

The Day Book

Volume 4, Issue 1

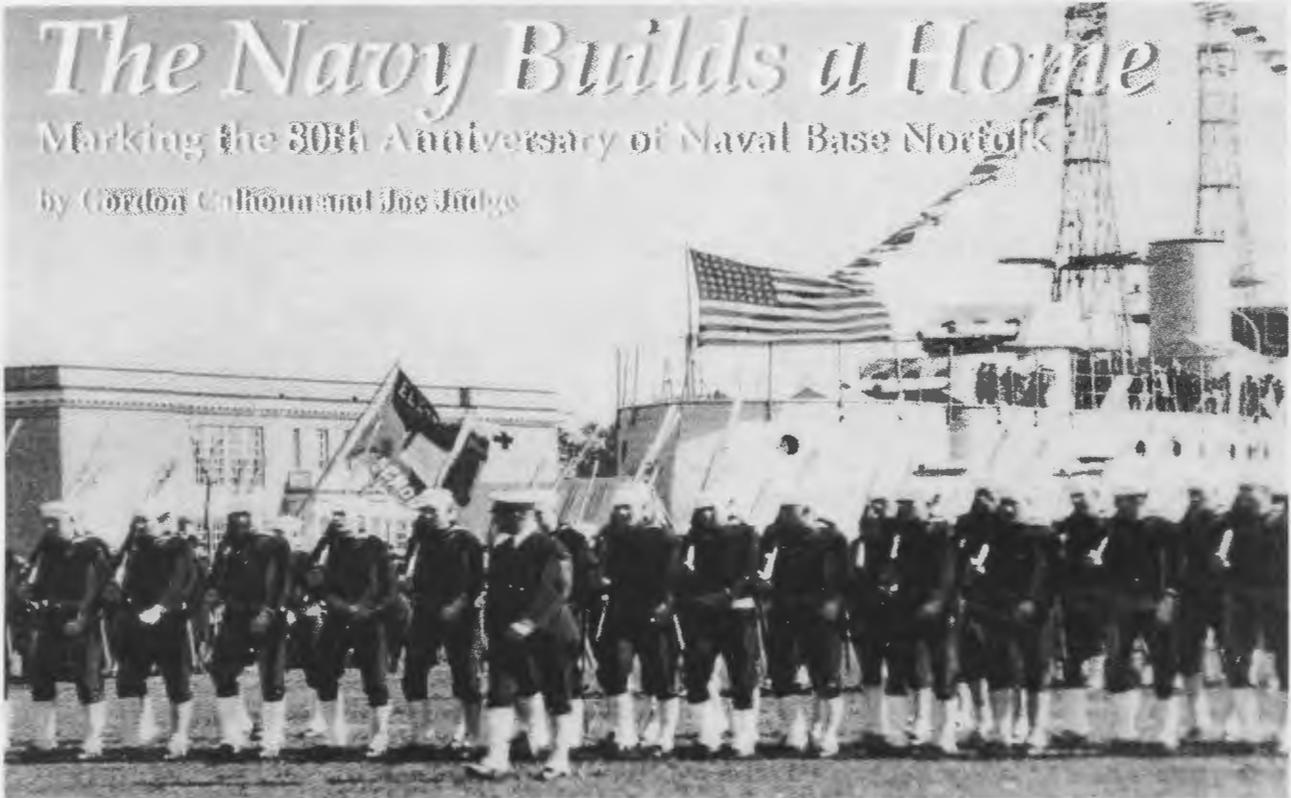
November-December 1997

A Newsletter for the Supporters of the Hampton Roads Naval Museum

The Navy Builds a Home

Marking the 80th Anniversary of Naval Base Norfolk

by Gordon Calhoun and Joe Judge



Students of the Navy's electronics school drill on the parade grounds in front of the Administration Building on the new Naval Operating Base, Hampton Roads in 1920. Behind them, proudly waving a 48-star jack, is USS Electrician, a mock-up battleship that allowed recruits to get hands-on experience with the increasingly complicated warships. 1997 marks the base's 80th year as home of the U.S. Atlantic Fleet. (HRNM photo)

Norfolk lawyer Theodore Wool probably had one of the most thankless tasks that a person could ever ask for. As secretary and general counsel to the Norfolk-based Fidelity Land and Investment Corporation, it was his to job to find some way to clear out and dispose of hundreds of acres of abandoned land around

Sewells Point, Virginia. The land was somewhat developed as it used to be home to the great Jamestown Exposition. But, the fair went bankrupt before the year was out and owed over \$1.5 million (1907 dollars) in loans and outstanding bonds. Fidelity agreed to purchase the land and buildings from the Expo and the Federal bankruptcy court at a substantial discount. But, Wool could not find a buyer. Who in 1908 needed lots of open space and more importantly, had the money on hand to buy the land? One day, we are not sure exactly when, it dawned upon Wool. Such a buyer existed: Uncle

Sam, specifically Uncle Sam's Navy.

