

The Daybook

Volume 5 Issue 3

Spring 1999



Norfolk in the Quasi-War with France

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In This Issue...

WTKR TV-3's Veteran Newsman Ed Hughes to Speak about USS <i>Liberty</i>	3
Museum Receives Large Ship Model and Book Collection.....	4
<i>Pax Americana</i> Now on Display.....	5
The Brig <i>Norfolk</i> in the Quasi-War with France.....	6



About The Daybook

The Daybook 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. Book reviews are solely the opinion of the reviewer.

The HRNM is operated and funded by Commander Navy Region Mid-Atlantic. The museum is 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 Daybook'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.

Questions or comments can be directed to the Hampton Roads Naval Museum editor. *The Daybook* can be reached at (757) 322-2993, by fax at (757) 445-1867, e-mail at gbcalhoun@cmar.navy.mil, or write *The Daybook*, 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>.

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HRNM Staff

Director
Becky Poulliot
Curator
Joe Judge
Education Specialist
Bob Matteson
Exhibits Specialist
Marta Nelson
Museum Technician
Ofelia Elbo
HRNM OIC
Ensign Julius McCloud
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Gordon Calhoun
Special Events
Helene Tisdale
Director, HRNHF
Maj. Gen. Dennis Murphy,
USMC (Ret)



Rear Adm. R.T. Ziemer
Commander Navy Region Mid-Atlantic

Features

The Director's Column-

Signals, Signage, and a Loss.....2

Book Reviews.....10

In Irons: Britain's Naval Supremacy and the American Revolutionary Economy by Richard Buell, jr. Reviewed by maritime historian Ira Dye.

Lamson of the Gettysburg by Roswell H. Lamson. Edited by James and Patricia McPherson and *From Cape Charles to Cape Fear: The North Atlantic Squadron During the Civil War* by Robert M. Browning, jr. Reviewed by HRNM docent Hunt Lewis.



The Museum Sage looks at Secretary of the Navy Benjamin Stoddert and signal flags during the Quasi-War.....12

Cover Photograph: The American merchant ship *Mary* is attacked by three French privateers in the Caribbean, 1799. French raids like this one prompted President John Adams to deploy American warships to the area. Hampton Roads was the main naval station for the war. In addition, the region contributed the brigs *Norfolk* and *Richmond* to the cause. (Picture used with permission from the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, MA)

Signals, Signage, and a Loss

The Director's Column

by Becky Poulliot

On April 16, a red letter day occurred for the Hampton Roads Naval Museum. Final touches were completed on a permanent seven-foot exterior sign. The finished work features our logo of the *Cumberland* along with the complete name of our institution. And so, almost five years after our relocation to Nauticus we have arrived. Thanks to the Nauticus staff, the City of Norfolk's Design Review Committee, the City Council, and especially, the Hampton Roads Naval Historical Foundation for funding the fabrication and installation. Already, visitor feedback has been quite positive and confirms our theory that the sign would attract more awareness and ultimately, visitation to the museum.

This issue is dedicated to the memory of the "good doctor"—volunteer interpreter, Hampton Roads Naval Historical Foundation board member, and friend, **Dr. Charles J. Devine, Jr.** Dr. Devine died on February 12. A member of our unpaid staff since February 1994, he never hesitated to become involved in hands-on programs for visitors, young and old. Dr. Devine's greatest role at the Museum was that of the good doctor,



The museum now has a sign on the exterior of Nauticus. It is visible from Waterside Drive and has dramatically increased public awareness of the museum. (Photo by Bob Matteson)

a Civil War surgeon. He was meticulous both in research and in the first-person method of presentation. His ensemble included a replica 19th century surgeon's kit. Naturally, he knew the names and usage of each instrument for Dr. Devine was a world

renown surgeon. Despite an active schedule—he was quite popular as a speaker within the medical profession—Dr. Devine promoted the museum to the community as a member of our Speaker's Bureau, and always had recommendations on how to reach out to new audiences. Thursday afternoons, his regular duty times, are not the same. Our deepest sympathy goes to his wife Rae and family.

Summer is the museum's busiest time for tourists and this year we will offer an active "Family Fun" weekend series. Each Saturday and Sunday, the museum will host regular, advertised programs. Our newest one will incorporate a hands-on presentation in signal flags to teach children and their parents about the history and importance of communication in the Navy. A new staff member, **Helene Tisdale**, will serve as one of our special program presenters. Helene, a new history graduate from Virginia Wesleyan, joined the Hampton Roads Naval Museum on May 17. She is an enthusiastic presenter and an able organizer. On weekdays, she assists in planning special events like our lecture series and our Dunderfunk luncheons. See you there!




Nationally respected urologist, museum board member, and museum docent Dr. Charles Devine jr recently passed away. He is pictured here during one of his many presentations as a Civil War surgeon. (Photo by Bob Matteson)

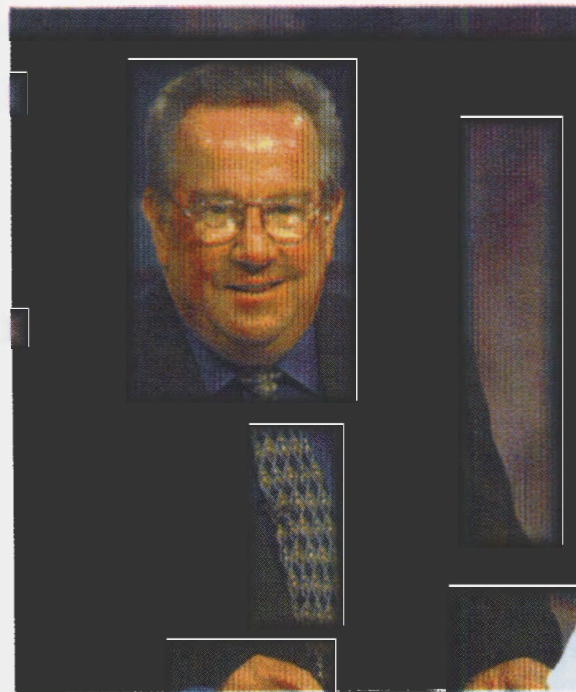
Becky

WTKR TV-3's Ed Hughes to Speak About the Attack on USS *Liberty*

The attack on the Hampton Roads-based intelligence ship USS *Liberty* (ATGR-5) is the subject of the next speaker in the Hampton Roads Naval Museum Luncheon Lecture Series. Our speaker will be Ed Hughes of WTKR TV-3. Mr. Hughes' very first assignment for Channel 3 was to cover the return of the damaged vessel to its homeport at Little Creek Amphibious Base. He and his producer spent three hours on board the ship where they were allowed view the damage

of the more dangerous tours of duty during the Cold War. These converted freighters (officially designated by the Navy as "technical research" ships) usually operated extremely close to unfriendly waters, often without escorts and with very little armament of their own. Their main mission was to intercept and monitor enemy communication signals. As a further example, just a year after the attack on *Liberty*, North Korean forces attacked and seized the intelligence ship USS *Pueblo* (AGER-2.)

If you would like more information about the talk or if you would like to make a reservation, please call the museum reservation line at 322-2992. 



