Laban Odell, Captain, April 20, 1862; W. B. Kivett, Captain, March 6, 1863, and Columbus F. Siler, Captain, May 1, 1863. A copy of the complete company roster is available from the Society.

The company fought in every battle except First Bull Run, and sustained its greatest losses at Chancellorsville, Va. After Jackson's death at this battle, Lee reorganized his army into three corps. At Gettysburg, the Randolph Hornets were a part of Iverson's brigade, Rhodes Division, Ewell's Corps. These men were ordered to make a large sweep and assault the Union line behind a stone wall. Heavy losses were again suffered.



Capt. John Milton Odell

A few Hornets were present at the final surrender at Appomattox, Va. But no one knows at what time in the company's eventful career the flag passed from its possession [HLPC editor's note: see *"The Randolph Hornet's Battle Flag: A Question Finally Answered"* by Barbara Newsome Grigg, following, for information on the capture of the flag by union forces]. When next we hear of it, nearly a century later, it was located in Connecticut.

It is believed that the flag was captured, but the story of its owners and travels after being taken from the Randolph Hornets is a mystery. Dr. and Mrs. Roberts learned of the flag in 1961, and after a long and determined effort were able to gain possession of it, so that it could be returned to North Carolina.

The minutes of the Randolph County Historical Society meeting at which the flag was dedicated, records this condensed account of Dr. Roberts' statement: "... while visiting with some Civil War buffs in Doyleston, Pennsylvania, I heard a member of the group from New Jersey mention that someone in Connecticut had a flag made for the Randolph Hornets, but he had no idea who it might be.

"I was determined to get this flag, therefore I got in touch with a friend in Nashville, Tennessee. He knew a buff in Pennsylvania who knew a gentleman in New Jersey who knew where the flag was. I still do not know who had the flag, nor how it got to Connecticut. I have an idea it was captured. As you can see, I obtained this flag from and through my friend in Nashville."

Although there were other Randolph Counties in the Confederacy, North Carolina's Randolph was the only one with a "Hornet" Company.

Dr. Roberts says he "argued with myself for over a year --- whether to keep the flag or return it to Randolph County." He decided to donate it to the Randolph County Historical Society with the provision that its care be perpetuated and that it be displayed in a suitable case. "I am sure we made the right decision," he said.

Following appropriate ceremonies, the flag was placed on permanent display in the Randolph Room of the Asheboro Public Library, along with the Society's other historic mementoes. A special display case, manufactured by the Oro Manufacturing Co. of Monroe, N.C., revolves so that both sides of the flag may be conveniently examined.



Our Society, the oldest historical society on record in this state, invites all persons interested in local history to see this unique historical acquisition whenever they are in Asheboro.



Rendering of flag showing its likely colors by artist Henry Bowers

The Randolph Hornets' Battle Flag: A Question Finally Answered

By Barbara Newsome Grigg

The mystery of when and where the Battle Flag of a Company of Confederate Soldiers from Randolph County, who called themselves 'The Randolph Hornets,' was lost, has finally been answered.

I, Barbara Newsom Grigg, found an old newspaper, the "Weekly Times" printed in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, dated December 20, 1879, which tells the story of the loss of 'The Randolph Hornets' Battle Flag.

The article is very long, telling much about the blockading of the Potomac River, but the part about the flag is copied in its entirety.

At the end of the newspaper article is the paper written by Joseph R. SUGGS entitled "The Battle Flag Come Home," which tells the story of its origin and being returned to Randolph County.

ANNALS OF THE WAR
CHAPTERS OF UNWRITTEN HISTORY BLOCKADING THE POTOMAC
A Project in Which the Confederates Were Not Wholly Successful

TALKING ACROSS THE RIVER
The Story of a Union Soldier Stationed on the Northern Bank
By Oliver C. COOPER of the First Massachusetts Infantry
HOOKER'S Division

"About the 1st. November 1861, HOOKER'S Brigade comprising the First and Eleventh Massachusetts, the Second New Hampshire and the Twenty-ninth Pennsylvania... was ordered down the Potomac to help look after the rebel force which had "gathered at the river" and established formidable batteries with the view of cutting off Federal water communication with Washington...

"On Tuesday, March 9, (1862) the unusual movements about the rebel batteries attracted the attention of our people. During the forenoon one of the gunboats –the "Anacosta," I think – cautiously approached the upper battery, dropping shells into the works as she moved down. Getting within close range and finding no signs of occupation, a detachment of men landed from the gunboats, who scrambled up the steep embankment, and soon the multitudes of our soldiers who, from the opposite river banks had been anxiously watching these proceedings, saw the Stars and Stripes wave out to the breeze above the hostile guns, and then such a cheer went up as had never before rolled over the waters of the Potomac. At the same time a loud explosion occurred at the Shipping Point battery, clouds of smoke and earth ascending high in the air. It was now evident that the enemy was evacuating and that the blockade of the Potomac was at an end. All was excitement on our side. The long-roll was beat in every camp and the men eagerly responded to the order to "Fall in!" Three barges loaded with men from the Massachusetts First started for the Virginia shore and landed at the Shipping Point batteries simultaneously with portions of the crews of the gunboats, which had steamed down to the scene, throwing their shells as they proceeded, and soon the starry flag of the Union also floated here. Two or three of the guns of the battery were found bursted. All of the pieces had been heavily wadded, then crammed to the muzzle with sand and fires built under the carriages with the expectation that they would burn and the heat cause the gun to discharge and burst. But this failed except in few instances. The guns were mostly rifled 7 and 9-inch Dalhgrens, with one magnificent 120-pounder Blakeley gun, which had been brought from England but a few months before. This, with its fellows, was subsequently taken to the Washington Navy Yard, where they were all pug [sic] in good condition and did much excellent service for the Union thereafter.

OCCUPYING THE ENEMY'S CAMP

"Our troops penetrated to the rebel camps and saw abundant indication of very hasty departure. Plenty of fresh beef was found in the quarter, and but recently killed. A sutler's store, containing a large stock of goods, was discovered and the contents appropriated. On a desk in the store was found a letter, partly finished, directed to parties in Richmond. It seemed as if the late occupants had been seized with a sudden panic and had precipitately fled, glad even to get away with life. In the deserted camps were found abundance of cooking utensils, with other indications that the "Johnnies" had not by any means been in a starving condition. On the following day five hundred men crossed the river, and while some of them cautiously excavated the exploded magazines in quest of shot and shell, other companies went on a reconnoissance. The camps were again visited and many relics obtained, almost every man going away loaded. Among the captures was a fine litter of bloodhound pups, which were presented by the Captain to Colonel AUSTIN, of HOOKER'S staff. Many regimental papers, reports, etc., as well as private letters, addressed to officers and soldiers, were picked up in the camps. The writer of this has a letter addressed to "Lieutenant W. T. IRVINE, Brooks Station, VA.", from his wife, on the back of which is a memorandum of officers and men, doubtless selected for guard or other detail. Two handsome banners were obtained in one of the camps – one, of silk, having belonged to an Arkansas company and the other, of satin, bearing on one side the inscription, "The Randolph Hornet's," and on the other, "Onward to Victory." A building was found containing fifteen or twenty ready-made pine coffins, and the numerous graveyards, filled with fresh graves, which were met with, showed that sickness and death had been busy in the Confederate Camps during the winter. In fact this was also shown by the company and regimental reports found..."