THE DAYBOOK®

VOLUME 17 ISSUE 1

In This Issue

NAVAL HISTORY & HERITAGE COMMAND

HAMPTON ROADS NAVAL MUSEUM

The Daybook® is a registered trademark of the Hampton Roads Naval Museum (HRNM), Department of the Navy, an agency of the United States Government. It is an authorized publication of HRNM. Its contents do not necessarily reflect the official view of the U.S. Government, the Department of Defense, the U.S. Navy, or the U.S. Marine Corps and do not imply endorsement thereof. Book reviews are solely the opinion of the reviewer.

The HRNM reports to the Naval History and Heritage Command, Museums Division (www.history.navy.mil). The museum is dedicated to the study of 237 years of naval history in the Hampton Roads region. HRNM was accredited by the American Association of Museums in 2008.

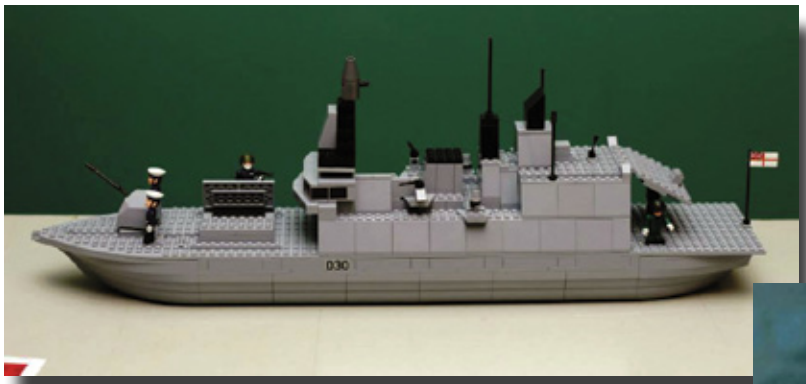
The Daybook's purpose is to educate and inform readers on historical topics and museum-related events. It is written by staff and volunteers.

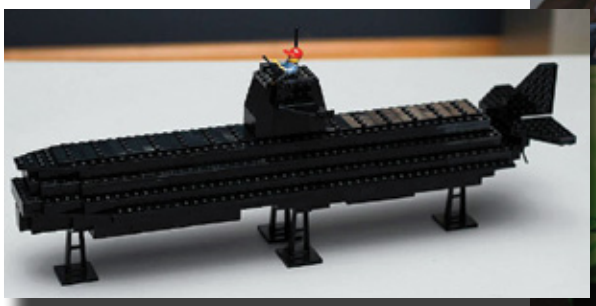
Direct questions or comments to the Hampton Roads Naval Museum editor. *The Daybook* can be reached at 757-322-2993, by fax at 757-445-1867, e-mail at hrnavalmuseum@navy.mil or write *The Daybook*, Hampton Roads Naval Museum, One Waterside Drive, Suite 248, Norfolk, VA 23510-1607. The museum is on the World Wide Web at http://www.hrnm.navy.mil.

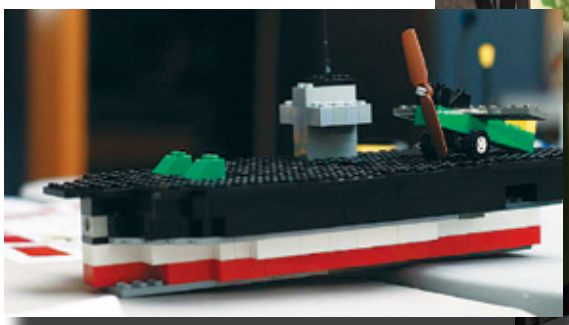
The Daybook is published quarterly. To subscribe, contact the Hampton Roads Naval Historical Foundation at (757) 445-9932 or visit http://www.hrnhf.org.

LEGO® Day 2014!

HRNM held its third annual Brick by Brick: LEGO® Shipbuilding event on February 8. Produced in association with the Hampton Roads Naval Historical Foundation, the Tidewater Officers' Spouses' Association, Bricks 4 Kids, and the Naval Historical Foundation, the program was another great success! Whether participants wanted to build a naval ship from a plan designed by HRNM staff, play around in the free play area, or enter a ship in the contest, staff planned a wide variety of activities for everyone. Here are photos of the event and the ship models taken by museum staff member Diana Gordon. See more photos, including all of this year's shipbuilding contest winners, on HRNM's Facebook page.







Two U.S. Navy gunboats at anchor in the Elizabeth River between Norfolk and Portsmouth, 1863. Since the Union Army occupied the two cities in May 1862, the local population Squadron and its commanding officer Acting Rear Admiral Samuel Phillips Lee (at far right), needed ships elsewhere. (HRNM images)

All Quiet in Hampton Roads:

Local Civil War Naval Events in 1863

By Gordon Calhoun

March 1863 looked very different than March 1862 in Hampton Roads. In 1862, the eyes of the world looked upon the great battle between the ironclads. The U.S. Army's and Navy's subsequent attempt to capture Richmond via the Virginia Peninsula did not succeed, though the Army did capture Norfolk, Portsmouth, Suffolk, and the southern portion of Hampton Roads.

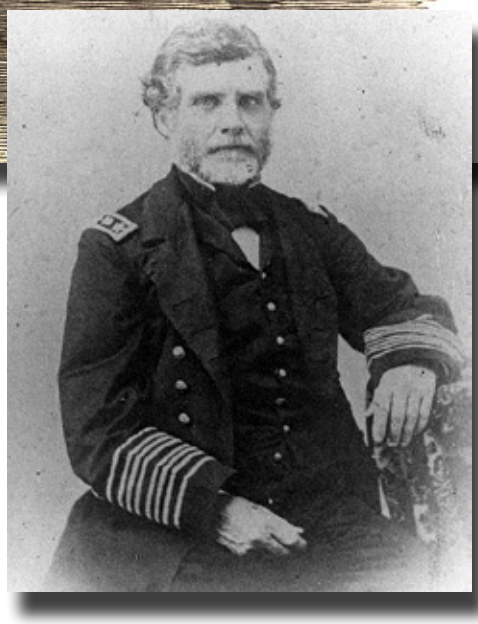
By Spring 1863, the region settled down and became very quiet, relative to the rest of the war. Outside of Washington, D.C., the Army of the Potomac geared up for an offensive against Richmond. The Confederate Army of Northern Virginia made preparations to resist any movement toward its capital. For its part, the U.S. Navy concentrated the new ironclad squadrons further south and targeted Charleston, South Carolina.

Acting Rear Admiral Samuel Phillips Lee, commanding officer of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron was in charge of U.S. Naval forces in Hampton Roads. A third cousin to Confederate General Robert E. Lee, S.P. Lee (as he signed his name), was born in Fairfax County, Virginia. But like so many Southern-born Naval officers, Lee felt more loyalty to his nation than to his state of his birth, and remained in the U.S. Navy. He once stated, "when I see Virginia stamped on my commission, I will resign it."

Unlike previous commanding officers of the squadron, the Navy Department placed no pressure upon Lee to conduct major offensive operations. Given priorities elsewhere, he could not have conducted offensive operations, even if he had been instructed to do so. Unlike March 1862, the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron did not have the ships capable of conducting large scale assaults. In March 1863, it consisted of nine steam gunboats, six converted ferryboats, a few "double-ender" steamers (gunboats with screws at both ends of the vessel), and a few tugs. All of these vessels carried no more than two main guns.

The grand exception to these small littoral warships was Lee's flagship, the magnificent steam frigate USS *Minnesota*. Two other large vessels stood next to *Minnesota*. One was the much criticized ironclad USS *Galena*, which remained at *Minnesota*'s side as the flagship's guard ship. The other was the sail frigate USS *St. Lawrence*. Her participation in the Battle of Hampton Roads had demonstrated that the frigate's days as a combat vessel were clearly over. Instead, the Navy converted her into a large supply ship and floating machine shop.

With these ships in his squadron, Lee's mission was quite clear: maintain the *status quo*. This meant keeping a vigilant watch on the North Carolina and Virginia coastlines for Confederate and British blockade runners, and assisting the Army



n did not offer up any organized resistance. This was fortunate for the U.S. Navy because the North Atlantic Blockading

in holding onto its gains made in the two states during the 1862 offensives. The opinion of Lee's very capable junior officer, Lieutenant William Lamson, summed up the situation correctly. He stated to his wife that Hampton Roads, "is not where I would wish to be, but where I am ordered to do duty. I would wish to be in the fleet to attack Charleston."