(Photo of Ed Hughes provided by WTKR TV-3)

The Hampton Roads Naval Museum presents Ed Hughes veteran reporter and news anchor for WTKR TV-3. June 9, 1999 at Norfolk Naval Station's Club Pier 26. Lunch included at a price of \$10. Reservations required. Call 757-322-2992 to make reservations.

and interview the captain. Mr. Hughes has worked at WTKR for over thirty years and is one of Hampton Roads' most respected news reporters. His presentation will take place at noon on June 9 at Norfolk Naval Station's Pier 26. The cost for the lunch is \$10 and reservations are required.

The attack on USS *Liberty* is one of the most controversial events in the history of the Navy. In 1967, the ship was in the eastern Mediterranean with orders to monitor Egyptian radio traffic. According to the crew of the ship, their specific assignment was to determine if Soviet-made TU-95 bombers based in Egypt were being operated by Egyptians or Soviet pilots. Even though a war between Israel and Egypt was currently under way, *Liberty* was stationed only about thirteen miles off the coast of the Sinai Peninsula. Shortly after she completed her assignment, the ship came under attack by Israeli torpedo boats and aircraft. A controversy has raged ever since whether Israeli forces attacked *Liberty* by accident or on purpose.

The Navy's intelligence ships had one

"Someone Attacked the *Liberty*" -HRNM Docent Jim Reid Recalls That Day

One of my life's defining moments has to be the day the Israeli Air Force bombed USS *Liberty* (ATGR-5) in the Eastern Mediterranean during the Six Day War in 1967. While I did not participate in any way, I had the most unusual opportunity to watch history from a ringside seat. A defining moment is an event that allows us to establish milestones in our lives. The USS *Liberty* episode remains as clear as it happened just yesterday.

I was attached to an A-4 Skyhawk Squadron, Attack Squadron 36, aboard USS *America* (CV-66.) The ship was just below the Island of Crete and my flight was supposed to be practicing dropping live bombs on a rocky Greek island called Avgo Nisi. Because of the heavy demand for bombs in Southeast Asia, our East Coast Squadron rarely had the opportunity to fly with full loads of live ordnance.

It was a beautiful sunny day, the kind that often leads to daydreaming. My flight was circling the islands waiting for our time to

begin our practice. My calm was broken by a call from *America* ordering me to "jettison all weapons and return to base immediately." I requested time to make the bomb runs since I was carrying such a large load. The instructions were to do as I was told and to proceed to orbit over the ship until signaled to land. Below, everything looked normal except the ship had taken a course toward the southeast and was going somewhere in a real hurry. I was clueless as to what was causing the turmoil going on below.

After a while, other ships from the Sixth Fleet began to join *America*. The carrier *Saratoga* (CV-60) joined up with many more cruisers and destroyers. Several of the ever present Russian spy trawlers attempted to infiltrate the assembly of US Navy ships, but were herded out by our ships who seem to imply the Russians must leave or be rammed. All this I could see from above, but I could not imagine what could be causing all this furor.

Reid continued page 15

Museum Receives Large Book and Ship Model Contribution

A maritime history enthusiast has given the museum over 2,300 ship models and hundreds of military reference and history books. This gracious donation will greatly assist the museum in its ongoing mission to educate the public on the history of the U.S. Navy.

The ship models are metal, 1:1200 scale models representing warships and civilian ships of many different time periods. They all are in very good condition and will be very useful for educational purposes. Some of the models include battleships from the Great White Fleet, aircraft carriers from World War II, and *Ticonderoga*-class cruisers from the modern era. The collection is not limited to American ships. It also includes Japanese World War II battleships and cruisers, German World War II destroyers, and modern day warships from the navy of the Soviet Union. There are also several different civilian ships including modern container ships and cruise liners. The museum is currently processing the collection which, considering its size, will take some time.

The book collection includes a wide variety of military history and military reference books. Museum librarian **Ofelia Elbo** has been working around the clock



One part of the ship model collection donated to the museum concentrates on ships from the Age of Steel. Shown here are warships from the Great White Fleet: USS Idaho (BB-24), Colorado (ACR-7), Alabama (BB-8), Virginia (BB-13), Kansas (BB-21), Maine (BB-10), and Seattle (ex-Washington) (ACR-11). (Photo by Gordon Calhoun)

over the past few weeks. Many of these books will soon be available for the public to use. Since the collection includes books we already have and several non-naval history titles, we have turned over part of the collection to the Little Creek Amphibious Base library. 🚢



The largest portion of the collection are World War II ships. Included are ships from many different navies. Pictured here are the battleships USS Alabama (BB-60), North Carolina (BB-55), and Washington (BB-56). (Photo by Gordon Calhoun)

Local Artist Loans Museum a Painting About Church Street

Local artist Maizelle has loaned the museum one of her acrylic paintings. Entitled "Liberty," this 1997 painting depicts Norfolk's predominantly black business district of Church Street in the 1940's. The painting will be on loan at least through the summer. It is currently on display in the museum's "Walk Down Granby Street" gallery.

This painting is a part of Maizelle's "Where I Lived" series. The series' theme are based on the artist's many memories of Norfolk. Due to segregation, an independent African-American community flourished on Church Street. Businesses, shops, and entertainment awaited African-American sailors on shore. An effort is currently underway to restore the Church Street area to its former glory.

A picture of the work can be seen on page 16. 🚢

Pax Americana Now on Display

Through October 31

The museum's newest exhibit is currently open for the public to see. Entitled *Pax America: The U.S. Navy in the Era of Violent Peace*, this exhibit explores and discusses the role the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps have played in five recent peacekeeping operations.

The exhibit features artifacts loaned to the museum from the Naval Historical Center, the Marine Corps Historical Center, and Explosive Ordnance Disposal Unit 2 based at Ft. Story. Items on display include an Iranian mine recovered from the Persian Gulf in the 1980's; land mine education posters published by NATO and the UN; several uniforms including one that was used by museum docent **Paul Bohn**; personal items from a Marine killed in the 1983 terrorist attack on the Marine Barracks in Beirut; and clothing worn by women in Somalia. These artifacts are joined by several photographs and political cartoons drawn by Pat Oliphant.

The exhibit is located in the museum's Modern Navy gallery and will be open through October 31. Call 322-2993 for more information. ▶



A steel fence greets the visitor to the museum's newest exhibit on peacekeeping operations. Among the artifacts included in the exhibit are a dress from Somalia, uniforms from active participants, and several photographs. Two cartoons from nationally renowned political cartoonists Pat Oliphant are also on display. (Photo by Gordon Calhoun)



One of the nightmares that military personnel and civilians alike have to face are land mines. It is the job of the Navy's Explosive Ordnance Disposal units to assist clearing these deadly weapons. Part of their job includes education through the use of these mine awareness posters produced by NATO and the United Nations. (Photo by Gordon Calhoun)



This Sea Bee uniform belonged to a BUI who was one of the first American military personnel inserted into Bosnia. Notice the authentic Bosnian dirt. It is currently on loan from the Naval Historical Center. (Photo by Gordon Calhoun)

Within thirteen years of the end of the American War of Independence, the United States faced the possibility of war with her strongest ally in that conflict. France, after her own revolution, was engaged in war with England. She saw American diplomatic efforts such as the 1794 Jay Treaty with Great Britain as an attack on the special relationship that had existed between the U.S. and herself. On 18 January 1798, the hard-liners in Paris expressed their displeasure with American policy in a decree that declared a neutral ship (including American) carrying British goods would be judged a good prize if captured. French privateers began seizing American ships. The pickings were especially good in the West Indies where

Stoddert ordered Norfolk Navy Agent William Pennock to buy her and fit her out. The cost should be less than \$20 per ton. The *Norfolk Herald* thus reported on 5 September 1798: "On Saturday [1 September] was launched at the Ship Yard of Mess. Nash & Herbert, Gosport, the United States Brig *Norfolk*. She is a handsome vessel, is to mount 18 six pounders, is coppered to her bends, and is to be commanded by Capt. Thomas Williams. The judgement and attention this gentleman has displayed in fitting this vessel are eminently conspicuous, and a pleasing presage he will do honor to his appointment."

