

The Day Book

Volume 3, Issue 6

September-October 1997

A Newsletter for the Supporters of the Hampton Roads Naval Museum

A Friendship Under Fire

The Confrontation Between Stephen Decatur and James Barron, Part 1

by Joe Mosier

On March 22, 1820, two of the senior officers of the United States Navy met on "the field of honor" at Bladensburg, Maryland. This duel was the result of a long-standing feud based on an insult to a lady and a naval battle that was not fought.



While respected by all in Hampton Roads, the tight circle of U.S. Navy captains kept their distance from Commodore James Barron as they did not trust his judgement and sense of honor. This particular picture was painted by Denmark's royal court painter during Barron's self-imposed exile in Copenhagen. (Photo of painting provided by the E.G. Swem Library)

Tragically, the meeting could have been avoided except for the manipulations of two other officers who acted as seconds.

The meeting between James Barron and Stephen Decatur was in some respects not typical. Christopher McKee pointed this out in his landmark study of the early U.S. Navy, *A Gentlemanly and Honorable Profession*. "In spite of the misleading impression created by the Barron-Decatur duel, the practice of dueling was all but entirely confined to the younger members of the officer corps."

At the time of their confrontation, Barron was 51 years old and Decatur 41. By contrast, twelve of eighteen officers killed in duels before 1815 were midshipmen. This trend had worried Decatur, who was himself probably the most experienced in dueling among naval officers of his day. In 1809, while Decatur commanded the frigate *United States* he tried to put an end to the senseless dueling among his midshipmen. He required each junior officer under his command to swear to bring their disputes to him first and to move to the field of honor only with his approval. This "Decatur Plan" gained popularity and was adopted by other commanders.

Also, unlike many duels of the day, the encounter was not the result of single action or unguarded word. The two principals were, in fact, old shipmates and

former friends. They had first served together in the wardroom of *United States* in 1798. Their later correspondence shows Third Lieutenant Barron acted as a mentor to the new midshipman. Their paths had crossed frequently in the small navy of that era. In 1804, Decatur



One of the greatest heroes of the U.S. Navy: Commodore Stephen Decatur. While his sense of duty and honor was legendary, it would be exploited by other Naval officers and lead to a complex entanglement with Commodore Barron. (HRNM photo of an engraving by John W. Jarvis)

became first lieutenant of the 32-gun frigate *New York* with Barron as her captain. They worked well together. On one occasion, Barron had even convinced Decatur not to resign from the Navy. Their falling out started at the end of the Barbary Wars in 1806.

Decatur had leaped to national *Decatur-Barron continued on Page 6*

Inside *The Day Book*

The Director's Column.....	2
New Exhibit.....	3
SDI in the 1840's.....	4
Volunteer News & Notes.....	9
The Museum Sage.....	10

The Good Old Days: Were They?

The Director's Column

by Becky Pouliot

On September 23, the museum will be hosting the last of its Scuttlebutt summer conversations under the Nauticus pavilion at 3:00 p.m. This summer series of get togethers has covered a wide range of topics: from the Civil War Peninsula Campaign, to the evolution of ship technology, to collecting Civil War Memorabilia. Many thanks to HRNM docents **Ralph Preston** and **Bob Comet** and HRNM staff member **Gordon Calhoun** for sharing their knowledge. Low key in nature, these presentations provide an opportunity for sharing information.

The last Scuttlebutt will focus on the city of Norfolk during the 1940's. There has been a raging debate among the volunteers and museum visitors, many of whom grew up in Norfolk, on how the citizens of Norfolk accepted the huge influx of sailors and civilian workers during World War II. Was Norfolk's notoriety deserved? How did the locals and the sailors interact? I



HRNM docent Ralph Preston shows the First Lady of Virginia, Susan Allen, and her children, around the museum. Mrs. Allen was in the Hampton Roads area to promote the Time Traveler's history initiative. (Photo by Bob Matteson)

am developing a presentation and encourage anyone with stories about downtown Norfolk and the Naval Base during the war, to join in a roundtable discussion. Bring photographs or memorabilia if you have them.

Volunteers! Please be on the lookout for a mailing concerning our

next docent meeting. Plans call for the meeting to be held **September 19** at **10 a.m.** at the second floor conference room in Nauticus. Rich Conti, interim director of the Center, will be on-hand to answer any questions you may have. He has expressed his appreciation for our volunteer program and wants to be of assistance. If you have anything you wish to discuss, here is your opportunity. Other topics of discussion include the docent awards system, our trip to Annapolis, and the 1998 educational programs.

We have finished with the summer tourist rush and now it is back to school. It was a successful summer in terms of the number of children's group tours and military ceremonies held. We enjoyed participating in the Time Travelers Program for children. Our scavenger hunt was quite popular. We even had a chance to try it out on the First Lady of Virginia, **Susan Allen**, when she dropped in for a visit.

So now back to school and the field trips. We're ready. 

HAMPTON ROADS NAVAL★MUSEUM

Local History. World Events.

About *The Day Book*

The Day Book is an authorized publication of the Hampton Roads Naval Museum (HRNM). Its contents do not necessarily reflect the official view of the U.S. Government, the Department of Defense, the U.S. Navy or the U.S. Marine Corps and do not imply endorsement thereof. The HRNM is a museum dedicated to the study of 220 years of naval history in the Hampton Roads region. The museum is open Mondays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Tuesday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is free.

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

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

HRNM Staff

Director

Becky Pouliot

Curator

Joe Judge

Education Specialist

Bob Matteson

Exhibits Specialist

Marta Nelson

Museum Technician

Ofelia Elbo

HRNM OIC/Asst. Curator

Lt. Tom Whalen

HRNM LPO/TPU Admin.

