

# THE DAYBOOK

VOLUME 10 ISSUE 3



Educators Kept Busy This Summer.....3

Artifacts from the Barron/Truxtun Collection.....4



USS Cumberland in Africa: The Slave Trade Patrols.....6



## About The Daybook and the Museum

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 225 years of naval history in the Hampton Roads region. It is also responsible for the historic interpretation of the battleship *Wisconsin*.

Call for information on the museum's and *Wisconsin's* hours of operations. Admission to the museum and *Wisconsin* 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 gbcalthoun@nsn.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://www.hrnm.navy.mil>.

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Rear Admiral Stephen A. Turcotte  
Commander, Navy Region, Mid-Atlantic

## HRNM Staff

**Director**  
Becky Poulliot

**Curator**  
Joe Judge

**Exhibits Specialist**  
Marta Nelson

**Museum Tech./Librarian**  
Ofelia Elbo

**Editor of The Daybook**  
Gordon Calhoun

**Architectural Historian**  
Michael Taylor

**Battleship Wisconsin Operations Manager**  
Captain Mary Mosier,  
USN (Ret.)

**Education Specialist**  
Odean Vanthul

**Special Events/Education**  
Kathryn Shaffner

**Volunteer Coordinator**  
Thomas Dandes

**Public Relations**  
Emily Cass

**HRNM OIC**  
NCC(SW) Lisa Robinson

**Ceremonies/Graphic Design**  
LI2 (SW) S. Clay Hoskins

**Education/LPO**  
ABE1 (AW) James Capasso

**Director, HRNHF**  
Rear Admiral Byron Tobin,  
USN (Ret.)

## Features

The Director's Column.....2

Places of Wonderment

Book Reviews.....10

Kimmel, Short, and Pearl Harbor:  
The Final Report Revealed  
by Fred L. Borch and David Martinez.  
Reviewed by Howard Sandefer

Sailors in the Holy Land by Andrew C.  
A. Jampoler. Reviewed by Ira R. Hanna



The Museum Sage.....12

Results of Commodore  
Conover's Africa Squadron

Cover Illustration: We present here a portion of a pencil sketch by museum intern and studio art student Lauren Kirchner. The sketch portrays the sloop-of-war USS Cumberland in Fimchal Roads in the island of Madeira, off the coast of Portugal. The island was a frequent stopping point for U.S. Navy warships conducting trans-Atlantic voyages via the Gulf Stream en route to the Mediterranean Sea, Africa, and South America. Cumberland stopped over at Madeira en route to the Cape Verde Islands and her most difficult assignment to date.

# Places of Wonderment

The Director's Column  
by Becky Poulliot

A recent article published in the national Parent Teacher Association magazine *Our Children* described museums as “places of wonderment, exploration, learning, and fun for the entire family.” This apt description sets a professional benchmark for all of us educators at the Hampton Roads Naval Museum, one that certainly comes to the forefront during the summer rush of family vacationers.

With the dedication of the museum education space JJ's Room on board Wisconsin (see Volume 9 Issue 1 of *The Daybook* for more information) our staff made a commitment to family learning in an entertaining setting. A generous donation of \$5,000 from Owl International-Global Associates in March 2005 has turned that commitment into reality. We have been able to make the room comfortable for hands-on activities and are still in the midst of furnishing it with shipboard games and material. Our belief, seconded overwhelmingly by visitors, is that the best part of our Family Fun program is the personal touch—the one on one with a staff person, either a docent or one of our interns. Let me introduce you to them now.

Team leader Michael Powles is approaching his second year of graduate school in the Old Dominion University History program. Mike is interested in Early American Intellectual History, particularly the Antebellum period. Mike has made past contributions to our museum in getting our membership program kicked off. In his current role of educator, he particularly enjoys interacting with the visitors and has learned a tremendous amount of history about the Navy, especially during World War II.

Mike said visitors are so appreciative of our efforts “to interpret for them, and not leave them trying to figure things out on their own.” Mike has past experience in historic interpretation, having worked at the Francis Land House in Virginia Beach. This past

spring his research studies took him to the Bermuda Maritime Museum where he researched blockade running during the Civil War.

John Dooley is a senior at James Madison University studying English Literature. John has a real passion for U.S. Naval history; his father served as a Navy chaplain in the first Gulf War. As an elementary student, he recalls sending cards to the sailors, a practice he now oversees at the Hampton Roads Naval Museum. Right now, John has a veritable Navy wall museum in his room—pictures of destroyers, a ship's bell, his Dad's command covers, and a picture of the Missouri. “Thinking about reporting to a battleship for work is amazing, and then being able to communicate that passion to people takes that experience a step further,” is how he summarizes his work at the museum. After graduating, John plans to enter a seminary, and wants to continue working with youth.

Lauren Kirchner is one talented artist. She was a museum volunteer last year, and her handiwork is used everyday by children who take our Wisconsin activity book home. This fall, Lauren will enter her senior year at Southern Illinois University of Edwardsville to obtain her Bachelor of Fine Arts. Her long term goal is to become a master print maker of fine art. Lauren has enjoyed her summer here, particularly interacting with the children. She has been amazed at how quickly children pick up skills, like tying knots. She feels that the museum fulfills an important educational function in “introducing both children and adults to the Navy, and to the different jobs that sailors perform.”

Lindsey Sigafoos is a Hampton Roads



Summer interns John Dooley, Lindsey Sigafoos, and Lauren Kirchner are shown here with museum director Becky Poulliot. (Photo by Emily Cass)

native and will be entering her junior year at St. Leo's College. She is fascinated by history and marketing, with a long term dream to work for the History Channel. Lindsey is a people person, and she has enjoyed meeting a variety of visitors from all over the United States. Lindsey commented that this job has afforded an opportunity to learn Naval history first-hand from our volunteers. One of the highlights of the summer was to go inside the ship and see the turret close-up during a special tour.

Hampton Roads Naval Museum educator Odean Vanthul says visitors give rave reviews about the work of our interns. He has overheard people comment on how “great it is to see the museum doing programs for kids.” I can only second Odean's praise concerning the interns' “enthusiasm, willingness to engage the visitor and the content of their programs.”

It has long been part of the museum's strategic plan to further hands-on programs. On a personal note, I have always wanted our museum to become an environment for tomorrow's museum leaders and I think Mike, John, Lindsey and Lauren all qualify in that regard.

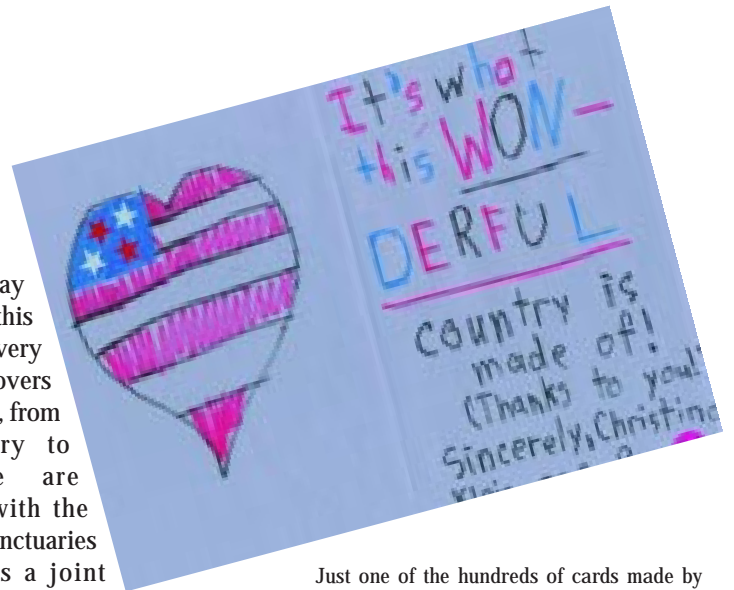
*Becky*

# Museum Educators Kept Busy This Summer

by Odean Vanthul

Our Education staff has been very busy this summer so far. To help with the increase of visitors and to make their stay at the HRNM more enjoyable, we've hired four summer interns. Our interns, Mike Powles, Lindsey Sigafos, Lauren Kirchner, and John Dooley have proven to be a valuable asset to our team. They conduct education programs in the gallery and on the ship, anything from how to tie knots to performing our "Life at Sea" program. We have received very favorable comments on their enthusiasm, their

of the area and roleplay ships that took part in this historical event. This very interactive program covers a broad range of SOL's, from literature to history to presentations. We are presently working with the National Maritime Sanctuaries (NMS) to make this a joint program. The HRNM would do the history portion and then turn it over to the NMS to conduct an underwater archeology section.



Just one of the hundreds of cards made by younger museum visitors for Little Creek-based Mobile Security Squadron Two. The Squadron is currently defending Iraqi oil platforms in the Persian Gulf.



Museum educator Kathryn Shaffner working with middle school students from the Hampton University Techno Scholars Program. (Photo by Marta Nelson)

willingness to engage the visitor and the content of their programs.