Williams, a Norfolk County native, was a fifty year-old merchant sea captain who had commanded a privateer during the Revolution. The brig's other officers were selected by Williams with the help of Col. Josiah Parker, a Federalist Congressman from Isle of Wight

Guadeloupe where letters of marque were being handed out freely by the Revolutionary government.

First Cruise

Campbell in the cutter *Eagle* was delayed in arriving so the small squadron consisting of *Norfolk*, *Montezuma* and *Retaliation* got underway from Hampton Roads on 25 October 1798. Seventeen days later the group weathered the Virgin Islands and commenced patrolling to the west of Antigua and Guadeloupe. From British ships cruising there, the word came that the French had nothing larger than schooner privateers in the area. On 22 November, Murray's three ships were in chase of two French brigs when two larger ships appeared. Bainbridge in *Retaliation*, being closest to them, hoisted English recognition signals. By the time Bainbridge realized that the reason he could not make out the replies was that the ships were French not English, he was trapped. Recognizing the inevitable, Bainbridge surrendered. Thus the *Le Volontaire* and *l'Insurgente* made the first recapture of a warship in this conflict and Bainbridge became the first officer of the new United States Navy to lose his ship.

Montezuma and *Norfolk* continued their cruising among the islands to the north and west of Guadeloupe for the next two weeks. On 5 December, *Norfolk* suffered the first of many problems with her masts. Williams put in to Roseau on the island of Dominica for repairs. In short order the brig was again cruising with *Montezuma*. Both vessels called at Prince Rupert Bay on Dominica to join with the frigate *United States* commanded by John Barry. They were ordered to convoy 23 friendly merchantmen north through French patrolled waters.

On their return, Williams and Murray found that Capt. Thomas Truxtun of the frigate *Constellation* had arrived and relieved Barry as senior officer. This change in authority would not bode well for *Norfolk's* captain. Truxtun was undoubtedly the most forceful of the new navy's officers. Navy Secretary Stoddert had once told President Adams,

Norfolk continued on page 7

"She is a Fine Looking Vessel and Will Sail Fast"

The Brig *Norfolk* in the Quasi-War with France

by Joe Mosier

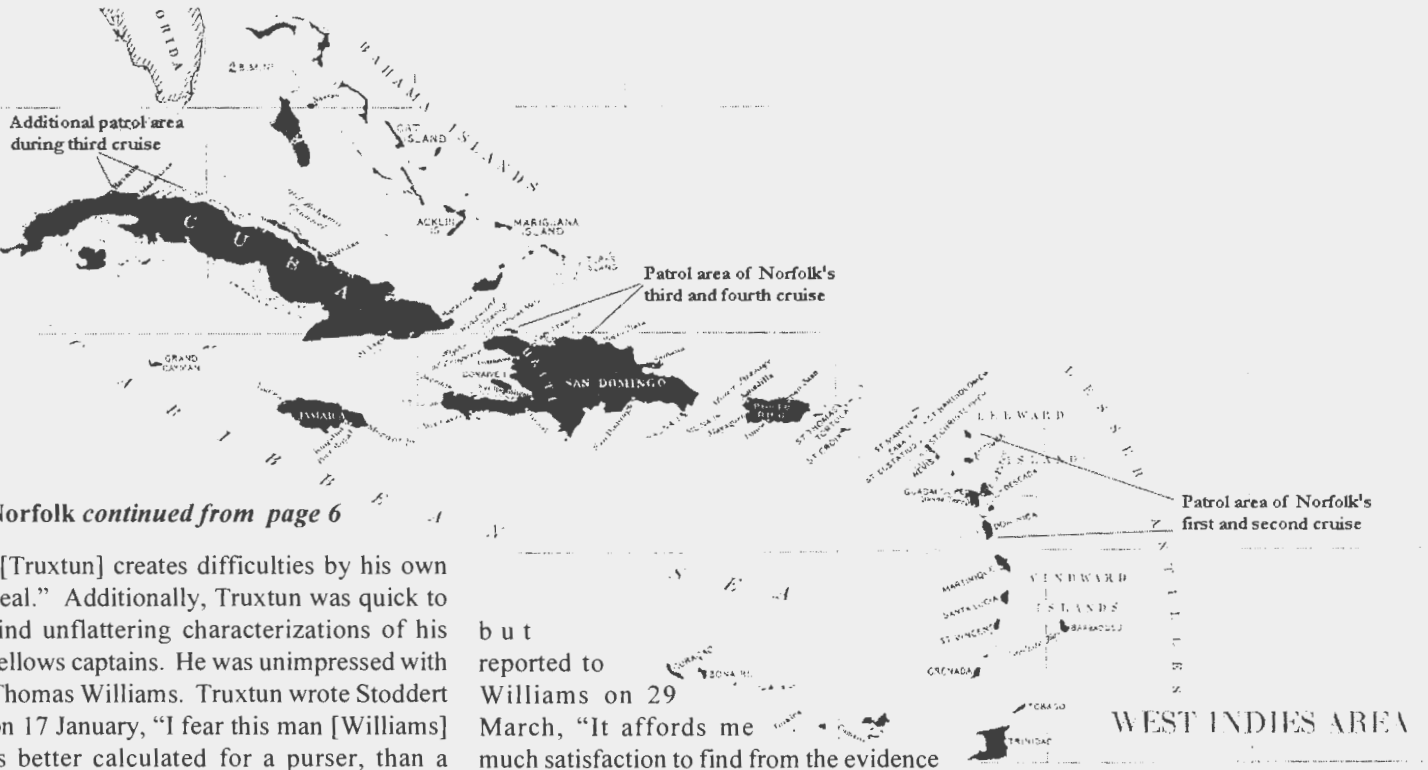
American bottoms supplied both French and English colonies. President John Adams sent a negotiating team to France to attempt conciliation, but French negotiators demanded a bribe of \$220,000. When news of this so-called XYZ affair reached the U.S., Congress readily authorized naval action against the French.

There was only one problem. The United States had no navy. The last of the Revolutionary War frigates, *Alliance*, had been sold in 1783. Legislation was quickly passed authorizing a Navy Department and completion of six ships whose construction had been started in 1794 for use against the Barbary States of North Africa. The new Secretary of the Navy, Benjamin Stoddert, saw that the nation could not wait for this construction to be completed. Warships were needed immediately. The quickest way to achieve that goal was to convert suitable merchant vessels into men-of-war.

