H-Gram 063: "Battles That You've Never Heard Of," Part 2

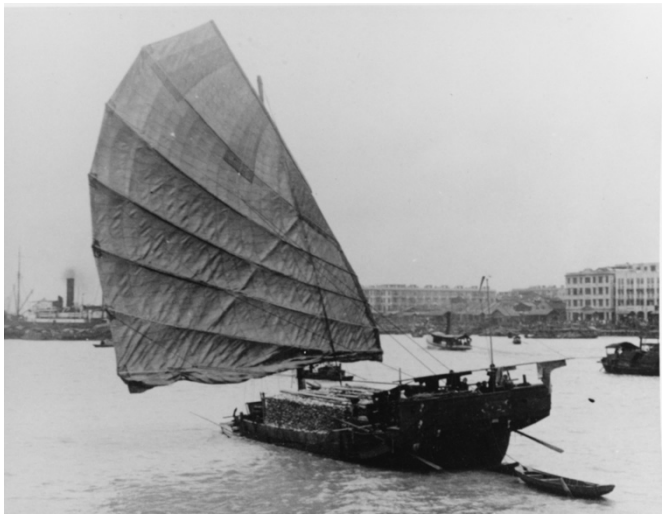
9 July 2021

Overview

This H-gram covers the Battle of the Pearl River Forts, China (1856); the Battle of Somatti, Fiji (1859; the Battle of Shimonoseki Strait, Japan (1863); the Formosa Expedition (1867); and the Battle of Ganghwa, Korea (1871). This H-gram includes cannibals!

Battle of the Pearl River Forts, China, 1856

In late 1856, as a detachment of U.S. Marines and sailors was withdrawing from the American compound in Canton, China, under a guarantee from the Chinese that U.S. interests would be protected during the outbreak of the second Opium War, a Chinese fort fired on a boat that was carrying Commander Andrew Hull Foote down the Pearl River to his ship, the sloop-of-war USS Portsmouth. *The next day, the fort fired on a U.S. survey boat, killing the coxswain. Viewing the Chinese action as an egregious breach of good faith and an affront to the U.S. flag, the commander of the U.S. East Indies Squadron, Commodore James Armstrong, authorized Foote to take punitive action against the four Chinese forts that guarded the Pearl River approach to Canton. Armstrong was ill, and his flagship, the steam screw frigate* San Jacinto*, drew too much water to go up the river.*



Eighty-one years after the Battle of the Pearl River Forts described below: A junk on the Pearl River, Canton, 1937 (NH 81676).

On 16 November 1856, two small steamships towed Portsmouth *and sloop-of-war* Levant *upstream toward the forts.* Levant *ran aground, but* Portsmouth *engaged in an hours-long gunnery duel with the forts. Although she was damaged,* Portsmouth*'s fire was much more accurate. On 20 November, with* Levant *refloated, the two sail sloops (augmented by much of* San Jacinto*'s crew) were again towed within range of the Chinese forts. Once fire from the forts was suppressed, a 287-man detachment of Marines and armed sailors went ashore and captured the first fort from the landward side, turning its guns on the other three forts. The Marines beat off a 1,000-man Chinese counterattack with the considerable help of sailors with a wheeled boat howitzer. Over the next two days, the Marine and*

Navy force sequentially captured all four forts, and then set about demolishing them with explosives. During the course of the engagement, Portsmouth *was hit 27 and* Levant *22 times, but neither suffered critical damage, mostly attributable to bad Chinese gunnery. U.S. casualties included 7 killed in action, 3 killed in a demolition accident, and 32 wounded. Chinese casualties were estimated at 250–500 dead. For more on the Battle of the Pearl River Forts please see attachment H-063-1.*

The Battle of Somatti, Fiji, 1859

The Fiji Islands were always regarded as a dangerous place to outsiders, and there had been previous skirmishes between the U.S. Navy and Fijian warriors (see H-Gram 062). In the summer of 1859, Fijian tribesmen on the island of Waya killed and cannibalized two American merchant seamen. The American consul in Fiji requested that the just-arrived sloop-of-war USS Vandalia *take punitive action. As the water around Waya was too shallow for* Vandalia*, her skipper, Commander Arthur Sinclair, chartered the schooner* Mechanic*. Under the command of Lieutenant Charles Caldwell,* Mechanic *headed toward Waya with a party of 10 Marines, 40 sailors (with a 12-pounder lightweight wheeled boat howitzer), and three Fijian guides. After a harrowing nighttime climb up the steep mountainside, during which the howitzer got loose and fell down a 2,300-foot cliff, the landing party reached the summit at daybreak to find the Fijian warriors in full "battle dress" ready and waiting outside the village of Somatti. Despite their fearsome reputation, the warriors were no match for Marine rifles, nor did they appear ready to comprehend and counter a "flanking maneuver." At least 14 Somatti warriors were killed, including two chiefs, before they retreated into the jungle. Six Americans were wounded. The gun crew then proceeded to burn down the 115-hut village. A number of other Fijian tribes were appreciative of the U.S. action in that they had also been victimized by the Somatti. In the end, Fiji became a British colony, and a British problem. For more on the Battle of Somatti, please see attachment H-063-2.*

