



The Day Book

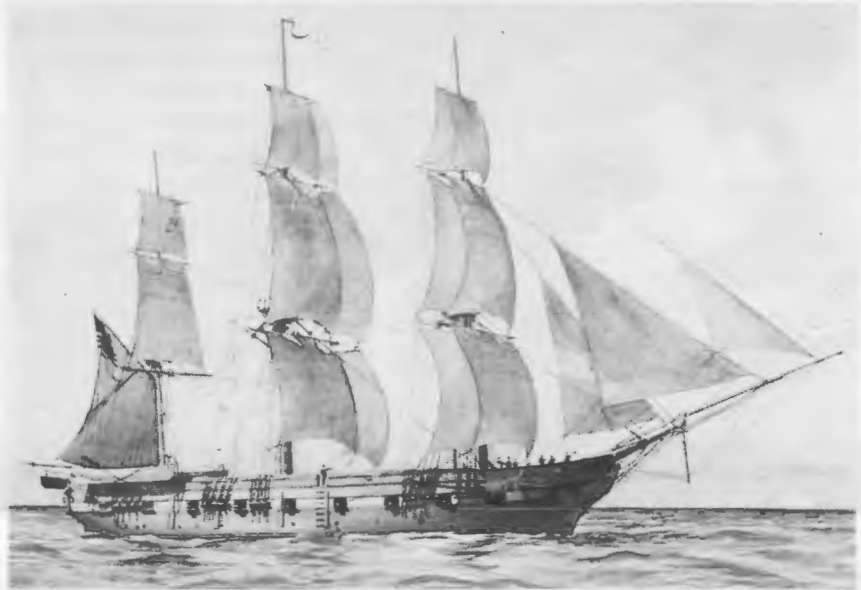
Volume 4, Issue 6

September-October 1998

A Newsletter for the Supporters of the Hampton Roads Naval Museum

On May 5, 1857, USS *Dale* departed Norfolk for the west coast of Africa. In command of the 566 ton sloop of war was Cmdr. William McBlair, USN. He immediately began what he called "a daily chat" with his wife, Virginia Myers McBlair, the granddaughter of Norfolk merchant Moses Myers. This chat took the form of a serial letter, parts of which would be mailed at every opportunity throughout the two-year cruise of the *Dale*. His comments provide us with an intimate look at the U.S. Navy's fight against the international slave trade.

By the time the *Dale* left Hampton Roads, the importation of slaves "from any foreign kingdom, place or country" had already been illegal for fifty years. After initial legislation in 1807, Congress in 1819 authorized the President to dispatch naval vessels to the coast of Africa to suppress the slave trade. The following year a law was passed branding trafficking in slaves as piracy. Still, before 1839 the Navy's efforts were only sporadic, as an occasional single cruiser would be sent from the Gulf Squadron to patrol in African waters. Even these efforts were hampered by the legal restriction that



The 24-gun sloop-of-war USS Dale. This ship operated out of Hampton Roads and served many tours on the Africa Station in the mid to late 19th century. It, however, took aboard more African parrots (over a hundred) than it did liberated slaves. (Naval Historical Center photograph of a 1903 R.G. Skerret wash drawing)

"We Are Mere Scarecrows"

USS Dale in the Africa Squadron, 1857-1859

by Joe Mosier

only American-flagged ships could be seized. As a result, American slavers often resorted to the immunity of false flags.

The English had been far more aggressive in their attempts to put down the slave trade. They were, however, held back by America's refusal in the years after the War of 1812 to allow British inspection of U.S. merchant vessels. By 1841, England had negotiated treaties with most European countries regarding mutual rights of search. Only the United States still refused. As McBlair would write:

"England has treaties with all nations except our own which authorizes her to capture any except Americans. We have treaties with none & can only capture those bearing our own flag. I hope however to be so fortunate as to come across one." The expectable result was that slavers increasingly began to use the American flag for protection.

In 1842, the U.S. and Britain signed the Webster-Ashburton Treaty. Among its provisions was one stipulating that each nation would
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Cumberland Speaks

The Director's Column

by Becky Poulliot

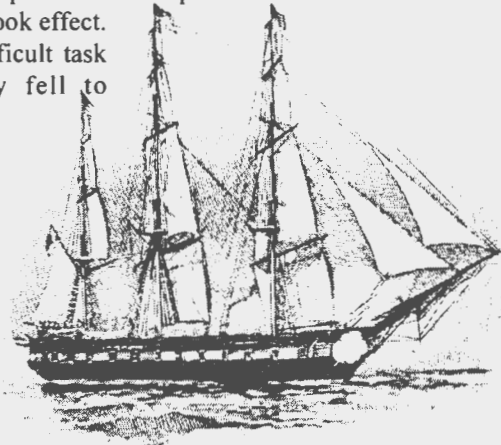
One of the advantages of our collocation with Nauticus is the opportunity to coordinate special exhibits and events together. On Sept. 26, the Hampton Roads Naval Museum will provide an adjunct display and educational program for the national traveling exhibit, "A Slave Ship Speaks: The Wreck of the *Henrietta Marie*." The exhibition's name refers to a slave ship that sank off the coast of Florida in 1700. With its discovery in 1972 by well-known treasure hunter Mel Fisher, the world was able to view the single most important cache of artifacts relating to the transatlantic slave trade. "Henrietta Marie" is on a national tour and will be at Nauticus until Jan. 4, 1999.