One such suitable vessel, a brig designed for the West Indies trade, was nearing completion in Portsmouth, Virginia. On 14 July 1798,

County. They included lieutenants John McRea of Alexandria and Thomas Calvert of St. Brides Parish, Surgeon John K. Read, and Purser John Muse. Lt. Josiah Reddick recruited his Marine Corps detachment in nearby Suffolk. By early October, *Norfolk* had completed her preparations and moved down to Sewells Point. Col. Parker visited the brig there and reported to Stoddert, "She is a fine looking vessel and will sail fast."

Stoddert ordered Capt. Alexander Murray in *Montezuma*, outfitting in Baltimore, to take command of a squadron consisting of his ship, *Norfolk*, the Revenue Cutter *Eagle* (Capt. Hugh G. Campbell) and the schooner *Retaliation* (Lt. William Bainbridge). [*Retaliation*, previously the French privateer *Le Croyable*, had been taken by Capt. Stephen Decatur, Sr. in *Delaware* as the first American capture of the war.] Williams had actually been senior to Murray, but Stoddert changed the latter's commission date in the belief that Murray was the more known quantity. Murray's orders were to proceed to the West Indies "to take and destroy French armed vessels." The squadron was to focus on the French stronghold of



Norfolk continued from page 6

“[Truxtun] creates difficulties by his own zeal.” Additionally, Truxtun was quick to find unflattering characterizations of his fellows captains. He was unimpressed with Thomas Williams. Truxtun wrote Stoddert on 17 January, “I fear this man [Williams] is better calculated for a purser, than a Captain of a Ship of War, as he pays more attention I understand to pecuniary matters, than those of a more glorious Nature.” Truxtun established his base at Basseterre Roads, St. Kitt’s. He used *Norfolk*, *Montezuma* and *Montezuma’s* replacement, the brig *Richmond*, in convoy and patrolling duties around Guadeloupe. On 1 March, he ordered Williams to convoy a valuable merchant vessel to Antigua. During this trip, *Norfolk* encountered a French privateer and the outcome would confirm for Truxtun his low opinion of Williams.

As Truxtun explained to John Barry in a letter dated 14 March: “The *Norfolk* I have sent to Philadelphia, in order that Captain Williams may answer the Secretary of the Navy such Questions as he shall put to him, in Consequence of various charges exhibited by his Officers for shortening sail, and quitting chase of a French privateer after the said privateer had received great Injury from his chase guns, and had absolutely hove to, etc., etc. etc. A number of indifferent people in no way interested, saw the whole of the above business from Saint Kitts, and blame Williams much, but it is right that the man should have fair play...” *Norfolk* departed Basseterre Roads on 7 March with a convoy of 20 plus ships. To help solve his squadron’s manning problems, Truxtun removed all but 50-60 of *Norfolk’s* crew. Williams arrived back in Philadelphia by 27 March. Secretary Stoddert listened to the complaints of Lt. Calvert and others,

but reported to Williams on 29 March, “It affords me much satisfaction to find from the evidence of your officers, that the newspaper paragraph so injurious to your reputation, is a gross misrepresentation of the circumstances to which it alludes.” Williams, however, requested and received permission to attend to his private affairs for two months. As *Norfolk* was needed back in the West Indies, Stoddert passed command of the brig to William Bainbridge, recently released by the French after the seizure of *Retaliation* and promoted to master commandant.

Second Cruise

Acting quickly, Bainbridge recruited a new crew and reprovisioned his ship. *Norfolk* departed Philadelphia on 20 April 1799 for St. Kitts with the supply ship *Florida* in convoy. On her arrival on 17 May, *Norfolk* was ordered to patrol with *Baltimore* (Capt Samuel Barron) to the windward (east) of Guadeloupe until 10 June. Captain Thomas Tingey in *Ganges* had replaced Truxtun in command at Basseterre Roads. *Norfolk’s* patrols continued until 5 June when she forced to return losing both topmasts while in pursuit of the French sloop *Vainquere*. After repairs, Bainbridge convoyed the schooner *Regulator* to St. Barts and commenced patrolling off that island in company with *Ganges*.

On 28 June, the brig’s main mast sprung, and more trouble appeared on 18 July when her main topmast was carried away. Tingey

decided enough was enough. He wrote Secretary Stoddert that *Norfolk’s* masts were “totally unsafe for cruising”. Bainbridge was ordered to convoy a large group of American vessels northward. Assisting in this effort would be the sailing ping-pong ball *Retaliation*, again recaptured from the French by *Merrimack*. *Norfolk* would then proceed to New York for extensive repairs. The 100-ship convoy left Basseterre Roads on 30 July. On 4 August, a ship that Bainbridge reckoned to be a 44-gun French frigate attacked the convoy. Bainbridge felt that *Norfolk* with her 18 six-pound guns could offer little defense, so he signaled the convoy to scatter. The Frenchman took off in pursuit of *Norfolk*, but the brig managed to elude capture before nightfall. In the morning Bainbridge was able to reestablish the convoy with some 48 ships in company. *Norfolk* reached New York by 12 August. Secretary Stoddert, anxious for *Norfolk’s* return to the West Indies cautioned Bainbridge to keep repairs down to essentials. The work was completed in a month, and on 12 September, *Norfolk* departed Sandy Hook with orders to report to the senior officer at Cape François on the St. Domingo station (modern Haiti).

Third Cruise

Norfolk arrived on station by 15 October
Norfolk continued on page 8



The English Caribbean colony of St. Christopher as seen by an English artist in the early 1800's. Located on the north end of the Leeward Islands, St. Christopher was a frequent port of call and way station for U.S. Naval warships patrolling for French privateers. It was also frequently visited by American merchant ships hoping to catch an escort home. (Naval Historical Center photograph of a drawing by the Naval Chronicle)

Norfolk continued from page 7

1799. Together with *General Greene* and *Boston*, she patrolled off Cape François. Bainbridge reported to the senior officer, Captain Silas Talbot in *Constitution*.

At this time there was little French activity in the region. Given the strong American presence, most French privateers had moved further north. On 7 November, however, Bainbridge and George Little in *Boston* encountered one of those which still plied the area. They seized a sloop *Le Gourde du Pelican* armed with 11 swivel guns and carrying 24 men. They found nearby a barge which had been taken by the sloop. All male passengers had been murdered by the French and all the women had been "insulted." The barge was sunk and the sloop sent to New York for adjudication. The resultant prize money was \$5,652.88 split between the two ships.

On 15 November, Bainbridge received Stoddert's orders to proceed to Havana and take charge of a squadron to consist of *Pinckney* and *Warren*. The Navy Secretary strongly cautioned Bainbridge that his ships were to remain at Havana and not return to the United States for supplies. Again activity was fairly light. On 16 March, *Norfolk* chased the French privateer schooner *Beauty* into shoal waters off Sugar Key and battered her

with broadsides. Bainbridge's squadron had been able to remain almost constantly at sea for six months, but with his crew's enlistments coming to an end, Bainbridge departed Havana on 3 April 1800 with a convoy of 23 merchants.

