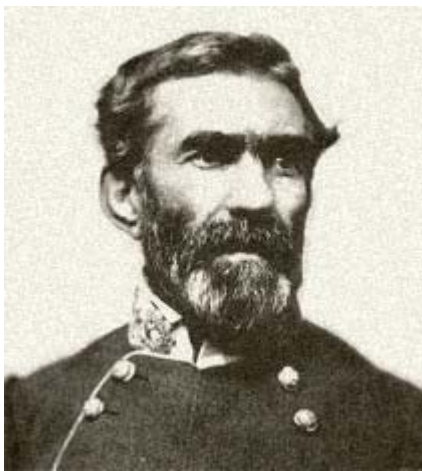




The Cape Fear Civil War Round Table

General Braxton Bragg

By Debra Lynn Walker



General Braxton Bragg was the scourge of the Confederacy. A dour and argumentative man, he did not inspire loyalty or respect from his troops, his contemporaries or from civilians living in the South. Bragg rose to power not from his abilities on the battlefield but from his family connections in North Carolina and his close personal relationship with Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederacy.

Braxton Bragg was born into a large family of twelve in Warrenton, North Carolina on March 21, 1817. Just before Braxton was born, his mother, Margaret Crosland Bragg was released from jail. She had been arrested for murdering a free Negro that had been disrespectful. Needless to say, the Bragg's were not accepted socially. Bragg never spoke of his mother.

When Braxton turned sixteen (with the help of his brother John; an Alabama judge and congressman), he was accepted into United States Military Academy at West Point. Thomas, Sr., Braxton's father had been petitioning officials since Braxton was ten to get him accepted. Braxton was quickly promoted from cadet private to cadet captain but, according to Grady McWhiney, biographer, Braxton was promoted under unusual circumstances causing other cadet officers to resign their positions in protest. Braxton graduated fifth in his class in June 1837.

Bragg started his military career in July of 1837. He was sent to Florida to deal with the Seminole Indians. By spring of the following year, he was too sick to serve and was sent home. Bragg suffered from several illnesses (many historians think they were stress related) for the rest of his life. He was ordered back to Florida (under protest because of his "broken constitution") in October 1840. Bragg spent three years in Florida growing more morose and argumentative with each passing day. Ulysses S. Grant wrote (in his personal memoirs) that Bragg was "remarkably intelligent and well informed man, professionally and otherwise, who had an irascible temper and was naturally disputatious. As a subordinate, he was always on the lookout to catch his commanding officer infringing his prerogatives; as a post commander he was equally vigilant to detect the slightest neglect, even of the most trivial order." Grant recalled a story about Bragg when he was both company commander and

quartermaster. "As commander of the company he made a requisition upon the quartermaster-himself-for something he wanted. As quartermaster he declined to fill the requisition, and endorsed on the back of it his reasons for so doing. As company commander he responded to this, urging that his requisition called for nothing but what he was entitled to, and that it was the duty of the quartermaster to fill it. As quartermaster he still persisted that he was right. Bragg finally went to the post commander for resolution of the problem who declared "My God, Mr. Bragg, you have quarreled with every officer in the army, and now you are quarreling with yourself."

During 1845-1846 Bragg joined General Zachary Taylor in the Mexican War. He came out of the war a hero. Some soldiers would have disagreed with that assessment. Lieutenant Samuel G. French wrote as the army was leaving Monterey, Bragg ordered a halt to the withdrawal and wanted him to go back (under enemy fire) and cut off the harnesses of dead horses. Lieutenant French wrote that he "never forgave Bragg for the picayune order."

General Zachary Taylor became Bragg's ideal for a military leader; possibly because Taylor had put in a promotion for Bragg to brevet Lieutenant Colonel. One incident between Bragg and Taylor brought Bragg into the limelight and helped make him a national hero and celebrity when he returned to the United States. During one battle, Taylor supposedly rode up to Bragg's battery under heavy fire. Bragg asked what he should do and Taylor yelled, "A little more grape, Captain Bragg." Other variations of the same theme were published in newspapers and periodicals throughout the United States, but the story was never corroborated.