On the blockade itself, a deeper boredom settled in. Assistant Paymaster William Keeler's ship, the steamer USS *Florida*, was stationed off the coast of Fort Fisher as part of a six ship flotilla to catch blockade runners. He commented to his wife in March 1863, "It is to be one dull monotonous round, day after day, week after week, yes & month after month, for expect to count the time here by month. No papers, no letters, 'no nothing.'"

This is not to say the Squadron's mission and Hampton Roads itself were not critically important. The fact that the Navy held on to Hampton Roads, aided by the U.S. Army-garrisoned Fort Monroe, benefited the fleet greatly. While the Navy had set up three depots in Confederate territory, nothing could compare to what Hampton Roads provided: a deep water harbor for friendly ships traveling to and from Southern points, safe from storms and enemy attack. Hampton Roads also provided a place for the U.S. Navy to repair vessels battered either by the wind of the open ocean or by enemy gunfire during an assault on a Confederate fort.

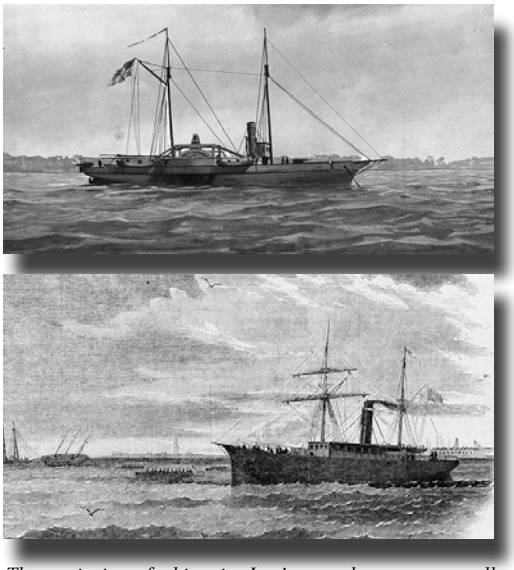
To make the port more useful, the Navy began to clear wrecks in the Elizabeth River and get the Navy Yard into working order. After being burned to the ground twice, once in 1861 and then in 1862, not much was left standing. When Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles asked about the condition of the Yard, Lee responded with the obvious, "it is burned down and it is a mere wreck." But he also stated that the Yard had use and was good for ships with minor repairs.

The fact that the citizens of Norfolk and Portsmouth did not organize any kind of resistance to Yankee occupation made the job of repairing the Yard and clearing the river easier. Nonetheless, Lee had one or two warships patrol the Elizabeth River to provide support to occupying ground forces and to remind the locals who was in charge.

The early months of 1863 provided proof of the harbor's importance. In January, the first of several ironclads preparing for the assault on Charleston arrived in Hampton Roads. First to arrive from Philadelphia was the impressive broadside ironclad USS *New Ironsides*, followed by the monitor USS *Patapsco*. Coming from New York City a few weeks later, the monitors USS *Catskill* and *Weehawken* and the non–turreted ironclad USS *Keouk* all arrived in the region with damage caused by rough weather off the coast of Delaware and Virginia's Eastern Shore. At about the same time, the monitors USS *Montauk* and *Passaic* arrived with severe battle damage caused by Fort McAllister in Georgia. With the dry dock at the Norfolk Navy Yard not yet ready to receive ships, both the commanding officers of these ships conducted repairs the old-fashioned way, by beaching the vessels on the shore.

While waiting for their ships to be refitted and for further orders, officers and sailors on these ironclads heard rumors that the Confederate States Navy was busy constructing a second CSS *Virginia* in Richmond. The rumors further stated that Union forces could expect an attack on Hampton Roads by this new warship at any time. With dreams of repeating the 1862 Battle of Hampton Roads with their own ships, the ironclad companies prayed

While steaming south from New York, the new monitor-type ironclad USS Weehawken *and her escort, the steam sloop USS* Iroquois*, hit a major storm off the coast of Assateague Island, March 1863. While she did not suffer the same fate as USS* Monitor*, the ironclad made it to Hampton Roads battered and bruised. After being repaired, she headed further south for an assault on Charleston, South Carolina. Several other ironclads making their way south from northern yards suffered a similar fate and used Hampton Roads as a safe harbor before proceeding to the front lines. (HRNM image)*



The majority of ships in Lee's squadron were small steamers, such as USS Hetzel (above) *and* Mount Washington (below)*, and not ironclad warships or large frigates. The Navy used these particular warships to patrol the many rivers and tributaries within Virginia and North Carolina. (NHHC images)*

and hoped that the new *Virginia* would make an appearance. The desire to engage in combat with this ship led to some itchy trigger fingers.

In one incident, watches aboard *Galena* spotted what they thought was a Confederate ironclad and raised the alarm. Because it was raining very hard and was 9 o'clock at night, conditions for positive identification were less than ideal. Nonetheless, watches aboard *Patapsco* spotted *Galena*'s alarm flag and the ironclad went to general quarters. With the ship moving toward *Galena*, *Patapsco*'s commanding and executive officers stood on top of the ship's turret to get a better view. *Galena*'s watches saw the mystery ship coming toward them and her captain ordered one of the ship's Parrot Rifles to open fire. The mystery ship was indeed *Patapsco*. According to one diary entry, *Galena*'s shell flew over *Patapsco*'s turret and came within a few inches of *Patapsco*'s captain's head. It is not clear who realized the mistake first, but both ships' companies quickly stood down from general quarters.

But incidents such as this one were rare. Lee spent most of his time shuffling ships in and out of Hampton Roads to continue the blockade. While he kept one or two vessels in the York River and Chesapeake Bay to watch Virginia coastal traffic, the majority of his resources watched approaches to Wilmington. While his ships captured a few blockade runners, several made it through. Lee came to the conclusion that the only way to shut down the port of Wilmington was to capture it. This meant capturing Fort Fisher, which guarded the mouth of the Cape Fear River. The fort had not yet reached its legendary fortress status and Admiral Lee sensed it could be conquered. He constantly implored Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles to provide him with the necessary resources to go forward. Welles disagreed and continued to send resources toward Port Royal with the intention of capturing Charleston.

Events occurring in Richmond soon turned Hampton Roads from a quiet sector into an active one. At Confederate General James Longstreet's suggestion, General Robert E. Lee detached two divisions from the Army of Northern Virginia and placed them under Longstreet's direct control. Longstreet originally intended for the troops to go west toward Tennessee, but Lee changed his orders upon receiving information that the U.S. Army's 9th Corps was on the move in Hampton Roads. Lee ordered Longstreet and his two divisions to make a demonstration toward Suffolk, Virginia.

The expedition was intended to check any move by the 9th Corps, but Longstreet also took the opportunity to collect supplies and food from towns in southern Virginia. Seeing that 9th Corps left Hampton Roads and was placed on trains en route to Kentucky, Longstreet switched over to offensive operations, with the intention of capturing Suffolk and Nansemond County. He also hoped to dislodge Union troops from coastal North Carolina.

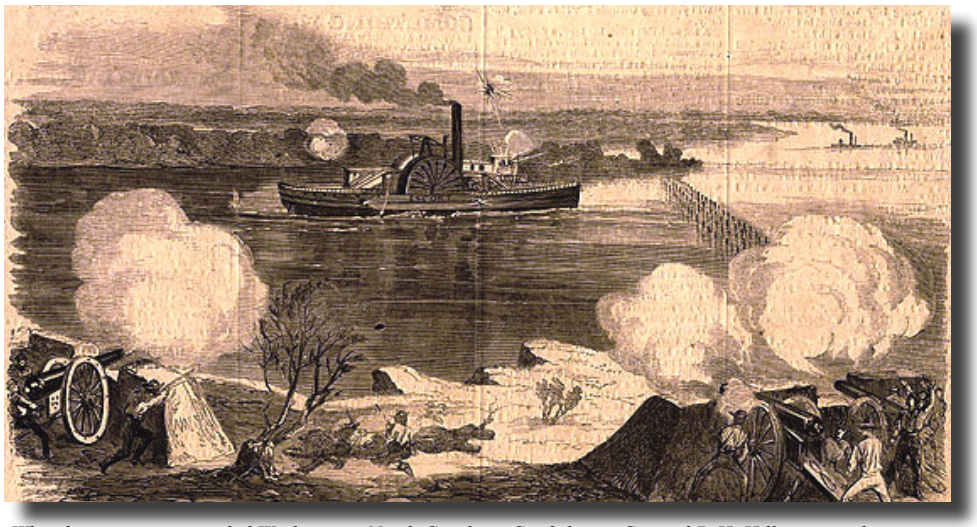
The offensive alarmed regional Union commanders, who now feared a general assault on all Union-held territory in Hampton Roads was underway. They had received intelligence that Confederate ground and naval forces were also marching down the Virginia Peninsula and James River.