On *Norfolk's* arrival in mid-April, her crew was paid off and Bainbridge received the welcome news that he had been promoted to captain. Thomas Calvert who had been one of *Norfolk's* lieutenants since her commissioning would take command and Bainbridge would get the new frigate *George Washington*. Replacing Calvert as senior lieutenant would be Stephen Decatur, Jr., crossdecking from the frigate *United States*. When resupplied and recrewed Calvert was to convoy two civilian brigs, *Maria* and *Louisa*, to Cartagena on the coast of modern Columbia.

Fourth Cruise

Norfolk sailed at the end of May 1800. Off the island of St. Martins on 19 June, a French privateer of 14 guns with 120 men aboard attacked. A passenger on the *Louisa* described the event: "... Capt. Calvert hailed and ordered us to make sail and keep our course, with which we complied, till we saw him round to and lay his top sail to

the mast, when we did the same. The Frenchmen was at this time within about half gun shot of us, when he hoisted a colour and fired a gun. When he got so near that we could distinguish plainly every



In contrast to his later portraits, this drawing of William Bainbridge shows a significantly more rough individual. This depicts the New Jersey Naval officer when he was a young lieutenant and the second commanding officer of the brig *Norfolk*. (Naval Historical Center photograph of a painting by Trott.)

person on board prepared for boarding, with their shirt sleeves rolled up, the *Norfolk* fired into him, four or five broadsides; at length they were along side of each other at the distance of pistol shot, when a smart


Norfolk continued on page 9

Norfolk continued from page 8

engagement ensued, which lasted about ten minutes, during which time the *Norfolk* fired at least 15 rounds of all the different kinds of shot that are used in vessels of war, besides about 300 muskets, and I have no doubt that the Frenchman lost fifty men or upwards. He got away at last by hauling upon a wind; we all chased him for three or four hours..." According to other reports the attackers consisted of two ships and Calvert was severely wounded in the attack.

Norfolk completed her convoy to Cartagena and pursuant to Stoddert's orders, sailed north again to join the squadron off St. Domingo. She arrived "in a shattered and insecure state" according to the senior officer, Captain Alexander Murray in *Constellation*. The brig leaked so badly that Murray ordered her into Cape François for inspection. Thorough repairs proved to be necessary, but would prove too costly on station. Murray was also worried about the news Calvert had brought of French activity off the coast of South America. *Norfolk* was ordered to return to Cartagena to collect American shipping there "with property valued at \$300,000" and convoy them to America. Murray recommended *Norfolk* then sail to Baltimore for repairs. His convoy completed, Calvert reached Baltimore about 18 October 1800. A survey of the ship convinced the Navy Secretary that it would be better to sell than repair her. *Norfolk's* crew was to be paid off while Calvert transferred to the command of the brig *Eagle* taking Decatur and some of his warrant officers with him.

Before this could happen, Murray approached Stoddert with what he saw as Calvert's bad conduct in the encounter of 19 June. He felt Calvert had not been aggressive enough and thus allowed the French privateer to escape. Murray informed the Secretary that "[Calvert's] lieutenant [Decatur] can give details." This was an ironic twist in that Calvert's testimony had been central in the charges against his first commander, Williams.

At any rate, Calvert was replaced on *Eagle* by an officer with the decidedly unwarlike name of Lt. M. Simmones Bunbury. *Norfolk*, her military stores removed, was sold out of service, probably in November 1800 ending the short but valuable career of Hampton Road's first contribution to the new United States Navy. 




This the museum's model of the 18-gun brig *Norfolk*. The exact dimensions of the warship are not known, but a good estimation can be made as it was a converted merchant vessel of a common type. (HRNM photo)

Norfolk's Norfolk Commanders

Because of their relatively short period of service little is known of the two native Virginians who commanded the brig *Norfolk* during the Quasi-War with France. Her first commander was Capt. Thomas Williams. Born on 6 March 1747, son of Thomas and Feebey Williams, he had served in command of the 16-gun privateer brigantine *Willing Lass* during the Revolution. He and his ship had been drafted into Governor Jefferson's Emergency Fleet at the time of Benedict Arnold's raid in winter 1780 - spring 1781. Like the other members of that fleet, *Willing Lass* was lost at Osborne's on the James River on 27 April 1781. After the war, Williams probably returned to his life as a merchant sea captain. No record exists of how or why he was chosen to command *Norfolk*. Most histories portray Williams as having resigned to avoid court martial following the end of his first cruise. A fuller reading of Navy Secretary Benjamin Stoddert's correspondence with Williams gives no indication that Williams faced punitive action. Indeed, when "a careful captain" was needed in June 1799 to take the newly purchased brig *Augusta* to Boston for fitting out, Stoddert recommends Williams to Naval Agent William Pennock. Williams did enjoy prosperity in private life as a merchant captain. Newspaper accounts in 1802 show him making several voyages to the West Indies in his brig *Regulator*. Williams' obituary in the *American Beacon* of 28 February 1817 read: "Died in this

borough, on Wednesday last [25 February] Capt. Thomas Williams aged 70 - for many years a highly respectable sea captain of this port, and formerly of the Navy, Commander of the US brig *Norfolk*."

Norfolk's last commander served aboard her for the whole of the brig's Navy career. Thomas Calvert was a grandson of Cornelius Calvert. Of Cornelius' ten sons, eight were sea captains. Thomas Calvert followed in the family business. We do not know Calvert's age at the time he served on *Norfolk*. Based on those of his contemporary lieutenants, he was probably about thirty. When the Quasi-War came to an end, Congress passed the Peace Establishment Act of 1801 to govern the downsizing. At its peak during the war, the naval officer corps had numbered about 700. Under the new law, this was to be reduced to about 240. Historians generally agree that performance was the chief factor in selection for dismissal. Certainly, the criticism of Calvert's conduct on 19 June 1800 sealed his fate. He was dismissed from the Navy on 15 April 1801. Like Williams, Calvert found success as a merchant captain following the war. In 1802 he was noted making several cruises to the West Indies, principally to Jamaica. In 1810, the Norfolk County tax rolls show Calvert among the top two percent in taxes paid. Calvert's obituary in the *Norfolk Herald* of 27 January 1813 was short: "Died Thomas Calvert at his seat near Kempsville on Monday last [25 January]." 

Book Reviews

In Irons: Britain's Naval Supremacy and the American Revolutionary Economy

by Richard Buel, Jr.

Reviewed by Ira Dye

This is a very important book. Any person seriously interested in the Revolutionary War and the effects of seapower on the course of the Revolution should read it and have it available as a reference. It is lucidly written although it is a complex and scholarly book. It is well documented, with 262 pages of text and 135 pages of endnotes.

Richard Buell, jr. *In Irons: Britain's Naval Supremacy and the American Revolutionary Economy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998. 400 pages, charts, appendix. ISBN 0-300-07388-7. \$35.00.

The author describes, in detail, the evolution of the American economy from late colonial times through the Revolution and into the early days of the Republic. To my knowledge, this is the first time that this has been accomplished. Throughout the book there is emphasis on how the economy and the course of the Revolution was impacted by seapower, principally British and French seapower.

By 1774, most thoughtful colonial leaders were convinced that war was coming and it seemed clear to them that they would have the advantage in the struggle. They had adequate manpower, a prosperous agricultural economy that not only fed the country, but also provided significant surpluses of wheat and flour (and naval stores, tobacco, rice, cotton, and indigo) for export. The foreign trade of the colonies was all handed through England under the restrictions of the Navigation Acts. But, if they broke with Britain, the

colonial leaders reasoned, they would be able to trade with the rest of Europe and the world to earn the hard currency that would be needed to fight the war. The colonial industrial sector was very weak, and the colonies depended on imports for manufactured articles, and crucially, for military goods, including most of their powder and arms. Imports had to be paid for with hard, internationally exchangeable money.