Bragg's celebrity status had him on the social circuit when he came back to the states. "A little more grape" balls and banquets were given in his honor. At one of these functions he met his future wife, Elise. They were married on July 7, 1849. Bragg had always threatened if he got himself a rich wife, he would resign. In 1856, Bragg resigned his commission and bought a sugar plantation with Elise's money. Just outside of Thibodaux, Louisiana, The plantation, named Bivouac, was successful allowing Bragg to become active in politics. In 1859 he was named Levee Inspector and School Director. Bragg accepted the Democratic nomination for 2nd District Commissioner and was elected to the State Board of Public Works.

In December of 1860, Bragg was appointed a member of the state military board. When Louisiana seceded, Governor Moore appointed Bragg commander of the state army. Bragg did everything he could to get Louisiana ready for war and thought he would be recognized. Jefferson Davis, the new Confederate President, had little use for Bragg at the time. He overlooked Bragg and made P.G.T. Beauregard the first Confederate general. One of Bragg's good friends was none other than William Tecumseh "Cump" Sherman. On his way to Ohio, he stopped and dined with Elise and Braxton. Sherman noted in his memoirs that Bragg "seemed jealous" of Beauregard's commission and Elise commented that "you know that my husband is not a favorite with the new president." Bragg would not be overlooked for long. Davis needed officers and put him in charge of the Louisiana army.

In July 1861, Bragg was known as one of the best first generals of the Confederacy. Theophilus H. Holmes, a future general for the Confederacy was quoted as saying that President Davis "had made most excellent selections in the appointment of his first generals."

Bragg was assigned to Pensacola, Florida and Beauregard was moved to Charleston, South Carolina. As commander, he was a strict disciplinarian and drove his troops hard. A teetotaler, he would allow no alcohol. The troops were required to drill, exercise and parade incessantly. His camps were kept very sanitary and as a result, there was very little sickness. Bragg was reportedly good to his troops; checking to make sure they had enough good food to eat, clothing, bedding and adequate shelter. One soldier wrote that Bragg authorized a private to go home so he could marry his dying fiancée after his superior officer had denied the request. Bragg reportedly visited every wounded soldier in the hospital. He even allowed a comedian to entertain the troops.

The stress of being in charge of six thousand men was too much to bear for Bragg. At forty-five, he looked like an old man. He repeatedly suffered from rheumatism, dyspepsia, severe migraines and general nervousness.

On February 28, 1862 Bragg left Pensacola with approximately ten thousand soldiers and went to Jackson, Tn. He was still extremely popular. Bragg stopped in Corinth, Mississippi where Beauregard was waiting for him and gave him command of all Confederate troops south of Jackson. They were awaiting General Albert S. Johnston. Johnston was withdrawing his troops from Nashville, TN. Upon arrival, Johnston named Bragg Chief of the General Staff. The position was designed for Bragg to be able to give orders in Johnston's name. Bragg had an excellent reputation for moving, feeding and organizing troops, but the Tennessee troops were unorganized and Bragg had no faith in them. Neither did Elise, whom Bragg wrote to often and, according to McWhiney, took her advice (which she was not shy about giving) often. Elise believed the only troops Bragg could trust were the Louisiana Creole and the Mississippi troops. She wrote, "Dear Husband, please do not trust the Tennessee troops. Put the Tennesseans where our batteries can fire upon them if they attempt to run." Private Sam Watkins of Tennessee confirmed that Bragg did just that. "Bragg would place some of his corps behind the Tennessee troops, to shoot us down if we ran."

The Battle of Shiloh, on April 6, 1862 was the first of many disasters for Bragg. He, Johnston and Beauregard attacked Grant's army. At West Point, Bragg had learned the advantages of using bayonets to attack. This archaic strategy did not work with the Union's modern weaponry. It was a massacre. After the defeat, Bragg started casting blame on others. Bragg claimed he had tried to rally the troops by taking the flag and leading them. Henry W. Allen of the 4th Louisiana refuted, "General Bragg, staff and body guard retired to a ravine (when an enemy battery opened fire). I saw nothing more of them that day. No member of his staff ever rallied any of my men, nor do I believe any of them at any time rallied your brigade." Colonel Randall Gibson stated Bragg did not give him and his men artillery support. Gibson's brigade lost nearly one third of his men. Blaming others for his own shortcomings on the battlefield became a common theme throughout Bragg's life.

Bragg had covered his bases and Jefferson Davis appointed him a full general. Newspapers were singing his praises but there was also criticism. Bragg had not fallen from grace yet, but he was on his way. Volunteers reported acts of brutality, their furloughs were denied and deserters were reportedly shot.