The USS Wisconsin's education room is now open and starting to take shape. We open the room at certain times of the day to welcome kids of all ages to learn various nautical things. The educators along with museum exhibits specialist Marta Nelson are forming the different stations inside the room. Stations will include learning about navigation, morse code, sound-powered phones, signal flags, and who works on battleships. We will even have a big Battleship game.

Kathryn has developed a new Civil War program where we put the students at the scene of the Monitor/Virginia battle. The kids position themselves on a giant chart

HRNM education staff also saw a need for further community outreach. We have now developed a program with the Children's Hospital of the Kings Daughters (CHKD). Our staff presently goes out to the CHKD on a bi-weekly basis and conducts one of our programs tailored to CHKD's educators' needs. ABE1 Jim Capasso and I recently went there to present our

"Up Periscope" program. The kids are genuinely excited that we can bring them something to look at and sometimes touch when they cannot personally make it to our facility.

Recently, we conducted a really, really, long outreach program by asking children who are visiting the museum to write cards to sailors serving Iraq. During the month of July, children composed cards and wrote letters of encouragement and thanks to Mobile Security Squadron Two. Based at Little Creek Amphibious Base, the Squadron is currently protecting Iraqi offshore oil platforms in the Persian Gulf. The letters were sent to the sailors at the end of July.

Our Navy Heritage Program for active duty personnel that we mentioned in our last issue has been very well received. We have conducted two programs so far and expect more to follow as the word is spread.

With school just around the corner, plans have been and are being made to bring



Intern team leader Michael Powles leads a group from Kindercare on board the Battleship Wisconsin. (Photo by Gordon Calhoun)

the HRNM programs to all the surrounding school districts' teacher orientation meetings. We feel we need to make a one on one contact with the various Social Studies lead teachers to talk to them and show them the free programs we offer. Our goal is to become an asset and a resource for our teachers. Anyone interested in one of our education or other public programs can call the museum's education department at 757-322-2992.

# The Barron/Truxtun Family Collection

by Joe Judge

Norfolk's long association with the sea derives from its geography, and has marked its history and its people. The great eastern rivers and the bay and the ocean beyond have been ever-changing stages for human drama. As historians our interest lies with the actors on this watery stage and we labor to remind ourselves that the past is nearby. Sometimes we organize this past around great events, wonderful or terrible or strange, and at other times we rely on the narratives supplied by the actors.

Of all the narratives available to humanity the most common and the most compelling may be family. Kinship ties reach into the history of the region and make connections. The names of families sound across the years, identify places and events and carry us into the future. Two of the greatest names in the Norfolk story belong to the Barrons and the Truxtuns, and the museum has benefited from a significant donation involving both these families.

Mr. Edward W. Wolcott, the late President of the Hampton Roads Naval Historical Foundation, and its founder and guiding spirit, contacted the museum in 1990 about an important Navy collection. In pursuit of this collection Mr. Wolcott introduced the staff to Mr. and Mrs. Richard S. Barron.

Who were the Barrons? The answer takes the reader back to the beginning of Virginia and the beginning of the Navy. The first Barron arrived in the colony in 1737, and his family began a long association with the Navy that included bravery and skill in the Revolutionary War and participation (by James Barron Jr.) in an infamous duel with Stephen Decatur. The family has been the subject of books and museum exhibits. Mr. Richard S. Barron was a direct descendant of this "web-footed" family.

Such stories should have been enough for an afternoon of coffee with Mr. and Mrs. Barron. However, there was more. Mrs. Nancy Barron in fact had been born Nancy Truxtun, a member of another famous Navy



An art conservator cleans a magnificent oil portrait of Samuel Barron Jr. The portrait was recently donated to the museum by his descendants and long time supporters of the museum. (Photo by Marta Nelson)

family that had also achieved glory in the Revolutionary War, the subsequent conflict with France and the War of 1812. The family histories were a revelation, and they were supported by a significant collection of artifacts.

Mr. and Mrs. Barron agreed to loan the museum this family collection. It focuses on some important Barron family members and a Truxtun with a long naval career.

The most striking Barron family item may be a shield from a belt buckle belonging to Commodore Samuel Barron (1765-1810), an officer in the Virginia State Navy and one of the early officer corps in the United States Navy after its establishment as a Department in 1798. The shield comes the period of Commodore Barron's Federal service. His most significant assignment during this period was his command of a fleet of ten ships during the early nineteenth century war with Tripoli. A sword presented to the commodore by the Bey of Algiers was also loaned to the museum.

This Commodore Barron, who died shortly after being appointed commandant of the Gosport Navy Yard, left behind a son



The collection includes two carte de visites portraying Samuel Barron Jr., at two different stages of his life. The above shot was taken in Paris when Barron was in foreign service for the Confederacy.

also named Samuel. This young Samuel (actually the third of that name) accepted the challenge of a Navy career for himself. When the Civil War approached Samuel Barron left the U.S. Navy and joined the Confederate Navy, where he was captured as the commanding officer of Forts Hatteras and Clark in North Carolina. After a prisoner exchange, Captain Barron went on to England and Paris to represent the Confederacy. Samuel Barron is represented

Barron/Truxtun continued on page 5



This sword was given by the Bey of Algeria to Samuel Barron the Elder in 1805 during the commodore's service in Africa. (Photo by Marta Nelson)

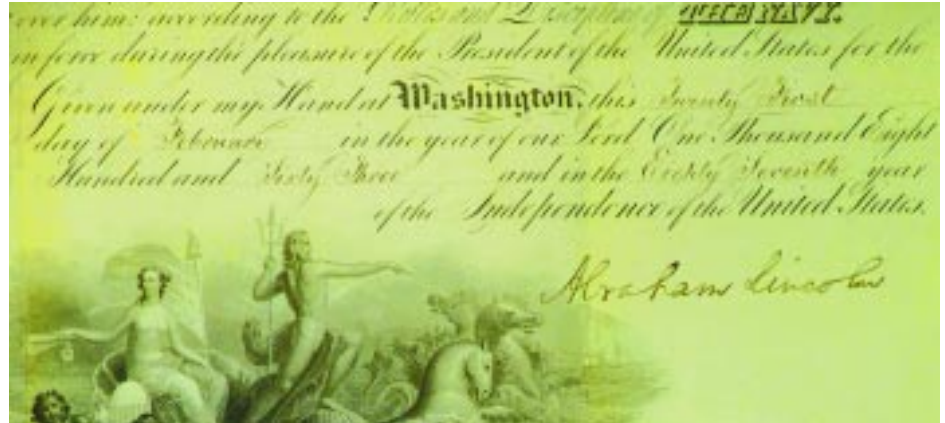
Barron/Truxtun continued from page 4 in this collection by two carte de visites, small photographic portraits favored in the nineteenth century, and by a magnificent antebellum oil portrait in its original frame.

As Samuel Barron made the fateful decision to leave the Navy and "go south," another young naval officer was in the midst of a long and successful career in Union blue. William Talbot Truxtun was the son of Commodore Thomas Truxtun who achieved glory as captain of the *Constellation* in action against French frigates.

William Truxtun's story is represented in this collection by uniforms, swords, and documents (including many commissions signed by Presidents from Tyler to Lincoln to Arthur). Truxtun held several commands with the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron during the Civil War and participated in the capture of Plymouth, North Carolina and the two attacks on Fort Fisher. He ended his career as commandant of the Norfolk Navy Yard where he ignited controversy by suggesting that it was time to heal the wounds of war by removing signs from war relics at the Yard. Truxtun's career is documented by a series of informative official letters that are part of the collection.

Two families are thus entwined in the history of Norfolk and the Navy – each family an important story and each joined to the other in the marriage of Richard Barron and Nancy Truxtun. Richard and Nancy remained friends to the Hampton Roads Naval Museum by keeping the collection on loan through the hectic years of moving from Naval Station Norfolk to the downtown waterfront. Richard in particular would often stop by the gallery to chat about Norfolk's history and the Barron's place therein.