YNI (SW) Brad Saltzman

Editor of The Day Book

Gordon Calhoun

Director, HRNHF

Maj. Gen. Dennis Murphy,

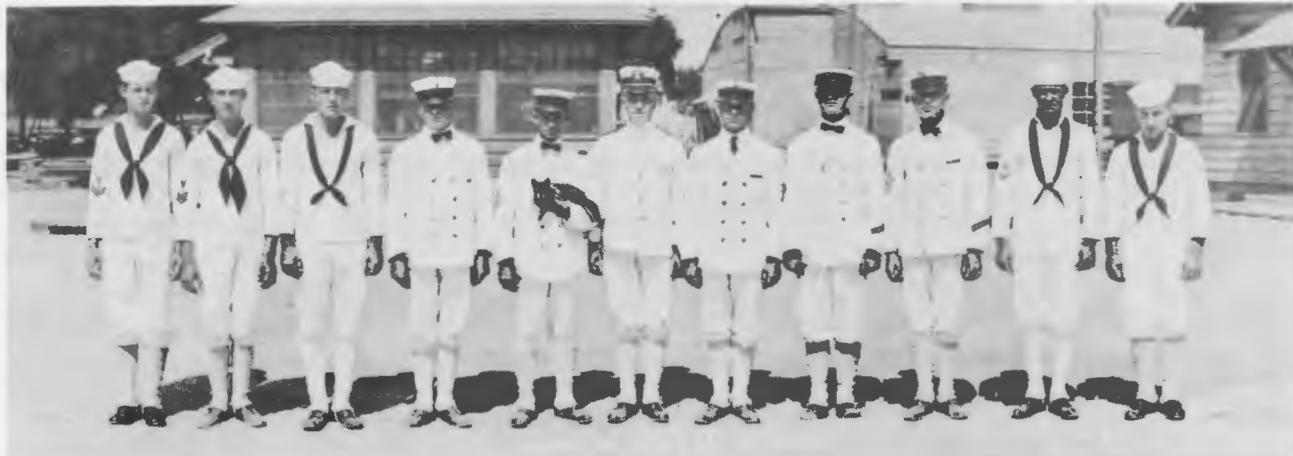
USMC (Ret)

Museum to Open Exhibit on Animals and the U.S. Navy

For those of us who have worked or been around the Navy, we have thousands of sea stories to tell. Well, the Hampton Roads Naval Museum has a few of its own. These stories though are not about your normal

Naval Museum will open a new exhibit entitled "The Sailor's Best Friend: Animals and the United States Navy." Using photographs and artifacts, this exhibit will look at the wide variety of roles that animals have performed in the

months just outside of the museum's permanent gallery. The museum also has in the works, in co-operation with the Virginia Zoo, a day where visitors will be able to meet up close and live some of the animals portrayed in the exhibit. -G.C.



See animals on parade starting November 3. Shown here are the instructors and their feline mascot from the Naval Signal School at the Norfolk Naval Base, 1920. Exhibit artifacts include the blanket of Bill the Goat, the mascot of the U.S. Naval Academy. (HRNM photo)

everyday sailors. These are stories are about animals, and we do not mean rowdy bluejackets! We are talking about dogs, cats, monkeys, kakoo birds, lions, tigers, and whole lot of other creatures.

On November 3, the Hampton Roads

service of our country. Never before has this particular subject been given such detailed attention.

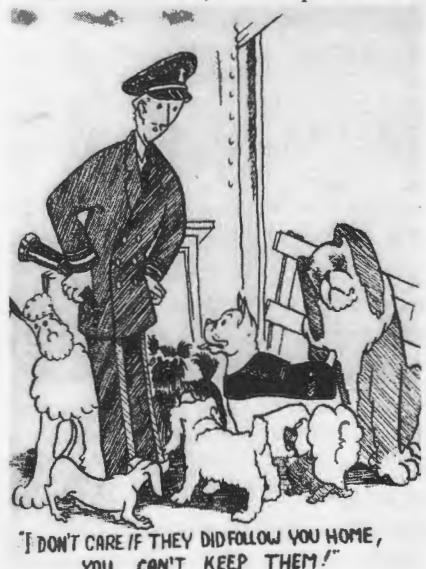
The exhibit will cover four major areas: working animals, mascots and pets, sea stories of ships overrun with animals that turned U.S. Navy ships into modern day Noah's Arks, and how animals have

"The Sailor's Best Friend: Animals and the United States Navy," a new temporary exhibit, opens November 3. Admission to the exhibit is free.

served as symbols of bravery and honor.

Some of the artifacts to be included in the exhibit are a blanket worn by Bill IX, the mascot of the U.S. Naval Academy in the 1930's, cartoons and items belonging to a beloved boxer dog mascot named Yokusan, and items used by the Navy's Military Working Dog to train their dogs.

This exhibit is scheduled to run for six



"I DON'T CARE IF THEY DID FOLLOW YOU HOME,
YOU CAN'T KEEP THEM!"

Artifacts and cartoons of a boxer named Yokusan, mascot of USS Kawishiwi (AO-146) and USS Shangri La (CV-38), will be on display as part of the museum's tribute to Navy animals. (HRNM photo of a 1954 cartoon by Berrisford)



Not every animal in the Navy was of the common variety. Shown here is a Black-faced Cuckoo and a New Zealand Cuckoo. Both of these birds were discovered in the South Pacific by the Wilkes Expedition in 1840.