The Battle of Shimonoseki Strait, Japan, 1863

The "opening of Japan" by Commodore Mathew Perry in 1854, with steam warships and shell guns, did not meet with universal acclaim among the daimyo *(feudal lords) of Japan. For the first time in centuries, the emperor became actively involved in the affairs of state as the Tokugawa Shogunate lost face and power as a result of acceding to Perry's demands. In the spring of 1863, with the U.S. pre-occupied by the Civil War, Emperor Komei issued an "expel the barbarians" order. On the night of 25–26 June 1863, in defiance of the Shogunate, but in accord with the Emperor's edict, ships of the Choshu* daimyo *fired on the American merchant ship* Pembroke *at the entrance to the Shimonoseki Strait (which connects the Inland Sea with the East China Sea). Choshu guns from six forts overlooking the strait subsequently fired on and hit French and Dutch ships in the next days. (Five of the guns were new 8-inch Dahlgren guns, courtesy of the United States.) Although the emperor's order applied to all Western nations, the United States was the first to react.*

On 16 July 1863, the steam screw sloop USS Wyoming *(the only U.S. ship in the Far East at the time), under the command of Commander David McDougal, entered the Shimonoseki Strait ready for battle, expecting to be fired on. The Choshu did not disappoint. As soon as* Wyoming *was in range, all six forts opened up with a tremendous cannonade. However, McDougal had noted the range stakes in the strait, deducing that the Japanese had calibrated their guns to hit ships in the channel. Instead, McDougal steered so close to the shore that Japanese cannon balls missed 10–15 feet above the deck, tearing up the rigging and perforating the smokestack, but doing no serious damage. McDougal then headed toward the three armed Choshu ships at the far end of the channel, a sail bark, sail brig, and a steamer (all previously purchased from the United States).*

Wyoming *passed the bark starboard-to-starboard at pistol-shot range as both ships emptied broadsides into the other. The heavier U.S. weapons were far more effective, although the Japanese got off three broadsides.* Wyoming *then did the same to the brig, leaving her in sinking condition.*

Wyoming *then passed the steamer port to port and engaged her with portside guns. She turned to port behind the steamer in order to open the range and use her two 11-inch Dahlgren pivot guns. In doing so,* Wyoming *ran aground. The steamer slipped her anchor and made a run at the screw sloop, either to ram or board, but* Wyoming *backed off in time. A well-aimed 11-inch shell passed clean through the steamer, but blew her boiler, causing her to sink in less than two minutes.* Wyoming *then re-engaged the brig with 11-inch guns and accelerated her trip to the bottom. The screw sloop put more rounds into the bark, leaving her severely damaged, and then worked over the forts until they were silent.* Wyoming *actually conserved ammunition because her primary mission was to engage the Confederate raider CSS* Alabama*, which was not in the Far East yet.* Wyoming *was hit in the hull 11 times and suffered five dead and six wounded. Japanese casualties are unknown, but were probably considerable as the ships were described as "heavily manned."*

McDougal believed that the Choshu had gotten the intended message. However, they raised the sunken ships, re-armed the forts, and continued to block the strait for another 15 months. Finally, in early September 1864, a combined 18-ship British, French, Dutch, and U.S. force attacked the Choshu again. The U.S. contribution was token. By that time, the only U.S. ship in the region was the sail sloop USS Jamestown*, and all the other ships of the other navies were steam-powered, making her more of a liability. As a result,* Jamestown*'s skipper, Captain Cicero Price, chartered the steam ship* Ta-Kiang*, put a 30-pounder Parrott gun on board along with 18 American crewmen, including a lieutenant and the surgeon, and then placed the ship under the command of the British admiral (which may have been a first). In the Second Battle of Shimonoseki Strait,* Ta-Kiang *performed useful service towing boats with British troops ashore and serving as a hospital ship for the "allied" force.*

The end-result of these actions was a civil war in Japan (the "Boshin War" in 1868–69), in which forces siding with the emperor (Komei's son, Meiji) gained the upper hand. However, the Tokugawa navy, led by Vice Admiral Enomoto Takeaki, refused to surrender and attempted to establish an independent republic on Hokkaido. The imperial forces cobbled together a fleet of ships from several daimyo *(including the Choshu). The Tokugawa had purchased an ironclad ram from the United States in 1867. She was originally built in France for the Confederate Navy and commissioned as CSS* Stonewall*, although she didn't reach the United States until after the Civil War ended. The United States held up delivery during the Boshin War, until it was obvious the Meiji forces were going to win (and Meiji wasn't nearly as anti-foreign as his father). In the hands of the imperial navy,* Stonewall *(re-named* Kotetsu*—literally "Ironclad") played a decisive role in the naval battle of Hakodate in 1869, in which the renegade Tokugawa navy was defeated (the action is considered the birth of the Imperial Japanese Navy).*

President Theodore Roosevelt wrote, "Had that action [Shimonoseki Strait] taken place at any other time than the Civil War, its fame would have echoed all over the world." For more on the Battle of Shimonoseki Strait, please see attachment H-063-3.