On the other side of the equation, the British were faced with long distances over which to deploy and supply their forces. They also had to contend with the hostility of France, which although temporarily latent in 1775, could, and did, become active. Also, the ending of trade with the colonies, their largest flow of overseas trade, was very painful to Britain.

As soon as the war got seriously underway, unexpected events began to interfere with rosy pre-war economic assumptions of the revolutionary leaders. Many and complex, these fascinating events are described in detail by the author and woven together to describe the evolution of the economy. Just a few of the examples will be given here:

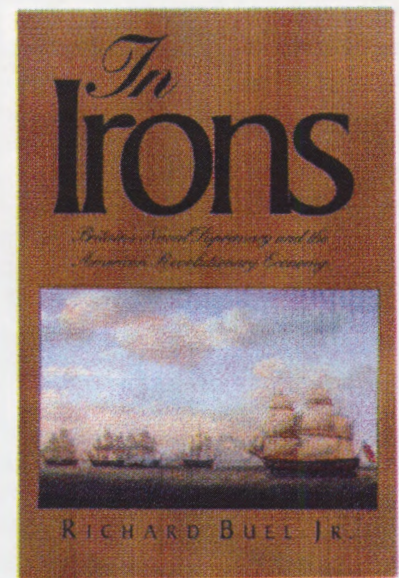
Trade with the French began to go well—the British Navy was weak off the American Coast. But they soon began to stop French shipping in European waters and condemn the cargo if it was of American origin, and often the ship as well. French merchants were willing to take the risks involved, but only for valuable cargoes. What they wanted from America was tobacco, to be made into snuff in France. This pushed up the price of tobacco in the Chesapeake Bay region, which had been depressed, and farmers immediately turned from producing the grains and

foodstuffs needed by the American army, to producing tobacco for export to France. It began to get difficult to get enough food for the army.

Then, a shortage of farm labor developed, caused by rural farm boys entering the militias or the army. The American leadership wanted, and had expected, the farmers to raise wheat, which when made into good quality flour, kept well, was relatively easy to transport, and made the bread preferred by soldiers. But to successfully raise wheat, the seed had to be planted during a short period in the Fall, and harvested during a very brief time window in the next July, a very labor-intensive operation. So the farmer needed to be reasonably certain at the Fall planting time, that he would have the laborers available the next Summer for the harvest. Given the army's manpower needs, and the uncertainties of war, farmers could not be sure of their labor supply and therefore fewer farmers planted wheat and more planted corn, which was harder to transport and use, or other crops.

In spite of these problems, the economy worked fairly well in 1776 and 1777 to support the war. The continental currency used internally in the new states, although back only by faith in the Revolutionary government, was accepted for the internal exchange of goods. But in 1778 and 1779, two years of bad harvests were a major set back. Also, the British Navy was beginning to be effective in slowing trade by shutting down the major entry ports on the Chesapeake and Delaware Bay, and

In Irons continued on page 15



Lamson of the Gettysburg

by Roswell H. Lamson, Edited by James and Patricia McPherson

From Cape Fear to Cape Charles:

The North Atlantic Blockading Squadron in the Civil War

by Donald Browning

Reviewed by Hunt Lewis

The story of Federal naval operations about and from Hampton Roads during the Civil War is the story of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron. There are two books which look at this story. One is a history and an analysis and the other is a first person narrative by Lt. Roswell H. Lamson which covers the many facets of the squadron's operations related through his personal letters.

Roswell H. Lamson. Edited by James and Patricia McPherson. *Lamson of the Gettysburg*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. 224 pages, illustrations. ISBN 0-19513-093-6. \$14.95.

If the letters of Roswell H. Lamson had been written during World War II rather than during the Civil War, large portions of his letters would have had more holes than a sieve — the result of censors deleting operational references and occasional criticisms. Fortunately, the letters remained whole until discovered by Pulitzer Prize winning author James M. McPherson (*The Battle Cry of Freedom*) and his wife Patricia at Princeton

Robert M. Browning, jr. *From Cape Charles to Cape Fear: The North Atlantic Squadron During the Civil War*. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1993. 472 pages, map, illustrations, appendix. ISBN 0-81730-679-X. \$39.95.

University Library. Skillfully culled and well annotated to provide continuity and to illuminate internal references (people, places, ships, battles), they present the evolving career

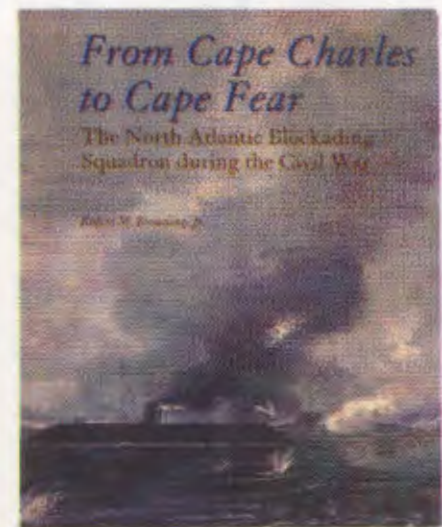
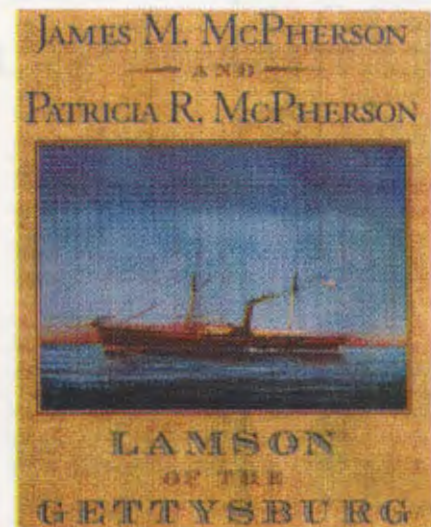
of a young officer which is best summarized in the authors' own preface:

"Lamson commanded more ships and flotillas than any officer of his age or rank in the service, climaxed by his captaincy of the navy's fastest ship in 1864, the USS *Gettysburg*. As commander of the 'Torpedo and Picket Division' on the James River in May-June 1864, with the duty of clearing the river of Confederate Mines, he pioneered techniques in the dangerous new naval mission of minesweeping.

Lamson always seemed to be where the action was in the naval war on the South Atlantic coast: he was captain of the big deck guns on the USS *Wabash* that did the most damage to enemy forts at Hatteras Inlet and Port Royal; he was the officer who took command of the CSS *Planter* in May 1862, when slaves led by Robert Smalls ran her past Confederate fortifications in Charleston harbor and delivered her to the Union Blockading fleet; he commanded a gunboat fleet on the Nansemond River that helped stop James Longstreet's advance on Norfolk in the Suffolk campaign of April 1863; he skippered the ship that towed USS *Louisiana* packed with more than 200 tons of gunpowder under the guns of Fort Fisher in December 1864; and he led a contingent of 70 men from USS *Gettysburg* in the January 15, 1865, attack on the sea-face parapets of Fort Fisher, where he was wounded."