The Original Strategic Defense Initiative

Two 19th Century Weapon Systems for Hampton Roads
by Lt. Tom Whalen

In the 1980's, President Ronald Reagan put forward a bold and controversial plan to prevent a nuclear war. Officially called the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), this plan envisioned completely removing the Soviet Union's nuclear warfighting capability through the use of high tech satellites in outer space. In theory, SDI's supporters reasoned that by making the Soviet's nuclear weapons arsenal obsolete, it would make their large conventional forces obsolete as well.

The American press, not known for strategic comprehension, labeled the program "Star Wars" and proclaimed it would not work. Like many defense projects, SDI won few friends because of its sticker price. The price tag was estimated into the tens of billions of dollars in order to make it operational. SDI was never fully funded and did not become operational. However does this necessarily make it a failure in the annals of history? While the system never became operational it in fact had the desired effect. It assisted in the defeat of the Soviet Union and bringing the Cold War to a relatively peaceful conclusion.

The reason for this was that SDI addressed and answered the Soviet Union's nuclear war fighting strategy. Yes sports fans, our rivals in the East did not believe in the traditional "mutually assured destruction" strategy. Rather they believed in an extensive nuclear war fighting strategy, which included not only firing their nuclear arsenal at us but also absorbing all our nukes and continuing to fight until they achieved victory. If their nuclear arsenal could not be depended upon to inflict maximum damage they could not realistically expect to win a

nuclear confrontation or the conventional confrontation that would follow.

While SDI is heralded or harangued, depending upon one's point of view, it was not a unique concept in American strategic ingenuity but rather one step in a tradition that goes back to the nation's early history. In the mid 1800's, the United States put forward a bold, and yes controversial plan, that

Norfolk. They made sure it stayed there by placing two ships-of-line and three frigates in Hampton Roads. Even the invincible *Constitution* was forced to stay in the port of Boston for the better part of 1813 and 1814 due to the blockade.

With the American Navy more or less contained, and to relieve pressure on the Canadian front, the British went on the offensive. British soldiers and



Capable of carrying 140 guns, the ship-of-the-line USS Pennsylvania was the largest sailing warship ever built for the U.S. Navy. The fact that it took 16 years to build her, the availability of smaller steam powered warships, and the lack of any credible sea time, make her a frequently mocked vessel. However, Pennsylvania and her smaller 74-gun cousins forced Europe for the first time to stand up and take notice of the American battle fleet. (HRNM photo of a lithograph by N. Carrier)

raised many of the same type of questions that SDI did in the 1980's.

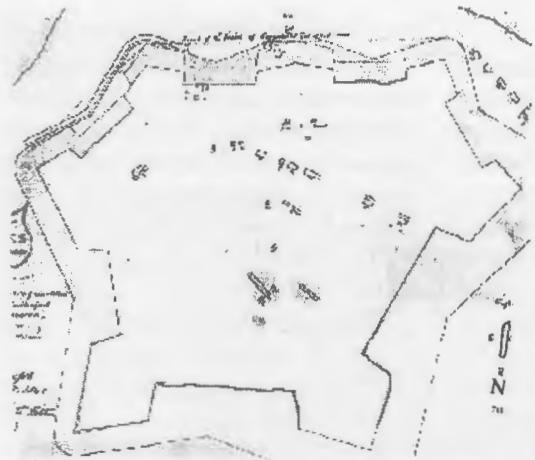
This plan grew out of the harsh lessons learned during the War of 1812. During this war, the British grand scale strategic plan was to use the superior numbers of the Royal Navy to blockade American ports and harass our commerce. It worked all too well.

Individually, American warships in the War of 1812 did extremely well. However, they were few in number and by mid-1813, much of the small American fleet was bottled up in harbors by superior numbers. For example, in early 1813, the British chased the frigate *Constellation* into

marines struck at will and were able to ravage larger maritime cities like Washington, D.C. and Alexandria, VA and smaller towns like Norfolk, VA. Even in those cities where the raids were repelled, like here in Norfolk, the blockade had a long term impact on the maritime economy. As a result of these strategic victories by the British and the humiliations, the United States began planning and implementing the nation's first real strategic defense initiative after the war ended.

The foundation of this new American military paradigm was to be the addition of at least eleven ships-of-

SDI continued on page 5



This is a copy of a 1820 Robert E. Lee sketch of Fortress Monroe. The mammoth fortification was built to dominate the waterways of Hampton Roads and withstand any siege. (HRNM photo of a National Archives sketch)

SDI continued from page 4

the-line of "no less than 74-guns" combined with an extensive system of harbor defense structures or forts. The linchpins of this strategic system was to be stationed here in Hampton Roads: a huge stone fort at Old Point Comfort called Ft. Monroe and the blockade-smashing 3,241 ton, 120-gun USS *Pennsylvania*. The cost for these ships and fort infrastructure would be in the tens of millions of dollars and represent a huge percentage of the young nation's gross domestic product.

Construction on Ft. Monroe was begun in 1819 and all but completed by the end of 1834. Originally the fort's construction was budgeted at \$850,000. But like many new defense systems, the total cost was much higher. One she was finished, her final price tag exceeded \$2,000,000. It was classified among the banner battlements of the "Third System" forts, whose notable sisters included Ft. Sumter in Charleston, Ft. Pickens in Pensacola, Ft. Pulaski in Savannah, and Ft. Jackson just south of New Orleans. Each of these rock citadels possessed massive vertical walls, high centralization of armaments and soldiers, and tremendous total firepower.