You may wonder how the Hampton Roads Naval Museum could add to this story. Throughout this issue of *The Day Book*, you will see some of the stories, items, and illustrations we are presenting about the U.S. Navy's patrols off the coast of Africa. "A Humanitarian Symbol: The U.S. Navy

on the Africa Station" is the museum's temporary display, located adjacent to "Henrietta Marie" on the third floor of Nauticus. "A Humanitarian Symbol" tells a story that is little known and seldom researched. In 1808, the U.S. Constitution's ban on the importation of slaves into this country took effect. In 1820, the extremely difficult task of enforcing the policy fell to the U.S. Navy. "A Humanitarian Symbol" highlights the men and their ships on station off the coast of Africa, and offers an interesting story of lives saved and lost.

"A Humanitarian Symbol" maintains a direct tie into the museum's permanent gallery. Our very own 19th century *Cumberland* served as flagship of the Africa Squadron prior to her ignominious sinking in the James River during the first day of the Battle of


Hampton Roads. The Hampton Roads Naval Museum is the sole repository for the ship's remains which were recovered in the 1980's. Like the "Henrietta Marie," the *Cumberland* artifacts speak to the visitor through the simple items found on board. The



Part of the museum's nationally known USS *Cumberland* collection will on display for the first time as part of the museum's new display on the U.S. Navy and the Africa Station.

excitement of the field of underwater archaeology is in the discovery of time capsules such as these two shipwrecks.

The museum plans to share the *Cumberland* story with 3,000 sixth graders during the fall months. The students will tour the "Henrietta Marie" and "A Humanitarian Symbol," do a hands-on activity and then come to the Hampton Roads Naval Museum to explore the *Cumberland* and underwater archaeology.

We continue to offer a great luncheon lecture series. On **Sept. 10**, learn about the dangers of collecting history in war zones as Marine Corps **Lt. Col. Dennis Mroczkowski** talks about Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia. Then on **Oct. 13**, do not miss the Navy's Birthday bash planned aboard USS *Wasp* (LHD-1) with President Teddy Roosevelt. See page 3 for more on President Roosevelt's arrival. Call me for information for both of these events and to make reservations at 757-322-2992. 



About *The Day Book*

The Day Book is an authorized publication of the Hampton Roads Naval Museum (HRNM). Its contents do not necessarily reflect the official view of the U.S. Government, the Department of Defense, the U.S. Navy or the U.S. Marine Corps and do not imply endorsement thereof. The HRNM is a museum dedicated to the study of 220 years of naval history in the Hampton Roads region. The museum is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is free.

The Day Book's purpose is to educate and inform readers on historical topics and museum related events. It is written by the staff and volunteers of the museum. The newsletter takes its name from a 19th century Norfolk newspaper.

Questions or comments can be directed to the Hampton Roads Naval Museum editor. *The Day Book* can be reached at (757) 322-2993, by fax at (757) 445-1867, e-mail at bapoulliot@cmar.navy.mil, or write *The Day Book*, Hampton Roads Naval Museum, One Waterside Drive, Suite 248, Norfolk, VA 23510-1607. The museum can be found on the World Wide Web at <http://naval-station.norfolk.va.us/navy.html>. *The Day Book* is published bi-monthly with a circulation of 1,200. Contact the editor for a free subscription.

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Teddy Roosevelt Coming to Norfolk on October 13

“What we care for most is the character of the average man; for we believe that if the average of character in the individual citizen is sufficiently high, if he possesses those qualities which make him worthy of respect in his family life, and his work outside...there is literally no height of triumph unattainable in this vast experiment of government by, of and for a free people.” This quote comes from President Theodore “Teddy” Roosevelt’s speech at the opening of the Jamestown Exposition of 1907 and is very representative of one of the most colorful and forceful personalities in American history.

As a part of “Fleet Week Hampton Roads,” the Hampton Roads Naval



Museum and the Hampton Roads Council of the Navy League of the United States are proud to present a person whose passion is to remember this great American. On Oct. 13, Mr. James Foote of Long Island, NY will present his first person interpretation of the 24th President of the United States at 11:30 a.m on board the warship USS *Wasp* (LHD-1). His presentation will include several Roosevelt speeches on the U.S. Navy, national destiny, and foreign relations. He will also recall the President’s experiences in the 1st U.S. Volunteer Cavalry during the Spanish-American War and his role as Assistant Secretary of the Navy.

Teddy Roosevelt held many positions of public office before becoming President. He was police commissioner for New York City,

Governor of New York, and most importantly to Hampton Roads, Assistant Secretary of the Navy during the McKinley Administration. He made three speeches in this area, one for the Jamestown Exposition and two for the Great White Fleet. He is best known for being a huge supporter of the U.S. Navy, an advocate for the preservation of the American wilderness, and a crusader against big business monopolies.