When Richard and later Nancy passed away, Norfolk lost two outstanding



President Abraham Lincoln officially made William Truxtun a lieutenant commander with this commissioning proclamation. (Photo by Marta Nelson)

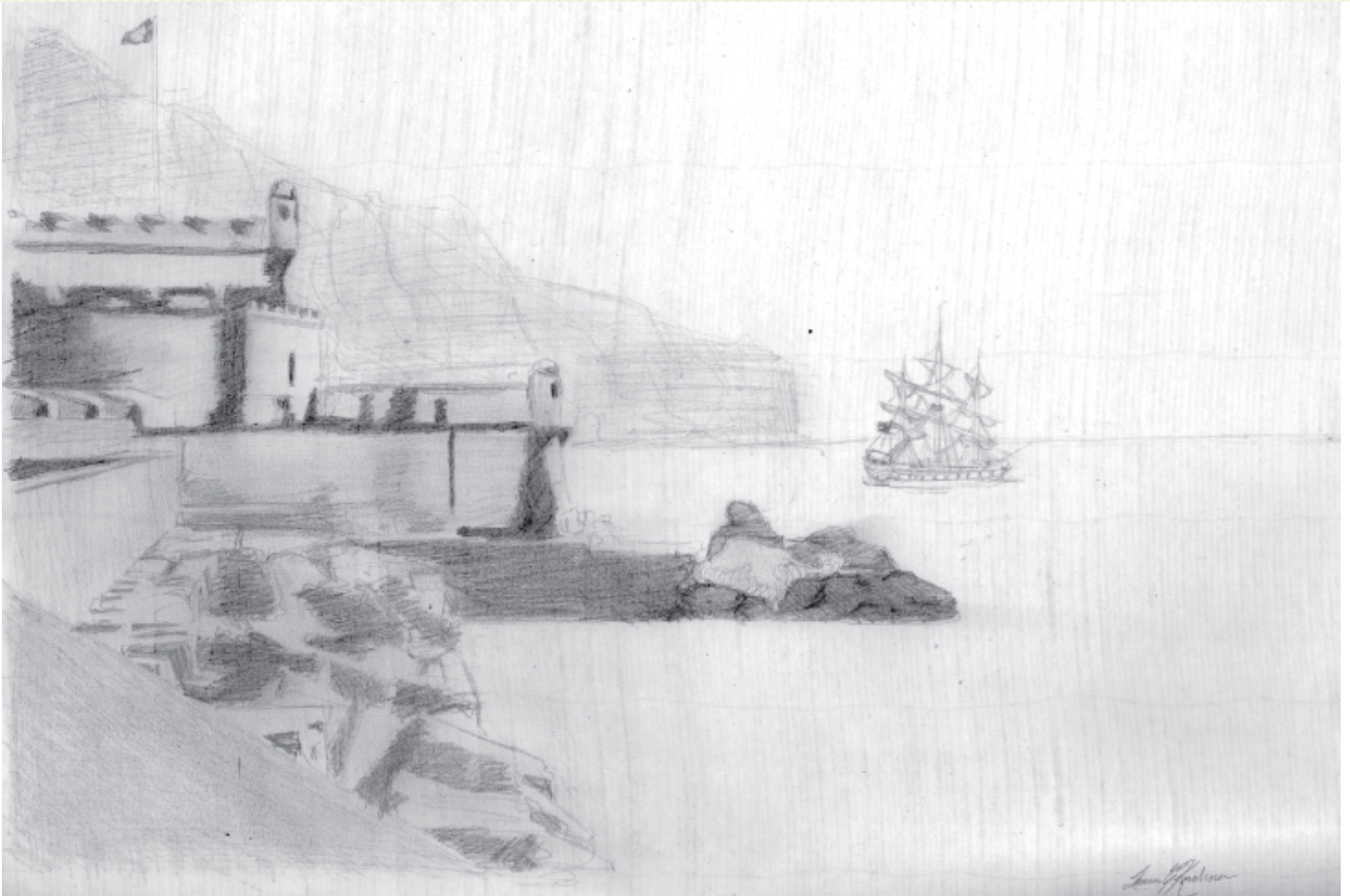
advocates of local history and two living representatives of the ties between the City and the sea service. While the museum lost two friends, they made another in the person of Ms. Nancy Barron II, the daughter of Richard and Nancy. Nancy determined that the collection should remain in Norfolk, as a reflection of her parents' wishes and an acknowledgment of the importance of the Truxtuns and Barrons to the City's history. In 2004, Nancy Barron donated the

collection to the museum.

The museum has begun a long-term project to provide proper conservation for the items. The portrait of Samuel Barron was in need of professional cleaning and the original frame needed repair. The painting was carried to a conservation studio in Richmond where the work is underway. The museum is proud to care for these artifacts that reflect the great traditions of the Navy in Hampton Roads. 



Some of the other items in this collection are William Truxtun's officer's coat, his gold shoulder boards, and his tassels. (Photo by Marta Nelson)



USS Cumberland at anchor in Fimchal Roads, island of Madeira. The U.S. Navy frequently used the Portuguese-controlled volcanic island as a way station for its ships that were en route to the Mediterranean, Africa, and South America. (Pencil drawing by Lauren Kirchner © 2005, used with permission.)

# The Flagship in Africa

## USS Cumberland and the Slave Trade Patrols

by Gordon Calhoun

After spending two years in the Charlestown Navy Yard, Cumberland had received a major rework. The result of the rework (to be discussed in more detail in Part 6 of the series) was a smaller, less crew intensive ship, that maintained her reputation as an excellent sailing vessel. Additionally, workers replaced the broadside battery of fifty-four guns with twenty-two nine-inch shell guns and one X-inch Dahlgren smoothbore gun mounted on the fore and aft pivot mounts respectively.

Officers and men began arriving in Boston in the spring of 1857. When the officers recommissioned the ship, shipyard workers had yet to complete the overhaul. The main sails were still being assembled, and the pivots for the “Great Guns,” as the

X-inch Dahlgrens were affectionately known as, were broken, along with several other little issues needing the Yard’s carpenters’ and blacksmiths’ attention.

By the summer, Secretary of the Navy Isaac Toucey gave Cumberland the dreaded Africa station as her next mission. The station was the least desirable of all stations open to U.S. Naval officers as the Navy’s presence in Africa had been problematic since American warships had first begun cruising the area in the 1820s. The climate in Africa was unfavorable to Westerners. Disease such as yellow fever was rampant, the international politics of the slave trade were complicated, the squadron was never given the proper tools, and there were few ports of call. By the late 1850s, the rhetoric from both those who wanted to

destroy the slave trade and those who wanted to liberalize it had become more combative, making the assignment that much more uncomfortable. It is little wonder that the New York Times described the patrol as “monotonous drudgery.”

Toucey anointed Cumberland as the flagship of a four-ship squadron. It included the sloops-of-war USS Dale out of Norfolk and the USS Vincennes out of New York, and the brig USS Marion out of Boston. These four ships were all very good warships, but were not the best choices for the mission. Slave traders typically used small brigs and schooners that were designed for speed and an ability to navigate rivers. The four ships assigned to the squadron were sail-powered only

Africa Squadron continues on page 7

This is part five of an ongoing series about the flagship and symbol for the Hampton Roads Naval Museum, the frigate/sloop-of-war USS Cumberland. The museum is the only official repository for artifacts from the ship, which was sunk by the ironclad CSS Virginia on March 8, 1862.

Series Index

- Part 1-A Classic American Warship (Design and Construction)
- Part 2-Flagship of the Mediterranean Squadron (First Cruise)
- Part 3-Cumberland in Mexico (Operations in the Mexican War)
- Part 4-The Flagship's Roman Holiday (Second Cruise to the Mediterranean)
- Part 5-Flagship of the Africa Squadron (Slave Trade Suppression Patrols)
- Part 6-Rebuilding a Classic (Conversion to the Sloop-of-War)
- Part 7-Sailing for the Union (Opening Operations in the Civil War)
- Part 8-Death with Honor (Battle of Hampton Roads)
- Part 9-The Flagship at Rest (Rediscovery and Recovery)

Africa Squadron continued from page 6 vessels that were on the large size.

Serving as squadron commodore was New Jersey native Thomas H. Conover. Like many commodores, Conover had served in the Navy for several decades before getting command of the squadron. He was a veteran of both Essex and the Battle of Lake Champlain during the War of 1812 and had commanded John Adams and Constitution, before breaking out his pennant on board Cumberland in June 1857.

Assisting him was Northampton County, Virginia native Lieutenant John Upshur, who was making a return tour to the Flagship. On this tour he was flag lieutenant. Overseeing the ship's company were South Carolina native Commander John Missroon and his executive officer Lieutenant Reed Werden.

Among the division officers, there were a few notable figures. Lieutenants Charles Greene, Napoleon Bonaparte Harrison, and Somerville Nicholson would all get their own commands during the American Civil War with Greene suffering a major injury during the 1864 Battle of

Mobile Bay.

Among the junior officers, there was one outstanding prospect, Master Richmond W. Meade Jr. Like Upshur, Richmond Meade came from a family with a deep tradition of national service. His father, Richmond Meade Sr. was a longtime veteran of the Navy, including participation in the capture of the slave ship Amistad. Richmond Meade, Sr.'s brother was General George Meade, familiar to all for his position as commanding general of the Army of the Potomac during the 1863 Battle of Gettysburg.

The real hero for this particular mission was Cumberland's chief medical officer Fleet Surgeon George Blacknall. Blacknall, and the squadron's ten other surgeons that he supervised, had his hands full combating the wide range of tropical diseases suffered during the cruise.

The command staff and ship's company were in place by early summer 1857, but personnel issues complicated the ship's departure. First, two officers had to be replaced. Shortly after a church service on June 1, division officer and Norfolk resident Lieutenant Albert Almand suddenly collapsed after complaining of a sharp pain in his head. He died an hour later of what was determined to be a stroke in the brain. Work on all the ships at the Yard stopped. The commandant of the Navy Yard, with a Marine honor guard, led a funeral procession of all the officers and enlisted sailors present. It was so moving that it made headlines in newspapers across the country.