The Formosa Expedition, 1867

In March of 1867, aboriginal Paiwan warriors massacred the crew (including the captain's wife) of the American merchant bark Rover*, which had wrecked on the southern tip of Formosa. In June, the United States launched a punitive expedition. (Regular steamship service from the United States*

to the Far East had recently been instituted, enabling Washington to become involved and accelerate or delay overseas operations—compare with Wyoming*'s deployment at Shimonoseki Strait.)*

On 13 June, the U.S. East Indies flagship, screw sloop USS Hartford *(of Civil War, Admiral Farragut, and "damn the torpedoes" fame) and USS* Wyoming *arrived off the area where* Rover *had wrecked. A force of 181 Marines and sailors, under the overall command of Commander George E. Belknap, went ashore. In a poorly conceived operation, with no intelligence as to the objective and terrain, nor even much of a plan upon reaching the objective other than to "punish the Paiwan," the American forces thrashed around for hours in the steaming-hot jungle in two columns. The Paiwan were not taken by surprise and their defense consisted of a version of "rope-a-dope." The mostly unseen Paiwan would loose spears, stones, and occasional musket fire, causing the Marines and sailors to charge until they were exhausted. With much of the force delirious and suffering from sunstroke and heat exhaustion, including the prostrate Commander Belknap, a Paiwan musket ball found its mark and mortally wounded Lieutenant Commander Alexander Slidell MacKenzie, leader of one of the columns. At this point, Belknap had had enough and the U.S. force withdrew. Paiwan casualties, if any, were unknown. Although an apparent failure, the expedition actually did impress the Paiwan, who subsequently signed an agreement with the U.S. consul not to kill any more shipwrecked sailors, to which they mostly adhered. For more on the Formosa Expedition, please see attachment H-063-4.*

The Battle of Ganghwa, Korea, 1871

In August 1866, the American-flagged armed merchant schooner General Sherman *sailed up the Taedong River to Pyongyang despite repeated Korean warnings to leave. Depending on the account, the purpose of* General Sherman*'s voyage was to open trade with isolationist Korea, loot Korean royal tombs, or spread the Gospel. Along the way, the schooner left Bibles on the riverbank, took a senior Korean official hostage and demanded ransom, fired on a crowd ashore (killing five), and ran aground. After several days of skirmishing, the governor of Pyongyang had had enough and ordered the ship destroyed by fire raft. The entire crew of* General Sherman *burned or drowned, except two who made it to shore and were beaten to death by an angry mob.*

In May 1871, the U.S. Asiatic Squadron showed up to do something about it. Under the command of Rear Admiral John Rodgers (son of War of 1812 hero John Rodgers), the force included the flagship, screw frigate USS Colorado*; two new screw sloops of war, USS* Alaska *and USS* Benicia*; and two sidewheel gunboats, USS* Monocacy *and the smaller USS* Palos*. Embarked on* Colorado *was the U.S. minister to China, Frederick Low, as the primary stated mission of the force was to open trade with Korea and also investigate what had really happened to* General Sherman*. Attempts at diplomacy were stymied, as the Koreans steadfastly refused to negotiate and demanded that the U.S. force leave.*

On 1 June, four U.S. steam launches, supported by the two gunboats, commenced a survey of the Salee River, which separates the island of Ganghwa from the Korean mainland and leads to the Han River, which in turn leads to the Korean capital of Seoul. Without warning, Korean forts on both sides of the river opened fire, which fortunately was inaccurate. The steam launches immediately returned fire with their boat howitzers, quickly joined by the heavier guns of the gunboats. The U.S. vessels eventually withdrew in the treacherous currents after Monocacy *was damaged when she hit an uncharted rock.*

Although the U.S. vessels were clearly in what today would be considered internal territorial waters, violating Korean sovereignty, in the 1800s the U.S. and European powers assumed the right

to steam anywhere in non-Western nations they pleased. Rodgers and Minister Low were outraged that the Koreans had had the temerity to fire on U.S. ships. The Koreans were given 10 days to apologize and commence serious trade negotiations. After 10 days with no satisfactory response from the Koreans, Rodgers commenced a punitive phase of the operation.

On 10 June, the steam launches and gunboats returned to the Salee River (the bigger ships couldn't enter due to draft), this time towing 22 boats with a landing party of 109 Marines, 542 sailors, and 7 wheeled boat howitzers. The gunboats engaged the southernmost forts on the left (west) bank, fortunately causing most of the defenders to retreat. This was a lucky break, as the landing "beach" turned out to be a wide stretch of knee-deep muck. The Marines were able to capture the first fort in short order, but dragging the guns through the mud turned into an all-day affair under a blazing sun.