Mr. Foote currently lives on Long Island, NY and has been interpreting Roosevelt for several years. He first started portraying the President when someone recognized the likeness and asked him to be in a parade. He has since done extensive research on Roosevelt’s public and private life.

He has presented his interpretation of Roosevelt across the nation to several groups and historic sites including Roosevelt’s birthplace, Sagamore Hill (Roosevelt’s home in NY), and for the commissioning ceremonies for the aircraft carrier USS *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN-71).

Mr. Foote’s presentation will be accompanied by a lunch. It will include



Mr. James Foote as President Theodore Roosevelt

a question and answer session about Roosevelt’s life after the presentation. Reservations are required. The cost is \$15. Call (757) 322-2992 to make reservations or for more information. ▶

THE HANDCLASP OF CENTURIES

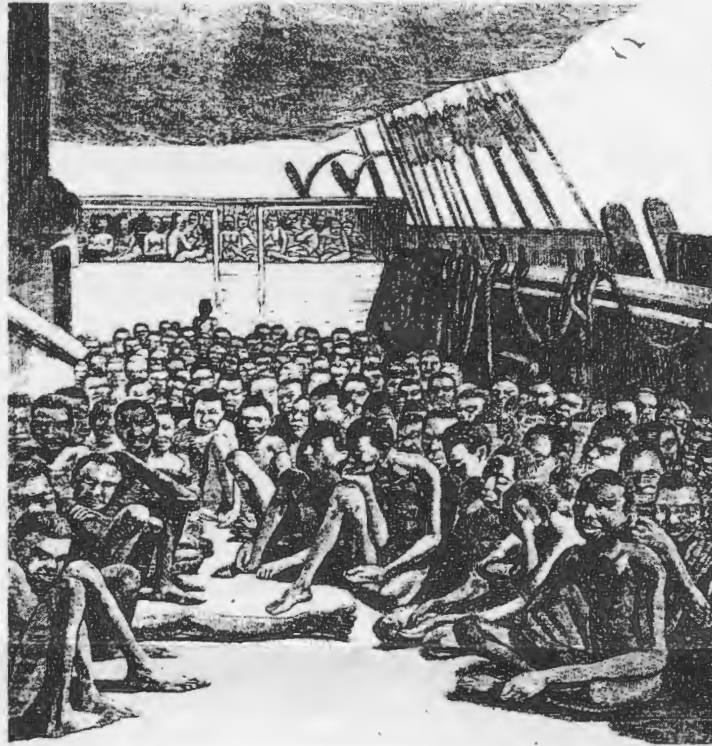


“De-lighted! Welcome to the Jamestown Exposition.”

Museum Opens New Display on the Navy's Africa Station

The Hampton Roads Naval Museum will open a new display on the U.S. Navy's Africa Station on Sept. 23. This display will accompany *Nauticus*, the National Maritime Center's new travelling exhibit "A Slave Ship Speaks: The Wreck of the *Henrietta Marie*" on the third floor. This display will discuss the Navy's role off the coast of Africa between 1820 and 1862. During this time period, the U.S. Government assigned the Navy the task of interdicting the slave trade. This display will include artifacts, models, and illustrations of the men and ships involved with this campaign.

In addition to the anti-slave trade campaign, the Navy also assisted the American Colonization Society and other affiliated groups in establishing a colony of freed slaves in Africa. This colony eventually grew into the Republic of Liberia, which has the distinction of being the oldest free black country in Africa. The display will include an 1843 journal from the Society which has been graciously




A June 2, 1860 Harper's Weekly engraving of the slave ship *Wildfire* which was seized by the steam gunboat *USS Mohawk* off the coast of Cuba.



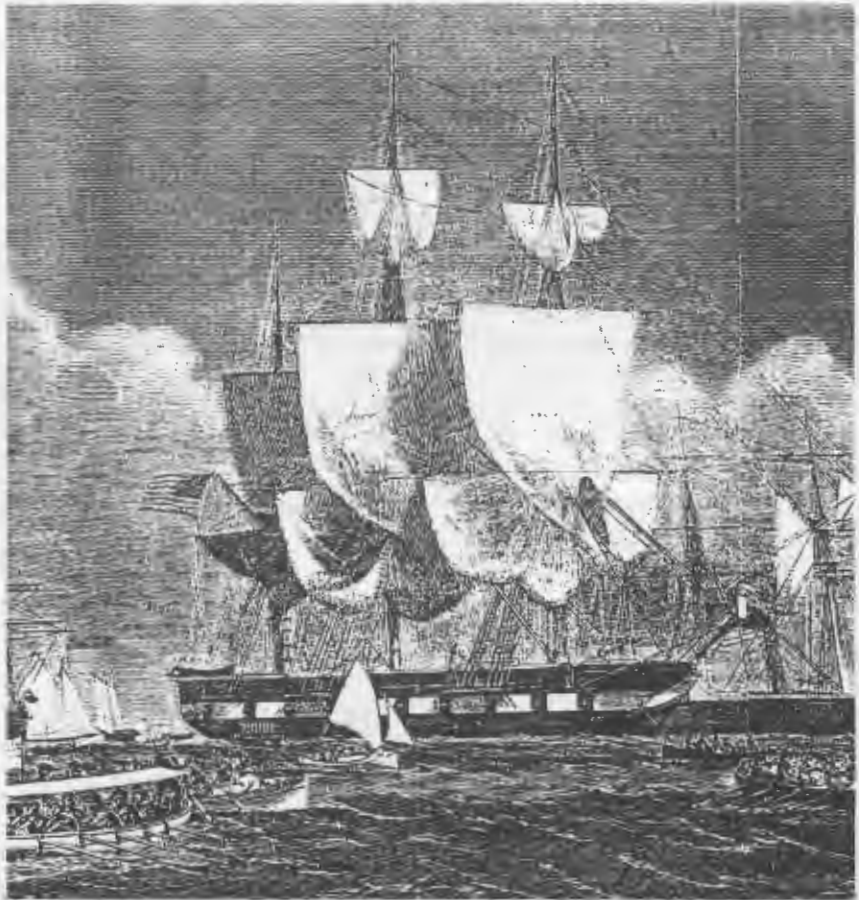
Shown here are various pain killing devices used aboard *USS Cumberland*. Pictured are an ale bottle, a liniment oil (the 19th century version of Ben-Gay) bottle, and a tobacco pipe. (Photo by Gordon Calhoun)