A few weeks later, Commander Missroon informed another one of his division officers, Lieutenant Thomas Crossan, to leave the ship and depart for Washington. It is not known why Crossan was asked to leave the ship or what transpired in Washington, but he did not return and resigned his commission a few months later in September. In the Civil War, he refused to serve in either navy. Instead, he served in the "North Carolina Navy" and ran guns and supplies from Bermuda to Wilmington.

Trouble was brewing among the enlisted ranks as well. On more than one occasion, Boston sheriff's deputies arrived on board with arrest warrants for various sailors. Five sailors later decided that they did not want to be in the Navy after all and attempted to desert. Missroon placed a \$20 bounty on each of their heads. Two were quickly caught and returned.

As the month of June came to a close,

Yard workers finally delivered a set of twenty-four sails for the ship, which were properly rigged over a period of two days. Additionally, mechanics and blacksmiths finished replacing the "Levis bolts" on the gun pivots, allowing the "Great Guns" to rotate as designed.

For his part, Commodore Conover did not report to the ship until everything was ready. He arrived on the morning of June 23 and the ship put to sea that afternoon. The ship fired off a 13-gun salute in honor of the Navy Yard commandant, discharged



South Carolina native John Stoney Missroon served as Cumberland's ninth commanding officer. His career was a quiet one. He earned his highest honor as ordnance chief of the Charlestown Navy Yard during the Civil War. (Naval Historical Center photo)

the harbor pilot, and made sail for the island of Madeira off the coast of Portugal.

To pass the time while being carried along by the wind and the Gulf Stream, the sailors were kept busy with the ways of military service. In addition to their day-to-day duties of ship's operations, the ship's company prepared itself for combat. Sailors trained daily on both the smaller broadside shell guns and the XI-inch Dahlgrens. But along with the big guns, sailors and Marines drilled for close combat and boarding actions. Sailors and Marines on the boarding teams carried three types of weapons: one section carried blade weapons such cutlasses, another carried long barreled muskets, and a third carried Sharps breech loading carbines. Officers conducted daily drills with their respective divisions in order for the sailors and

Africa Squadron continued on page 8



Northampton County, VA native George Upshur, shown here as a rear admiral, made his second tour aboard *Cumberland* as Commodore Conover's flag lieutenant during the ship's cruise to Africa. (Naval Historical Center photo)

Africa Squadron continued from page 7  
Marines to be ready to seize a suspected slave ship on the high seas.

The trans-Atlantic passage from Boston to Madeira took fifty-three days and the sloop-of-war arrived at the Portuguese island on July 18. After scrubbing the ship down, cleaning the ship, and hosting the local American ambassador on board, *Missroon* granted liberty, but only in small groups. *Cumberland* stayed in port for about a month while the ship's company made final preparations for the trip south.

Once on liberty, sailors took full advantage of the local establishments. Four sailors in particular returned to the ship in a less than perfect state, but they certainly seemed to have enjoyed themselves. Specifically, the officer of the deck Lieutenant Bannard recorded that two of the sailors were "tolerably sober." As for the other two, Bannard recorded, "Mr. Jackets and Leary dead drunk, no jacket." He was probably pleased enough that they returned at all, as desertion in a foreign port was always an issue for American warships.

A glaring example of the problem happened on August 2. On that day, eleven sailors either decided that *Missroon* was not handing out liberty passes fast enough or that two months in the Navy was enough. So they stole one of *Cumberland's* whale boats. As they rowed for shore, Lieutenant *Werden* ordered them to return. The eleven

sailors loudly shouted curse words back at the ship's executive officer and continued their escape. Search parties later caught seven of them in town and returned them for trial.

As the ship left Madeira for the Cape Verde Islands, *Missroon* and *Conover* held several court martials not only for the seven deserters, but also for several other crimes by the sailors while on liberty. The logbook, which normally recorded the specific crime, simply stated, "Call all hands and read the sentences of a summary court-martial on a number of grievances."

*Cumberland* arrived at the island of St. Vincent and the town of Porto Grande. Here she joined up with the Norfolk-based sloop-of-war *Dale*, which had been at anchor for a few days. Also present were several transports with men from the British 38<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot on board. The Lichfield, England-based soldiers were going to Calcutta, India to reinforce local and colonial forces fighting in the Indian Mutiny. Officers from the American warships present exchanged visits and dinner with officers from the 38<sup>th</sup>.

The sloop *St. Louis* arrived on August 20 after spending a few weeks patrolling for slave ships. As *St. Louis* could now head for home, she and *Cumberland* exchanged sailors. *St. Louis* received several deemed too sick and unfit by Dr. Blacknall to survive the African patrols. Among the sailors transferred off was one sailor who had a trunk fall on him causing a severe hernia, another who suffered from convulsions of an unknown origin, and a third who was prone to violent acts of rage when he did not get his grog ration in a timely fashion.

In return, *Cumberland* received twenty-seven *Krooman*, native Africans who lived along the coasts of northwestern and central Africa. Both American and European ship captains vigorously recruited *Krooman* to add their ship's company, and the Cape Verde Islands had become a recruiting depot for these sailors. The *Krooman* were excellent fishermen and swimmers. They also possessed knowledge of local languages, customs, and geography that was invaluable to Western ships.

After loading several dozen barrels of food such as beef, dried apples, beans, and bread, and restocking the ship's whisky and water supply, *Cumberland* began her first slave trade patrol in earnest on September

5. She headed south towards Portuguese outposts, and their infamous slave driven sugar plantations, on Principe Island and Sao Tome, slightly north of the Equator. Off the coast of Sao Tome, lookouts spotted *Cumberland's* first suspected slave ship on September 29.

This first ship in question was the merchant ship *Pearle*, which flew a British flag. *Cumberland* put up a British flag as well and waited to see what would happen. One of the major disputes between the United States and Great Britain was the use and abuse of the American flag by suspected slave traders. As the United States refused to yield the coveted "right of search" to British warships patrolling the region, slave ships would often claim American registry in an attempt to escape capture or ward off an approach vessel. As a result, one counter trick American Naval



Like Upshur, Master Richard Meade Jr., came from a family with a rich tradition of national service. *Cumberland's* sailing master's father was a flag officer in the Navy and his uncle George Meade is well known for his role as commanding general of the Army of the Potomac from 1863 to 1865. (Naval Historical Center photo)

officers learned was to have their ship act as if they were a British ship so as not to tip off their true identity to the slave traders until it was too late.

Upon seeing a British-flagged warship approach, *Pearle* struck her colors, and replaced it with an American flag. That act alone was enough to draw suspicion. Upon getting within firing range of the merchant

Africa Squadron continues on page 9



# Fleet Surgeon Blacknall's First Aid Kit

While medicine in the 19th century was nothing like medicine in the 21st, Fleet Surgeon Blacknall and his staff had a fair understanding of common ailments. The doctor carried with him on board Cumberland a mixture of modern medicine and older herbal solutions. His "kit" was actually an arsenal of over 350 different tools, chemical elements, compounds, roots, herbs, vaccines and alcohols to combat the day to day injuries and diseases that were inflicted upon the ship's company. Here is a partial list:

- Arrowroot-used as a starch to make bland food
- Flax Seed Meal
- Vaccine Lymphl-small pox vaccine
- Tartaric Acid-Flavor additive or as a mild laxative
- Sulfuric Acid
- Tannic Acid
- Acetic Acid
- Chloroform
- Collodium-a highly flammable solution of pyroxylin and alcohol used to hold surgical dressings together and reduce scarring
- Arsenic Nitrate
- Burgundy pitch
- Quinine
- Castor Oil
- Ammonia
- Opium
- Magnesia Sulphate
- Copper Sulphate
- Olive Oil
- Veratria-a highly toxic, plant-derived mixture used to treat arthritis and nerve disorders
- Several bottles of Ale
- Several Bottles of Brandy
- Black tea
- Lemon oil
- Tapioca
- Epsom Salts
- Artificial leech
- Stomach pump
- Surgical tools
- Six different types of syringes
- Teeth extracting instruments



Africa Squadron continued from page 8

vessel, Cumberland went to battle stations, struck the British colors, and raised her American ensign. Lieutenant Greene assembled a boarding team and headed over to the vessel. Greene inspected the vessel's paperwork. He looked to see where the ship had been, where it was supposed to be going, and what it was carrying. Anything out of the ordinary would draw further suspicion and possibly lead to a full inspection of the ship itself. Satisfied with what he saw, Greene reported back that the ship's papers were in order and released the vessel.

The Flagship continued to sail south across the Equator. Four days after inspecting the Pearlle, lookouts spotted another vessel closer to shore. This one was a schooner anchored at the mouth of a small river. When the vessel was spotted, sailors struck Cumberland's commodore's pennant and the American flag. Sailors replaced them with a British commodore's pennant and flag. Like the Pearlle, the schooner raised an American flag. Missroon again waited until he was close to the suspected ship, went to battle stations, then revealed his ship's true identity.