On 11 June, the Navy-Marine advance continued up the west bank of the river through very difficult terrain, capturing a second fort with the aid of naval gunfire (although Palos *hit a rock and was forced out of the battle), and fighting through ambushes and small-scale counterattacks by Koreans with antiquated weapons that were no match for U.S. Remington rifles and howitzers. By noon, the U.S. force was within 150 yards of the most formidable of the forts on the west bank, defended by about 300 Koreans (considered an elite force) commanded by General Eo Jae-yeon. Realizing the Koreans only had single-shot weapons, mostly old matchlocks, about 350 Marines and sailors rushed the fort and scaled the ramparts. The Koreans resorted to throwing stones and spears, and the battle quickly turned into a 15-minute close-quarters melee, in which superior U.S. weapons overcame considerable Korean bravery. General Eo was killed by a Marine sharpshooter and the Koreans finally broke and fled toward the river, where many were trapped by Americans still outside the fort and were cut down by howitzers. Many drowned in the river and many committed suicide rather than surrender.*

As the American assault on the fort culminated, a force of about 4,000–5,000 Koreans was forming up for a counterattack from the landward side. At the same time, the one fort on the opposite side of the river opened fire, but was suppressed by fire from Monocacy. *The howitzers ashore kept the large Korean force at bay thanks to a timely resupply of ammunition from* Monocacy. *When the Koreans realized the fort had fallen, they opted not to press the counterattack.*

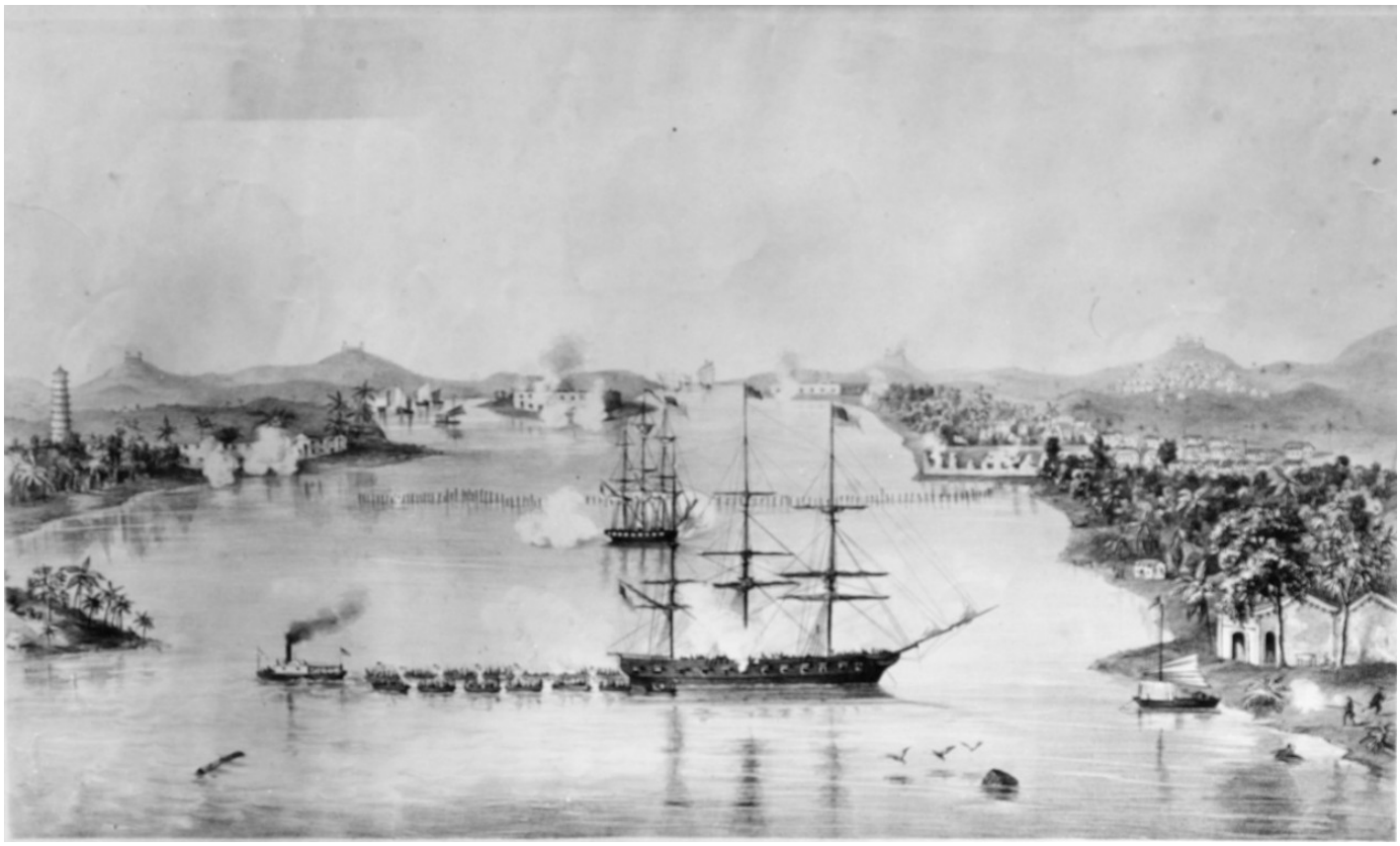
American casualties in the operation were three dead and ten wounded (and others temporarily felled by sunstroke). The two gunboats were damaged by rocks in the river and were in need of repair. Fifteen Medals of Honor were subsequently awarded (nine to sailors and five to Marines), almost all for the hand-to-hand battle inside the last fort. This was the first time the award had been presented for operations against an overseas foreign adversary. Korean casualties included 243 corpses counted of an estimated total of 350 dead. The forts on the west bank were all demolished and over 40 guns captured or destroyed.