loaned by the Hampton University Museum in Hampton, VA.

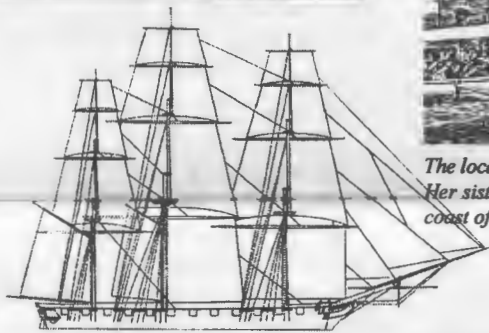
Other artifacts that will be on display come from the museum's *USS Cumberland* collection. Many of these artifacts have never been on public display. The sloop-of-war *Cumberland* served as the flagship of the Squadron between 1856 and 1858 before she was sunk by the ironclad *CSS Virginia* in 1862. Other Hampton Roads connections to the station include the locally built and based sloops *USS Jamestown*, *Yorktown*, and *Truxtun*. Local courts were frequently asked to pass judgement on suspected slave ships.

The display will show through Jan. 4, 1999. For more information, contact Gordon Calhoun at 322-2993. 

“A Humanitarian Symbol: The U.S. Navy on the Africa Station,” a display about the Navy’s role in suppressing the African slave trade will open for viewing on Sept. 23. It will accompany Nauticus’ **“A Slave Ship Speaks: The Wreck of the *Henrietta Marie*”** exhibit on the third floor. Call 322-2993 for information on the Africa Station display and 664-1000 for more information on the *Henrietta Marie* exhibit.



The locally built and based sloop USS Jamestown. This warship served two tours on the Africa Station. Her sister ship, the locally built and based ship USS Yorktown was lost when it struck a rock off the coast of Africa. (June 16, 1861 Harper’s Weekly engraving.)



All Cumberland items in this display are being shown for the first time to the public since the museum acquired them. Shown here are an oil lamp, an ink well, and a silver spoon from Cumberland’s ward room. (Photo by Gordon Calhoun)



A pepper bottle from USS Cumberland. Note the words “U.S. Navy” pressed into the glass. (Photo by Gordon Calhoun)

Africa Station continued from page 1

“maintain in service, on the coast of Africa, a sufficient and adequate squadron, or naval force of vessels, of suitable numbers and descriptions, to carry in all not less than eighty guns, to enforce separately and respectively, the laws, rights and obligations, of each of the two countries, for the suppression of the slave trade.” The following year Commodore Matthew C. Perry led four ships to equatorial waters as the first contingent of the U.S. Navy’s Africa Squadron. For the fifteen years prior to the *Dale*’s cruise, the Squadron’s size remained largely at that level. In addition to fighting the slave trade, the Squadron was given responsibility for aiding the Liberian settlements of freed American blacks, supporting U.S. trade, surveying the coast and cultivating good relations with native peoples. The Squadron’s cruising grounds were divided into northern and southern divisions: the former along the Bight of Benin, the latter south of the Equator along the mouth of the Congo River.

The first stop on *Dale*’s cruise was the island of Madeira reached after a voyage of three weeks. Capt. McBlair waited there another twenty days for the English mail steamer from Gibraltar. The steamer still had not shown when the sloop-of-war USS *St. Louis* arrived with orders sending the *Dale* on to the Africa Squadron’s base at Porto Pria in the Cape Verde Islands. Ten days after leaving Madeira, McBlair celebrated his 50th birthday by commuting the punishment of a seaman sentenced to confinement and by giving up chewing tobacco, “a vile and pernicious habit” (although “segars” he considered “a very gentlemanly luxury & I do indulge in it.”) Deeply religious, McBlair spent much of his free time reading the Bible and scholarly commentaries on the Bible. The arrival of the *Dale* at Porto Pria on June 27 was undoubtedly a heartening sight to the crew of the schooner USS *Dolphin*, the ship she was ordered to relieve.