Lest one think by the foregoing description that these letters to his cousins Flora and Kate who later became his fiancée are but a dry operational journal, they are most human as well describing tiredness, frustration, despair, pride, hope, longing, joy, faith and love. Throughout the letters, and in the replies to his letters that the authors included, runs a strong sense of patriotism that we may feel today when put to a test, but would be embarrassed in expressing (we should not.)

Lamson's expeditions and commands



could not have occurred without the underlying support functions of strategic planning and support. Although it is a thorough and readable history of the activities and tactics of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron from the Hatteras Expedition through the fall Fort Fisher, it is much more than that.

Dr. Browning, the Chief Historian of the U.S. Coast Guard, discusses the interwoven (and sometimes non-cooperative) policies within governments, armies, and navies of the opposing forces as to how they impacted upon the success of the blockade. Its greatest value is its study of the problems of providing ships, maintenance, personnel, and provisions to the ships of the blockading squadron. Donald L. Caney in his introduction to his 1998 book *Mr. Lincoln's Navy* honors *From Cape Charles to Cape Fear* as the only thorough study *North Atlantic continued on page 15*

A Bureaucrat as a Motivational Speaker?

Mail boxes are bombarded by direct mail ads for “professional speakers.” For a certain amount of money, these people will teach you new work skills like how to motivate your employees, how to stand up to your boss, deal with work related stress, and how to make your business run more efficiently. In addition to these speakers, we also in our daily lives look for heroes, both past and present, to give us an example to be motivated by. Can a U.S. Government employee be such

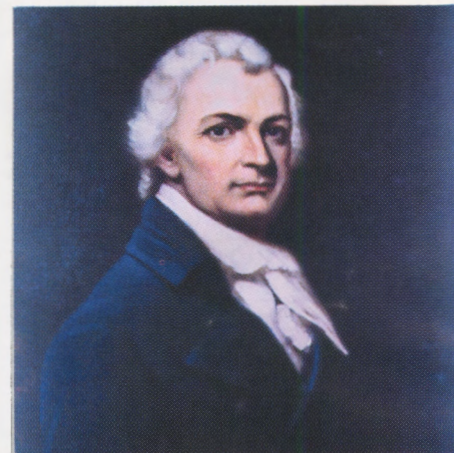
best effort. “I have always entertained an opinion that men who suffer trifling difficulties to interpose between them and their duty are unfit for public service. It shall be my endeavor to rid our Navy of such men. If our officers cannot be inspired with the true kind of zeal and spirit, which will enable us to make up for the want of great force by great activity, we had better burn our ships, and commence a navy at some future time when our Citizens have more spirit,” he wrote in a letter.

One historian commented that Stoddert sought “officers who were eager to excel, not those who were satisfied to ‘escape censure.’” As an example of how serious Stoddert could be, he fired the captain of the frigate *Constitution*, without so much as a court-martial, when the officer produced very poor results in the Caribbean. Before the war was over, he disciplined several more of his senior officers. But, even when he became angry with one of his officers, he was diplomatic in his tone. To the same captain of *Constitution*, he did not dismiss the captain out right but instead gently offered him a somewhat respectable shore assignment. On the flip side, Stoddert found his perfect officer in Thomas Truxtun and gave the captain of *Constellation* wide latitude. This was despite the fact that Truxtun’s ego could be very difficult to deal with at times.

Stoddert never served aboard a warship,

“I have always entertained an opinion that men who suffer trifling difficulties to interpose between them and their duty are unfit for public service...If our officers cannot be inspired with the true kind of zeal and spirit, which will enable us to make up for the want of great force by great activity, we had better burn our ships, and commence a navy at some future time when our Citizens have more spirit.”-an angry Secretary of the Navy Benjamin Stoddert, 1799.

though he did have an excellent grasp of maritime issues by being a senior partner of a international trade firm. Though he did not really want the job, President John Adams eventually convinced him to accept the position, he executed his duties with tremendous enthusiasm. When the Republican Thomas Jefferson took over as President, he was so impressed by Stoddert’s work ethic, that he asked the




The Navy’s first, and arguably best, secretary, Benjamin Stoddert of Georgetown, MD. (Naval Historical Center photo of an oil painting by E.F. Andrews)

Federalist secretary to stay. An exhausted Stoddert politely declined.

Besides his driving personality, one other possible explanation for Stoddert’s mentality is his service in the American Revolution. While Stoddert did not serve in uniform during the war with the British, he helped oversee the course and direction of the conflict. Specifically, he served on the War Administration Board, the organization that handled all of the little details of running the conflict. He and other members of his generation had fought long and hard for the right to be independent from a European power, risking their lives

and property for this cause. Stoddert was not about to lose it because of lethargic and uninspired employees.

So the next time you have a problem at work, either as an employee or as a supervisor, do not spend the training budget on another speaker or the latest self-help fad. Pick up several naval histories and heed the words of an 18th century bureaucrat named Benjamin Stoddert. 



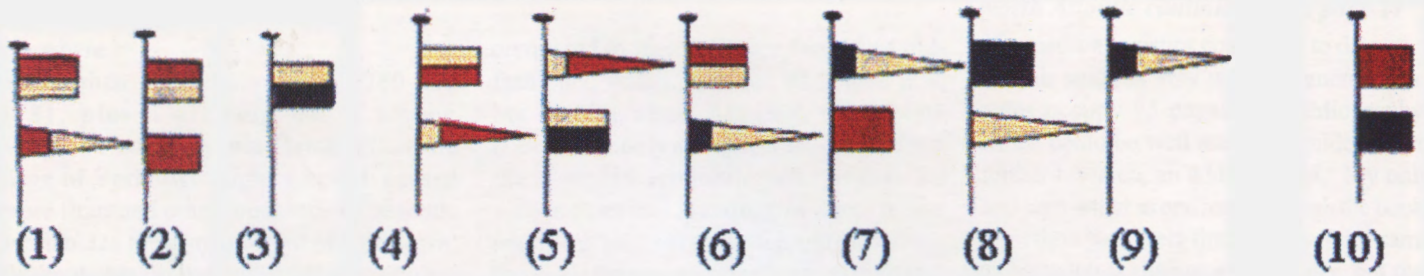
The Museum Sage

an example?

Well, the Sage has found such a person and it is a Secretary of the Navy no less. When one reads up about the Quasi-War with France, one can not help but come across material about Secretary Benjamin Stoddert. Secretary Stoddert was the Navy’s first, and arguably one of the finest, secretaries. One book written about the war is appropriately called *Stoddert’s War* by Naval Historical Center historian Michael Palmer as Stoddert almost single handily organized and directed America’s first war.

Even though his entire Department staff in Philadelphia amounted, on average, to about ten people, Stoddert’s responsibilities were more than administrator. He was the Navy’s public affairs person, motivator/cheerleader, disciplinarian, chief tactician, and Congressional lobbyist. Did I forget to mention that he was a loyal father to seven children on top of his public duties?