Sensing that no ground reinforcements would be forthcoming, Brigadier Generals John Dix and John Peck began to press Admiral Lee to have his ships provide assistance. The two men wanted Lee to provide ships at six different locations: Yorktown and Gloucester Point on the York River, Jamestown Island on the James River, the upper and lower parts of

*Admiral Lee's corner of the war became an active sector when Confederate forces began a series of diversionary attacks on Union-held coastal towns in North Carolina. Shown here are Union ground forces in New Bern mobilizing toward the sound of Confederate artillery located on the north side of the Neuse River. Four U.S. Navy gunboats and a U.S. Revenue cutter arrived simultaneously and chased off the Confederates. With Naval forces now committed to New Bern, the Confederates moved north to Washington, North Carolina, and Suffolk, Virginia, and lay siege to those towns. (*Harper's Weekly *engraving)*

the Nansemond River near Suffolk, and Washington, North Carolina, on the Neuse River. After all the requests, Lee remarked to Secretary Welles, "It is very flattering to have the Army rely upon the Navy. But where so great a result is at stake, the general should not make the mistake of foregoing those measures necessary to secure his rear."

However, Longstreet reinforced Dix's opinion when one Confederate regiment headed further south toward New Bern, North Carolina and the Union fortification of Fort Anderson. Confederate artillery set up across from the fort on the northern shore of the Neuse River. In the first of many times during this campaign, the Navy came to the Union Army's rescue. Commander Alexander Murray (son of the Age of Sail commodore of the same name) came up the Neuse River with a force of four gunboats, USS *Shawsheen, Hunchback*, *Hetzel*, and *Ceres*, plus one Revenue Cutter Service steamer, USRC *Agassiz*. The flotilla immediately began to bombard Confederate positions with over 250 shells, forcing the Confederates to retire northward toward Washington, North Carolina.



When his troops surrounded Washington, North Carolina, Confederate General D.H. Hill attempted to counter Union riverine forces by placing artillery batteries along the shore of the Pamlico River (shown here firing at the U.S. Army steamer Escort*). Local U.S. Naval forces such USS* Hunchback*, however, kept the river open to Union traffic. (*Harper's Weekly *engraving)*

With the Union gunboat forces in New Bern, Confederate General D.H. Hill believed his forces could take the town. Just to be sure, he had his soliders place artillery batteries along the Pamlico River. Murray's gunboats, however, helped break the siege by assisting Army steam transports to pass the Confederate shore batteries. The siege of "Little Washington," as some called it, ended with Hill's forces withdrawing further north to Suffolk.

Union ground forces around Suffolk concentrated within the town limits and prepared to resist. Originally, Union ground forces had been deployed both within the town limits of Suffolk and along the Nansemond River to the north of the town. While a small skirmish broke out along a portion of the river on April 11, Peck had become concerned that there were not enough forces to repel an assault on Suffolk itself and continued to move units deployed along the river into town. This move potentially gave Confederate forces the opportunity to cross the river unopposed and surround the Union force.

Admiral Lee's reluctance to help his

An engineer from a New York regiment drew this crude map of Suffolk during the Confederate "siege" of the town. Notice the black shapes-these are Lamson's and Cushing's gunboat force on the Nansemond River that protected the Union garrison's northern flank. (Library of Congress image)

Army counterparts continued. Indeed, the admiral had two ironclads to use: *Galena* and the brand new, 1,300-ton monitor USS *Sangamon*, which was equipped with the new monstrous XV-inch Dahlgren smoothbore cannon. Lee assigned both ships to steam to Jamestown Island and keep watch because he received intelligence that the Confederate Navy had six to eight ironclads with which it could attack. The fact that this piece of intelligence came from a Confederate deserter captured by Union picket lines around Suffolk did not make Lee think the information was unreliable.

Fortunately for all Union flag officers involved, Lee had two of the most able junior officers in the entire U.S. Navy working for him: the previously mentioned Lieutenant Roswell Lamson and Lieutenant William P. Cushing. Admiral David Dixon Porter would later remark that, between Lamson's leadership and organization abilities and Cushing's raw courage, the two men formed an unbeatable team under any circumstances.

Lee instructed Lamson to take charge of a four ship flotilla on April 10, consisting of the small river steamers USS *Mount Washington* and *Stepping Stones* and two small Army steamers to secure the upper Nansemond. Prior to beginning his patrol, Lamson ordered his men to take sheets of iron nominally intended to be used to patch up leaky boilers, and they placed them around the pilot house and along the side of the ship. Cushing and *Commodore Barney* arrived from Jamestown Island a day later.

On April 14, Confederate artillery ambushed Lamson's squadron from prepared positions at Northfleet Point, about two miles north of Suffolk. The ten-gun battery severely damaged *Stepping Stones*. All five of Lamson's ships returned fire and silenced most of the Confederate guns.

During the action, though, Lamson's own vessel, *Mount Washington*, ran aground. Cushing rushed in with his vessel to help, but *Mount Washington* had to wait until flood tide for the ship to break free. Seeing the Yankee vessel disabled, the Confederate artillery returned and exchanged fire with the squadron for over four hours.

Even with the boiler plate, Lamson realized that *Mount Washington*, *Commodore Barney*, and *Stepping Stones*'s hulls were all made of thin wood and would not be able to withstand a long fight. By 6 p.m, the flood tide freed *Mount Washington* and the squadron withdrew northward. A second round of fighting between the Navy's gunboats on April 17 damaged USS *Coeur de Lion*, which had just arrived as part of emergency reinforcements from the Potomac River Flotilla. The Army did land a few companies of soldiers in an attempt to capture the Confederate batteries during a night raid, but quickly withdrew upon being spotted by a Confederate patrol.

After receiving reports about these engagements and the vulnerability of his

Admiral Lee was fortunate to have two capable junior officers working for his command: Lieutenants Roswell Lamson (left) and William B. Cushing (right). (Princeton University Libraries image)

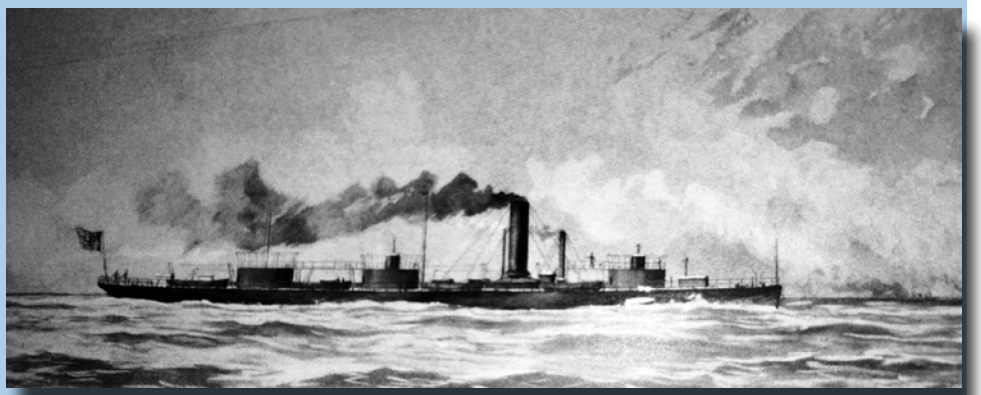
Hampton Roads' Three-Headed Monster

One major flaw in the design of the original USS *Monitor* was her lack of firepower. With only two XI-inch guns, many in the U.S. Navy believed the design needed to be upgraded. Many engineers felt this could be solved by putting a bigger gun in the turret, or by adding a second turret. USS *Monitor*'s original designer, John Ericsson saw no need for a second turret. He also believed the turrets would get in the way of the line of fire.

John Lenthall, the Navy's longtime chief of the Bureau of Construction and Repair, however, decided that even two turrets were insufficient. Shortly after the Battle of Hampton Roads, Lenthall got the idea that if the Confederacy could convert a ship like *Merrimack* into an ironclad, the U.S. Navy could do the same.