To be fair to Wool, he was not simply trying swindle the U.S. Government and American taxpayers into buying a thousand acres of useless, barren land. The Navy had long advertised the fact that it wanted and needed a proper operating base for its Atlantic Fleet. Up to this point, the fleet had to operate from makeshift naval stations out of the seven Government-owned Navy Yards on the East and West coasts. These ad hoc stations worked for a Navy that only had a few active duty ships in peacetime. But at the turn of the century the Navy had

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Ringling in the Fun

The Director's Column

by Becky Poulliot

On January 27, the Hampton Roads Naval Historical Foundation will be hosting a Volunteer Recognition Banquet. In years past we have had a Christmas party for the volunteers in December. The planning committee has decided to have this year's party in January when things are a little less busy than during the holiday season. The committee planned menu for the evening will consist of New England clam chowder, carved round of roast beef, breast of chicken, and broiled flounder. There will be some super hors d'oeuvres and entertainment. Hungry? See page 9 for sign up details.

This party is the museum staff and foundation's way of thanking the volunteers for all their hard work in 1997, helping make the museum the best ever. This event could not be happening without the assistance of committee members **Sally Tobin, Margaret Godfrey, Ann Prince, Betty Ritter,** and

Harold Anten. They have all put in hours of work finishing up the smallest details.

The 1998 lecture series is now up and running. Off to the right is the impressive line up for next year. Many of these talks will take place with a lunch included. Call 322-2986 for more details. In addition to these speakers, the "Scuttlebutt" conversation series will return for a second season of casual talks on naval history.

Be prepared to hear a lot about "strategic planning" in 1998. A few weeks ago, on October 30, board members, staff, museum volunteers, and Navy representatives met for a retreat-a first for us. The first topic of discussion was the report received from the American Association of Museums regarding the museum's participation in the Museum Assessment Program. The report commented favorably on the museum's education dimension (the purpose of the report) and our ability to reach audiences through exhibit and interpreter programs. The report went a

step further though, to comment on the necessity of establishing a sound base for the museum's future by ensuring adequate financial and personnel resources.

Naturally, a one day retreat can hardly address all the concerns expressed in the 25-page report. A dialogue between all museum parties was started and I look forward to reporting on our progress in the coming months. 

1998 Hampton Roads Naval Museum Lecture Series Line-up

March 5-Historian Col. Joe Alexander, USMC (Ret.), will share his findings about Midshipman Robert Chester Foute of CSS *Virginia* from primary source material.

May 15-Living History Associates will mark the 100th anniversary of the Spanish-American War with a first person perspective of the war.

July 16-FBI Special Agent Robert Hunter will discuss the infamous Walker spy ring, a espionage operation which caused significant damage to Navy secrets.

September 10-U.S. Marine Corps historian and director of the Casemate Museum Dennis Mroczkowski will discuss his time as an official historian during Operation *Desert Storm*, and Operation *Joint Endeavor*.



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 Monday 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.

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.

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“Cuba Libre!”

Why the Norfolk-based battleship USS Maine was in Cuba

by The Museum Sage

We are going to take a slight detour from the normal “Museum Sage” column and take a trip to sunny Cuba to set the stage for a major historical event. February 15, 1998 will mark the one hundredth anniversary of one of the most emotional moments in U.S. Naval history: the sinking of the Norfolk-based battleship USS *Maine* (BB-2/c, ex-ACR-1). Now why, you might ask, was an American battleship doing in Cuba in the first place?

The short explanation is that the battleship was sent down to Havana,

product of over 70 years of American interest in the fate of the island nation.

Cuba was one of the last jewels in what was once one of the most powerful empires in the world. Colonists in Cuba had tried to overthrow Spanish rule by starting insurrection in the 1860’s. But, after thirty years of on and off fighting, they were not close to victory. The Cuban insurrection would have died rather quickly if it were not for American interest in the conflict.

American business ventures in Cuba were one of the primary interest groups. Cuba provided many agricultural and luxury goods for the American dinner table. This included tobacco (i.e. fine Cuban cigars), sugar, molasses, and rum. Eight-five percent of Cuba’s exports went to the United States, which accounted for 8% of America’s imports. Many American companies made brisk business investing in and shipping these exports. But, by the 1890’s, the fighting had brought the export trade down to a slow crawl. Cuban rebels made a point of attacking sugar and tobacco plantations because they were both the symbol of Spanish oppression and such attacks kept the war fresh in America’s mind. As a result, big business wanted to see an end to the fighting, regardless of who won.

While the agriculture business was hurting, a different kind of business mushroomed which is always busy during an insurrection: weapons dealing and gun running. The rebels received most of their weapons from a rampant gun trade from Florida. A New York City-based group of Cuban exiles and American sympathizers, called The Junta, were the brains behind this covert operation. They raised the money, bought the weapons, and arranged for their delivery.

The operation was of particular concern to American policy makers as it

angered Spain. The Spanish squarely blamed Americans for keeping the bloody revolt alive by funneling guns to Cuba. Spain became particularly paranoid and extremely suspicious of any American vessel which came within 20 miles of Cuba. This led to many incidents of Spanish naval vessels stopping American merchant vessels on the high seas, regardless of where the ships were going. The U.S. Navy and Coast Guard tried to stop the gun runners before they made it to Cuban waters. Out of the 71 expeditions planned and launched from



Spain’s version of Darth Vader: Gen. Valeriano Weyler “The Butcher” y Nicolau, Governor of Cuba. His autocratic rule and iron handed counter insurgency tactics had earned him the reputation as Cuba’s bad boy in the American press. He did not help Spain’s already shaky public relations image. (HRNM photo from The Pictorial Atlas of the Spanish-American War) Cuba for a “good will” visit and to protect American interests in the region during the island’s domestic troubles. Sending warships to foreign ports to “show the flag,” is probably one of the most common roles the U.S. Navy plays. But, Cuba was different than the other countries where the United States had sent warships. The American public felt it had a special relationship with Cuba. *Maine*’s arrival in Havana was the



Then there were the good guys like General Maximo Gomez, leader of the Cuban insurrection. Gomez and his fellow leaders were the darlings of the American press. The insurrection’s American fund raising and information organization, The Junta, reported him killed no less than seven times. (HRNM photo from The Pictorial Atlas of the Spanish-American War)

Florida, only 31 made it to Cuba. But, the patrols and inspections could not stop the practice altogether, and it lead to some ugly exchanges between Spanish authorities and American merchant men.