One of the first orders of business for Capt. McBlair was a cruise to Porto Grande on the nearby island of St.



Vincent. This small settlement served as a coaling base for Royal Navy steamers, and thus as post office for the American Squadron. At Porto Grande, the ship took on her compliment of eighteen Kroumen. These African natives served as boatmen and translators for U.S. Navy ships. Known for their swimming ability and sobriety, the Kroumen were given nicknames by the crew. Their leader was called John Adams as he had gained freedom after three years of slavery in Brazil by stowing away on the frigate USS *John Adams*. Others in this group were Seabreeze, Two Forty, Wash Woman, and Tom Bigbee.

It was not until Aug. 15 that Commodore Thomas H. Conover arrived in his flagship USS *Cumberland*. He ordered *Dale* to sail the next day to patrol off the mouth of the Congo River. A month later, the sloop anchored at her destination, underscoring the immense distances ships of the Africa Squadron were required to travel. After a side trip to Loango Bay for wood and water, McBlair returned to the Congo to begin searching in earnest.

He spoke to the captains of two Royal Navy steamers who reported capturing two slavers in the past few days. Although he encountered several ships from other countries, McBlair found only a single American whaler commanded by “an impudent Yankee.” Running short of fresh food, the *Dale* left station to reprovision at Sao Paulo de Loando, two days sail to the south of the Congo.

McBlair was disappointed in his initial lack of success. He felt his sailing ship stood no chance on its own. “Our squadron is a farce. With a small steamer, I would have ere this been in the Congo & without doubt have made many prizes but with sails I can do nothing. Sails were never made to contend with currents & calms. Indeed so soon as my flag was seen off the coast, it was announced by runners far & wide & before I reach any place where I may hear of a slaver my departure is announced & my approach anticipated & I find nothing apparently but legal trade.” He was determined to go so far as to work jointly with the British to end this frustration. He later wrote his wife of his efforts after
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returning to the Congo from Loando. "On the 20th we sailed from St. Paul de Loando. I being anxious to get my expedition up the Congo provided I could have the aid of an English steamer; consequently I kept the land in sight as the probable means of meeting with one and about noon of the 21st was fortunate in doing so. Dispatched a boat (after making my arrangements with the commander HBM Steamer *Myrmidon*) under the command of Lt. Walker with a detail consisting of Lt. Cummings, Dr. Dean and fifteen men, the next day I stood for the mouth of the Congo and anchored finding the *Cumberland* there. Sent a boat to her but did not visit her the weather being unpleasant. She sailed early next morning. On the 23rd we were all expectancy & every sail coming out of the Congo was hailed as a prize. Sail after sail shot through its mouth wafted swiftly away in the strength of the current. At length the steamer was discovered with the *Dale's* boat in tow. It was a death blow to all hope. Shortly the arrival of our boat alongside confirmed our suspicions, but two American vessels were in the Congo; the papers of both correct but one a very suspicious craft. I perhaps may see more of her."

The two American craft McBlair wrote of were the bark *William G. Lewis* and the *Windward*. The former he seized after a thorough examination of her papers showed serious discrepancies. He dispatched her to Norfolk with a prize crew headed by his executive officer, Lt. Joel S. Kennard. The latter managed to get away despite McBlair's suspicions, but was later taken by the British. In a letter dated Dec. 29, 1857 from St. Helena, he explained to his wife: "The *Windward* which I sent an expedition after and which through want of judgment in my boarding officer got clear of us and which I afterwards pursued with so much vigor amongst the Keys of the Congo but without success managed to get two hundred miles from the coast with a cargo of six hundred slaves & was captured by an English steamer & brought here [St. Helena] for condemnation. One hundred and fifty of her slaves died on the passage. They were actually

packed in each other's laps when taken."

The capture of the *Windward* by the British despite flying the U.S. flag reinforced McBlair's sense of frustration. "The inefficiency of sailing vessels on this coast has been so fully represented to the Department that I think their attention must be drawn to it. We are mere scarecrows and the only ones benefited are the English cruisers who induce those bearing the American flag to believe that the *Dale* is near at hand & that they will detain them until she makes her appearances. As the illegal traders are guilty of piracy by our laws, they are very willing to throw overboard their flag & papers and become prizes to the English under the head of 'no papers

the officers visited a few little huts on the beach and found quite a large number of the Congo tribe assembled, the King amongst them. Today His Majesty came on board to pay me a visit. He was dressed in a grass smoking cape, an English Lieutenant's frock coat, a shirt & his loins girded like the rest of them with a cloth, only it had a number of tails hanging down and I believe the more tails & the longer they are denotes the greater dignity. He had no trousers or shoes but silver rings around his ankles & wrists. He was a very respectable looking Negro very much like many you meet with in Virginia. I invited him into the cabin. Gave him cigar & whisky, a bundle of the former & a bottle of the latter to carry with him. I made a little trade



One of the few known pictures of McBlair is this formal portrait at the Washington Navy Yard in 1860. McBlair is the American officer in the middle. To his right is Capt. Franklin Buchanan who would take command of the ironclad *CSS Virginia* a year later. Sitting in front of Buchanan is the first ever Japanese ambassador to the United States. (U.S. Navy photo)

or colors'. I have made a report upon the subject to Commodore Conover, which he has thought proper to found a report upon to our Government and also to address a letter to the [English] Admiral of this station."