Missroon handed the boarding responsibilities this time to Lieutenant Nicholson and Master Meade, who assembled a team and boarded the

schooner. The vessel was the New York City-based Cortez. Nicholson found the ship's papers highly suspicious. The boarding team found tobacco, palm oil, firearms, and other trading items recently unpacked and on the deck of the vessel. All of these items were known trading goods used in buying slaves from native enslaving gangs. The team also found shackles on the deck. Nicholson and his team had just caught Cortez in the act of preparing for an imminent slave trade transaction.

Cortez's captain, one A.V. Thousrherd, could not be found and the crew was highly uncooperative upon being questioned. Nicholson had seen enough and ordered the ship and her crew to be placed under arrest. Meade was left in charge with a prize crew with orders to take the vessel back to the United States for trial.

With Cortez taken care of, the Flagship proceeded south towards Sharks Point, near the mouth of the mighty Congo River, a place frequented by both merchants engaged in legitimate trading activities and slave smuggling. She arrived a week later and encountered a squadron of Portuguese warships and the American-flagged merchant ship William Shailer. After a quick inspection of Shailer, Cumberland's officers trusted the civilian ship's captain enough to hand over the mail bag to the homeward bound American vessel. Dale,

commanded by Norfolk resident Commander William Henry McBlair, arrived at the anchorage a few days later, and both American warships conducted an officer exchange with their Portuguese counterparts.

Cumberland weighed anchor a few days later and proceeded closer to the mouth of the Congo. Cumberland spotted a British-flagged ship and monitored her activities. Upon closer inspection it was determined to be a warship, and the Americans backed off. On October 22, Missroon had his ship drop anchor again and assembled boarding parties in the ship's cutters for a raid up river. The cutters, under the command of Lieutenant Greene, spotted an American barque and boarded her. She was the Salem-based barque Gold Finch. Greene and his men inspected the ship and papers and were satisfied that the Massachusetts-based vessel was legitimate.

Dale arrived in the area the same day. With another ship in the region, it was felt that Cumberland could retire. She proceeded north along the coast and sailed for Liberia. After two days, watches spotted a British-flagged schooner in Kabenda Bay. After being challenged, the schooner claimed she was a supply vessel supporting the British Africa Squadron. Conover did

Africa Squadron continued on page 13

## Book Reviews

### Kimmel, Short, and Pearl Harbor:

#### The Final Report Revealed

by Fred L. Borch and Daniel Martinez  
Reviewed by Howard Sandefer

"....of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body."  
Ecclesiastes 12:12

The Preacher did not know about Pearl Harbor, but he must have been exposed to other subjects that would not go away. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor is an event that has, does, and will continue to capture the attention of people who are attempting to understand what happened. Nine reports generated by several official investigations, plus many

Fred L. Burch and Daniel Martinez.  
Kimmel, Short, and Pearl Harbor: The Final Report Revealed. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2004. ISBN 1-59114-0900-0. \$25.95.

books have attempted to explain the event. None has fully satisfied either the military or the general public, so more will undoubtedly be published.

There are sets and subsets of subject matter that attract the attention of investigators. This book is part of a subset to the discussions, focusing on the two commanders in Hawaii and whether or not they should be advanced from their two-star retirement ranks to the ranks they held during the attack. The battle over the responsibility of Admiral Kimmel and Lieutenant General Short will undoubtedly range far into the future, regardless of the good intentions of the Dorn Report. The question inevitably revolves around the question of whether the two men took the appropriate actions, given the level of intelligence and direction each received.

The book itself contains the full text of the Dorn report, which was named for Edwin Dorn. He was, at that time, Undersecretary of Defense. It is the only Department of Defense study of the question of reinstatement and is an attempt to present the facts about the responsibility of the two over-all commanders on that day.

Proponents on both sides bring fervor and passion to the discussion.

The reports stress the responsibility of the two commanders. All the reports reach the conclusion that the two commanders were deficient in judgment. That was the basis for initial relief, and the rationale for the continued denial of the restoration of the four and three star ranks.

Of course, the various conspiracy theories postulate Washington involvement and deep, sinister plots to involve the U.S. against the will of the people. Ammunition is provided because the two senior commanders, despite war warnings and tense international tensions, chose to keep all airplanes on the ground that fateful morning.

The study conclusively details the failure of the judgment of the two commanders in several areas of responsibility:

-Surveillance of the approaches to Pearl Harbor, including radar surveillance, although the value of such surveillance had been thoroughly documented and demonstrated in the United Kingdom during the Battle of Britain.

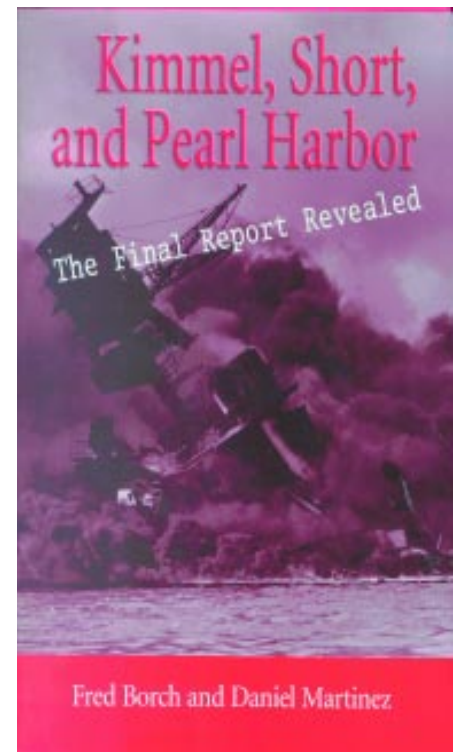
-Torpedo nets had not been installed, although the British had demonstrated the use of torpedoes in a harbor at Taranto.

-No long-range patrols were aloft to search approaches to Pearl Harbor. Possibilities included the PBY aircraft and smaller naval units on probable attack positions. Possible results are problematical, but it would at least have demonstrated a war-like approach to surveillance.

-No pursuit planes were airborne. Radar control of pursuit planes was not something that "just happened." Training was required but there is no mention that such training programs were instituted.

-Much was made of the reliance on Washington to provide up to date intelligence about the tactical intentions of the Japanese.

-Air attack from the sea had been a feature of several of the Fleet Problems in the 30's, and yet Kimmel and Short ignored the possibility of such an attack.



-Kimmel and Short should have been aware of the Japanese history of attacking before issuing a declaration of war.

Efforts to restore the two officers to their ranks at the time of the attack were predicated on the lack of information that was available to them just prior to the time of the attack. The Dorn report concluded that some information was lacking, but that sufficient indicators to the possibility of an attack existed to allow them to take defensive measures. Dorn concluded that they could not have prevented the attack, but could have mitigated the damage and loss of life if some of the measures available to them had been utilized.

Awareness of impending war was conspicuous by its absence at Pearl Harbor, in contrast to the rest of the commands. The authors pointed out that Admiral Halsey put his task force on a war footing when reinforcing Wake Island just before Pearl Harbor; General MacArthur had plans to attack Japanese bases on Formosa as soon as war was declared; and the Atlantic Fleet had been at war since 10 April when USS Niblack (DD-424) depth charged a German submarine off of Iceland.

The authors have presented the Dorn report in its entirety. It is an excellent read and perhaps here is where the debate of this subset should cease. 🏠

## Sailors in the Holy Land: The 1848 American Expedition to the Dead Sea and the Search for Sodom and Gomorrah

By Andrew C. A. Jampoler

Reviewed by Ira R. Hanna

It was a far different Navy in 1847 than we have today. Only 350 of the 700 Naval officers were employed. The other half sat at home at half pay awaiting the Secretary of the Navy's call. They spent their time sending letters to the Secretary that ranged from requests for command of a specific ship to proposals for expeditions to strange lands. Lieutenant William Lynch

Andrew C. A. Jampoler. *Sailors in the Holy Land: The 1848 Expedition to the Dead Sea and the Search for Sodom and Gomorrah*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2005. ISBN 1-59114-413-2. \$32.95.

proposed what to us would be an astounding plan of exploration seemingly unrelated to regular service. He proposed the first and only U.S. Navy expedition to the Holy Land.

Why would the Secretary of the Navy approve this request? Of what value to the Navy or America would it be? Was Lynch's mission scientific or merely the "Holy Grail" of his religious fervor-to provide physical evidence of the Bible's story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah? In his book, *Sailors in the Holy Land*, Andrew Jampoler has made a monumental effort to answer those questions and to reveal every detail of Lynch's voyage.