With the Secretary's approval, Lenthall sent shipyards and ironworks in New York City plans to convert *Merrimack's* sister ship, the USS *Roanoke,* into an ironclad monitor-type warship with three turrets. Lenthall's design called for the turrets to be armored with single iron plates each twenty-two feet long, 4 1/2-inches thick, and weighing four tons. Each turret housed either XV-inch Dahlgrens or a 150-pounder Parrott Rifle. If that was not enough firepower, Lenthall wanted a "huge axe" on the bow of the ship in order to ram.

The Common Council of New York City saw the ship and lobbied the Navy to assign the vessel as a harbor defense ship for New York harbor. The Navy rejected the idea and penciled in the ship for fort suppression duty off of the coast of Charleston.



The one, and only, triple-turreted monitor ironclad, USS Roanoke*, under ideal conditions. The Navy placed her in Hampton Roads, and there she stayed. (NHHC image)*

The conversion was a remarkable feat of American engineering. Iron forges in four different states provided the huge plates to Novelty Iron Works in New York City. Each plate then had to be heated and bent to the correct curvature. In all, workers placed 1,000 tons of armor on the ship.

While she was a marvel of engineering, the brains at *Scientific American* magazine were skeptical of Lenthall's design. "If she makes nine knots, we shall be agreeably disappointed," they wrote.

The editors further commented, "As the *Roanoke* will sit very low in the water, we hope that proper arrangements will be made for ventilation on the main deck. The defects of the *Galena* and *Monitor,* so clearly pointed out in the *Scientific American* of last week, by an intelligent correspondent, will be reproduced in the *Roanoke*. [This will render] her very deficient as a 'sea boat,' unless this advice is heeded."

The advice was not taken. The Navy charged forward and *Roanoke* put to sea as the most powerful warship in the world. Her captain quickly discovered what *Scientific American* writers predicted when she was sent to Hampton Roads. Monitor-type ships in general did not have very good sea-keeping traits to begin with, and *Roanoke* had the worst of them all.

First, she lacked speed. *Scientific American* hoped for nine knots. The commanding officer, however, reported to Secretary Welles that the ship would not go more than five knots. He concluded that he could "not consider the *Roanoke* adapted to fighting a battle at sea, on account of her rolling renders her guns unserviceable and exposing her to shot below her iron plating."

All the captain could recommend to the Secretary was that the ship serve as a coastal defense vessel. Welles agreed, but did not assign the ship to New York City. Once the ship arrived in Hampton Roads, she remained there until 1865.

ships to ground-based artillery, Lee refused to send more ships back to the Nansemond. He even dispatched his trusted aide, Fleet Captain Pierce Crosby, to personally order Lamson and Cushing to withdraw back to Hampton Roads.

The U.S. Army did reestablish a presence along the river, but its commanders still felt that Navy gunboats were needed. Lee continued to balk at the suggestion. Not only did he feel his ships were outgunned, but he also felt that he did not have enough ships to spare. His refusal set off a series of critical memos between

All Quiet in Hampton Roads
Continues on Page 13

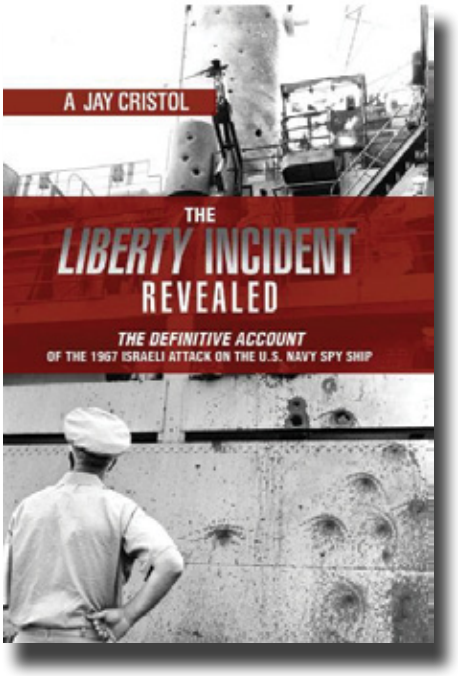
In a bold move of the Suffolk campaign, Captain Steven Hazard led soldiers from the 8th Connecticut Volunteers, 89th New York, and USS Minnesota *sailors off USS* Stepping Stones *and up the banks of the Nansemond River, The assault encircled Confederate fortifications overlooking the river. The Army awarded Hazard the Medal of Honor for his gallantry, though not until thirty years after the event. (HRNM image)*

Book Reviews

The Liberty *Incident Revealed: The Definitive Account of the 1967 Israeli Attack on the U.S. Navy Spy Ship*

By A. Jay Cristol

Reviewed by Howard Sandefer



This book, subtitled *The Definitive Account of the 1967 Israeli attack on the U.S. Navy Spy Ship,* details the search of Jay Cristol, who spent about twenty-seven years investigating the assault on the Hampton Roads-based USS *Liberty (*AGTR-5). The attack occurred on June 8, 1967, off the coasts of Israel and Egypt during the 1967 war. During his investigation, he wrote and published his first book titled *The Liberty Incident*, published in 2002. Cristol was granted access to Israeli tapes and transcripts in 2001, and National Security Agency transcripts of intercepts of a previously unreported EC-121 aircraft monitoring VHF/UHF radio traffic of the attack were released in 2003. These additional documents as well as continued research indicated the need for a revised book. This new volume is the result of incorporating the new information into the previous book.

A. Jay Cristol. *The* Liberty *Incident Revealed: The Definitive Account of the 1967 Israeli Attack on the U.S. Navy Spy Ship.* Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2013. ISBN 978-161251-340-9

Cristol detailed the attack, and then went quickly to the question of what an intelligence collection ship, armed with only four .50-caliber machine guns and no back up assistance, was doing in what was demonstrably a war zone. He cited the five separate messages that were sent to *Liberty* to remain at least 100 miles off each coast instead of the twelve and fifteen miles respectively contained in her original orders, cut before the war began. None of the new orders arrived before the attack, although all were sent before it. Cristol finds fault with the communications system, but does not report why such micro-managing individuals as President Lyndon Johnson and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara would do nothing to remedy the situation. If there were any overriding lessons to be learned, they were lessons that should have been learned long ago. One is, "Communications dominate war." Another is that the 'fog of war' obscures some events to the detriment of clarity of reporting.

Details in the book included three diagrams of the attacks. Each of the two air attacks consisted of three passes firing by each two-plane flight, and torpedo attacks by three torpedo boats, firing a total of five torpedoes, one of which hit *Liberty*. The torpedo hit in the security space, causing most of the casualties and a starboard list. No bombs were dropped on *Liberty* because no aircraft were armed for anti-ship operations.

Part of the problem in evaluating information was the high classification of some of the documents. The Johnson administration had gone on record saying that no U.S. ships or aircraft were in the war zone, so the presence of *Liberty* and the EC-121 were a variation in the scenario painted by the administration.

Rumors included the accusation that the United States contributed RF-4C aircraft to aid the Israeli Air Force, that there was a submarine in the area, and that *Liberty* was attacked on the orders of Moshe Dayan (Israel's Minister of Defense) to keep us from learning that the Israeli army was going to attack the Golan Heights. Cristol investigated all allegations, refuting them with the documents that were promulgated. This action clears the deck to examine the actual events, which is sufficiently disconcerting in and of itself. His scholarship allows his readers to ponder how an efficient organization like the Israeli Defense Force could make such a public and tragic mistake as attacking an unengaged and neutral nation friendly to them.

The conclusion reached by all the investigators was that the incident was, in fact, a horrible and tragic example of friendly fire. It is of note that even our vaunted special forces caused the death of Pat Tillman. In 1994, two F-15 Air Force jets shot down two U.S. helicopters. Several thoughts come to mind, such as that war is a dangerous business.

A similar event that occurred in January 1968 was the boarding and capture of USS *Pueblo* (AGER-2) by the North Koreans. Again, a ship armed only with four .50-caliber machine guns was sent into hostile seas with no backup support.

This reviewer was assigned as the oceanographer on USS *San Pablo* (AGS-30) in 1969. During the Summer months, *San Pablo* conducted a survey in the Caribbean Sea, with orders to observe the twelve-mile limit south of Cuba. She was more heavily armed, with four 20-millimeter cannons, but again no back up support. No incidents occurred with the Cubans. But it certainly can be said that Washington was inhabited by slow learners during this period.