Among the more infamous of these incidents was the *Virginus* affair in 1873. *Virginus* was a side-wheel steamer commanded by a Naval Academy ***Cuba Libre! continued on page10***

Shots Fired and Blood Drawn

The Confrontation Between Stephen Decatur and James Barron, Part 2

by Joe Mosier

The night before he died, Commodore Stephen Decatur spent the evening with his wife at a lavish party given by Secretary of State John Quincy Adams. Throughout the two weeks that separated the agreement between seconds and his duel with Commodore James Barron, Decatur had kept up a full social life. This was not a mark of unconcern on his part, but rather a fervent desire to keep the meeting secret. Even his wife, Susan, remained ignorant of the matter. Barron as well had kept knowledge of the impending affair from his neighbors in Hampton.

Both men were fully aware of the potentially lethal outcome of such a meeting. Using the excuse of the likelihood of his return to sea after a long period ashore, Decatur carefully went over financial concerns and household matters with his wife. He asked his father-in-law, former Norfolk Mayor Luke Wheeler, to come for a visit so as to be with Susan if the worst should occur. He made arrangements with Robert Goodloe Harper to bring his wife Catherine, Susan's closest friend, down from Baltimore for the same purpose.

Barron put about that he was traveling to Baltimore "on business." With his second Capt. Jesse D. Elliott, his nephew Edward Latimer, and his personal physician Dr. Hall, Barron sailed on March 20 in the overnight steamboat *Virginia* from Norfolk. Ironically, Luke Wheeler was a fellow passenger on the trip. Arriving in Baltimore, Wheeler continued by carriage to Washington. The Barron party traveled to Bladensburg, the agreed upon site for the duel. They spent the night at an inn there.

Decatur arose early on March 22. Leaving his still sleeping wife behind, he walked from his house on what is now Lafayette Square up Pennsylvania Avenue to Beale's Hotel. Waiting for him there were his second, Commodore William Bainbridge, and Purser Samuel Hambleton who was to act as Bainbridge's aide. The three men ate

breakfast and discussed the forthcoming duel. Hambleton later wrote, "He was quite cheerful, and did not appear to have any desire to take the life of his antagonist. Indeed, he declared that he should be very sorry to do so." Decatur had earlier expressed his intention to attempt to wound Barron in the hip. Decatur also addressed the most serious

ahead to ensure the Decatur party was at the rendezvous. Stopping the coach a short distance from the ground, Barron's group walked through the foliage that guarded the site from the Washington-Baltimore stage road. Decatur and the others, now joined by Decatur's doctor, Naval Surgeon Samuel Trevett, were there waiting.



The ancient ritual of dueling was one way gentlemen could settle their differences due to personal insults or slights. Off to the side are the "seconds." It was the seconds' responsibility to work out the details and rules of each specific duel. (HRNM photo from a drawing by Your Navy magazine)

possible outcome saying he had made arrangements with his friend Col. George Bomford for his body to be buried at that officer's estate, Kalorama. Decatur also mentioned that he brought his will along. The document needed three witnesses, however, so it was agreed to wait until the party arrived at Bladensburg. As 9 a.m. approached, Decatur, Bainbridge, and Hambleton got into a hired coach for the five mile ride to the dueling ground.

James Barron arose at the inn at Bladensburg at about 5 a.m. after "a quiet and good night's repose." He woke his nephew, dressed and shaved. At a table in his room, he wrote a brief will leaving everything to his wife, Elizabeth. After a walk in the inn's garden, Barron joined the others in his party for breakfast. The meal over, they ordered a carriage giving Washington as their destination to maintain the subterfuge. Elliott went on

Bainbridge, Elliott and their aides then began 45 minutes of seemingly unending formalities. They read aloud the agreed upon rules, picked the stands for their principals and measured out the unusually short eight-pace distance between the duelists. Doctor Hall and Surgeon Trevett laid out their medical tools for possible later use. While this was going on, Decatur committed an unusual breach of etiquette. As Barron recalled, "About this time...I, to my inexpressible astonishment, observed Commodore Decatur leave the seconds, pass round them, and advance towards [Barron and his nephew]." Decatur approached to within about ten paces and "placed himself in an attitude which indicated a design to be offensive." A stare-down followed between the two Commodores, one in which Decatur

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backed off first. In that moment the fatal outcome of the duel was probably ensured. Before that time, both antagonists had expressed a desire to avoid seriously injuring the other. After, each must have been convinced of the other's bad intentions.