Capt. McBlair was also occupied with the diplomatic outreach portion of his duties. He visited often with civil and native leaders along the coast. On Nov. 7, he wrote his wife: "Yesterday some of

for a fetish made of vegetable ivory and we parted company."

The *Dale* returned to Sao Paulo de Loando for provisions in mid-November 1857. The ship then turned south to patrol the coast below that city before leaving for Saint Helena to celebrate Christmas liberty. At St. Helena, McBlair visited Longwood, the former residence of Napoleon during
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his imprisonment by the British. The widow of one of the late emperor's guards gave McBlair a brass shaving mug that had belonged to Napoleon. The ship's crew celebrated New Year's Day by putting on a "matinee" for the local gentry. The requirements of hospitality had taxed McBlair's larder, "My Virginia hams have been scattered as specimens of our private curing." Many of his religious books ended up in the Governor's library. In return, McBlair now shared his cabin with a terrier pup named Bony.

Another part of a captain's duty in the Africa Squadron was protection of American citizens. After departing St. Helena on Jan. 4, 1858, McBlair directed his ship to Benguela. During a previous stop there in early December he had received a petition from two imprisoned American sailors. Patrick Kelly, Jeremiah Sullivan and Manuel Ackmore from the New Bedford whaler *Osceola* had been arrested in

"How happy I shall be to get away from the cares of office. I do believe sailors as a class have fewer ideas of morality than any other body of men. You cannot indulge without being imposed upon." -An exhausted McBlair comments about his crew to his wife, April 1859

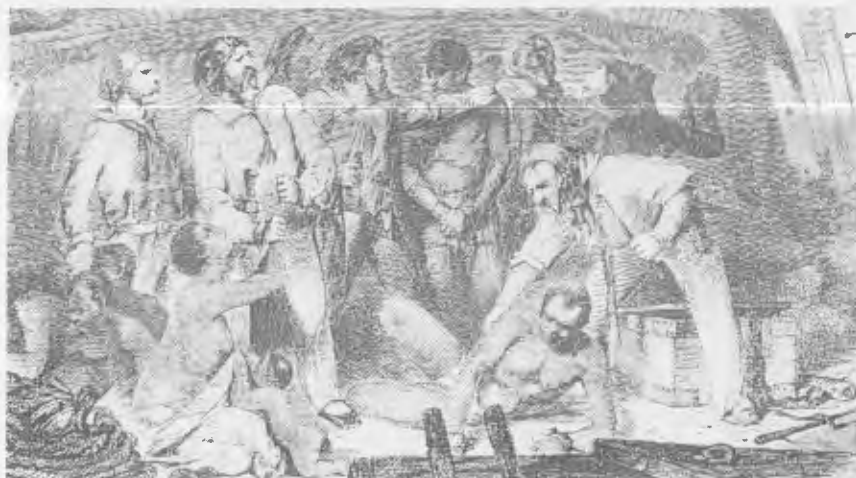
governor who after some delay said that his judges told him the case was still not ready for trial. McBlair then sent a letter threatening that if the men were not released to him, the *Dale* would take them by force. A trial was quickly held the next day and the American sailors found not guilty.

The *Dale* departed Benguela on Feb. 4, making an uneventful pass through the southern division on the way to Monrovia and the Canary Islands. She returned to the Squadron's home base in the Cape Verde Islands on June 27, 1858. There, Commodore Conover

would have a successful agricultural economy would be if slavery were to be introduced. The Bight of Benin cruise was largely uneventful, featuring mostly visits to colonial authorities ashore. The ship departed the coast for Porto Pria about Dec. 15.

McBlair's output of letters declined during the late portion of the cruise. Weariness and impatience began to show through. Of one of his officers, Lt. E. Lloyd Winder, McBlair wrote: "Winder is amiable and very attentive to his duties but not very bright, not the man for an executive officer." The captain also found fault with his personal servants with one exception: "Adolphe, my colored servant is an exceptional, honest boy, the only one of my party who has not been robbing me I think. I have discharged both cook and steward." McBlair had felt lucky early in the cruise to have good relations with his officers and men. By the end he was writing; "How happy I shall be to get away from the cares of office. I do believe sailors as a class have fewer ideas of morality than any other body of men. You cannot indulge without being imposed upon."