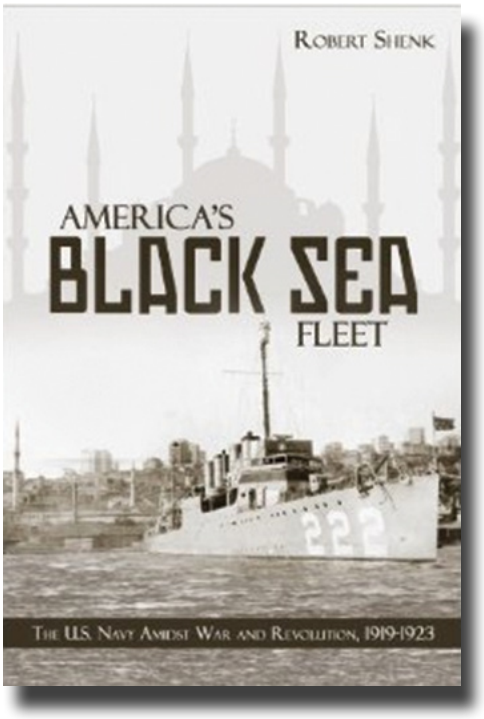
Twelve reports of the incident have been released by various sources in the United States and four from sources in Israel since the incident. Between them, they covered most possibilities of the event, including the different rumors that were spread about the incident.

Cristol points out the tendency of most organizations, especially governmental agencies, to hide problems. This only exacerbates the suspicions of the public and sets the stage for further suspicions for later events, which are to surely come. Since Watergate, the watch word has been, "It's not the crime, but the cover up." His scholarship in investigating the incident will not convince all persons about the reason or lack thereof for the attack, but it is an impressive work of investigation, well worth reading.

America's Black Sea Fleet: The U.S. Navy Amidst War and Revolution, 1919-1923

By Robert Shenk

Reviewed by Ira R. Hanna



If you like a book that is written in standard historical style; that is, one filled just with facts backed by authoritative references, then *America's Black Sea Fleet* is not for you. On the other hand, if you like a concise history book that is both impeccably referenced and full of "sea stories," then this book is for you. It reads so smoothly that you will not notice the change from fact to storytelling. It is almost like sitting at a table in the Wardroom or in the enlisted mess discussing the latest liberty port exploits. While sailors were having good times in Constantinople and Smyrna (modern Izmir), Turkey and Russia were going through violent revolutions to change their governments. Despite this, junior officers and their commanding officers gained experience in diplomacy as well as naval maneuvers.

Robert Shenk. *America's Black Sea Fleet: The U.S. Navy Amidst War and Revolution*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2012. ISBN 978-1-61251-053-8

During the early 1920s, Turkey, Greece, and Russia were in turmoil. Thousands of refugees fled to other countries. In Turkey, ethnic minorities such as the Armenians and Greeks were expelled by the Turkish revolutionaries. During that time, the Black Sea Fleet protected American interests. At the same time, its ships aided humanitarian efforts. When the Turks drove the Greeks out of Smyrna (modern Izmir) and burned the city, American ships rescued over 200,000 refugees.

From 1920 until 1923, while this small group of destroyers and cruisers were stationed in the Black Sea, officers and sailors often established personal relationships with the local population. In fact, some had affairs with foreign women, much to the chagrin of Rear Admiral Mark L. Bristol, commander of the squadron. One such incidence concerned Ensign Ted Wellings, whose plans to marry a Russian woman were thwarted by Bristol. Wellings was sent back to the States immediately. However, he gave his fiancé enough money to book passage to the U.S.A. and he married her anyway when she arrived in Boston a few weeks later.

Bristol is the main character in this book, although his previous naval and political assignments were not noted by the author. By not mentioning these experiences, Shenk missed an opportunity to analyze how they might have influenced Bristol's decisions. For example, Shenk only compared Bristol's disregard for the Armenians' plight with other published viewpoints and his support for Turkey's rebel leader Mustapha Kemal.

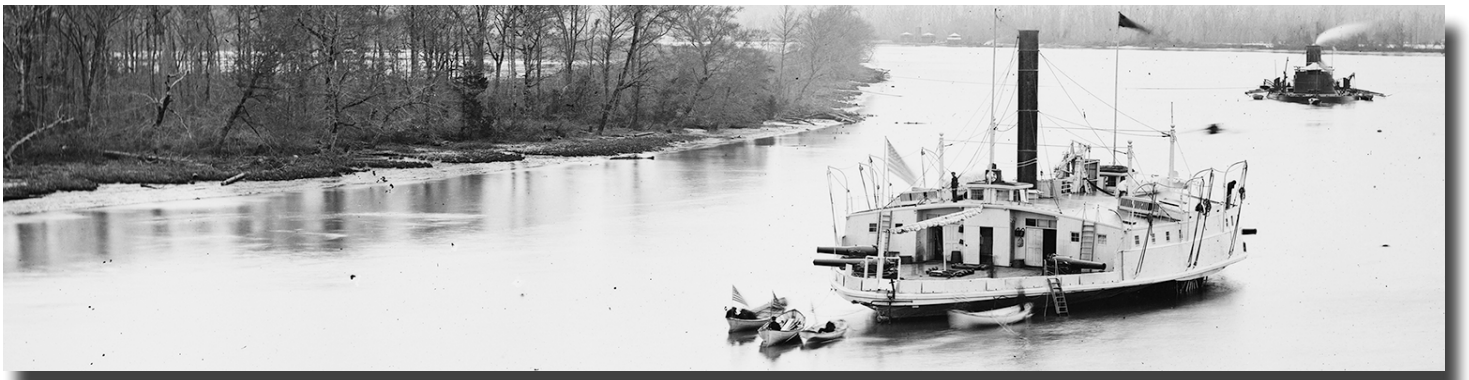
Bristol was a man of action and had expected to be put in command of a fleet with a large number of ships. Although disappointed in the small number of ships permanently assigned to the Black Sea Fleet, additional ships of all types were assigned temporarily to the fleet for specific political or humanitarian missions. To accomplish these, Bristol spent as much time being a diplomat as a naval officer. Within six months of his arrival, he was appointed "High Commissioner" to Turkey and moved into the embassy, effectively replacing the elderly, ill ambassador. Thus, Bristol became the senior American diplomatic official as well as the senior naval officer in waters east of Greece. Bristol was the person every American in the area turned to for solutions to their problems, especially transportation. Businessmen, in particular, depended on American warships to get them to remote Black Sea ports. Even news reporters and wives of naval personnel traveled on the fleet's ships and used them as their major entertainment venues.

At the same time, the violence in Russia and Turkey affected American interests. Bristol was firmly on the side of Turkey's revolutionaries, although he did little to aid Kemal's forces. He did, however, refuse to support the Armenians when they pleaded for American intervention to prevent what some claim was genocide.

Shenk provided the historical background, described those events succinctly, and used the writings of American relief workers, educators, businessmen, and missionaries to give personal perspectives to them. He admitted that he tended to "include more personal stories and colorful detail than some historians would appreciate." What he did do well was to provide a wider viewpoint than other historians who have written on the same events. But nowhere does one find a thorough analysis of the effect Bristol's actions had on future events in the region, other than good will.

It was appropriate that the last chapter of this book was titled "Departure," for it seems that the author was as loath to leave his discovery of the fascinating stories of ordinary sailors and future famous naval officers, as they were to leave Constantinople. There was no conclusion to be found, just a picture of their experiences in foreign cultures.

This book is as much about diplomacy as it is about naval activities. Over all, *America's Black Sea Fleet* contributes knowledge about the Navy during a time and place that few historians have chosen to investigate. It shows how much more an American naval fleet commander can do than simply prepare his ships for battle.