As preparations continued it was a second rather than one of the principals who became visibly nervous. Bainbridge's hands began to shake violently as he attempted to load the pistols chosen for use. He was unable to pour gunpowder into their chambers. Finally, after both seconds agreed, Decatur was called on to complete that task. By toss of coin, Decatur was given the lower stand at the north end of the ground. In a standard dueling procedure, the principals went into the bushes to void their bladders thus minimizing the hazard of an abdominal wound. Barron and Decatur were led to their positions by the



One of the Navy's outstanding officers, Capt. David Porter served as a neutral observer for the duel. He was aghast at the cowardly fleeing of Capt. Jesse Elliott, and forced him to return and tend to Barron's gun shot wound. A man of high sense of personal honor, Porter would resign his commission in 1823 after a heated dispute with the White House. (HRNM photo of a Navy Historical Center print)

other's second. Barron asked Bainbridge, "If there is no objection, I should like to hear the word of command as you intend to give it." Bainbridge, who was likely to stammer, recited the procedure, "Present, One, Two, Three." With Barron and Decatur set to proceed, the strict dueling code was now twice violated by their seconds.

Standard procedure called for the principals to be asked about the
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Barron took these flintlock pistols to his duel with Decatur. He borrowed them from Norfolk merchant and personal friend John Myers. Handcrafted with wood and iron by London gun maker Darus Egg, these large pistols are impressive works of art. They are currently on display at the Moses Myers house in downtown Norfolk. (Photo provided by the Chrysler Museum of Art)

"A Case of the Very Best Pistols"

James Barron's biographer, William Oliver Stevens, wrote: "Having never fought a duel before, and not owning a set of dueling pistols, Barron had turned to [John] Myers, who lent him a set of his own, recently purchased in London." The set of pistols in question which Stevens was convinced were actually used in the duel are today on view at the Moses Myers House in Norfolk. London gunsmith Darus Egg manufactured the pistols. They were purchased for John Myers, Moses Myers' eldest son, by his friend Archibald Lee.

In a letter found in the Myers Family Papers held by the Chrysler Museum, Lee wrote John Myers on March 22, 1810, "I have the pleasure to send on a pair of excellent pistols cost 31 guineas by Lt. [Jesse D.] Elliott of the [frigate] *John Adams*. I hope they may prove satisfactory." Also among the Myers Papers is the receipt signed by D. Egg for the sum of thirty-two pounds, eleven shillings, and six pence "for a case of the very best pistols." Egg, who styled himself, "Gunmaker to His Majesty, the Prince of Wales, the Duke of York, etc., etc.," had a shop at No. 132 The Strand in the Haymarket area of London.

As many as four sets of pistols have been claimed as actually having been

used in the duel. The U.S. Naval Academy Museum holds a pair owned by Capt. Jesse D. Elliott. Family tradition maintains these pistols were employed at Bladensburg. The descendants of John Rodgers also insist pistols in their possession are the genuine article. Stevens, after researching Barron's papers, felt the best claim lay with Myers' fine set. He further wrote that the pistol which killed Decatur was marked with a small "X." The author and *The Day Book* editor examined the pair with the kind help of Harriet Collins, Myers House Director. The X is indeed visible on one of the guns. This same set of pistols is known to have been used in a duel involving Barron's namesake James Barron Hope.

The answer to this minor historical quandary may lie in the Naval Academy Museum. When Decatur's body was exhumed in 1839 for reburial in Philadelphia, Col. Bomford removed the deadly bullet from the casket. He presented it to Decatur's family who later donated it to the Academy Museum. As caliber was highly idiosyncratic in those days of handmade pistols, it may be possible to identify the weapon actually used from among the various contenders. The Hampton Roads Naval Museum has requested USNA Museum's assistance in making this determination.

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built a large number of steel warships and had big plans to build many more to protect American interests.

At the forefront of this grand navy concept was Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels. A highly spiritual man



Norfolk lawyer Theodore Wool was the region's point man and chief political lobbyist for the NavalBase project. For ten years, he attempted to convince the Navy and the U.S. Congress to purchase over 400 acres of Sewells Point. (HRNM photo from the Jamestown Exposition Blue Book)

and a newspaper publisher by trade, Daniels had never served in the Navy, nor did he have a particular interest in the Navy before he was appointed. But he was one of President Woodrow Wilson's staunchest political supporters in the South. Wilson awarded his loyalty by appointing him Secretary of the Navy. Many critics claimed that Daniels "could not tell the difference between an automobile and a battleship."

He was out to prove them all wrong. Daniels had outlined a plan where, over a ten year period, Navy would acquire forty-eight "Dreadnought"-type battleships with at least 150 destroyers, 40 submarines, and 30 support vessels. He wanted to build not only the largest peacetime fleet the U.S. Navy had ever had, but the largest the world had ever seen. He planned to even surpass the mighty Royal Navy of Great Britain. With each battleship costing over eight million dollars, the plan raised many eyebrows in Washington.

Nonetheless, even if Congress only authorized a more modest expansion, a new base would be needed to dock the new fleet, train and house its sailors, and to supply it with food, ammunition, and other supplies. The training factor was

convincing many private sector companies to invest in their fair city on the Elizabeth River.

The Chamber had earlier success with the Navy by convincing the service to open a new training station in St. Helena.