Ft. Monroe is the largest fort in the country totaling more than sixty-three acres and encircled by a moat a mile and a quarter that ranges in width from 60 to 150 feet. She earned two nicknames, one very complimentary and one critical. Because of her size

and firepower she was hailed as "the Gibraltar of Chesapeake Bay." However, because of her enormous costs she was called a "warmongering folly."

While the Army constructed its mammoth forts, the Navy's participation in this new plan was the 74-gun battleships of the *Delaware*-class. Six of these ships were completed prior to 1820-including USS *Delaware* which was built, and later burned in 1861 at the Gosport Shipyard-and gained great favor among Naval officers.

But, 74 guns was not enough. It was felt that a warship was needed to blow anything out of the water that might blockade the American coastline. Thus, the concept for the monster 120-gun *Pennsylvania* was born. Designed by master Naval architect Samuel Humphries, who copied many of the features found on the giant 130-gun Spanish battleship *Santissima Trinidad*, she was thirty-three percent larger than the 74's, could carry up to 140 guns, and needed a crew of 2,000 men to run. The 74-gun battleships cost the Navy about \$450,000 to build. This paled in comparison to *Pennsylvania*'s armament and her price tag of \$800,000. This does not include the

eventually broken up on the construction ways.

Tight military budgets was the main explanation for *Pennsylvania*'s lengthy construction time. The SDI of the 1800's did not have the benefit of lucrative government borrowing that the SDI of the 1980's did. In fact, in the 1800's it was considered unpatriotic for the government to borrow large sums of money and run a high public debt in peace time. As soon as the War of 1812 officially ended in 1815, Congress immediately devoted a large portion of the budget to paying off bonds issued to finance the war. In 1815, the public debt was \$123 million. During *Pennsylvania*'s construction, the public debt had reach an all-time historical low of \$38,000.

Nonetheless, both *Pennsylvania* and Ft. Monroe were built to completion. For all their expenses, these two weapon systems had the desired effect upon the rest of the world. The European powers in both the political and military arenas all debated solutions to address these new and significant additions to American naval and coastal arsenals. They could no longer hope to control the sea with the ease of decades past. Any future conflict with the United States would reflect drastic and expensive strategic adaptations. The British Parliament, for example, immediately debated whether or not it should respond to



Pleasure craft and merchant vessels cruise gracefully by Old Point Comfort and Ft. Monroe. This peaceful scene is brought to you in large part by the guns of Ft. Monroe and warships like USS *Pennsylvania*. (HRNM photo of a 1857 Ed Byer painting)

per-cruise operating expenses of \$400,000. Construction began on this battleship in 1821, at the now closed Philadelphia Naval Shipyard, but was not finished until 1837. *Pennsylvania* was lucky. Many of the proposed battleships, such as *Virginia* and *New York*, were never finished and

Pennsylvania's construction by building an equally large battleship called *Royal Albert*.

One may argue this initiative was a outright military failure. After all, the one voyage of USS *Pennsylvania* was to Hampton Roads, where upon arrival

SDI continued on page 9

Decatur-Barron continued from Page 1

prominence with his sneak attack into the harbor of Tripoli to burn the captured American frigate *Philadelphia*. This brought him immediate promotion to the rank of captain (at 25 still the youngest in U.S. Naval history.)

On his return from the Mediterranean, Decatur had met and started to court Susan Wheeler, daughter of Norfolk mayor Luke Wheeler. According to one version, the couple were walking one day when they encountered a party of naval officers including Barron. When one of the officers made a joshing remark about Decatur's interest in Miss Wheeler, Barron broke in to say there could be nothing improper, as he knew Decatur was already engaged to a young lady in Philadelphia. Decatur, unfortunately, had failed to mention that fact to Miss Wheeler. Norfolk historian George Tucker, on the other hand, blames the start of the animosity on an injudicious reference by Barron to the fact that Susan Wheeler was illegitimate.

Whatever the cause of the initial falling out, the relationship between Barron and Decatur was irreparably damaged in the aftermath of the *Chesapeake-Leopard* affair in 1807. Either scapegoat or villain, Barron was convicted of failing to clear *Chesapeake* for action by a court martial that included Decatur. He was sentenced to a five year suspension from the Navy.

When the War of 1812 broke out, Barron was stranded ashore in Europe, his merchant ship having been seized by the Danes. He made a brief epistolary effort to seek reinstatement to active service, but in effect sat out the war in Copenhagen. In fact, Barron did not return until 1818, three years after the war ended. There is some hint in letters held by the Chrysler Museum that this tardy return was influenced by Barron's relationship with a Danish widow known only as "Mrs. H." Upon his return, Barron sought not only active duty, but command of the next Med Squadron based on his seniority. The date of his promotion to captain, May 27, 1799, put him second only to Navy Commissioner John Rodgers on the seniority list.

An uproar followed. Barron's re-establishment would have placed him

above the many officers who had earned promotion for their brave deeds during the War of 1812. Most of the officer corps felt this would be a gross injustice.

however, Perry came to criticize his former subordinate. He wrote to Purser Samuel Hambleton, "It was a matter of great doubt, when I began to reflect on



The rift between Barron and Decatur began in earnest when the British frigate Leopard fired on the American frigate Chesapeake, in which Barron was her commodore, in 1807. The Secretary of the Navy ordered Decatur to serve on Barron's court martial board even though Decatur made it clear before hand that he believed Barron to be guilty. (HRNM photo of a watercolor by Casey Holtzinger)

Decatur was perhaps the most vocal of Barron's opponents. By this time, Decatur was a member of the three-man Board of Navy Commissioners and atop the social swirl in Washington. Attacks on Barron's character were a regular part of dinner conversation at Decatur's well-attended soirees.