From early January 1859 on the *Dale* remained mostly at Porto Pria. A few side trips were made to Porto Grande to pick up the Squadron's mail. McBlair sailed to Sierra Leone to drop off the Kroumen in late January. Mostly the crew waited for orders or their relieving ship. Finally, liberation came about April 15, 1859. The *Dale* departed for the United States carrying an excited crew, more than one hundred parrots and at least two dogs. On May 20, Virginia McBlair received the best communication of all, a telegram announcing her husband's arrival in New York. 🏠



An engraving of the inside of a 19th century slave ship. Most American slave traders were from New England and made a tremendous amount of money "selling flesh" as anti-slavery activists called it. One of the many problems the U.S. Navy faced was that many slave merchants were not American and therefore did not fall under American jurisdiction. (HRNM photo of a engraving from the journal of Andrew Foote)

late March 1857 after a fight at Little Fish Bay. Their trial had been delayed ever since, and Kelly had died of illness in the prison hospital. McBlair had inquired about their case and had been told that evidence still needed to be sent to Benguela from Little Fish Bay. When McBlair checked at that place, he was told that all evidence had been forwarded to Benguela. On Feb. 2, the captain called on the Portuguese

ordered a cruise of the northern division from the Liberian colony of Cape Palmas south to Accra, Quittah, Whydah and the Badagry. Contrary winds kept *Dale* from reaching Liberia until Sept. 14. McBlair described a dinner ashore with several freed American slaves who were now leaders of Liberian society. He was disturbed to hear a former Virginia slave proclaim that the only way the colony

Volunteer News & Notes

Next Docent Meeting

The quarterly docent meeting will be on Oct. 8 at 10 a.m. at the Virginia Zoological Park located on Granby Street in Norfolk. Attendees will be given a live animal presentation by our very own **Ralph Preston**. Please call Bob at 322-2986 to tell him if you plan to attend or not. Also call if you need a ride, directions, or further information about the meeting.

Sixth Grade Program

The Hampton Roads Naval Museum and Nauticus are planning an educational program for Norfolk sixth graders. Our part of the program will center around the USS *Cumberland* exhibit and underwater archaeology. The three part on-site instruction will include a teacher guided tour of the "Henrietta Marie," a science experiment, and a HRNM hands-on less. We need docents to come forward to participate in this program. Like the third grade program, docents will need extra training for their presentations. This program will start on Oct. 19. Training for this will be given

Fleet Week Hampton Roads 1998 Highlight Schedule

Friday October 9

USS *Ashland* open for tours at Nauticus through Oct. 12.

6 p.m.-Opening Ceremony at Norfolk's Town Point Park. Ceremony to include a performance by the Navy Steel Band.



6:30 p.m.-Concert at Town Point Park with Hal Ketchum and Patty Loveless.

Saturday October 10

Hampton Phoebus Days runs through Oct. 11.

11 a.m. and 2 p.m.-Portsmouth Naval Hospital Dungeon tours.

1 p.m.-Fleet Chili Cookoff at Naval Air Station Oceana.

Tuesday October 13

11:30 a.m.-Jim Foote's first person interpretation of President Teddy Roosevelt on board USS *Wasp*. See page 3 for more information.

Wednesday October 14

5 p.m.-Concert at Portside with the U.S. Navy Steel Band.

Thursday October 15

7:30 p.m.-Navy Birthday Concert at Chrysler Hall with the Atlantic Fleet Band.

For more information on any of these events, call (757) 322-2797 or 322-2853.

by Mike Taylor on Oct. 5 and 9. You need to be present for both sessions, each

lasting about one hour. Each docent also needs to attend a practice session with Mike which will be scheduled during the course. See or call Bob at 322-2986 if you are interested.




Museum docent Preston Turpin explains the ways of the sea to a group of third graders (Photo by Bob Matteson)

Africa Station Display

Even though the Africa Squadron display will be on the third floor, you may get questions from visitors about it. Once the display opens in late September, Gordon will take interested docents upstairs for a walk through.

Next Dunderfunk

The next meeting of the Dunderfunk Society will be Thursday, Oct. 29 at 12:30 p.m. The speaker will be HRNM and Chrysler Museum docent Joe Moiser. He will talk about the letters of Capt. William Henry McBlair which he has been working on. 



The Museum Sage

Attention All History Grad Students

We have focused this issue of *The Day Book* on the Africa Squadron and the Africa Station. This is a part of U.S. Naval history that is scarcely talked about. The campaign against the slave trade and the presence of American warships in Africa lasted over 40 years. Yet many naval historians either tend to mumble their way through the Africa Squadron or are unnecessarily negative.

Some articles are simply cheap shots at the Navy. The worst of the lot is this example: "Slave traders took an average of 40,000 slaves from Africa each year for 420 years. The magnitude of these numbers places in perspective the lack of commitment of the United States Government and the Navy Department to suppress the African slave trade and ultimately bring it to an end," wrote one writer (a retired Naval officer the Sage might add) in a military history magazine. Never mind the United States Navy as an organization had only existed for 26 years when the U.S. Government ordered them to Africa.

When we get beyond these comments, a few important points and observations float to the top. The squadron has been criticized, today and in the 19th century, for the following reasons:

- 1) It lacked a defined mission (were ships there to stop the slave trade or promote American commercial interests?)
- 2) It lacked the resources to do the job properly (no station supply ships until the 1850's.)
- 3) The policy of interdicting the slave

trade was based largely on a strong emotional belief which did not have widespread domestic support.

4) Interdicting the slave trade did nothing to enhance the national security of the United States.

5) A lack of cooperation with other countries who had similar goals (in this case the British) made the campaign more difficult.

If we remove all references to slaves, one might think we are talking about 20th century peacekeeping operations, as these are the exact same charges critics have leveled at foreign and military policy makers. The 1988 mission to Somalia, for example, was done largely out of a reaction that we had an obligation to alleviate the suffering of starving people, and not for national security reasons.