"There is no training station now owned by the Government that would have the advantages of one established at [Sewells Point]. It would not only have the best location for a naval training station, but would get the benefit of much of the improvements it placed upon the property." -Theodore Wool, 1908

high on Daniel's list of priorities. These new steel ships were increasingly complicated and sailors would need to know how to operate them properly. Daniels also felt that sailors should not simply be uneducated brutes and he had plans to increase continuing education programs.

Hampton Roads was one of contenders seeking this "base of the future." Charleston, South Carolina, and Philadelphia and several other East Coast cities were providing stiff competition. Recognizing this,

Norfolk had help from Virginia's Congressional delegation. Both of Virginia's U.S. Senators and Norfolk's lone Congressman held important, senior positions and all three were Democrats. This latter part being important as the Democrats controlled both houses of Congress and the White House.

Wool became the Chamber of Commerce's and Norfolk's point man for the project. He had history on his side. Hampton Roads had long been a major staging area for famous naval operations and squadrons. It hosted to four



The silent grounds of the great Jamestown Exposition of 1907. By 1908, the Exposition went bankrupt and the land was bought out by the Fidelity Land and Investment Corporation. Notice how many buildings still remain. Once the Navy moved in, sailors used these buildings as shelters until more permanent facilities were finished. (HRNM photo)

Norfolk's city leaders went into action. Norfolk had always had an extremely active business development and political lobbying organization. Led by business man Barton Myers, the Norfolk Chamber of Commerce had succeeded in

international naval rendezvous, the Great White Fleet being the most prominent, in the past twenty years, demonstrating the waterways could easily hold and support a fleet of large warships. When

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the Navy needed to place a squadron to watch for the Spanish fleet on its way over from Spain in 1898, it located the Flying Squadron in Hampton Roads because of the area's ability to support the squadron and its geographical location on the East Coast.

As a part of his public relations offensive, Wool published a 10-page booklet called *Reasons* for distribution among Congressmen and Navy planners. In this booklet, Wool argued that: the Chesapeake Bay had a deep anchorage and was relatively safe from inclement weather; there was plenty of open land to expand if the station ever grew bigger; the climate in Hampton Roads was perfect for year round operation of the fleet; and Norfolk's rail and maritime transportation infrastructure were first class.

Possibly to trying to appeal to the Secretary's deeply held Christian beliefs and his philosophy of clean living, Wool somewhat ironically made the case that while the base would be near a city and its infrastructure, it would not be so close that sailors would constantly be tempted by sinful things like alcohol, prostitution, and gambling. Lastly, he reminded the Government that it had already spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to build buildings for the Expo which were going to waste.

Wood also made his case directly to Washington by testifying before the Naval Affairs Committee and appealing directly to Secretary Daniels. Unfortunately between 1908 and 1916, Wool made little headway. Virginia's Congressional delegation had introduced several resolutions authorizing the Navy to purchase the land around Sewells Point, only to be rejected by the House each time. In a 1916 letter, Daniels wrote to Wool stating that while acquiring the property was "very luring," it was simply not possible due to financial constraints. The Secretary did leave the door open as he promised Wool that the Navy would continue to study the situation.

World events quickly pressed the situation in Wool's favor. German U-boats had stepped up their attacks on neutral shipping in the Atlantic. President Wilson ordered the Navy to go to a war time footing just in case his hand was forced. More importantly to Wool, the President personally endorsed the building of a naval operating base in Hampton Roads. By the summer of 1917, Congress passed a resolution granting the Navy \$2.8 million to purchase the land around Sewells Point and to develop deep water piers, storage building for naval stores, training facilities, and quarters for the new influx of recruits.

Legally speaking, the Government was taking title of 474 acres-367 acres from the former Jamestown Exposition, 100.8 acres of the development on nearby Pine Beach, and six acres of Maryland Ave. Of the \$2.8 million, \$1.2 million was set aside for the actual purchase of



One sailor remarked that Rear Adm. Arthur Dillingham had one of the loudest voices he had ever heard. While small in stature, Dillingham was a tough, short tempered, by-the-book administrator. Long a champion of Hampton Roads, he served as the new base's first commanding officer. (HRNM photo)



"The Boys Who Shot the 'U' Out of U-boat." The destroyers USS Hopkins (DD-6) and John Paul Jones (DD-10) return from the front lines on their way to the new Naval Operating Base Hampton Roads during World War I. The dazzling paint scheme on the hulls of the warship was not the work of urban vandals. Rather, it was an attempt by Allied naval units to make it difficult for U-boat commanders to determine an exact torpedo range. (HRNM photo)

the land. Some of the land was owned by private property holders, and they were not all pleased the buying price. They wanted no less than three million. The Government disagreed and took the land. The resulting lawsuits, which the Navy won, dragged on for several years.

Regardless of the dispute, the Navy pressed on with construction. Under the direction of Rear Adm. Arthur Dillingham, around four thousand military and civilian workers were

brought in to build the base. Dillingham, a tough, no-nonsense administrator, had long been a supporter of bringing a naval base to Hampton Roads and it was somewhat fitting for him to be the Base's first commanding officer. Labor parties had their work cut out for them. Since the grounds of Sewells Point had not been used in over 10 years, the entire area had to be mowed and cleaned up, the grounds had to be drained, and barracks for the workers had to be built all within

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three months.