In the spring of 1819, one guest passed his remarks on to newly promoted Capt. Jesse D. Elliott, Barron's sole supporter

***"Sir, I have been informed in Norfolk, that you have said you could insult me with impunity, or words to that effect. If you have said so, you will no doubt avow it, and I shall expect to hear from you."* -Barron to Decatur, June 1819.**

among senior naval officers. Elliott saw a chance to advance his own designs. As a result of his spotty performance in command of the sloop *Niagara* at the Battle of Lake Erie, Elliott's personal courage had become suspect. Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry, in overall command at that engagement, had initially praised Elliott. Increasingly,

Marine Captain John Heath, had been head of the marine detachment aboard Perry's ship *Java*. An argument between the two had turned into an assault by Perry on Heath. A subsequent court-martial found both at fault. Elliott prodded Heath into calling Perry out. In the resulting duel (at which Decatur acted

Decatur-Barron continued on Page 7

Decatur-Barron continued from page 6

as Perry's second), Heath missed and Perry refused to fire. Unsuccessful in this attempt, Elliott directly challenged Perry three times. On each occasion, Perry declined to fight until Elliott's clearance by a board of inquiry made him a fit opponent. Further, Perry requested that the government court-martial Elliott and began collecting evidence against him. He wrote Elliott, "Mean and despicable as you have proved yourself to be, I shall



On more than one occasion, Capt. William Bainbridge's naval career was trumped by Decatur. He refused to speak to Decatur for five years until he heard from Decatur that he needed a second for an upcoming duel with Barron. Sensing an opportunity to see Decatur killed, he agreed to make the arrangements with Capt. Elliott. (Library of Congress)

never cease to criminate myself for having deviated from the path of strict propriety for the sake of screening you

Venezuela. With Perry dead, Elliott transferred his animosity to Decatur as the man with the greatest potential to harm his reputation.

Elliott had served under Barron aboard *Chesapeake*. He had been one of the few to give favorable testimony at Barron's 1807 court-martial. He saw in his relationship with Barron a chance to duplicate, perhaps more successfully, the strategy he had used in the Perry-Heath conflict. He hurried to Norfolk to report Decatur's remarks to Barron. Barron in response wrote Decatur in June 1819, "Sir, I have been informed in Norfolk, that you have said you could insult me with impunity, or words to that effect. If you have said so, you will no doubt avow it, and I shall expect to hear from you."

Decatur immediately responded, "Whatever I may have thought, or said, in the very frequent and free conversations I have had respecting you and your conduct, I feel a thorough conviction, that I never could have been guilty of so much egotism as to say, that 'I could insult you' (or any other man) 'with impunity.'" A week later, Barron responded with satisfaction that Decatur's "declaration, if I understand it correctly, relieves my mind from the apprehension that you had so degraded my character, as I had been induced to allege." To Decatur, Barron's words

Norfolk that Barron had gained an apology from Decatur. He convinced Decatur to send copies of the correspondence to Littleton Tazewell, Norfolk lawyer and Judge Advocate at Barron's 1807 trial. The circulation of these letters caused Barron to reopen the exchange in October. He accused Decatur of a "malignant spirit which had before influenced you to endeavor to ruin my reputation" and of "trading my



Capt. Jesse Elliott is one of the most underhanded and mysterious characters in the history of the U.S. Navy. He loathed Decatur and did much to precipitate a duel between Decatur and Barron. He served as Barron's second. (Naval Historical Center)

character whenever an occasion occurred which suited your views." Moreover, "a respectable officer of the navy" (presumably Elliott) had informed



Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry was one of Decatur's best friends and Capt. Elliott's commanding officer at the Battle of Lake Erie. When Perry died of yellow fever, Elliott transferred his resentment of Perry to Decatur. (Library of Congress)

"Whatever I may have thought, or said, in the very frequent and free conversations I have had respecting you and your conduct, I feel a thorough conviction, that I never could have been guilty of so much egotism as to say, that 'I could insult you' (or any other man) 'with impunity.' -Decatur's response to Barron's June 1819 charge.

from public contempt and indignity. For this offense to the community, I will atone in due time by a full disclosure of your disgraceful conduct."

In 1819, the Secretary of the Navy ordered Perry to South America to negotiate with Venezuela and Argentina in hopes of suppressing piracy. On his departure, Perry left the paperwork relating to the case with his close friend, Stephen Decatur. Unfortunately, Perry died of yellow fever off the coast of

sounded too much like he had seen an apology when none had been offered. He closed this first portion of the correspondence by writing that the motives of Barron's informants was "a matter of perfect indifference to me, as are also your motives in making such any inquiry." Despite Decatur's tone, Barron decided to let matters rest.

A friend of Decatur, Master Commandant William Carter, jr., unfortunately, picked up rumors in

Barron "that you have tauntingly and boastingly observed that you would cheerfully meet me in the field, and hope I would act like a man, or words to that

Decatur-Barron continued on page 8

effect." Decatur responded with a long letter reviewing their former correspondence and explaining why he had sent copies to Norfolk. He also explained his views on serving on Barron's court martial. He concluded by denying he had ever invited Barron to field nor ever expressed a wish Barron would call him out. He had merely made a statement to "a gentleman" (Elliott?)