Bragg continued to show his ineptitude at the Battle of Perryville in October 1862.

Although sixty thousand Union troops were close by, Bragg was totally unaware. Perryville was considered neither a victory nor a defeat because it accomplished nothing but casualties on both sides.

After Perryville, Bragg's popularity dwindled. Two generals, Kirby Smith and Henry Heth thought he had lost his mind. After the battle, Bragg retreated from Kentucky and abandoned it to the Yankees. Historians have generally accepted the charge that the Kentucky campaign caused nearly every Confederate except Davis to lose confidence in Bragg.

Bragg once again retreated in Murfreesboro, TN. Under intense criticism from the press, Congress and his own generals and troops, Bragg's health declined. He suffered from chronic diarrhea, boils and loss of appetite. Biographer Grady McWhiney felt Bragg had lost all confidence, had become disoriented and "he had lost touch with reality."

Bragg retreated to Tullahoma after Murfreesboro. Once there, he had to retreat again. Bragg then lost Middle Tennessee and North Alabama. In response to losing them, Bragg was quoted, "Last night I took up a more defensible position, losing nothing of importance." The implication that these two areas were unimportant to the Confederacy was ludicrous. Middle Tennessee and Alabama were the largest concentrated areas for the production of much needed war materials. Bragg blamed Union General William Rosencrans for the loss, stating Rosencrans did not fight "fair" .

Bragg's poor health continued to plague him and he was hospitalized in Chattanooga. His health improved sufficiently, although the relationship with his troops continued to decline. The army was disorganized, disobedient and poorly trained. Confusion reigned. The Union Army started bombing Chattanooga and Bragg retreated.

On September 19, 1863, the Battle of Chickamauga was fought. Bragg actually won the battle but did not realize it. Instead of focusing his attention on the enemy, he made war on his own superior officers and let the Federals escape back to Chattanooga. No strategic position was won; the Federals were still in control of Chattanooga.

Not only was Bragg fighting his superior, he was also arguing with his subordinates. One said, "Bragg is so much afraid of doing something which would look like taking advantage of an enemy that he does nothing. He would not strike Rosencrans another blow until he has recovered his strength and announces himself ready. Our great victory has turned to ashes." Mary Boykin Chestnut, wife of Brigadier General Chestnut wrote in her diary, "Bragg, thanks to Longstreet and Hood had won Chickamauga; so we looked for results that would pay for our losses in battle. Surely they would capture Rosencrans. But no! There sat Bragg like a good dog, howling on his hind legs before Chattanooga and some Yankee holdfast grinning at him from his impregnable heights. Bragg always stops to argue with his generals. I think there is something wrong about the man." Bragg was focusing more on trying to get rid of his detractors and was unaware of the Union army building up their forces. He laid siege on Chattanooga, trying to cut the supply line to the Union Army. The Confederate Army was outgunned and outmanned. Bragg added another disastrous "episode" to his inept military career.

Bragg Resigned, due to mounting pressures and retired from command. In February of 1864, however, Jefferson Davis offered Bragg the position of military advisor to the President. Bragg

accepted. Catherine Anne Devereux Edmonston wrote, "So the deed is done! What we last week laughed at as idle and wild a foolish rumour which no one heeded is un fait accompli. Gen. Bragg, Bragg the incapable, the Unfortunate, is Commander in Chief! Unhappy man! The object of execration to the greater part of the nation, he will be viewed with suspicion and dislike and will ere long have cause to rue the blind unreasoning friendship with which Mr. Davis regards him."

Bragg was a very good administrator and had excellent organizational skills. If only he had been able to get along with others (and stayed in that position), history might have been kinder to him. He was very efficient at managing supply lines and military departments and all improved under his tutelage. But Bragg could not get along with anyone and under intense pressure Davis assigned Bragg to check on the defense works and deal with the crisis that was growing in Wilmington, NC. Supposedly, Davis sent Bragg to smooth over a riff that had developed between the local town folk, blockade runners and General WHC Whiting. Davis did not care for Whiting because he had insulted Davis in the past. (Davis had heard rumors of Whiting drinking; just enough of an excuse to replace Whiting with Bragg). Why Davis thought Bragg could be diplomatic and smooth over a delicate situation when he could not even get along with himself will never be known.