Stoddert was a man who did not care that his Navy was outgunned and outmanned. He held a strong belief that no one who served under him should give anything less than their



Signal flags were the way ships during the Age of Sail communicated with one another. During the Quasi-War, U.S. Naval vessels used their own set of

Signal Flags During the Quasi-War

signal flags to communicate and coordinate with convoyed merchant ships. Just before getting under way, the convoy commodore would issue his own set of signal flags to the merchant captains he was protecting.

American Quasi-War convoys varied greatly in size from convoy to convoy. There was no set doctrine, unlike World War II. In World War II, the rule of thumb for an ideal convoy was four escorts plus one for every ten merchant ships. However, in the Quasi-War, merchant vessels would anchor together at a port in the Caribbean and hope that American warships would arrive. As a result, the convoy varied from six vessels to over 100 vessels as they tended to be assembled in *ad hoc* fashion.

No matter what the size, a convoy in any time period is difficult to keep together. The use of signal flags was one solution to the problem, although by no means a complete solution. Flags can only be seen when the weather is clear and in daylight hours. As a result, convoy commodores would include a set of "signal by night" orders in addition to the signal flag instructions. Instead of flags, they used lanterns during evening hours and fired off cannons during poor weather conditions such as fog.

On at least one occasion, the printer put in charge of publishing a set of signal manuals made several printing errors. Fortunately, Capt. Truxtun's sharp eye spotted the errors while forming up a convoy in Hampton Roads

Along the top of the page are a partial set of signal flag orders issued to merchant vessels by Hampton Roads-native Capt. Samuel Barron while serving as a convoy commodore on the ship *Baltimore*. They are as follows:

- 1) The fleet will heave to with the larboard tacks taken aboard.
- 2) The fleet will heave to with her starboard tacks taken on board
- 3) The sternmost ships to make all the sail they can. To keep up with the fleet.
- 4) To speak to the commodore
- 5) To sail in close order
- 6) To follow the commodore
- 7) To tack or wear and stand the other way
- 8) To shorten sail
- 9) The fleet to make sail
- 10) To anchor (if hoisted at the main) or To get under way (if hoisted at the fore)

and ordered all the erroneous books to be dumped.

American ships used another set of signal flags to communicate with the British. The Quasi-War with France occurred right in the middle of the two major Anglo-American wars. During the war with France, however, the Americans and the British were more or less friends. With the strong exception of an occasional impressment of American sailors, British and American naval officers got along reasonably well with one another. They shared meals together, shared intelligence on French privateer activity, and even convoyed each other's merchant ships.

To make sure that British and American warships could readily identify one another, British officers like Capt. George Cockburn often gave a copy of Britain's private signal

Flags issued by Truxtun before leading a convoy from Havana en route to the United States. Note the fact that he used three flags instead of two.



book to American officers. Cockburn is the man who would later be responsible for burning down Washington, D.C in 1813. Wars do truly make strange bedfellows.

Signal flags used by American and British warship to identify one another. Different flags were used on different days of the week.





USS *Elrod* (FFG-53), *William H. Standley* (CG-32), and *Guadalcanal* (LPH-7) escort the reflagged Kuwaiti tanker *Gas King* to safety through the Persian Gulf war zone, 1987. (Naval Historical Center photo)

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In Irons continued from page 12

elsewhere.

But then better harvests in 1780 and 1781, plus a growing belief among Maryland and Virginia farmers that the siege of Yorktown might succeed, caused more flour and other foodstuffs to be made available to the army in front of Yorktown. Without this, it is doubtful that the army could have maintained the siege through the summer. The arrival and brief presence in the Chesapeake of DeGrasse and the French fleet in September of 1781 clinched the victory, and Cornwallis surrendered on October 19.

The usual description of the Revolution, featuring battles and leaders, can be


compared to looking at the face of an old-fashioned watch: You see what time it is, but nothing else. Although this review could cover only a very few highlights from the complex economic process that the author describes, *reading In Irons* is like taking the back off the watch and examining the intricate gears, springs, and jewels that really do the work. You see the metamorphosis of the economy of early America as the colonies passed through Revolution and into nationhood. 

Ira Dye is author of the maritime history Fatal Cruise of the Argus: Two Captains in the War of 1812 (published by the Naval Institute Press).

North Atlantic continued from page 11

of squadron logistics conducted to date.

This study is very well documented: the notes occupy 95 pages; the bibliography, which could be well used as a guide toward further research, an additional 24. My only criticism is that as one reads through the book, sometime one feels that one read the same information a chapter or so earlier, but that does not detract from its value. In educational terms, you could call the repetitions "reinforcement" which is considered necessary teaching tool.

Both books are books that I'll take pleasure in reading again. 

Hunt Lewis has been a docent at the museum since 1994.

Reid continued from page 3

I sat overhead this spectacle for almost an hour before being signaled to land. Once on deck, I found things in utter chaos. Tons of bombs were being brought up from the ship's magazines and loaded aboard aircraft. I had never seen this scene before, although it would be a common site for me a year later off the coast of Vietnam. Fighter and bombers were being prepared to go to war. At least ten aircraft were being launched just as I was landing, but I could not find out where they were going or who we were going to attack. After shutting down and leaving my aircraft, I asked a sailor what was going. He could only say it was because of what happened but said he was unable to discuss what happened.

Unable to get a straight answer, I left the flight deck and headed to the ready room. There I found still more confusion and excitement. I finally learned that someone had bombed, and was still bombing, a US Navy electronics intelligence ship off the coast of Sinai, where the Israeli and Egyptian armies were locked in battle. Because of this fighting, there were large numbers of news people aboard *America* seeking stories about the war. The entire crew was ordered to avoid telling the newsmen what was happening. This was not a problem, as none of us knew was going on either. The routine was if asked why were launching armed aircraft to respond that it was because of what had happened. If asked what had, we were to say it was classified. Most of us believed that the newsmen, who were well known, really knew what was going on, but played along with the little game.

Shortly after the launch, there was an intercom called to the six ready rooms for the Commanding Officer of each squadron

to report to the Air Wing Commander for planning. Ready room responded that their CO had launched the strike. Then the next five ready rooms responded likewise. The Air Wing Commander then requested the presence of the executive officers. The rooms


Liberty, reported that they had made a mistake. The planes from *America* were well on their way, still not sure whom they were supposed to fight. Some aircraft with weapons that could not be recovered aboard a carrier, landed on Crete for their weapons to be downloaded.



The intelligence ship USS Liberty (ATGR-5) returns home to Hampton Roads soon after she was attacked by Israeli torpedo boats and aircraft. (Naval Historical Center photo)

reported that their XO's likewise had just launched. It appears that these pilots were anxious for some medals. The air wing commander finally asked that someone from each squadron please come into his office.

About this time, the Israeli Air Force, having failed to sink or silence the unarmed

Several days later, *Liberty* came along side *America* and the remains and wounded of her crew were transferred to our flight deck. The crew of *America* stood in a parade formation on the flight deck in honor of the gallant effort those Navy guys had made to save their ship. 

“Liberty”



(Photo of a 1997 acrylic painting by Maizelle)

In Our Next Issue....

☞ An Early World War I Test For America: The *Prinz Eitel Freidrich* Incident

☞ Canadian Commentator Andrew Wooley Speaks on the Future of NATO

☞ Book Reviews: *Academy on the James: The Confederate Naval School* and *Fighting Commodores: Convoy Commanders in the Second World War*