Stephen Decatur's lovely wife, Susan Wheeler Decatur. She was the daughter of the mayor of Norfolk and met Decatur shortly after he had been made captain in 1805. Allegedly, Barron made an offhand comment that she was an illegitimate child, much to Decatur's displeasure. (HRNM photo of a Decatur House painting by Gilbert Stuart. Used with permission.)

that "if you made the call, I would meet you." More letters followed that varied in intensity, but every time the waters seemed to calm, Elliott was at Barron's side with another claim of Decatur's hostility. Finally in January 1820, Barron issued a "call to the field".

Decatur had already begun to search for an officer willing to act as his second. In early November, he approached Commodore Charles Morris, then in Washington preparing to take command of the Brazil Station. According to a contemporary "[Morris] declined but offered his services for an accommodation, which, he told Commodore Decatur, *ought* to be made." Morris tried to convince Decatur that Barron was no coward and that others were using the quarrel for their own ends. Morris even drafted a sample note of

"I have no desire to lose my own life, and nothing shall induce me to take his." -Decatur's instructions to his second Capt. William Bainbridge concerning the upcoming duel.

explanation to Barron which would have prevented the conflict. Decatur, however, was convinced *any* conciliatory effort on his part would have been unseemly. Fellow Navy commissioners John Rodgers and David Porter also declined to act as second.

In mid-December, Capt. William Bainbridge appeared in Washington. He had recently received the appointment to command the Mediterranean Squadron that Barron had desired. His flagship, the 74-gun ship-of-the-line *Columbus*, was undergoing refit at the Washington Navy Yard. Bainbridge, like Elliott, resented Decatur. In Bainbridge's case, he felt Decatur's fame came at the expense of his own. Bainbridge had been in command of *Philadelphia*, the same ship that Decatur gained fame for burning, when the frigate had been captured. In 1815, both Bainbridge and Decatur were given command of squadrons to punish the actions of Barbary states which had returned to attacks on American shipping during the War of 1812. Decatur had proved the

more active of the two. By the time Bainbridge (the senior officer) appeared off the coast of Africa, Decatur had already forced concessions from all the Barbary leaders.

As a result, Decatur gained yet more esteem to Bainbridge's disadvantage. In response, Bainbridge had refused to speak to Decatur for five years. So there was a staged aspect to Bainbridge's warm greeting when he encountered Decatur on a Washington, D.C. street. Decatur did not credit Bainbridge with any ulterior motives. He invited Bainbridge to move into his home during the refit. It was while a guest of the Decaturs' that Bainbridge agreed to act. Decatur asked only that his representative "to do the best you can for me. I have no desire to lose my own life, and nothing shall induce me to take his."

Columbus moved down to the vicinity of St. Mary's near the mouth of the Potomac River to finish preparations. It was aboard her on March 8, 1820 that the two seconds negotiated the formalities of the meeting. Decatur had left the choice of weapons and distance to Bainbridge. His only request being that the location be specified as Bladensburg, outside Washington. His "friend" took full advantage of that authority.

A few days later, he sent Decatur a copy of the agreement. It stated the meeting would take place at Bladensburg as nine A.M. on March 22 and that the weapons would be pistols. Decatur was disturbed to read that distance was set at eight paces (about 24 feet) instead of the usual ten or twelve. Moreover, the opponents were to "present" before the count began. By custom, duelists pointed their weapons at the ground or at the sky before the count. This required them to take aim within a short period of time, a movement that often lead to missed shots. By aiming directly at one another before hand at such short range, Barron and Decatur were dramatically increasing the chances of a killing shot. Decatur's sense of honor prevented him from making any objections to these deadly rules.

Decatur realized that Bainbridge had completely blocked his true intentions. His wife Susan agreed in a memorial she wrote nearly thirty years later. "[Bainbridge] remained with us for two or three weeks; and during that time my husband requested him to act as his 'friend' in the difficulty with Commodore Barron and to do the best he could." She added, "Stephen had no desire to injure Commodore Barron and no desire to lose his own life. And the best thing Commodore Bainbridge could do in those circumstances was to cause my husband to be sacrificed in cold blood!"

"A Friendship Under Fire" will conclude in the next issue of The Day Book. The editor would like to thank Harriet Collins of the Moses Myers House for her assistance with this article.

Volunteer News & Notes

Museum Shirts Are In

The long awaited museum T-shirts are in. If you signed up for one and have not picked it up yet, see Marta. The cost for each shirt is \$20 and you should make your check out to the Hampton Roads Naval Historical Foundation. There are a few extras left over, if you need more or did not originally sign up for one.

Congratulations!

We realize we have not been able to recognize volunteer time. This is due to lack of a full-time volunteer coordinator. Nonetheless, our part-time coordinator, Sally Tobin, has calculated the hours as of August 8 and we present them here:

1000 hours

Ralph Preston
Eleanor Dipeppe
Jud Hill

500 Hours

Harold Anten
Joe Mosier
Ray Weller

SDI continued from page 5

she became the most heavily armed hotels in American history. She was just too expensive to keep underway and operational. As for Ft. Monroe, she never fired a shot in anger at a foreign invader or was asked to repel an invasion from the east.

Yet success of a defense policy can be measured as much by prevent a conflict as by actually winning a conflict. Between 1815 and 1861, the United States did not fight any major sea battles and nor did threats appeared to her commerce or her ports. America's foes were forced to honor the threat, whether or not we could have implemented it.

This was not due to a lack of enemies.



HRNM docents Jud Hill, Al Petrich, Jim Reid, Harrell Forrest, Ken Wiley, and friends at the August 21 picnic. (Photo by Gordon Calhoun)

Summer Picnic

100 Hours

Sally Tobin

New Volunteer Opportunities

You all should have received a letter outlining areas where the museum needs assistance. We are currently facing a major cut in funding and really could use help in these areas.