Looking more like a houseboat than a warship, USS Commodore Perry *steams ahead of a monitor-type ironclad on the James River. This vessel and others like her carried six heavy guns and could also carry ground troops into battle. (HRNM image)*

In Praise of Floating Cheese Blocks: The New York City Ferry System Goes to War

Above is an Alfred Waud sketch of a New York City ferryboat in Hampton Roads. It is possibly USS Whitehall*, which participated in the Battle of Hampton Roads. She accidently caught fire and exploded off Fort Monroe on March 10, 1862. (Library of Congress image)*

It would be hard to argue that any other state made a bigger contribution to the Union war effort than New York. Along with contributing over 150 units of

The Museum Sage

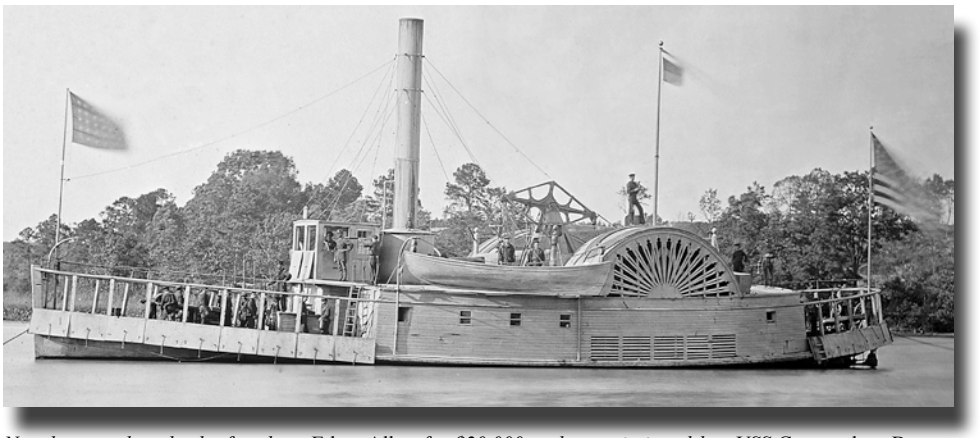
infantry, cavalry regiments, and artillery, the state had a major manufacturing base, particularly when it came to shipbuilding. The majority of the Navy's sea-going ironclads, and the material used to fabricate them, came from New York. (Full disclosure: The Sage is biased on the "hard to argue" statement. The Sage's Civil War ancestry traces back to a private who served in the 124th New York, the "Orange Blossoms," who fought with Colonel Chamberlain at Gettysburg.)

Add to these valuable contributions the New York ferryboat system. There has been some type of ferryboat system in New York City for over 180 years. Initially a for-profit venture, the City's Department of Transportation today operates a large fleet of ships.

New York City ferryboats were among the many civilian ships purchased by the U.S. Navy at the beginning of the Civil War. With their wide beam, sheltered decks with windows, and two wheel houses, they looked more like houseboats than warships. No one could have expected that when these ships began transporting people across the New York Harbor and the East River, they would actually become incredibly important to local Naval commanders during the Civil War. At least one vessel that used to be a New York ferryboat could be found in almost every campaign in and around Hampton Roads and the tributaries of North Carolina.

It is not exactly clear what purchasing agents were thinking when they scoured the docks in New York. But someone had the foresight to see that the Navy was going to need shallow draft vessels capable of negotiating rivers and coastal waterways. The ferryboats' ability to go backwards as easily they went forward--without having to turn--greatly assisted them in doing just that. The Navy purchased and converted nineteen ferryboats, most of which served in Hampton Roads. They were (and New York ferryboats continue to be), rectangular in shape. If USS *Monitor* was the "cheese box on a shingle," then the ferryboats could easily be labeled "cheese blocks on a granite slab."

Most of the ferryboats displaced 600 to 750 tons; were about 175 to 180 feet in length and about 29 feet wide; and only drew ten feet of water when fully loaded. The vessel's armament varied, but generally they were equipped with 100-pounder Parrott Rifles, IX-inch Dahlgren smoothbores, and assorted smaller guns, such as 32- and 12-pounders.



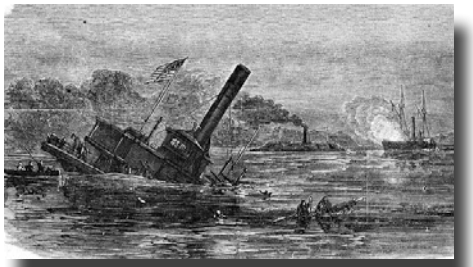
Naval agents bought the ferryboat Ethan Allen *for $20,000 and commissioned her USS* Commodore Barney*. The vessel served in several battles in Virginia and North Carolina. Among the battles was the Suffolk, Virginia campaign, where the ship was under Lieutenant William Cushing's command. (Library of Congress image)*

Once commissioned as warships, the Navy kept the original names for most of the vessels. When a name change was deemed necessary, the ferryboat *Commodore*

Perry seems to have inspired the Navy to introduce the "commodore" series of ship names after War of 1812 flag officers. Names included USS *Commodore Jones, McDonough, Morris, Barney*, and *Hull*.

In addition to being gunboats, they also excelled as amphibious assault ships. Since the ferryboats' primary function before the war was to carry people, U.S. Army commanders frequently requested use of the vessels for raids. The ships could carry several hundred soldiers on board along with heavy guns and ammunition.

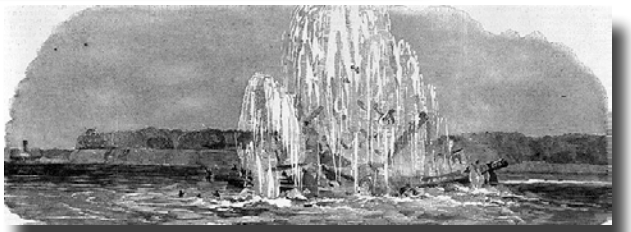
These ships, however, were not well protected, as they were they made out of thin wood. Enterprising naval officers often used boiler plate iron to reinforce critical areas of the ships, such as the wheel house, before taking them into battle. As a result, the ships took a beating during battles. However, in this area, none were ever sunk by gunfire. CSS *Albemarle* rammed USS *Southfield* on the Neuse River, a torpedo exploded underneath USS *Commodore Jones* on the James River, and USS *Westfield*'s commanding officer prematurely scuttled his ship during a Confederate counter-offensive near Galveston, Texas.



Before the war, Southfield *was part of the Staten Island ferry system. During the war, she distinguished herself in many actions in North Carolina. This included a hopeless defense against the ironclad CSS* Albemarle. *(*Harper's Weekly *engraving)*

After the war, the Navy sold the ferryboats either back to their original owners or to local merchants. *Commodore Perry* continued to serve as a New York City ferryboat until 1931. Today, the Staten Island ferry system has not forgotten the contribution of its boxy-looking craft to the war. A list of the vessels that served can be found on its website: http://www.siferry.com/SIFerry_Current__Ferries.aspx.

The ship's company of USS Hunchback *poses for a portrait while serving on the James River. Before the war, the vessel carried passengers between Staten Island and Manhattan. Because of the diverse human subjects portrayed, this particular image is one of the best Civil War Navy photos taken. (HRNM image)*



In 1864, Confederate torpedo operators detonated a torpedo under USS Commodore Jones *and obliterated the vessel in the James River. (*Harper's Weekly *engraving)*

This is USS Commodore Morris *photographed on the James River. This image gives an excellent overview of the best and worst qualities of ferryboats as warships. Notice the boiler plates along the side of the ship. After the war,* Commodore Morris *served once again as a New York City ferryboat until 1931. (Library of Congress image)*

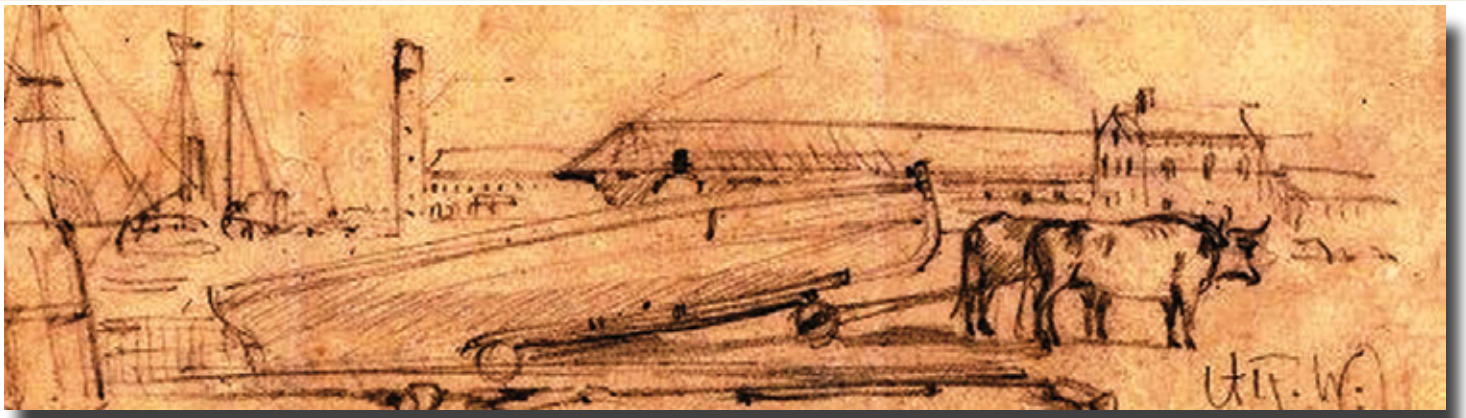
All Quiet in Hampton Roads Continued From Page 9

the admiral and Dix. Up until this point, the two men had gottten along quite well. Now, however, Dix felt that the Navy was skirting its duty. The argument reached the desk of President Abraham Lincoln. With far more pressing issues on his mind, the President kindly asked both men to get along.