Minister Low seemed chagrined that the carnage in the forts did not make the Koreans any more inclined to negotiate a trade treaty. The force ashore was withdrawn to the ships on 12 June. After waiting in placve for another two weeks with no formal response from the Koreans (local officials refused to even forward letters to the regent of Korea, the Daewongun, for fear of his wrath). On 3 July, Rodgers's force steamed away with no trade treaty and little to show except for a daring, well-executed operation and a lot of dead Koreans, who were merely defending their country. The devastation of the Ganghwa forts did give impetus to factions in the Korean government who favored opening trade, at least enough to acquire decent weaponry. However, it was the Japanese who gained the advantage following a

short battle at Ganghwa Island in 1875, which resulted in a Japanese-Korean trade treaty in 1876. The United States finally got a trade treaty with Korea in 1882. For more on the Battle of Ganghwa, please see attachment H-063-5.

As always, you are welcome to disseminate H-grams widely. One reason these battles are largely forgotten is that they are examples of what became derisively known as "gunboat diplomacy." Although at the time the United States was not considered an imperial power (as we had no aspirations for colonies or more territory—although Mexico might dispute that), we exhibited the same attitude of superiority toward Asians, Africans, and South Americans that the European powers did. Although national policy and the decisions of senior U.S. Navy commanders are open to debate, what is not debatable is that the ordinary U.S. sailors did their duty as their country asked, with extraordinary courage, innovation, and skill, in a harsh and unforgiving environment.

"Back issues" of H-grams, enhanced with photographs, may be found here [https://www.history.navy.mil/about-us/leadership/director/directors-corner/h-grams.html].



The attack on the barrier forts on the Pearl River near Canton, China, by the American squadron, 21 November 1856. The force consisted of *Portsmouth*, *Levant*, and steam frigate *San Jacinto.* Landing parties were commanded by Captain Foot (*Portsmouth*), Captain Bell (*San Jacinto*), and Captain Smith (*Levant*) (NH 56895).

H-Gram 063-1: The Battle of the Pearl River Forts, China, 1856

H-Gram 063, Attachment 1
Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC
July 2021

The Nuku Hiva Campaign, Marquesas Islands, Polynesia, 1813–14

In 1856, the Taiping Rebellion against the Qing (Ching) dynasty in China was still raging, resulting in the deaths of millions of Chinese and breakdown of law and order. That October, the Second Opium War broke out between the British and Qing China, this time with France joining in with the British (the First Opium War, 1839–42, was between the British and Qing China). As in the First Opium War, the Chinese were trying to keep opium out. Opium was the primary commodity that Britain and other Western countries used to trade for Chinese goods (i.e., the Europeans were the "pushers"). With the outbreak of the Second Opium War, Chinese factions increasingly threatened the interests of all foreign nations in China, including those of the United States, in particular at Canton (now Guangzhou). Canton was one of five Chinese ports open to trade with the West and had a significant U.S. commercial presence. The city is a number of miles up the Pearl River, which enters the sea between Macau to the south and Hong Kong to the north.

With the apparent rapidly increasing threats to U.S. citizens and interests, the American consul in Canton, Oliver H. Perry (son of Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry), requested help from Commander Andrew Hull Foote, commanding officer of the sloop-of-war USS *Portsmouth*, then at anchor off Whampoa, about eight miles

downstream from Canton, having arrived on 23 October.

Portsmouth, commissioned in 1844, had a crew of about 200 officers and sailors, and was originally armed with two 64-pounder Paixhans "shell guns" and 18 medium 32-pounder broadside guns. (Paixhans guns were the first guns designed to fire exploding shells instead of solid shot. Designed by the French, they were quickly adopted by the U.S. Navy in the 1840s until superseded by the safer and more powerful Dahlgren guns in the late 1850s.) However, *Portsmouth* had been ungraded with 16 new 8-inch Dahlgren shell guns before being assigned to the East India squadron. She had the distinction during the Mexican-American War of landing the force that captured Yerba Buena (later to become San Francisco, California) on 9 January 1846. *Portsmouth* had departed the U.S. West Coast in May 1856, with Commander Foote in command, to join the U.S. East Indies Squadron.