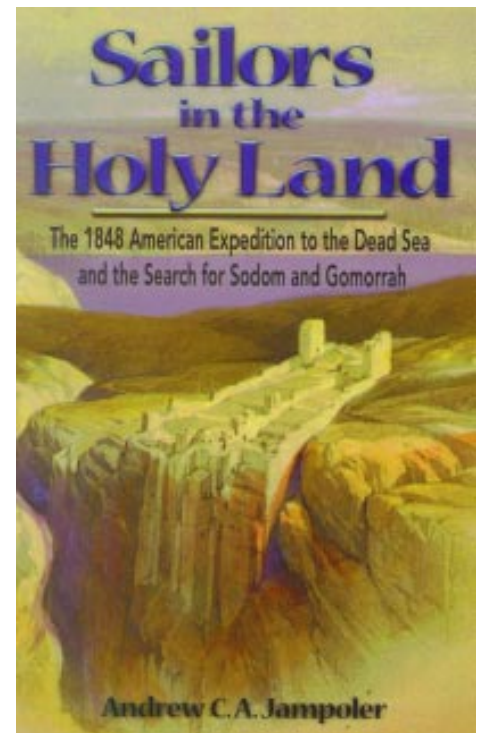
Lieutenant Lynch was a devoutly religious man and for ten or more years had planned a trip to the Holy Land. He was also a serious scientist who knew the importance of collecting specimens of all types. His proposal also struck a positive note with Secretary of the Navy John Mason's plans to resupply the Mediterranean Squadron. In addition, it may have helped that Secretary Mason was a fellow Virginian and that Lynch's personal friend and recognized Naval scientist

Lieutenant Matthew F. Maury endorsed the project. In essence, 1830 through 1860 was the age of "Manifest Destiny" for William Lynch as well as the United States of America.

All expeditions were expected to bring back specimens of plants, animals, and surveys to be used to formulate maps and charts. Lynch's mission was a combination of those expectations. In particular, it was to establish the relative elevation of the Mediterranean and Dead Seas; to collect minerals and other specimens; and to make scientific observations while he explored the Jordan River. The fact that the entire area was teeming with sacred Biblical associations did not necessarily keep Lynch from conducting his mission with exacting scientific methods. He did determine that the surface of the Dead Sea was precisely 1316.7 feet below the Mediterranean. As Jampoler notes, "As a bonus, Lynch reported that Jerusalem lay 2,610.5 feet above sea level and 3,927.24 feet above the Dead Sea."

In line with his plans, Secretary Mason assigned the U.S. Store Ship Supply to the expedition, and in October 1847, Lynch took command of his ship. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of November, Supply left New York harbor on its journey to the Holy Land. This expedition had several connections to the Hampton Roads area. William Lynch was born in Norfolk on April 1, 1801, even though his family home was in Frederick County, Maryland. In 1828, he married Virginia Shaw and the newlyweds made their first home in Norfolk. Lastly, the USSS Supply ended its voyage by tying up to a pier at the Gosport Naval Shipyard in Portsmouth on December 8, 1848.

Throughout this interesting and well-written book, the author provided collaborative information that explained the expedition in its historical context. There



was one disappointment. Jampoler's concluding chapter was more about the end of the expedition's ship than a synopsis of the expedition's results and the relevance to the Navy. Did it meet the Secretary of the Navy's expectations? What did the the surveys mean to the scientific community? Did Lynch really establish the locations of Sodom and Gomorrah and how they were destroyed? Was Lot's wife really turned into a pillar of salt and how did it happen?

If you want to know the scientific answers to these questions, you will have to read the entire book. He provided twenty-two pages of fully annotated chapter notes and a bibliography that included numerous primary and secondary sources. He left no doubt as to the authenticity of his information. Sometimes, this effort provided more peripheral information than the average reader normally would desire or could easily relate to regarding the main topic.

For instance, the introductory chapter is entitled "Divorce A Vinculo Matrimonii," which described William Lynch's problems with an adulterous wife and his eventual petition for divorce in October 1845. You learn in a later chapter that this may have influenced him to propose this expedition, but it is obvious that there were other factors that had more influence.

Despite a lack of focus at times, the book is well researched and a very good read. It is well worth the effort. 📖

# Commodore Conover's Tour in Africa

Cumberland's flag officer in 1857, Thomas Conover, is an obscure officer. His career started out with a bang when he served under David Porter on Essex and with Thomas McDonough at Lake Champlain, and ended rather quietly with Cumberland being his last of three commands. The Navy placed him on the retired list in 1862, and he died shortly thereafter.

When he assumed command of the Africa Squadron in 1857, the Navy had captured only five slave ships between 1850 and 1856. Before that, the Navy captured eighteen slave ships between 1820 and 1848, none during the Mexican-American War, and



## The Museum Sage

then captured five more between 1850 and 1856. This amounted to a total of twenty-three over a period of thirty-three years.

Conover's squadron only added slightly to that total. In addition to

Cumberland's capture of the schooner Cortez, the Squadron captured four other slave ships. Marion captured the barques Brothers, Orion, and Ardennes, all in the Congo River. The sloop-of-war Dale captured the William G. Lewis also in the Congo River. The sloop-of-war Vincennes came up empty.

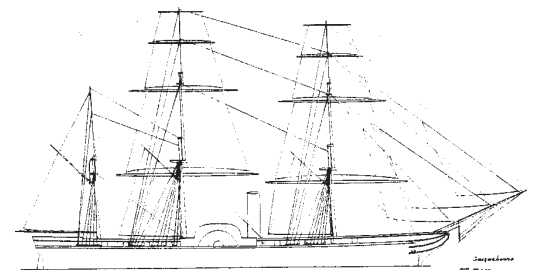
Dale's commanding officer William Henry McBlair complained that he really could have used a steam powered warship to chase down the slavers and their fast ships. Such ships were available, but none were assigned to the Africa Squadron until 1859, when new steamers came on line.

One possible explanation for the lack of support was national security priorities. In 1857, the Navy deployed six steam-powered warships to the Gulf/Home Squadron to look after Central America, a few to the Pacific, and a few to the all important and ever popular Mediterranean Squadron. It must have driven some of Cumberland's officers mad when they saw USS Powhatan being used as a Presidential yacht (see page 14) en route to the Mediterranean.


Disease was also a factor as it incapacitated sailors for weeks on end and replacements were hard to come by. Logistics was also a factor hindering performance as the closest "naval station" was Cape Verde Islands, which was several

hundred miles away from the main hunting ground.

Compared to other commodores, Conover's meager performance was a small improvement over the previous three commodores. Conover's men and ships certainly did try and can not be blamed for a lack of aggressiveness. The squadron together hunted down and searched several dozen ships. Cumberland's boarding teams searched no less than fifteen. In contrast, the squadron's first flag officer Commodore Perry was notorious for patrolling away from the African coast.



Shown here is the 16-gun steamer/Presidential yacht USS Powhatan. The warship pulled up alongside Cumberland in 1858, only to proceed to the Mediterranean and not on slave trade patrols. (National Archives)

In the end, Conover's results were poor, though it is worth noting that the capture of Cortez was the first capture of a slave ship by an American warship in three years! However, the results were nothing like the 1859-1861 patrols that netted fifteen slave ships off the coast of Africa, and many more around Cuba when it became a hunting ground. 

## Wisconsin Visitor Information

General Information  
757-322-2987  
[www.hrnm.navy.mil](http://www.hrnm.navy.mil)

Volunteer Opportunities  
757-322-3106  
[tdandes@nsn.cmar.navy.mil](mailto:tdandes@nsn.cmar.navy.mil)

Honor and Ceremonies  
757-322-2988  
[schoskins@nsn.cmar.navy.mil](mailto:schoskins@nsn.cmar.navy.mil)

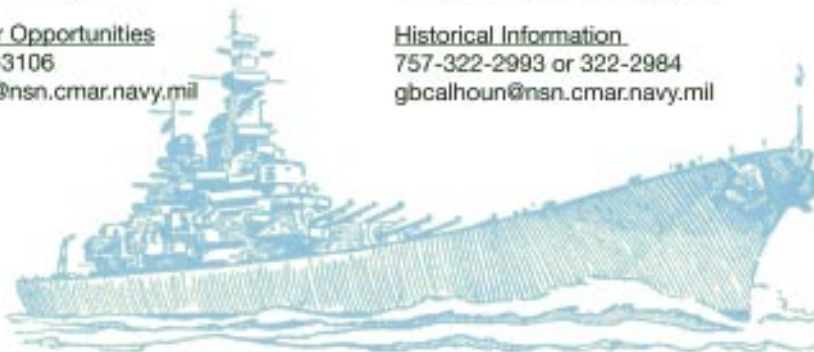
Historical Information  
757-322-2993 or 322-2984  
[gbcalthoun@nsn.cmar.navy.mil](mailto:gbcalthoun@nsn.cmar.navy.mil)

Nauticus' Wisconsin Exhibits  
757-664-1000  
[www.nauticus.org](http://www.nauticus.org)  
[shelia.harrison@norfolk.gov](mailto:shelia.harrison@norfolk.gov)

Wisconsin Project Partners  
Hampton Roads Naval  
Historical Foundation  
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USS Wisconsin Association  
[www.usswisconsin.org](http://www.usswisconsin.org)

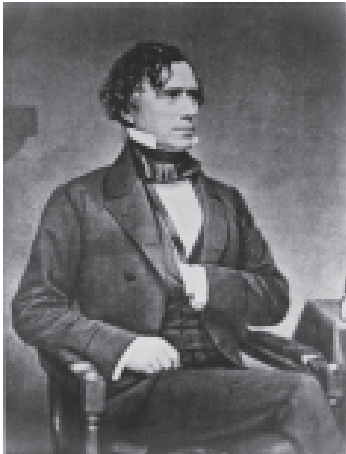
Battleship Wisconsin Foundation  
[www.battleshipwisconsin.org](http://www.battleshipwisconsin.org)



Africa Squadron continued from page 9

not believe the claim and sent a boarding team over. The boarding team confirmed that the ship was indeed a British supply ship and the schooner was released. Watches spotted an American-flagged barque the next morning. The boarding team confirmed her identity as the barque Hazard based out of Boston and released her.