Arriving in Wilmington by train October 22, 1864, Bragg was assigned commander of NC troops east of the Blue Ridge Mountains. When Bragg's reassignment was made known to the public, reactions were negative. "A bad augury for us! Morad the Unlucky's fate will follow him!" wrote Catherine Ann Devereux Edmonston in her diary. The Richmond Examiner purportedly wrote, "Bragg has been sent to Wilmington! Goodbye Wilmington."

Bragg reported back to Davis in Richmond that the defense works surrounding the harbor were very good and a naval attack could be beaten off but an attack by land would have dire consequences. But Bragg had no idea how important Wilmington and Fort Fisher was to the Confederacy. He wrote to Davis, "Whether the importance of the harbor is such as to justify the withdrawal of troops from other parts, also endangered your own judgment can best decide." He also met with General Whiting and North Carolina Governor Zebulon Vance. He saw no evidence of General Whiting drinking although he felt Whiting was needlessly excited about a possible enemy attack.

A minor incident happened after Bragg met with the governor that caused Governor Vance to become upset with him. Bragg had received reports that between two hundred and three hundred conscripts were working for the state at the coast to make salt. Rumor had it that they were not loyal to the south and possibly in communication with the enemy. Bragg had them removed and replaced them with slaves. Afterwards, Bragg informed Governor Vance of his actions. Vance felt Bragg had overstepped his authority. Although Vance protested, nothing ever came of it.

One thing Governor Vance and Bragg were in agreement on was that Wilmington needed more troops to defend itself against attack. President Davis coordinated between General Bragg and General Hardee, commander of troops in Charleston, SC to help one another out in case of attack.

Not only was Bragg commander of all North Carolina troops east of the Blue Ridge Mountains, he was also still President Davis's military advisor. Bragg's troops in Wilmington were unprepared, undisciplined and few in number. He also had to deal with a Navy that was out of control. Reports of robbery, drunkenness and even murder were common. He wrote to General Lee and requested a commander to help but there was no one to be had. Less than six weeks after Bragg arrived in North Carolina to take command, although rumors were increasing of an imminent Yankee attack on Wilmington, Davis sent Bragg to Augusta, Georgia to deal with General Sherman and his advance.

Whiting had been warning Bragg that he believed the Union fleet would bomb Fort Fisher while the army would put troops on land. Then the Navy would put war ships in the river behind the fort, blocking off Wilmington and isolating the fort. Bragg dismissed Whiting as an alarmist and took half of the Wilmington garrison with him, leaving a very small force behind to guard one of the most important ports in the South. Ulysses S. Grant heard about Bragg leaving and wanted to attack Wilmington while he was gone. Grant sent an expedition to cut the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad. Whiting wrote, "Between Bragg and Lee, Sherman and Grant, old NC is in a pretty fix."

Union General Benjamin Butler came up with the idea of blowing up a vessel close to Fort Fisher thereby blowing up the fort. Built by General Whiting and Colonel Lamb, Fort Fisher was known as the "Gibraltar of the Confederacy". Grant was skeptical but approved the plan. Due to bad weather and other delays, by the time Butler was ready to begin, Bragg was back from Georgia, but without the troops he went there with.

He reported the enemy fleet to Davis on December 20, 1864 and Davis sent General Hoke and his troops to Wilmington but they did not arrive until Butler's plan was set in motion. J.B. Jones, war clerk, stated in his diary that he hoped Bragg would be able to do more than just "chronicle the successes of the enemy."

Bragg and others knew a Union vessel had blown up but had no idea of its mission. He reported to Davis and Lee that a Federal vessel had blown up while chasing a blockade runner. Union troops landed unopposed. Whiting sent a series of telegrams to Bragg informing him of the situation and the fort needed help. The only thing Bragg did was to evacuate his wife, Elise. Her departure caused a general panic throughout Wilmington and a mass exodus of townsfolk. One of Bragg's subordinates later reported that Bragg's hands were trembling. Union forces cut telegraph lines and Whiting had to send messages to Bragg in a roundabout way. He telegraphed Bragg, "If you send reinforcements for General William Kirkland (Hoke's advance force) to attack in the rear, we can hold out." Bragg telegraphed back to bring in more junior reserves (they were just children and called "Seventeen Year Olds") and all the available troops across the river plus Hoke's troops when they arrived. Bragg further suggested that Whiting consider evacuation procedures. This infuriated Whiting; Bragg had not even tried to do anything yet but was already thinking of retreating. Kirkland awaited orders from Bragg to mobilize, yet none were forthcoming. While Kirkland's troops were waiting for orders, they captured a Union soldier. Lieutenant Charles Smith told Kirkland that the Confederacy was facing a full Federal division of twelve thousand troops. Bragg was convinced that the Yankees outnumbered him.