Andrew Hull Foote began his naval career as a midshipman in 1822 on board the 10-gun schooner USS *Grampus* (lost in a storm with all 25 hands in 1843—see H-Gram 060). Foote was aboard 30-gun frigate USS *John Adams* for her 1838–42 circumnavigation of the earth, including participation in the Battle of Muckie (see H-Gram 062). While aboard the 50-gun frigate USS *Cumberland*, Foote formed a temperance society, which would ultimately lead to the end of grog rations aboard U.S. ships by 1862 (*Cumberland* would be the first ship sunk by the Confederate ironclad CSS *Virginia*—ex-USS *Merrimack*—in 1862). In 1849–51, Foote commanded the 8-gun brig USS *Perry* on West African slave trade–suppression duty. Foote was an outspoken abolitionist. He was promoted to commander in 1856 and given command of *Portsmouth*.

On 23 October 1856, Foote wasted no time in leading a party ashore into Canton by small boat. It was made up of five officers (one a Marine), 60 sailors with a boat howitzer, and 18 Marines.

There was no opposition to the landing by the Chinese forts guarding the Pearl River approach to Canton. Between Whampoa and Canton, the Pearl River was covered by four Chinese forts (two on the north bank, one on the south bank and one on an island in the center of the river). Between them, the forts had 176 guns, some as large as 8-inch and 10-inch calibers, and were well-constructed using the latest European designs. Chinese troops in the forts and in the vicinity of Canton numbered several thousand. The small U.S. Navy and Marine force took up positions on rooftops and in some new fortifications around the American compound in the city.

On 27 October, a second sloop-of-war, USS *Levant*, arrived at Whampoa. *Levant* added another 20 Marines, a detachment of sailors, and another boat howitzer to the U.S. compound in Canton, bringing the total ashore to about 150. (The foreign compounds, known as "factories," lined the riverbank outside the walls of the city itself.) On 3 November, there was an exchange of gunfire between U.S. sentries ashore and Chinese troops, but no U.S. personnel were hurt. The American steamer *Cum Fa* also reported being fired on. As this was going on, a British assault force had forced its way into Canton. A few Americans accompanied the British and waved the U.S. flag from the breached city wall, which Foote immediately put a stop to as it compromised U.S. neutrality.

Levant was commanded by Commander William B. Smith. Commissioned in 1838, with a crew of about 200, the vessel had an older weapons fit than *Portsmouth* consisting of 18 "short" 32-pounder broadside guns, although her four 24-pounder long guns had been replaced by four new 8-inch Dahlgren guns. During the Mexican War, *Levant* was part of the squadron that captured Monterey, California, in July 1846. After serving in the Mediterranean for several years, *Levant* joined the East Indies Squadron in May 1856.

On 12 November, the screw frigate USS *San Jacinto* arrived at Whampoa from Shanghai with Commodore James Armstrong embarked as the commander of the U.S. East Indies Squadron. Armstrong had begun his career as a midshipman aboard the 22-gun sloop-of-war USS *Frolic* when she was captured on 20 April 1814 after a running gun battle with 36-gun frigate HMS *Orpheus* and 12-gun schooner HMS *Shelburne*. He had been promoted to commodore and given command of the East Indies Squadron in 1855.

The steam-powered *San Jacinto* was built as an experimental vessel and was one of the first in the U.S. Navy propelled by a screw propeller instead of sidewheel paddles. She was armed with six 8-inch smoothbore shell guns. (By now, you should be getting a sense of the logistics challenges as U.S. ships were armed with all kinds of different guns during this period.) First commissioned in 1851 or 1852 (records are missing), her steam engines were troublesome throughout her entire service life. After extensive repair, she was recommissioned in October 1855, under the command of Captain Henry H. Bell.

San Jacinto departed New York on 25 October 1855 and transited via the Madeira, Cape of Good Hope, Mauritius, Ceylon, Penang, and Singapore, where Commodore Armstrong relieved Commodore Joel Abbott in command of the squadron. *San Jacinto* then took U.S. envoy Townsend Harris to Siam, where he negotiated a trade treaty with the King of Siam, Mongkut (who would later be very inaccurately portrayed in the musical *The King and I*). *San Jacinto* then took Harris to Shimoda, Japan, to establish the first foreign diplomatic mission on Japanese soil (this leg of the voyage took several months until August 1856, as *San Jacinto*'s engines kept breaking down).

Upon arriving at Whampoa, Armstrong conferred with Foote, who came down river by boat. Although Armstrong concurred with the actions that Foote had taken in putting Marines and sailors ashore to protect the American compound, he also believed it would be considered a provocation. While seeking to open negotiations with Chinese authorities in Canton, Armstrong nevertheless ordered 28 more Marines (from *San Jacinto*) to go ashore under the command of Marine Captain John D. Simms, who would assume command of the combined Navy and Marine force ashore. Armstrong and Foote were both aware of the extreme danger posed by the Chinese forts to U.S. personnel and supplies transiting via the river between Whampoa and Canton. They considered making the transits at night, but opted against it, thinking the Chinese might also consider that a provocation.