The Flagship continued on her way to Liberia, specifically to Monrovia. The ship fired off salutes to the Liberians, which were



The fourteenth President of the United States, Franklin Pierce, and his ever frail wife visited Cumberland at the start of their European vacation while the ship was in Maderia. The ship's company gave the former President full honors even though he was an unpopular public figure. (Library of Congress photo)

promptly returned by a Liberian-manned fort on shore. American warships made frequent visits to the nominally independent nation of freed and liberated slaves to ensure that the nation was protected both from foreign interference and hostile native Africans who



Andrew Benson, Liberia's second president, made an official visit to the ship when Cumberland anchored in Monrovia. Though the United States did not officially recognize Liberia until 1862, U.S. Navy warships frequently visited the nation of freed American slaves to assist them with security issues. (Library of Congress photo)

lived nearby. Cumberland anchored next to a Liberian-flagged armed schooner and dispatched Lieutenant Upshur to shore. Upshur made contact with Liberian president Steven Allen Bensen and the American consulate "agent" (the United States technically did not recognize Liberia as an independent nation), both who later made official state visits to the ship. Missroom paid off and discharged most of the Krooman who had been serving as part of the ship's company since August. He found and recruited twenty-nine more to replace them.

With the diplomatic mission finished, the Flagship continued north to the squadron's depot at Porto Praya, arriving there on December 1. Conover found St. Louis still at anchor as she was awaiting Vincennes to arrive from New York to relieve her. Cumberland's ship's company spent the next few weeks assessing and repairing wear and tear damage to the vessel. Ship carpenters also lent a hand to the British troop transport Maria Somers who arrived in port with damaged masts and in need of emergency repairs. On December 17, Vincennes finally arrived, allowing St. Louis to leave for home, and the store ship Supply arrived two weeks later with supplies for the squadron. Missroom had to arrest three of Cumberland's hungry sailors for attempting to steal whole boxes of bread while off loading Supply.

The standown also gave Fleet Surgeon Blacknall a chance to catch up and assess the medical condition of the squadron. He asked Conover and Missroom to remove several sailors from the ship for various physical ailments, including sexually transmitted diseases and yellow fever, and for various mental disorders.

One patient in particular greatly concerned the surgeon. Specifically, he sent one of the newly recruited Krooman, given the name Tom Lee by the ship's purser, to the hospital on shore as Blacknall believed he had what he diagnosed as variola confluences. Commonly called by its more familiar name smallpox, Blacknall was particularly concerned with the apparent ineffectiveness of the smallpox vaccine he dispensed to the new Krooman. He believed other sailors might have already been infected with the highly contagious disease. Blacknall kept in close contact with Dr. Haffer, the Naval Surgeon who ran the Naval hospital on Porto Praya, on the status of the

sick African.

Tom Lee died two weeks later. A fellow Krooman, given the name Sam Lewis, refused to leave Lee's side and the Fleet Surgeon now worried that Lewis was probably infected as well. In what was an example of how valuable the U.S. Navy considered their Krooman sailors, when Blacknall reported that Lewis was infected with the pox, the surgeon concluded that the African could very well infect the entire ship's company and knock the ship out of service. However, he also wrote that the "importance of his services and the inconvenience of substituting him at [Porto Praya] are consideration in the one scale." As a result, he deferred medical judgment and allowed Conover to make the decision.

While there is no record of the commodore's decision on Sam Lewis, the disease did spread. Within a few weeks, twenty additional members of the ship's company were diagnosed with small pox or other contagious diseases such as influenza. Blacknall recommended to Missroom that the decks be washed, that sailors always wear blue flannel, even during the day, and cancel all gunnery exercises in an attempt to control the disease. The Surgeon later learned from a Portuguese warship that had recently returned from the African coast that it also was dealing with a pox outbreak and more than likely had received the disease from an African port it visited.

If that was not enough for the ship's command staff, a major storm with hurricane force winds slammed the Cape Verde Islands in March. The winds threw two of Cumberland's sailors overboard and were never seen again. Many thought the ship was done for. Fortunately, the Flagship made it through, though much of the ship had to be repaired. With all these issues building up on him, Conover decided that the Flagship would not make another patrol south, until the ship and the ship's company were completely ready.

Disease and repairs, however, did not stop the Flagship from hosting VIPs. In early April, the ship welcomed former President Franklin Pierce and his wife. The couple had just begun a tour of Europe aboard the steamer USS Powhatan in an attempt to improve their well-being. The ship's company rendered the former

Africa Squadron continued on page 14



Krooman fishermen launch a boat into the Atlantic surf. Krooman are indigenous people who live along the western coast of Africa. During the 1800s, the U.S. Navy recruited them to serve as fishermen, interpreters, and guides aboard their ships. At any given time, Cumberland had twenty to thirty of these sailors. (Naval Historical Center photo of an 1848 drawing by Charles Sand)

Africa Squadron continued from page 13  
 commander-in-chief full Presidential honors. This was no doubt a welcome change from the hostile anti-slavery, anti-Pierce mobs the couple left behind in New Hampshire.

Other than this Presidential visit, Cumberland spent the first six months of 1858 in the Cape Verde Islands doing very little. Except for drunken sailors falling overboard, and subsequently rescued by Krooman diving into the water after them, shouting matches between officers over correct ship protocol, and a bloody fight in the mess between the ship's cooks where

they stabbed and bashed each other with their iron cooking and firebox tools, the ship remained at anchor with little action.

The old brig USS Bainbridge, arrived from New York on June 17, but did not remain long as she was bound for Brazil. Dale returned from her latest patrol on July 1. With three ships of the Squadron in port, Conover decided to catch up on Naval justice and convened several court-martials including the trial of one Dale's assistant surgeons.

It was not until July that Conover decided the Flagship was ready enough to

make preparations for her second patrol. The inactivity infuriated some of the ship's officers who felt that they could have left sooner. Inactivity and a lack of support from back home were common complaints among Naval officers who served on the Africa Squadron. However, most kept their criticisms private and vented their frustrations through letters to family members.

One of Cumberland's officers, however, decided to take his frustrations public. In a letter to the New York Herald, an anonymous officer slammed the Navy, his commodore, and the President's current slave trade suppression policy. He wrote that since Cumberland seized Cortez in October 1857, "no slavers or any other vessels have been boarded by us, nor are likely to be, from present appearances...I merely give you this short account to convince your readers how much has been said, and how little actually done toward contributing any thing to the suppression of the slave trade."


The letter was picked up by several other national newspapers including Harper's Weekly, which titled the letter "Africa: What Our Squadron is About" (the full text of the letter can be seen at the bottom of this page). African-American historian and civil rights leader W.E.B. DuBois would later use the letter as a blanket condemnation of America's slave trade.  
 Africa Squadron continued on page 15

## "Africa: What Our Squadron is About"

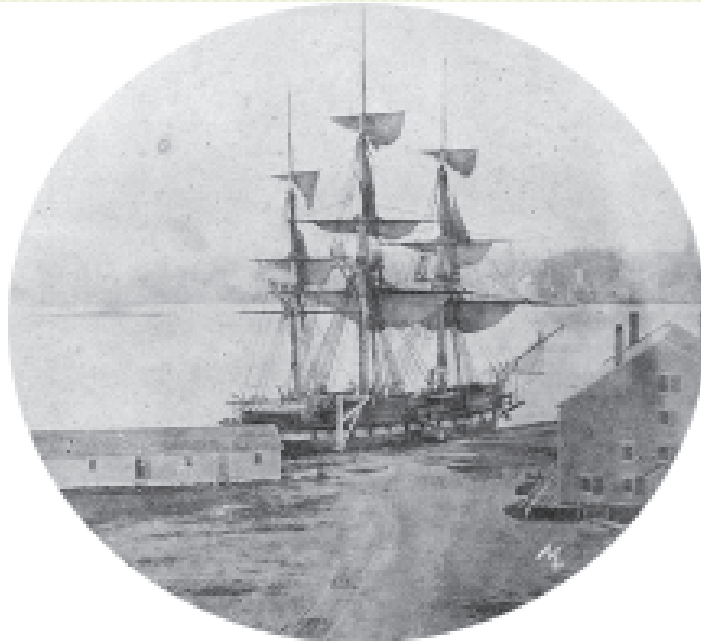
An 1858 Opinion Piece From An Anonymous Officer onboard USS Cumberland  
 As Published in the New York Herald and Harper's Weekly

**W**e have now been fifteen months on the African station, of which precisely twenty-two days have been passed on the usual cruising ground for slavers-thirteen of which twenty-two days we were at anchor and with the exception of the boarding and overhauling of the Cortez, of which daring exploit you received some account last October, no slavers or any other vessels have been boarded by us, nor are likely to be, from present appearances.