The arrival of Hoke's troops occurred roughly at the same time of the explosion of the Union vessel and did not go unnoticed by Butler. Union troops had landed but Butler lost his nerve and ordered a quick retreat. General Bragg was credited with repulsing the enemy. The praise he received apparently went to his head and the retreat of Union troops grew into enormous proportions. Bragg was quoted as saying to his subordinates, "One of the most formidable expeditions yet organized by the enemy has accomplished no other object than a fruitless landing on a barren coast, followed in forty-eight hours by a hasty re-embarkation. Thus another gigantic effort of a powerful enemy has come to naught." " proves that the superiority of land batteries over ships of war has been reestablished by the genius of the engineer; and the weaker party on the defensive may still defy the greater numbers and mechanical resources of an arrogant invader." (Biographer Judith Lee Hallock felt the painless repulsion of Federal troops gave the Confederates too much false confidence, making the next expedition easier). The next expedition was led however, by a much more competent commander.

General Whiting knew they had just been lucky. He wrote, "This account is the failure for the present of the very formidable combined attack of the enemy. We cannot always hope for such aid from weather or the blunder of the enemy." Bragg was too caught up in his victory to pay heed to Whiting's warnings. General Whiting and Colonel Lamb started working frantically to repair damages done by the Union Navy's bombardment of the fort. Bragg was more interested in salvaging a grounded blockade runner than refortifying the fort.

The next three weeks were relatively quiet except Bragg was complaining and whining about Hoke. Bragg complained to Richmond that Hoke was an "imbecile" because he took too much time to get from Virginia to North Carolina nor was he getting any cooperation from the west. (Bragg thought that was the only possible source for aid). When he had gone to Georgia in November, he wrote to the South Carolina Governor, Milledge Luke Bonham, to "prevail on your men to unite in protecting a sister state. Our cause is one. If Georgia is saved, South Carolina cannot be lost. If Georgia be lost, South Carolina cannot be saved." So impressed with his letter, he rephrased it to "fit" . "If the East is lost, the West must follow, if the East is saved, the West can be redeemed. Use this for our cause" , wrote Bragg to his military secretary, John B. Sale. Biographer Hallock believed that the last sentence, "Use this for our cause" was an indication that Bragg may still have had aspirations of commanding the Trans-Mississippi.

By the end of December 1864, General Bragg and General Whiting were at odds with each other. Bragg was convinced Fort Fisher was no longer in danger. General Lee offered Bragg additional ammunition for the fort and Wilmington but Bragg declined it. He suggested Governor Vance disband the Junior and Senior reserves and he made plans to send General Hoke's division back to Virginia. But first, Bragg ordered Hoke and his troops to come to Wilmington for an honor parade on January 8, 1865. General Whiting and Colonel William Lamb (Lamb was in charge of the fort) were shocked at Bragg's lackadaisical attitude. They wanted Hoke to remain near where the Federals had landed to protect the fort against another possible landing. Bragg ignored them both and had his parade. He was dressed in a new uniform that had been given to him by grateful citizens of Wilmington.

On January 4, 1865, Union General Alfred Howe Terry left Virginia for Wilmington. Terry had been part of General Butler's failed assault on Fort Fisher. Terry had learned from General

Butler's mistakes and his forces made landfall above Fort Fisher while the Union naval fleet provided fire power.

On January 12, 1865, the Yankees returned. A drunken telegraph operator (he had been imbibing after the parade) did not let Bragg know till after midnight that the Union fleet was back. Bragg wired Lee, cancelled all furloughs, recalled the Senior Reserves and ordered the troops back. There were only eight hundred soldiers stationed at Fort Fisher at the time. Of those one hundred were not fit for duty.