For his part, Lamson felt that the situation called for aggressive action, and not a retreat. After securing the support of the local Army counterpart, artillery expert Brigadier General George Washington Getty, Lamson fired off memo after memo between April 15 and 18 to Lee, outlining a plan to land soldiers and armed sailors, backed with boat howitzers, to encircle and capture the battery at Hill's Point. If nothing else, Lamson wanted to "send to [Lee] one of the guns that was used against *Mount Washington*."

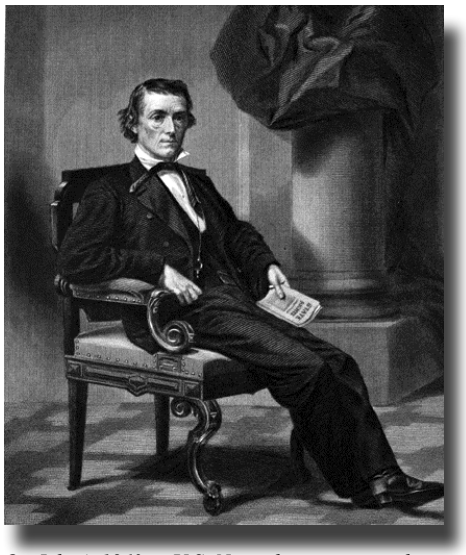
Lee conditionally agreed to Lamson's plan. He stated, "The Western Branch [i.e. Hill's Point] battery should be taken or silenced." What he did not want was for his ships to be floating targets on which Confederate guns could practice. On the night of April 19, Crosby wrote back to his boss that he did not need to order the ships out, because "General Getty landed today with Lieutenant Lamson, 300 men and four boat howitzers at the point of junction with Western Branch and Nansemond. Captured five pieces of artillery and 161 rebel prisoners of the Forty-fourth Alabama."

This memo came after Lamson and Captain Steven Hazard went ahead with the attack as outlined by Lamson.



Shown here is an 1863 sketch of the Norfolk Navy Yard by Alfred Waud. It shows a yoked oxen team preparing to pull a small boat out of the water. When Union forces reoccupied the Yard in May 1862, they found much of the property destroyed. With the Yard back in Union hands, the U.S. Navy used it to make small repairs to ships on the blockade squadron. This saved valuable time because the ships would not have to be sent north to Baltimore or New York. (Library of Congress image)

With soldiers from the 8th Connecticut Volunteers, 89th New York, and armed sailors from *Minnesota* that Lamson had trained for ground combat himself, the Union assault force deployed from *Stepping Stones* just south of the Confederate battery. While this took place, Cushing, aboard *Commodore Barney,* led a flotilla of four ships and awaited Lamson's signal to begin a bombardment from the river. At



On July 4, 1863, a U.S. Navy ship intercepted a tug carrying Alexander Stephens, the Confederate States of America's vice-president, on the James River. Never a staunch supporter of the war, Stephens was attempting to make his way to Washington for peace talks with President Abraham Lincoln. (Library of Congress image)

6 p.m., *Stepping Stones* blew her whistle and Cushing's ships opened fire on the Confederate battery. The distraction from the river allowed the combined Army/Navy assault force to land unopposed and attack the Confederate batteries from the rear. A charge by the 89th forced the Confederates to surrender. It was not without some irony that Lamson reported to Lee that the guns being used against Union gunboats were ones captured by General Stonewall Jackson's men when the Harper's Ferry garrison surrendered to Jackson's corps in 1862.

The "siege" of Suffolk lasted another two weeks before Robert E. Lee ordered Longstreet back to central Virginia. With the ground threat to Hampton Roads gone, Admiral Lee's forces returned to their duties of monitoring the Virginia and North Carolina rivers and coastlines.

In early June, Lee received his first hard proof that enterprising Confederates were building an ironclad in northeast North Carolina. The double-ender gunboat USS *Miami* took in a deserter near Plymouth, who provided a detailed sketch and dimensions of a six-gun, casemate-style ironclad currently in the advanced stages of construction. A pro-Union pipe fitter later confirmed this piece of information.

The presence of a Confederate ironclad in North Carolina waters caused a small amount of panic among Lee, his subordinate officers, and local U.S. Army commanders. Both services concluded that the best thing to do would be to place obstructions in the river and hope for the best. An enterprising Naval engineer, however, proposed using a spar torpedo of his own design to sink the ironclad. Seeing few other options, Lee sent the engineer directly to Secretary Welles for consultation.

Leaders in Washington, however, were not concerned with the ironclad that would eventually become CSS *Albemarle*. They were more concerned about the Army of Northern Virginia's movement towards Pennsylvania. Welles asked Admiral Lee to see if his forces could pretend they were about to launch an assault on Richmond.

Lee doubted that a feint attack would work, but at least the Navy had now given him ships enough to make a credible threat. In early June, he received another ironclad monitor fresh from the northern shipyards: the 1,300-ton monitor USS *Lehigh*. Led by *Lehigh*'s sister ship *Sangamon*, a few other wooden gunboats, and about 1,500 Army soldiers, the flotilla made its way up the James River, where the Chickahominy River emptied into the James.

During these two raids, Admiral Lee received more intelligence about Confederate efforts to build an ironclad squadron on the James River. Lieutenant Lamson reported to Lee that the Confederates were close to finishing two more casemate-type ironclads in addition to the ones already built. While this intelligence was again faulty, it was enough evidence for Welles to send two more ironclads to Hampton Roads.

Along with the increase in military activity, the Confederate invasion of Pennsylvania produced a curious political event on the James River. Alexander Stephens, vice-president of the Confederate States of America, travelled down the James in the unarmed tug *Torpedo*, waving a flag of truce. On the morning of July 4, Stephens asked Admiral Lee if his little ship and party of three could be allowed to pass through Hampton Roads and up the Potomac River unharmed, for the purpose of meeting with President Lincoln.

Admiral Lee was suspicious and told Stephens to wait until he got further instructions from Washington. At 9 p.m., Lamson told his admiral all he needed to know. Through his contacts in the Army, Lamson had heard a Union victory at Gettysburg. With this information in hand, Lee did not wait for an answer from Secretary Welles. He told Stephens to turn his ship around and return to Richmond.

With both major armies in Virginia

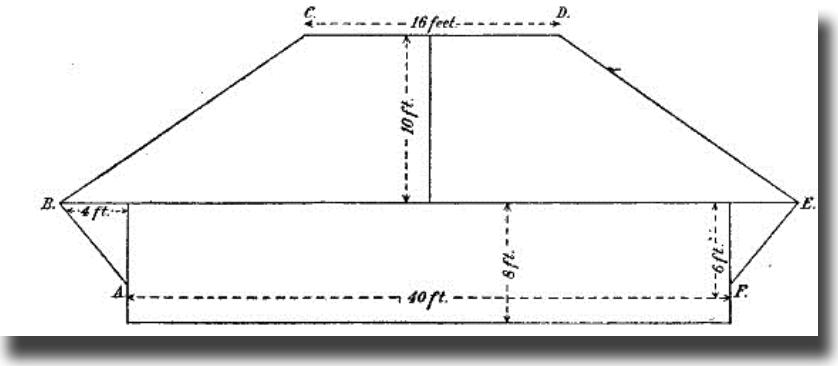
The threat of the Confederacy's James River Squadron's ironclads, whether they were in working condition or not, forced the U.S. Navy to keep at least one monitor-type ironclad on duty in the James River at all times. Shown here is the 1,300-ton USS Lehigh *which was equipped with the new XV-inch Dahlgren smoothbore. (Library of Congress image)*

taking a break from major offensives, Naval forces in Hampton Roads did likewise. By September 1863, the Norfolk Navy Yard was now in sufficient shape to take on smaller ships of the blockade and make light repairs. Lee believed he needed the Navy Yard at full capacity to ensure the blockade remained effective, which was his main priority since taking command. The North Atlantic Squadron in mid-1863 looked impressive with sixty-five ships. In reality, between the large area that fell within the Squadron's jurisdiction and necessary routine maintenance, it was much less effective in reality.