As a reminder we need help with:

- 1) AAM Accreditation
- 2) Research
- 3) Program Planning
- 4) Development
- 5) Public Relations

If you are interested in any of these areas, please contact Becky at 322-2990.

All we can say is Wow! We hope that you all had fun at the annual summer docent picnic on August 21. This year's was held on the picnic grounds of the Oceana Naval Air Station. Many thanks to picnic committee members Gene Hanlin, Ann Prince, Gurley Ritter, Preston Turpin, and Margaret Godfrey for organizing this festival of food and fun.

Reminder

Remember there is a docent meeting on September 19 at 10 a.m. here at Nauticus. Rich Conti, interim director of Nauticus is scheduled to speak. -G.C.

It is somewhat fitting that the fort's namesake, President James Monroe, issued one of the most aggressive foreign policy initiatives in American history during Ft. Monroe's and *Pennsylvania's* construction: the Monroe Doctrine. This policy was a point blank threat to the European powers to stay out of the affairs of countries in the Western Hemisphere. It would be tested many times by the Europeans and quoted by many American Presidents long after Monroe left office.

It is not what *Pennsylvania* became after arriving in Hampton Roads that is significant, it is what she was designed to be or represent that ultimately

matters. The young nation recognized the importance of commercial and military ships movements and in building these powerful weapons America proved to the rest of the world that she would pay the cost required to support and defend her national interests. This is what uncommonly supports the fact that Ft. Monroe and USS *Pennsylvania* were not expensive failures but rather were comprehensive and very grand successes in providing security for Hampton Roads and the United States as a whole. 

The editor would like to thank David Johnson of the Castamate Museum for his assistance with this article.



Hardest to Pronounce

The U.S. Navy draws from all sections of American culture to name its ships. As a result some are pretty darn hard to pronounce. Here is the long list of nominees for this award:

USS Canonicus

USS Catalba

USS Mahopac

USS Oneota

USS Miantomoh

USS Agamenticus

USS Monadnock

USS Montauk

USS Nahaunt

USS Patapsco

USS Haleakala

All of these ships, except the last one, are Civil War-era monitors and are named after either Native American tribes, villages, or famous warriors. *Haleakala* (AE-25) was an ammunition ship in the 1960's and 70's and was named after one of the volcanoes in Hawaii. We would like to recognize **BTCS (SW) Dandes** for nominating *Haleakala* and the staff of the **Monitor Marine Sanctuary** for nominating the winner, the monitor *USS Miantomoh*.

Most Patriotic

U.S. Naval vessels are one of the great symbols of American power and pride. As a result, we have given several ships patriotic names as examples of our pride. Here are the most patriotic names:

USS Constitution

USS Congress

USS President

USS Constellation

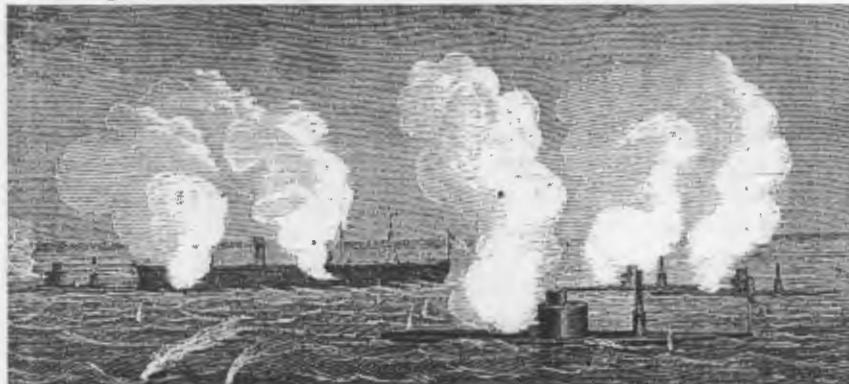
USS United States

The Museum Sage

The First Annual Bamboozle Awards

The nominations are in for The Sage's first ever U.S. Navy ship name competition, henceforth called The Bamboozle Awards. Bandbeezle is a maritime term for a practical joke.

As a reminder, the categories are Hardest to Pronounce, Most Patriotic, Most Confusing, Most Ironic, Most Lucky, and Best Overall Name.



Competition for the "Hardest to Pronounce" award was pretty stiff. In this particular engraving alone are three nominees: the monitors *USS Montauk*, *Nahaunt*, and *Patapsco*. The U.S. Navy named most of their single and double-turreted monitors after Native American tribes or famous Native American warriors like Chief Tecumseh. (HRNM photo of a June 13, 1863 Harper's Weekly engraving.)

USS Patriot

USS George Washington

USS Stars and Stripes

When the Confederate States formed their navy in 1861, they named a few ships after some of their "founding fathers."

CSS Patrick Henry

CS Privateer John C. Calhoun

CS Privateer Jefferson C. Davis

We picked *Constitution* as our winner.

Most Lucky

Some U.S. Navy vessels have been blessed with luck. No matter how sticky the situation got, the ship always remained afloat. Is it in the name? Here are a few of the most fortunate:

USS Constitution-Defeated four British frigates in three different battles, escaped from a squadron of six battleships and frigates, blasted the Barbary Pirates, and is still around today.

USS Brooklyn- During the Battle of Mobile Bay, it struck several underwater mines at the entrance to the bay. None of them went off.

USS Minnesota-Engaged *CSS Virginia* twice after running aground,

and lived to tell about it. Also survived several devastating shots from the guns of Ft. Fisher.