Bragg did not order Hoke to build defensive works at Sugar Loaf until January 12. It was too late, Union troops landed on that same day. Bragg had to requisition spades and shovels for the troops to construct the works. They arrived three days later. Thanks to Bragg's lack of planning and preparation, the Yankees were able to come ashore, unopposed again and establish themselves on land to prevent Hoke's army from coming to the aid of the fort. From Wilmington, Bragg ordered Hoke back to Confederate Point. He ordered Hoke to prevent the enemy from landing, if possible but if they had already landed, Hoke was to go to Sugar Loaf. Bragg was to join him as soon as he knew what the Federal army was doing. If Bragg had left Hoke at Fort Fisher, the Union army would not have been able to land.

Whiting had warned Bragg many times that Wilmington had been lucky due to bad weather during the first attack. They would not be so lucky the next time. The bombardment had begun just as Whiting had predicted. Whiting was still in Wilmington pleading with Bragg to attack. In desperation he even wired Confederate Secretary of War, James A. Seddon about the situation. Seddon testily replied, "Your superior in rank, General Bragg is charged with the command and defense of Wilmington." Bragg had no intention of attacking. He was still under the mistaken belief that the Yankees outnumbered him two to one. Whiting went to Fort Fisher without orders to do so from Bragg. Whiting wrote, "It would all be lost—sacrificed", that was the word for it—sacrificed by General Braxton Bragg, the president's friend with his dark gloomy countenance and his depressing record of defeat.

Upon arriving at the fort, Whiting is quoted as saying to his good friend, Colonel Lamb, "Lamb my boy, I have come to share your fate. You and your garrison are to be sacrificed. The last thing I heard General Bragg say was to point out a line to fall back upon when Fisher fell." As Whiting was leaving, Bragg was issuing orders to evacuate ammunition and equipment. Bragg then went to Confederate Point to join Hoke and ordered Senior Reserves to Sugar Loaf to reinforce Hoke and sent the Home Guard to protect Wilmington. Bragg ordered Hoke to maintain a defensive line because he feared moving too close to the enemy would attract fire. He did not want to divide Hoke's forces for fear the Federals would be able to attack his field headquarters at Sugar Loaf.

On January 13 Federal forces landed and established themselves on the beachhead. Whiting warned Bragg early that day that the garrison was too weak to resist an assault or prevent the enemy from advancing. He implored Bragg to attack immediately. Whiting repeated his requests throughout the day. By eight o'clock p.m., Whiting angrily wired him, "The Enemy are on the beach where they have been all day. Why are they not attacked?" Instead of ordering Hoke to attack the Federal forces from the rear under the relatively safety of darkness (the Union fleet could not fire on them at night for fear of firing on their own men), Bragg ordered Hoke to stay put.

It was January 14, and still no help from Bragg for the beleaguered fort. That morning Bragg had ordered Hoke to send out a small force and go towards the fort to find the South Carolina cavalry. While searching, Hoke's recon group ran into the Union main line instead. Bragg learned the Federals were now between Hoke and Fort Fisher. It was low tide shortly before noon and Whiting knew the Federal gunboats could not cross the bar. Whiting wired Bragg and requested that he attack before the boats could cross because of the rising tide. Bragg at 8 pm, wired Lee that Hoke felt it too risky to assault the enemy lines with his force. At midnight, Bragg changed his mind and sent Hoke to attack but lost his nerve and rescinded the order before it could be carried out.

All the while, Whiting and Lamb were sending desperate telegrams to Bragg urging and begging him to send in a regiment; Bragg promised he would send one thousand of Hoke's veteran soldiers to the fort but he wanted those reinforcements already there back. Whiting insisted he needed all of the men, so Bragg relented. Less than half arrived to help. The rest were stranded.

A supply boat that Bragg had tried to send to the fort with much needed ammunition and rations landed at Craig's Landing. Unfortunately, the landing had already fallen into Union hands; proof that Bragg had no idea what was going on or the enemy's position. Federal troops were now all of the way across the peninsula in force. Whiting was furious. Bragg had allowed the enemy to entrench themselves and now Fort Fisher was cut off. At 1:30 pm Whiting sent a message to Bragg, "The game of the enemy is very plain to me. They are now furiously bombarding my land front; they will continue to do that, in order, if possible, to silence my guns until they are satisfied that their land force has securely established itself across the neck and rests on the river; then Porter will attempt to force a passage. I have received dispatches from you stating that the enemy had extended to the riverbank. This they never should have been allowed to do; and if they are permitted to remain there the reduction of Fort Fisher is but a question of time. I will hold this place til the last extremities; but unless you drive that land force from its position I cannot answer for the security of this harbor." Offended, Bragg responded to Whiting hours later demanding him return to Wilmington to get a dressing down for his tone. Bragg wanted Whiting to leave in the middle of the battle to get reprimanded.