Despite the tense atmosphere, the American consul and Chinese authorities in Canton reached an agreement that the United States would not intervene in the war between China and Britain and France, and the Chinese would guarantee the safety of U.S. interests in Canton. As a result, the Americans agreed to withdraw the Navy-Marine force from the city, only leaving Commander Smith and a small number of Marines. Armstrong decided that *Portsmouth* and *San Jacinto* would remain at Whampoa, while *Levant* would move upstream to Canton as a contingency.

On the evening of 15 November, Foote was in the last boat rowing down the river when the largest fort opened fire with five rounds. No one was hit, but Armstrong and Foote were incensed at this apparent breach of good faith, and viewed it as an insult to the U.S. flag (which was flying on Foote's boat). The next day, Armstrong ordered a small unarmed boat from *San Jacinto* to proceed up the river to take soundings in support of possible movement of his ships upstream. When the survey boat drew within a half mile of the first fort, the Chinese opened fire with both round shot and grapeshot (anti-personnel rounds). The first volley went long right over the boat. In a second volley, the grape hit astern, but a round shot hit and killed the coxswain. The third volley was short. The survey boat returned downstream.

While this was going on, the American steamer *Cum Fa* towed the boats with the withdrawing force down river unmolested.

Armstrong decided that this outrage could not go unanswered. He shifted his flag from *San Jacinto* to *Portsmouth* because *San Jacinto* drew too much water to proceed much further upstream from Whampoa. Most of her crew was cross-decked to *Portsmouth* and *Levant*. Commander Bell assumed command of *Levant* as Smith was still in Canton.

At 1500 on 16 November, *Portsmouth* and *Levant* went to battle stations and began moving upstream under tow by two small American merchant steamships, *Cum Fa* and *Willamette*, with the intent to bombard the Chinese forts. Due to the narrow channel and current, this would be a risky proposition because the two ships would be stationary at anchor. *Levant* ran aground before coming in range of the first fort. *Portsmouth* continued toward the forts and, at 1530, anchored 500 yards from the closest one. All the Chinese forts opened fire, but most shots passed through the rigging with little damage. *Portsmouth* returned fire, with much greater accuracy. The bombardment by both sides went on until sunset, with *Portsmouth* firing 230 shells plus grapeshot at the fort. She was hit in the hull six times, only one hit considered serious, and grapeshot tore up her rigging, but the ship was not seriously damaged and only one Marine was badly wounded.

Levant was refloated overnight and towed into range. There was a lull for the next three days as the Chinese did not seem inclined to renew the battle. Armstrong attempted to negotiate with the Chinese to no avail and then suddenly took ill. He returned to *San Jacinto* and turned over command to Foote with instructions not to fire unless the Chinese attacked. However, faced with four granite forts, the strongest in China, with 176 guns and reports of somewhere between 5,000 and 15,000 Chinese troops in the Canton area, Foote determined that the best course of action was to attack. On 19 November, Armstrong gave Foote orders to take any action necessary to forestall a Chinese attack, exactly the longer leash Foote wanted.

On the morning of 20 November, on Foote's orders, *Portsmouth* and *Levant* (with Commander Smith back in command) were maneuvered into firing position by the steamships and opened fire on the forts. The forts returned fire within five minutes, slackening only after about an hour. The ships provided covering fire as three columns of boats put 287 men ashore, led personally by Foote. The initial landing was unopposed, although two apprentice boys were killed by the accidental discharge of a rifle. The first objective was the downstream fort on the north bank. About 50 Marines under Captain Simms and a detachment of sailors with a howitzer went up the bluff, through a village, and assaulted the fort from the rear. Although the fort was strong, the Chinese troops were poorly trained, poorly led, and unmotivated. Most of the Chinese troops fled, some jumping into the river. About 40 or 50 Chinese were killed, mostly as they were fleeing.

However, it didn't take long for a Chinese force to counterattack. The Marines had chased the Chinese through the village and into the rice paddies, when soon they were attacked by about 1,000 Chinese reinforcements coming from Canton. Sims ordered his men to hold fire until the Chinese were within 200 yards. The Chinese suffered numerous casualties, but initially stood their ground despite accurate fire from the Marines. Fire from the boat howitzers on wheeled carriages also inflicted many casualties. The Chinese tried to attack two more times before they were finally beaten back, broke, and fled. Americans turned some of the guns of this fort against the next one upstream on the north shore (referred to as the "Center Fort"). The other fort responded and one shot sank *Portsmouth*'s launch. At the end of the day, Foote and Smith

returned to the ships, leaving Commander Bell in charge ashore.