USS Franklin (CV-13)-This carrier's journey home from the Pacific is the stuff of legends. Her crew was able to keep the carrier afloat for thousand of miles after being severely damaged by air strikes.

Our winner is the frigate *USS Constitution*. Congratulations to **Hunt Lewis** for nominating the winner.

Most Ironic

This category has ship names in history that did not exactly fit the ship mission.

USS Aphrodite (SP-135)-World War I patrol escort. Named for the mythological Greek goddess of love. Puts a new spin on the phrase "Make Love, Not War."

USS Pansy-World War I VIP yacht.

USS Cuttlefish (SS-171) and *USS Spadefish* (SSN-668)-A cuttlefish is a small ten-armed creature that is a cousin to the squid. A spadefish is a colorful, peaceful tropical fish found all over the world's oceans.

Ship Names continued on page II

Ship names continued from page 10

USS *Cuttlefish* and *Spadefish* were both attack boats that were capable of wreaking havoc among enemy vessels.

CSS *United States*-When the Gosport Shipyard was overrun, the Confederates captured the hull of the frigate *United States* and renamed it.

The Sage would like to recognize **Matt Burchfield** for nominating *Cuttlefish*. We picked the flower ship, USS *Pansy*, as our winner.

Best Overall Name

We have three nominees for this category:

USS *Stump* (DD-978)-Modern day destroyer. Named for Adm. Felix Stump who was commander of several different surface warships, including *Langley* (CV-1), *Lexington* (CV-3), and *Alabama* (BB-60), during World War II and COMNAVAIRLANT right after the war.

USS *Shakamaxon*-Double turreted

monitor, never finished. Named for the town in Pennsylvania where William Penn signed a peace treaty with the Delaware Indians.

USS *Argus*-Successful War of 1812 brig that was eventually captured by the British off the coast of Ireland. Named for the mythological Greek “all-seeing” god of a thousand eyes who was zapped into the world’s first peacock by Zeus.

We picked *Shakamaxon* as our winner.

Most Confusing

We come now to the “Most Confusing” award. Most ships have one name and one name only throughout their entire career. Some ships, however, have had their name changed either because of politics or change in the ship’s mission.

Out of these latter vessels, there are those that have been renamed, but for one reason or another not everyone was clued into the fact that the vessel was renamed. As a result, the ships are incorrectly referenced in contemporary writings and

and verbally abused as this ship. Many visitors who come to the museum see the model of this ironclad and instantly called it *Merrimack*. This the Sage can understand. After all that is why we have the museum here in the first place, to educate the public on Naval history.

What the Sage can not understand, nor excuse, are when historians and other Civil War “experts,” refer to this ironclad as *Merrimack*. The Sage has seen many Civil War histories for sale in book stores written

Merrimack, not knowing that the Confederates renamed it. This was a common mistake. Another example of this type of confusion is the ironclad USS *Galena*. The Confederates referred to it as USS *Mystic*, as the only thing they knew about the vessel was the fact that it was built in Mystic, Connecticut.

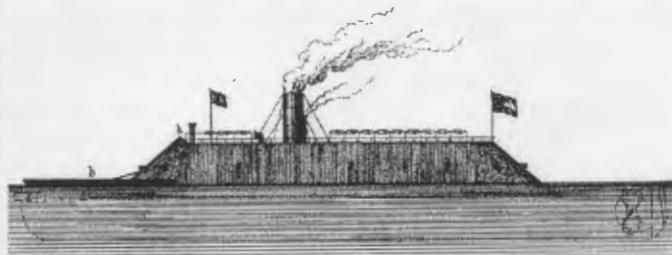
So, 135 years after the Battle of Hampton Roads, the mistake rolls on. Drive across the James River on I-664 if you do not believe this is the case. The Sage has heard every reason and theory



even in modern histories.

The first nominee is the cutter *Nagatuck*. It also is called *E.A. Stephens*, *Stephens Battery*, and *Ironsides* by contemporary writers. Union commanders knew that the Stephens brothers designed the vessel so they figured the brothers named it after themselves. The Confederates not knowing who designed the vessel or its name called it *Ironsides*.

But the hands down winner in this category is the second nominee: Hampton Roads’ very own ironclad CSS *Virginia*. No vessel has been so confused



Still confused over Merrimack and Virginia? The picture on the left is the 48-gun steam frigate USS Merrimack. The picture above is the ironclad CSS Virginia. (Merrimack-HRNM photo of a 1856 painting. Virginia-HRNM photo of a Harper's Weekly engraving)

by professional historians, that call the ironclad by the wrong name. Of further insult is when *Merrimack* is spelled without the “k.” The ship was named after the Merrimack River, thus the *Merrimac* spelling is incorrect.

The source of the confusion lays in the fact that when the Confederates overran the Gosport Shipyard, they captured and raised the hull of the steam frigate USS *Merrimack*. They converted the hull into an ironclad, then rechristened, and recommissioned the vessel CSS *Virginia*. Contemporary writers especially on the Union side always referred to the vessel as

under the sun on why people need to say *Merrimack*. It is the Sage’s opinion that we continue to make this mistake due to a phenomena in English known as alliteration. When you put two words together that both begin with the same letter, it is easier to say. When you say “The Battle of Monitor-Merrimack” together it flows off the tongue much easier than saying “The Battle of Monitor-Virginia.”

Whether that is the case or not, saying *Merrimack* is only correct when you are referring to the steam frigate. The name of the ironclad is *Virginia*. The Sage would like to recognize the staff members at the **Monitor Marine Sanctuary** for nominating the winner.

-G.C.