By this time, Fort Fisher had roughly two hundred casualties and only three or four artillery pieces still working. Food was scarce and temperatures were dropping. The soldiers had no blankets. Lamb and Whiting were certain a land attack on the Fort would occur the next day. Whiting ignored Bragg's summons and sent him another telegram urging him to attack the rear. Bragg would not respond. For some reason Bragg thought the artillery was working even though Colonel Lamb had reported otherwise.

At one o'clock on the fifteenth, Bragg ordered Whiting out of Fort Fisher. He was to be replaced by General Alfred Colquitt. This way Bragg was dealing with both Whiting and Lamb since Lamb was in command of the fort not Whiting. Whiting sent another telegram urging Bragg to attack the enemy. "The enemy are about to assault; they outnumber us heavily. Enemy on the beach in front of us in very heavy force, not more that 700 yards from us. Nearly all guns disabled. Attack! Attack! It is all I can say, and all you can do."

Bragg finally ordered Hoke to attack the rear. Just as Hoke was engaging the enemy, Bragg canceled the attack. Bragg was convinced that the enemy so outnumbered his men that it would do no good. He had already reinforced the fort with one thousand men (actually only three

hundred and fifty made it) therefore it was "perfectly safe" and did not want to risk Hoke's men because they were needed to defend Wilmington. As Fort Fisher was falling, Braxton Bragg was reporting to authorities in Wilmington all was under control and Fort Fisher was fine. "The sensational reports about Fort Fisher are entirely unfounded. Official information from General Whiting of later hour reports enemy's attack unsuccessful." Bragg abandoned Fort Fisher, General Whiting, Colonel Lamb and the soldiers that remained at the fort.

Fort Fisher fell to Union hands on January 15, 1865. Bragg offered no explanation in his report to Davis. Davis inquired if the fort could be retaken. Bragg refused fearing the Federal fleet would destroy him. He wrote his brother, Thomas, Jr. that Whiting was drunk, the fort was run by amateurs, the cavalry let the Yankees come through and blockade running had made the fort's defenders unfit for service. "The expedition brought against it was able to reduce it in spite of all I could do."

Bragg ordered Fort Caswell blown up and its guns dismantled. The defensive works on Smith Island, Fort Johnston and Fort Lamb were abandoned. Smithville was evacuated and Confederate troops were relocated to Fort Anderson. A secondary line of defense was constructed below Wilmington and all the while, Bragg was thinking of retreating. He ordered Duplin Road repaired in case of evacuation, government stores and private property that had military value was being evacuated to Raleigh. Bragg kept Wilmington ignorant regarding any military news. On February 21, 1865, Bragg abandoned Wilmington to the Union army.

General Whiting and Colonel Lamb had been injured in the attack and abandoned with the fort. They were taken as prisoners of war. Whiting died as a result of diarrhea from a bout of dysentery. He had tried to make Bragg accountable and called for an official investigation into Bragg's conduct. He wrote to General Lee, "I think that the result might have been avoided, and Fort Fisher still held, if the commanding general had have done his duty. I charge him with this loss; with neglect of duty in this, that he either refused or neglected to carry out every suggestion made to him in official communications by me for the disposition of the troops, and especially that he, failing to appreciate the lesson derived from (the) previous attempt by Butler, instead of keeping troops in the position to attack the enemy on his appearance, he moves them twenty miles from the point of landing in spite of repeated warnings." "I charge him further with making no effort whatsoever to create a diversion in favor of the beleaguered garrison during three days' battle[.]" After Whiting's death, his Federal surgeon found an unfinished letter addressed to a friend, Blanton Duncan, a prominent Confederate from Kentucky. In it Whiting wrote, "That I am here and that Wilmington and Fort Fisher are gone is due wholly and solely to the incompetency, the imbecility and the pusillanimity of Braxton Bragg."

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