Once the area was made somewhat liveable, construction on the actual Naval facilities began. Engineers and workers dredged eight million yards, or 793 acres, of mud from the western side of Sewells Point to make way for the required deep water piers. By the time the base was finished, the mud from the dredging increased the size of the base from 473 acres to over 800. The work force established a small air field and hangers which allowed the first squadrons of seaplanes to begin conducting antisubmarine patrols along the East Coast. Along with the facilities for surface ships and naval aircraft, workers built a major submarine base. Submarine facilities included a warehouse for storage of torpedoes and a compressor station to store compressed air for the submarines' ballast tanks.

Secretary Daniels enthusiastically wrote in his 1917 annual report to the President that the new base at Hampton

An excellent account of the early days of Naval Operating Base (NOB) Hampton Roads, as it was called in those days, comes from Seaman Apprentice Roger B. Copinger. Copinger was one of the first sailors to be assigned to the base in the summer of 1917. One of his fondest memories was meeting Adm.

“When finished...it will be the most ideal naval operating base in the world.”

-Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels' 1917 report to the President on the new naval base in Hampton Roads.

Dillingham for the first, and only, time. After arriving in Norfolk, Copinger and his seven fellow sailors were not sure where to go, and went door to door asking who they should check in with. They ended up at Dillingham's office at the Administration Building (where building N-26 stands today).

What happened next was somewhat unexpected. Copinger reported that “a

wore our hats, our poor shoe shine, our unmilitary bearing and our general lack of promise.” He then dismissed them to the mess with a stern “Right Face! Forward March!” order.

Copinger reports that the first few months of NOB Hampton Roads were very difficult. The winter of 1917 was

one of the worst on record. It was so cold that parts of Hampton Roads itself froze over. Outbreaks of scarlet fever and spinal meningitis occurred, forcing the sailors into quarantine and bad food made many of the new recruits nauseous. But, despite this, sailor morale remained high. When liberty call came, the sailors made frequent dashes to downtown Norfolk and the Navy YMCA. Despite Wool's belief and Daniel's best intentions, sailors became bored on base and frequently went off base to entertain themselves.

While on base, the sailors were busy learning. The new warships had several new electronic devices. To assist sailors learning about the new inventions, the Navy built a full-size mock up battleship next to the parade grounds. They called her USS *Electrician*. This battleship on land had working turrets, signals, cranes, and all the electronics one would find on a real battleship. An Officer's Candidate School operated out of Pennsylvania House and before of the end of 1918, the Navy built a hospital, a signal school, a larger naval air station, and supply centers.

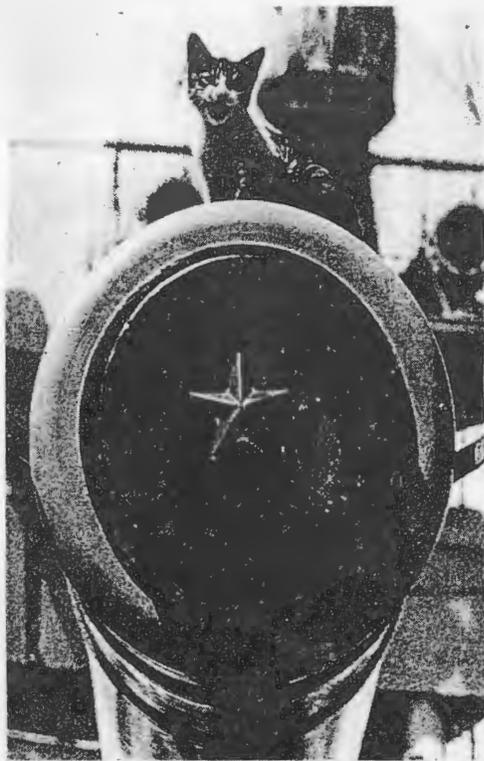
The base officially received President Wilson and Secretary Daniels in July, 1918 and at which point the base was 90% complete. The final price tag was \$24 million, a bit more than Daniels had estimated. But, the base's facility has operated through six major wars and several peacetime deployments over its 80 year history. Many of the buildings constructed and many of the piers built still serve the Navy well. It was \$24 million well spent. ~~4b~~



New recruits line up for morning drill. The base received its first sailors in the winter of 1917 and was fully operational by the summer of 1918. (HRNM photo)

Roads “will be the most ideal naval operating base in the world.” He was please to report that the new base had the capacity to train 16,000 sailors at a time, has all the “storage and shop facilities, marine railways, building ways, hydrogen plants (for observation balloons), and ample drill and parade grounds.” He also reported that plans were being drawn up for a large naval air station.

short, fierce-looking officer in a white uniform burst out of an office, in one of the loudest voice I have ever heard. [He] demanded to know what we were doing there...he dropped the orders, and when several of us tried to help him retrieve them, in an louder voice we were ordered to attention. After he read the orders again, Adm. Dillingham looked us over very disparagingly, shook his head several times, remarked on the way we



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Volunteer News & Notes

Volunteer Recognition Party

As mentioned in Becky's column, a volunteer recognition party will be held in January, 1998 in lieu of a Christmas party. Specifically it will be on **January 27 at 7 p.m.** at the **Norfolk Yacht and Country Club** located on Hampton Blvd.

The Hampton Roads Naval Historical Foundation has graciously agreed to pay for the entire event. In other words, it will cost the volunteers and their significant others not one penny to attend. This will include food and entertainment.

Since it is a recognition party, awards for hours of service will be handed out by Bob and Becky. Be on the lookout for an official invitation and please respond promptly. The menu looks awfully good and we hope all of you and your significant others can make it.