"In consequence of the injured health of the ship's company, consequent upon that affair and a boat expedition two miles up the Congo River, it was deemed necessary by the commander-in-chief that the ship should remain three months at Madeira, in order to recruit the health and spirits of the officers and crew after such unprecedented fatigues and hardships-two weeks being the period usually allotted to the other vessels of the squadron. The remainder of the time has been passed at Cape Verde from it-we are again on the coast of Africa.

"I merely give you this short account to convince your readers how much has been said, and how little actually done, toward contributing any thing to the suppression of the slave-trade. Our squadron on the west coast of Africa has never dreamed of such a thing." 





This is the only known photograph taken of USS Cumberland. She rests quietly at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, New Hampshire after returning from Africa. (HRNM photo)

Africa Squadron continued from page 14  
trade policy in his 1896 landmark history *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade*.

After nine months in port, *Cumberland* finally began her second patrol on August 13. This patrol headed straight for the heart of the slave trade activity in Angola. Before leaving Porto Praya, Blacknall had determined that twelve sailors were too sick to continue and chartered the schooner *A.Y. Linnell* to take them home. This cruise took the sloop-of-war south of the equator where watches spotted the American-flagged whaling ship *Washington* out of Sag Harbor, New York. Inspection teams determined the vessel was legitimate and released her. A few days later a Portuguese-flagged schooner was spotted and ordered to stop. Upon closer inspection, watches determined she was a small fishing vessel out of Lisbon and she was left alone.

*Cumberland* made her first port call during this patrol on September 17 when she dropped anchor at St. Paul de Loando, the colonial capital of Portuguese Angola. Present were several French and Portuguese warships, which Conover and Upshur visited as part of their diplomatic duties. Vincennes arrived a few days later and the two ships resupplied. *Cumberland* proceeded to St. Phillip de Benguela, another Portuguese controlled port to monitor slave ship activity. As in St. Paul, none was found. She then proceeded to the mouth of the Congo River where Lt. Werden assembled boarding teams in two of the

ship's cutters for a raid up the river. Unfortunately, no ships were discovered during this raid. Conover decided not to continue the patrol, Flagship left the area for Porto Praya.

The trip back to the Cape Verde Islands was uneventful. It was so mundane that the officer of the deck felt it necessary to record that a school of blackfish had surrounded the ship and were swimming alongside. She arrived back in Porto Praya on December 7. The fourth ship in the squadron, the brig *USS Marion*, had finally arrived from Boston and was in port awaiting patrol instructions from the commodore. The *Charles Millon*, a Navy-contract supply vessel, arrived a few days later with mail and supplies for the squadron.

The ship rested for the remainder of 1858, with Blacknall reporting to his superiors at the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery that "we are all very well." Conover did not have *Cumberland* stay in port for long as she got underway for the French trading outpost of Gorée in January 1859.

Upshaw visited French authorities to pave the way for an official flag visit with Conover's French counterpart aboard the frigate *Joan D'Arc* and other French warships in the harbor. Two weeks into the visit, an American-flagged brig, specifically the *Trimandra* out of Salem, entered Gorée. Missroon had an inspection team look over the vessel. While *Trimandra's* paperwork recorded her being at sea for over eight

months and came from the Congo River region, the team decided that she was a legal vessel and released her.

The Flagship left the French colony on February 24 and headed back to the Cape Verde Islands. She exchanged sailors with Vincennes and Dale before heading to Madeira in March to wait for her relief. The sloop-of-war *Constellation* was scheduled to relieve her and it was standard operating procedure to wait in a single location for the relief to arrive no matter how long it took. While awaiting *Constellation's* arrival from Boston, *Cumberland's* boarding teams inspected two American-flagged ships, but found nothing of interest.

Missroon authorized limited liberty, which resulted in several out of control sailors and Marines being thrown in jail by local authorities. Conover decided to keep the company busy by having them organize a large shipboard party. According to an account provided to the *Boston Courier* by an anonymous officer, the ball was quite the affair.

The officer reported that the "quarter-deck, which is very large, was cleared of all riggings, &c., and enclosed by flags- of which we have those of every nation on board-festooned with natural flowers, which are here so plentiful that large boat-loads of the most beautiful roses, camillas, lilies, honeysuckles, ivy, &c., including many rare plants, were sent off to the ship as presents.

Africa Squadron continued on page 16

“The quarter-deck, which is very large, was cleared of all riggings, &c., and enclosed by flags- of which we have those of every nation on board-festooned with natural flowers, which are here so plentiful that large boat-loads of the most beautiful roses, camillas, lilies, honeysuckles, ivy, &c., including many rare plants, were sent off to the ship as presents.”

-A description of a large party held aboard Cumberland, 1859

Africa Squadron continued from page 15

All the masts, the capstan, the wheel, the stair-railings, the large pivot-gun, and the gangways, were covered with wreaths and festoons of roses, and other flowers.”

Sailors cleared the quarterdeck and made it into a dancing area and the starboard side gun deck was cleared as a reception area. Two large chandeliers were made specifically for the occasion. The budget for the party ran into the thousands of dollars.

When word about Conover’s party reached America, there was a small uproar. Upon reading an account of it in the Boston Courier, the National Era denounced Conover and all of Cumberland for wasting the taxpayers’ money and time in an editorial entitled “Yachting and Pleasure Jollifications at the Expense of Uncle Sam.” The editor of the National Era commented that the British had been complaining that American warships on the Africa Squadron spent too much time lazily cruising around Madeira.

The editor wrote that “it certainly does not look as if the officers of the Cumberland devoted much time to cruising for slavers on the coast of Africa! Enjoying excursions into the interior, picnics, pistol-firing expeditions, &c., &c., according to the Courier correspondent seems to have been the ‘order of the day.’” The editor did not mention Cumberland’s or the squadron’s efforts or other troubles.

The Squadron’s relief began to arrive in mid-June with the sloop Portsmouth the

“Yachting and Pleasure Jollifications at the Expense of Uncle Sam...It certainly does not look as if the officers of the Cumberland devoted much time to cruising for slaves on the coast of Africa!”

-An editorial expresses its views of the same party

first to arrive on June 11. Though Cumberland’s company was preparing to ship home, an incident aboard an American merchant ship reminded the crew it still had work to do. On July 14, the merchant vessel Protector arrived in Maderia with her American flag at half-mast. Missroon dispatched the cutters over to the ship to find out what was going on.

Boarding teams discovered that Protector’s captain had been assaulted and stabbed by an African-American sailor named Richard Wallingford. Blacknall attended to the captain’s wounds and Marines took Wallingford into custody. The U.S. Consul determined that he should be shipped to America aboard Cumberland to stand trial.

Constellation arrived from Boston on August 7. Conover and Missroon wasted no time leaving port. Constellation’s crew manned the riggings and cheered as Cumberland headed for Portsmouth, New Hampshire. A month later the ship arrived in Portsmouth on September 5. The officers closed down the ship in a hurry. By September 8, the crew was paid off and the ship put out of commission.

Cumberland’s cruise in Africa was not the most productive. She spent a large

portion of her time in port and away from the patrol area. The one ship Cumberland did seize, the schooner Cortez, was later declared in violation of the slave trade act and condemned by a Federal judge. Federal marshals later sold her at auction.

Upon hearing about the capture, Northern newspapers declared Cortez as a prime example of the abuse of the American flag in Africa. Southern newspapers such as the Charleston Courier dismissed this argument. The South Carolina newspaper commented that Cortez was “an instance of the grossest exaggeration” of America’s involvement in the slave trade.

At the same time, newspapers did not give the whole story. Blacknall and his fellow surgeons produced nothing short of a minor miracle fighting off tropical diseases. While several dozen sailors were incapacitated due to disease, only twenty sailors out of a squadron total of 962 died from them. Other factors, such as the fact that Cumberland was not a suitable ship for the operation, or the general complexity of the slave trade were also not included.

With the Africa cruise over, Cumberland rested for a few months. The Navy would tap her services again in the coming year to patrol the home waters. 

## In Our Next Issue

▣ ▮ United States v. William G. Lewis: A Slave Ship is Brought to Trial in Norfolk

▣ ▣ Book Reviews: A Call to the Sea: Captain Charles Stewart of the USS Constitution and USS Ranger: The Navy’s First Flatop From Keel to Mast, 1933-1946