Like the Somalia operation, many 19th century policy makers wanted to pull the plug on the Africa Squadron soon after it started. Unlike Somalia, the Africa Squadron made great strides towards achieving its goals towards the end of the campaign. It showed that if some of the problems listed above were solved, an "emotionally based" military operation could succeed.

The fact of the matter is that more study needs to be done on the Africa Station. The station was not an overnight sensation that was born one day and died the next. For as long as American ships were there, all we have are some bits, pieces, and overgeneralizations. As a public service to graduate students in history struggling to decide what to do their thesis on, *The Sage* would like to suggest this topic. Start with William Parker Howard's classic *Recollections of a Naval Officer*. Howard served aboard the locally based sloop USS *Yorktown* while in Africa.

History's most valuable asset is the



The immortal Capt. Matthew Perry, first commodore of the Africa Squadron. The Sage believes he and his fellow commodore's actions have many lessons for today's military operations.

wisdom it can bring to things you are doing today. The Africa Station provides plenty of wisdom for the type of military operations we find ourselves involved with increasing numbers.

Two New Ship Models to Show Off

The Sage would like to present two new ship models on display in the museum's gallery: the steam gunboat USS *Cayuga* and the torpedo boat USS *Winslow* (TB-5).

USS *Cayuga*

Cayuga was one of the "90-day gunboats" constructed at the beginning of the American Civil War. While she served with the West Gulf Blockade Squadron, the model is a good representative of a highly successful class of light, steam powered warships that could frequently be seen attached to the Hampton Roads-based North Atlantic Blockade Squadron. *Aroostook*, *Unadilla*, *Chocura*, *Chippewa*, *Seneca*, and *Penobscot* were six that serve on this station. Of these six, *Aroostook* was probably the most relevant to our area as she was assigned to the Navy's James River Squadron in early 1862. She

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participated in the Battle of Hampton Roads and in several engagements designed to support the Peninsula Campaign, including the Battle of Drewry's Bluff.

Officially, *Cayuga* and her sister ships were designated screw gunboats and were named after Indian tribes or rivers in New England. They all displaced 691 tons, drew 11 feet of water, and had a maximum of 10 knots. Armament varied to whatever was available. They usually had at least of two 24-pounder smoothbores, one 20-pounder smoothbore, and one 11-inch Dahlgren. The Navy latter refitted *Cayuga* with an extra set of two 24-pounders as an experiment to see if the small ship could handle the additional armament.

The "90-day gunboat" program received as much, if not more, public attention in the North as construction of the first three ironclads. There was a pressing need at the time of the bombardment of Ft. Sumter for shallow draft blockade ships. While the Government was being a little ambitious when it called for the ships to be built in 90 days, several of them were turned out in under 100.

The Navy awarded all contracts for this program to civilian shipyards as it felt the Government-owned yards had more important things to work on. Twenty-three in all were completed within the first six months of the war, and they all provided valuable blockade and fort suppression duties.

The model's builder is not known, but it was latter refurbished by the late Tom Tragle. Mr. Tragle also built the museum's model of USS *Monitor* and the sub-chaser *SC 136*.

USS *Winslow* (TB-5)

The second model is the 1897 torpedo boat USS *Winslow* built by museum docent Bob Comet. Constructed by the Columbian Iron Works in Baltimore, MD, *Winslow* was commissioned and based at the Norfolk Naval Shipyard. She was 160 feet in length, displaced 142 tons, and a top speed of 25 knots. She was armed with three one-pounder rapid fire rifles and



The "90-day" steam gunboat USS *Cayuga* (HRNM photo)

three 18-inch Whitehead torpedo tubes.

Winslow was most famous for participating in a raid, along with the Hampton Roads-based USS *Wilmington* and revenue cutter USRS *Hudson*, on Cardenas, Cuba during the Spanish-American War. She was almost sunk during the battle.

The thinking behind and design of this warship was heavily influenced by a naval doctrine of costal defense and commerce raiders. The Navy's outlook for building in the late 1890's called for over 150 torpedo boats, including

torpedo boat flotillas. Battleships and cruisers were lined with small rapid fire and various automatic guns to make sure that torpedo boats kept their distance. A whole new class of warship was even invented to fight off torpedo boats: the torpedo boat destroyer.

When you see the model of *Winslow* on exhibit, notice that it is painted a dark green olive color. Since a torpedo boat's greatest chance for a successful target came at night, it needed to be given some type of camouflage. American torpedo boats of the 1890's



Model of USS *Winslow* built by museum docent Bob Comet. (HRNM photo by Gordon Calhoun)

15 for Hampton Roads, to defend the nation's harbors from enemy fleets. This plan was never fulfilled, as the Navy started to concentrate more and more on a true blue water fleet.

Despite the difficulty of pulling off a successful torpedo attack, the world navies were frightened of each other's

hold a unique position in U.S. Naval history as they were the only ships painted this color scheme. In addition, these ships did not have a peace time color scheme like their larger cousins.

The model is currently on display in the museum's Spanish-American War exhibit. 🚢