Animals and the U.S. Navy Exhibit

On November 3, we will officially open a new temporary exhibit called "The Sailors Best Friend: Animals and the United States Navy." Volunteers are asked to pick up a copy of the exhibit script so that they may familiarize themselves with the material. You can get a copy from Bob. If you still have a copy of *The Day Book* entitled "Dogs, Cats, and a Pig Named Dennis," that also has some useful information on the material discussed in the exhibit.

During the opening week of the exhibit, Gordon will also be giving detailed tours of the exhibit for the volunteers to learn about the artifacts on display. There will be two of these familiarization tours a day between November 3 and 6. If you can not make



it during this time, see Gordon to make other arrangements.

This is turning out to be a great exhibit and we hope you will find it as fun and as interesting as we have.

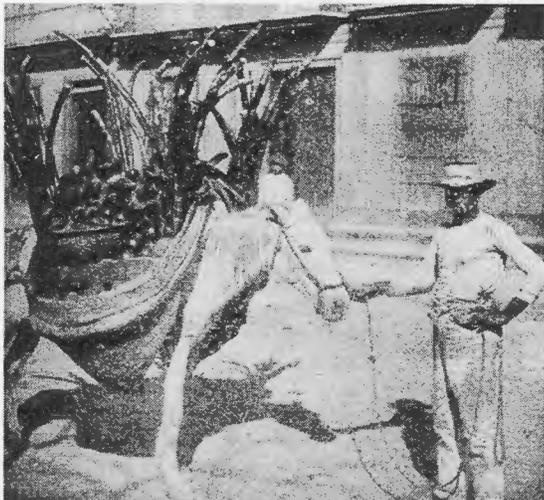
Need for Weekend Docents

There is a need right now for docents on the weekends, especially weekend afternoons. During the Fall and Winter months it is usually pretty quiet during the weekdays, but not during the weekends. **Eleanor Dipeppe** is current the only person working on weekend afternoons and we need more to meet the demand. 

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graduate and well known gun runner named Joseph Fry. The Spanish steam sloop-of-war *Tornado* intercepted *Virginius* off the coast of Jamaica and took her back to Santiago. Fry and 49 men of his crew were tried by Spanish authorities and executed by firing squad. Once executed, the Spanish beheaded the crew and placed their heads on spikes. An angry United States wanted to respond with force except that the Navy was in no condition to fight.

Then there was the attack on the steamer *Alliance*. On March 4, 1895, *Alliance* was travelling just south of Key West towards New York, not Cuba, when the gunboat *Conde de Venadito* ordered her to stop. *Alliance* ignored the order. The Spanish gunboat in response fired on the American vessel. *Alliance* got away, but the damage had been done.



A Cuban farmer poses with a horse loaded with sugar cane stalks and fruit. It was for people like this farmer that Americans demanded intervention. (HRNM photo from The Pictorial Atlas of the Spanish-American War)

Incidents like these fed the monster known as the American press, who wanted and demanded war. Some newspapers total disregard for fair reporting during this time period is well known. John Pulitzer's *New York Sun* and William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal* competed for who could come up with the most sensationalized headline. Huge two and three inch headlines called attention to the brutality of the Spanish army, women being raped by Spanish naval officers, and the destruction of American property. Articles and editorials often demanded Washington do something

about it, even though many of the reports were gross exaggerations.

The press got much of their information from The Junta. The group was more than happy to give Americans any kind of information, or lie. For example, historian John Tebbel noted that one of the rebel leaders was reported by The Junta to have been killed no less than seven times! The Junta set up a place in New York City called "The Peanut Club" for reporters to come and listen to "official" reports on the war and how Americans could help the rebels. While the group did not raise that much money, The Junta did keep the American public angry at Spain. But even newspapers that were more accurate and less sensationalized like the *Norfolk Virginian* and the *New York Times* expressed outrage at events like the *Alliance* affair.

Even before the incident the *Times* predicted "there will be nothing left...but to declare war."

Spain did not help its image in the press when it appointed a rather vicious person to be Cuba's governor in 1893: General Valeriano Weyler y Nicolau, known to the press as "Weyler the Butcher." While calling him a butcher was a bit much, Weyler was certainly no saint. He planned to crush the revolt once and for all no matter what the cost. His counter-insurgency plan was to forcibly round up and

relocate most of Cuba's rural population to fortified camps. The plan angered many Cuban farmers, and it gave the press more ammunition for editorials. Weyler further hurt his public image by issuing "dead or alive" bounties for the heads of troublesome reporters.

However, despite the pressure from the press, the public at large, and from Congressmen shouting "*Cuba libre!*" from the floor of the House, American Presidents down played any move to intervene in Cuba. They believed that quiet diplomacy with Spain was the best way to find an acceptable solution. While



President William McKinley and his White House predecessors did their best to down play the call to intervene in Cuba. However, McKinley's hand would eventually be forced. (HRNM photo)

the White House wanted the fighting in Cuba to stop, did not want to start a war with Spain. Talks with Spain began in earnest in the mid-1880's and lasted right up to the declaration of war in 1898. However, even if it meant bankrupting the country, Spain would not give up Cuba. Wall Street offered to buy (one of four solicitations over a period of 80 years) Cuba for \$130 million, but Spain rejected this as well. The quiet route did have some successes. Spain replaced Weyler with a more liberal governor-much to the anger of soldiers loyal to him-and Madrid promised to explore giving Cuba home rule status.

