

One of our great American Specialties

Here is a subject philatelists have been enthralled with for over 100 years.



The Confederate Post

The *Enchantress* Affair



Three years before the more well-known story of the “Immortal Six Hundred” unfolded in 1864 with prisoners used as human shields from the bombardment of their own Confederate artillery in Charleston Harbor, there was a lesser known but similar story—the *Enchantress* Affair.

July 6, 1861, not long after setting sail from Massachusetts, the Cuba-bound merchant schooner *Enchantress* was captured by the Confederate privateer Jefferson Davis and immediately put into use by the Confederacy. On July 22, 1861—just one day following the Union debacle at Manassas (Bull Run)—the *Enchantress* (Figure 1) was captured off Hatteras, North Carolina by the USS *Albatross*. Within a matter of roughly two weeks, she was back in Union hands.

The fourteen Confederate privateers aboard *Enchantress* were sent to prison and charged with piracy. Four of the crewmen, plus ten more from another captured privateer *Petrel*, were found guilty and sentenced to be hanged. Outraged by the whole affair, especially the verdicts, the Confederate Government responded by selecting an equal number of captured high-ranking Union officers and threatened to execute these prisoners of war should the U.S. carry out the sentences of the condemned privateers.

Lt. Col. Samuel Bowman (1818-1889), in the Field & Staff of the 8th Pennsylvania Infantry, was one of those Union officers incarcerated at Libby Prison in Richmond. The cover in Figure 2 is

addressed to “Lt. Col. S[amuel] Bowman (Prisoner of War) Richmond, Va.” It is franked with a 5¢ blue lithograph (Scott CSA No. 4), Stone 2, position 21 with “spur” at left—a listed plate variety. The stamp is tied with a blue Petersburg, Va. May, 27 [1862] circular date stamp used over a Wilkes-Barre, Pa CDS. The stamp was removed by a prior owner and hinged to show the marking at upper right with a matching black grid. A U.S. 3¢ rose (Scott No. 65) was used on the back flaps to pay the postage of the other side and torn in half upon opening (Figure 3). This Southern prison cover was delivered via the short-lived Petersburg route, only used May through September 1862.

Bowman was captured on June 7, 1861 when, unattended, he crossed the Potomac in the neighborhood of Williamsport to reconnoiter and was suddenly seized by rebel scouts and borne away a prisoner. He was a valuable officer and the capture proved a serious loss to the company.

Ultimately, the U.S. government reconsidered the case and decided to treat the captured Confederate privateers not as pirates but prisoners of war. Thus their sentences of execution were voided. On September 9, 1862, Lt. Col. Bowman was exchanged for Francis T. Nicholls of the 8th Louisiana at Aiken’s Landing. Eventually, all the prisoners involved were released with the exception of one man from each side who both died while being held as prisoners of war. ☐