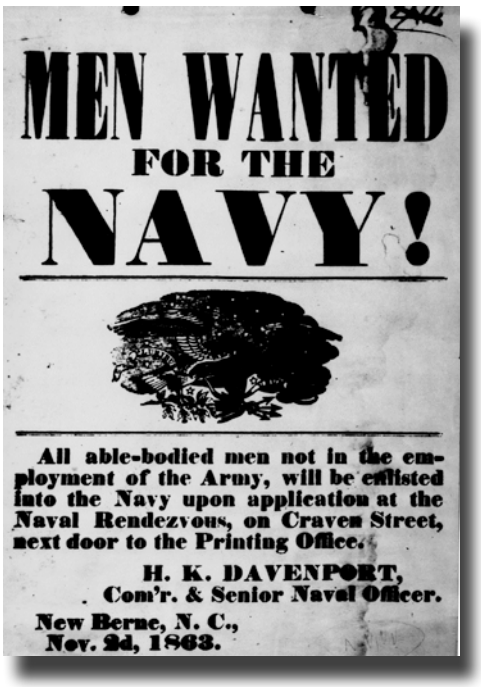
Only eight to ten ships patrolled the approaches to Wilmington. Lee commented to the Secretary that the nature of the location where the Cape Fear River emptied into the Atlantic produced two distinct exit points for blockade runners, requiring a separate squadron to watch each location. He commented that "At least fifteen to eighteen" suitable ships were needed.

A captured document demonstrated the daunting task facing this squadron. Lamson, now commanding the paddle steamer USS *Nansemond,* captured the blockade runner *Venus*. While searching the captain's cabin, he found a note titled, "Vessels engaged in running the blockade in 1863." It listed seventy-five private and publicly-owned vessels operating out of Wilmington. Another captured document stated that there were at least ten blockade runners in Wilmington making preparations to dash to the Bahamas. In addition, rumors floated out of Wilmington that the Confederates were building an ironclad squadron and a cruiser squadron to directly challenge the blockade.

The squadron did what it could. A typical chase between blockader and blockade runner, if one occurred at all, usually started when the watches aboard the blockading ship spotted a blockade runner making a run. On a clear day, watches usually spotted blockades runners from twelve to sixteen miles away. In one chase Lamson's ship spotted, for example, the blockade runner *Margaret and Jesse* and alerted two other ships, USS *Keystone State* and the fast Army transport *Fulton*. After a five-hour chase, in which the faster *Fulton* passed Lamson's ship, *Margaret and Jesse*



Confederate ironclads threatened the Union in North Carolina's rivers. Shown here are the dimensions of an ironclad as told to Union officials by two different witnesses. Due to the shallow depths of the rivers and shorelines, Lee and his Army counterparts realized early on that they could not stop the future Albemarle *with only the ships on hand. (HRNM image)*



The coastal towns of northeast North Carolina were important for the Union to control to keep them from being used as ports of call for blockade runners and privateers. The towns were also as valuable recruitment grounds for the Navy. (Library of Congress image)

stopped and surrendered. The Navy took the blockade runner and made her into warship. Commissioned USS *Gettysburg*, the Navy later put Lamson in charge of her.

Often the best way to "capture" a blockade runner was not by physically boarding it, but rather forcing the its captain to make a mistake. Blockade runners were built for speed and not for agility. Once a captain committed his ship to run the blockade, he had little room for navigation errors. In October 1863, three blockade runner captains made such errors while being chased, and ran aground north of Fort Fisher.

While running a blockade runner aground was not the ideal situation for the runner's captain, it was better than being captured outright. When this situation occurred, a second contest began. With the ship in shallow waters, or even on the beach, Confederate soldiers from Fort Fisher would dash out of the fort towards the blockade runner to secure the valuable war supplies. Union sailors would put to sea in whale boats and row to the blockade runner in an attempt to either secure the cargo or burn the ship and the cargo. Both sides called in artillery support to chase off the opposing party.

In one incident, the Union party arrived first, only to be overwhelmed and captured by Confederate soldiers. In another case,

The former blockade runner Robert E. Lee *photographed in Hampton Roads as USS* Fort Donelson. *Her capture and the capture of the blockade runner* Cornubia, *led to the discovery of documents proving that British subjects provided direct aid to the Confederacy. (Library of Congress image)*

the U.S. Navy blockaders did not bother to send a landing party. When the blockade runner *Hebe* ran aground hard (she was going fourteen knots when she hit the sand bar), *Minnesota* happened to be offshore. Confederate soldiers brought up a battery of English-made Wentworth rifled cannons to provide cover fire for a recovery team. However, the artillerists and recovery team quickly withdrew when they saw that *Minnesota*'s captain had decided to turn his ship's broadside toward the shore. On board *Minnesota* was the most powerful artillery battery of the war: one 150-pounder and four 100-pounder Parrott Rifles and one XI-inch and thirty-eight IX-inch Dahlgrens. After firing over 140 shells, at the expenditure of close to one ton of gunpowder, *Hebe* was demolished beyond recognition.

As the year drew to a close, the squadron captured a slew of blockade runners. Many of these blockade runners had been very successful at their craft and their captures were well-received by the Navy's higher authorities. These captures included *Robert E. Lee*, *Ella and Annie*, and *Cornubia*. The capture of *Cornubia* was the biggest prize of them all. At 2:30 a.m. on November 9, 1863, Commander Thomas H. Patterson of USS *James Adger* forced *Cornubia* ashore. Patterson's sailors to quickly pulled the ship off the shore and began their search. Patterson's prize crew did not find much of interest until *Cornubia*'s captain opened his mouth. He told Patterson's executive officer that his ship was too small to be running guns and war materiel. Additionally, he stated that "the Confederate government could better afford to lose any other vessel."

The statement drew the boarding officer's curiosity, and he ordered his boarding team to tear the ship apart. He also told his sailors to look in the water nearby for anything that might have been thrown overboard.

Sailors found some letters in the water. The letters belonged to a Confederate Army officer who had served as a Confederate purchasing agent overseas. The letters documented financial transactions and future ship building contracts between the Confederate States of America and English shipyards. It was the first hard piece of evidence of what many in the North had suspected for some time: that some Europeans were providing direct support to the Confederacy, despite public proclamations of neutrality.

Patterson captured *Robert E. Lee* just twenty-four hours later and found more classified documents. In this case, the boarding team found letters proving that the Confederate government directly owned several blockade runners, but told its captains to hide this fact. In addition to the documents, a few British artillery officers who were coming to the South to serve as advisors on British-made guns happened to be on board.

All of this information was forwarded to Admiral Lee, who in turn forwarded it to authorities in Washington and diplomats overseas. The importance of the find is evident in the documents that were captured on November 9. Within just four weeks, Charles Adams, American ambassador to the British Empire, showed the documents to Lord Russell, the British Foreign Minster, and demanded an explanation.

As for the captured ship itself, the Navy liked *Robert E. Lee*'s qualities so much that the Department "bought" the ship from the prize court and made her into the warship USS *Fort Donelson*. The blockader runner *Ella and Annie* did not surrender quietly or attempt to beach. As the USS *Niphon* moved north up the coast, *Ella and Annie* headed south. Instead of doing what every other blockade runner did when trapped, *Ella and Annie*'s captain ordered his ship attempt to ram *Niphon*. *Niphon* dodged the ramming, which put her alongside the blockade runner, close enough for boarders to storm the ship and capture her. The Navy took *Ella and Annie* into the fleet and commissioned her USS *Malvern*.

The Squadron's captures ended the year on a busy note. It was a prelude for what promised to be an active and busy 1864.

In Our Next Issue...

-Prelude to the Great War: Hampton Roads Ships and Sailors Deploy to Vera Cruz, Mexico, 1914

-Book Reviews: Whips to Walls: Naval Discipline From Flogging to Progressive Era Reform at Portsmouth Prison *and* The Burning Shore: How Hitler's U-boats Brought World War II to America