The most important decision to come out of these talks was an agreement to an exchange of warships. The Americans would send the battleship *USS Maine* to Havana and the Spanish would send the battleship *Vizcaya* to New York City. It was thought that the exchange of sailors would smooth things over. America planned to show a little force too. Ironically, it was not the Spanish who Washington was concerned about. The Germans, new players on the world scene, were ready to exploit the situation in Cuba and made it clear that they would be more than happy to take the island off Spain's hands. German advisors were already present in Cuba assisting the Spanish army. On January 7, 1898, *Maine* left Norfolk for Havana via Key West, and into the pages of history. 🗡️

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possibility of reconciliation of differences. Elliott and Bainbridge either overlooked or intentionally avoided asking this question. Indeed, they then quashed the opportunity for reconciliation when it did arise. As Barron recalled, "I had always intended to give Commodore Decatur time to acquit himself of an act for which he had no earthly provocation, and coolly hazarded this remark: Now, Decatur, if we meet in another world, let us hope that we shall be better friends." Decatur's immediate response was: "I have never been your enemy." This conciliatory thrust was quickly set aside by Elliott. He called out, "Silence!" and ordered them to their places. Bainbridge as well failed to react to the possibility of compromise and rushed into the firing orders.

At "Make ready" both Barron and Decatur turned to their sides presenting the smallest possible target. As Bainbridge called out "Present," the duelists cocked the flintlocks of their pistols and took aim. Their fingers tightened on "One," and at "Two" both pistols went off simultaneously. The ball from Decatur's pistol hit Barron just outside the hipbone and ricocheted downward. Barron swung to his right from the force of the shot. In pain, he hopped a few steps on his left leg before falling. As he did so, Barron expressed his apologies for leaving his stand. Barron's shot hit Decatur in almost the identical spot on his hip. The ball, however, hit the inside of the hipbone and ricocheted *upwards*, passing through his groin and into his intestines. Decatur slumped to the ground holding his wound. Surgeon Trevett heard him say, "Oh, Lord, I am a dead man!"

Their friends picked up the fallen men from the wet grass. They were carried to a dry spot where they lay not five yards apart. Though in great pain, they engaged in civil conversation about the matters that had brought them to the field. Capt. Elliott took stock of the scene. He apparently concluded that both men would die and he would be liable for arrest for his actions. He immediately commandeered Barron's carriage and drove off toward Washington, leaving

Barron to Latimer and Dr. Hall.

As the shots had been fired, others began to appear out of the woods. Capt. David Porter, Decatur's fellow Navy Commissioner, saw Elliott flee the scene. He checked briefly on Barron and then galloped off in pursuit. He overtook the



Decatur's Washington, D.C. home as it would have looked at the time of the 1820 duel. It was here that a mortally wounded Decatur was brought back from his duel with Barron where he eventually died. Located just a block away from the White House, the house is open for tours. (1822 Decatur House painting by Madame E. Vaile. Used with permission)

carriage within a mile and ordered Elliott to return to care for his principal. His son, David Dixon Porter, reported him as saying, "You left your friend weltering in his blood upon the bare earth; go back and do what you can to lessen the mischief you have aided in committing; go back and do your duty to your wounded friend." Porter then rode back to the ground and attended to Barron. When Elliott still did not return, Decatur offered to take Barron in his carriage, but there was no room. As Decatur's friends departed, Barron called out, "God bless you, Decatur." The dying man responded, "Farewell, farewell, Barron."

Porter remained with Barron futilely awaiting Elliott's return with the coach. Exasperated, Porter finally commandeered a private carriage. Barron was loaded aboard and the party left toward Washington. Finally, Elliott came slowly down the road at a pace the indicated no desire to arrive on the scene until all had left. Porter dragged Elliott out the carriage and pushed him into the other. "Your place is here, Sir, alongside your wounded friend. I insist upon your getting in." He told the coachman to proceed to Washington, mounted his horse and rode to join Decatur's party.

Barron was conveyed to the same Beale's Hotel where Decatur and his seconds had breakfasted. His wound became infected. He was forced to remain in Washington for three more weeks. When cleared for travel, Barron was carried to a steamship which

proceeded down the Potomac to Norfolk. His recovery would take months.

Decatur was taken to his house on President's Square. About 10:30 a.m., he was placed on a daybed in the downstairs room that served as his office. Decatur ordered his father-in-law to take Susan upstairs. Under no circumstances would she be allowed to watch him suffer. For twelve hours, he lay in extreme pain. The doctors proposed to remove the pistol ball, but Decatur refused. Later, he groaned that he did not know that man could endure such pain. As news spread that Commodore Decatur lay mortally wounded, a huge crowd began to gather outside his house. At 10:30 p.m., they were told that Decatur had died. The *National Intelligencer* reported in a rare special edition, "A hero has fallen. Commodore Stephen Decatur, one of the first officers of our navy; the pride of his country, the gallant and noble-hearted gentleman, is no more. He expired a few minutes ago of the mortal wound received in the duel this morning. Mourn, Columbia! For one of thy brightest stars is set!" 

The author would like to recognize his close friend, the late Dr. William Dunn, who wrote an unpublished account of the Barron-Decatur duel.