Just before dawn on 21 November, the Chinese fort on the south bank (referred to as "Fiddler's Fort") opened fire on *Portsmouth*, scoring a hit with an 8-inch round near the waterline. Two rounds of return fire from *Portsmouth*'s 8-inch guns ended the duel. Both ships bombarded Fiddler's Fort as *Cum Fa* towed lines of boats with Marines and sailors across the river from the fort captured the previous day. The three Chinese forts divided their fire between the two U.S. warships and the boat lines. Chinese fire was heavy but wildly inaccurate, although one 68-pound shot ripped through *San Jacinto*'s launch, killing three and wounding seven Americans. Once again, Simms led his men up and behind the fort. The garrison fled ahead of the Marines' assault, and this time about a 1,000 Chinese stayed out of range of the boat howitzers.

After taking the second fort, Simms' Marines cleared the shoreline, encountering a seven-gun Chinese battery outside the fort. The surprised Chinese fled and Simms destroyed the guns. By this time, the U.S. force had turned the guns of the first two forts against the remaining two, and by nightfall the third fort, located on the island in the river, had been abandoned and fell easily.

During the night, the U.S. force spiked all Chinese artillery that would not be useful in the assault against the last and strongest fort, on the opposite bank of the river. ("Spiking" a cannon means to drive a metal rod or large nail into the touchhole so that the cannon can't be fired. Technically this only temporarily disabled the gun, but getting the spike back out was extremely difficult.) The most capable captured Chinese guns were trained on the last fort.

At first light on 22 November, an American howitzer fired on the last fort, with no response. More artillery fired on the fort, again with no response. Three lines of American boats began moving across the river, under cover of a heavy barrage from both U.S. and captured Chinese guns. Only as the American boats reached the shore did the Chinese finally open fire with a hail of grapeshot, virtually all of which passed overhead. By the time the Marines had waded ashore and through heavy muck, the Chinese had abandoned the fort after disabling the guns, leaving one loaded cannon with a lit fuse pointed in the general direction of the boats. Marines snuffed the fuse before the gun fired. Over the next days, Foote's force beat off several large but ineffectual Chinese counterattacks, the most vigorous a surprise night attack on 26 November.

During the bombardments, *Levant* was hit 22 times in the hull and rigging, suffering one dead and six wounded. *Portsmouth* was hit 27 times. Neither ship was seriously damaged.

Once in control of all four forts, Foote's force proceeded to destroy them. All remaining operable Chinese guns were spiked and then rolled into the river. The walls were blown up by demolition teams. On 5 December, an accidental spark prematurely ignited powder being placed under the wall of the last fort, killing three men of the demolition team and wounding seven others. On 6 December, *Portsmouth* and *Levant* moved back downstream to join *San Jacinto* at Whampoa (this time, *Portsmouth* ran aground and had to be refloated).

When the battle was over, the four strongest forts in China were ruined, with as many as 250–500 Chinese killed. U.S. casualties included seven killed in action and three killed in the demolition accident, along with 32 wounded. Somewhat amazingly, no Marines were killed, although one subsequently died from illness.

The destruction of the Pearl River forts brought about a mixed outcome. Chinese authorities in Canton quickly issued an apology for the unprovoked attack on 16 November. In the words of a Marine Corps history, "Foote had avenged an

insult to the American flag and made certain that the Chinese at Canton would behave in the future." Nevertheless, after the American consul and remaining Americans withdrew from Canton, the Chinese burned down the foreign compounds. In the aftermath of the event, Foote came under considerable criticism for being overly belligerent, and there were those who believed the entire action was unnecessary and could have been avoided. Other critics blasted Commodore Armstrong for not being aggressive enough. Regardless, the United States and China subsequently signed a neutrality agreement, which both sides honored except for one U.S. infraction during the combined Anglo-French assault on the Chinese forts at Taku on the Hai River in June 1859.

The Chinese actually learned much from their defeat at the Pearl River forts that they incorporated into their defense of the Taku forts. Under a much more able commander, the Chinese gave the Anglo-French force a decisive defeat. The British lost three gunboats sunk, three run aground, 81 killed, and 345 wounded. The French suffered 12 killed and 23 wounded. Both British and French admirals were wounded. The commander of the U.S. East Indies Squadron, Commodore Josiah Tattnall (who had relieved Armstrong) was observing the battle from the chartered steamer *Toey-Wan* (ex-HMS *Eaglet*), when he decided to assist the British by towing some of their boats, One American was killed and another wounded.

Following the Battle of the Pearl River Forts, Commodore Armstrong returned to the U.S. in poor health. He was in command of the Pensacola Navy Yard when Florida voted to secede from the Union in January 1861 and surrendered the facility a few days later (four months before South Carolina fired on Fort Sumter, starting the Civil War). Captain Henry Bell, commander of *San Jacinto*, fought for the Union in the Civil War and returned to the Far East as commander of the East Indies Squadron. He was killed in a boat accident at Osaka, Japan, in 1868, becoming the first rear admiral to die in the line of duty (I think). Two ships were named after Bell: *Wickes*-class destroyer DD-95 (1917–22) and *Fletcher*-class destroyer DD-587 (1943–46, 12 Battle Stars).

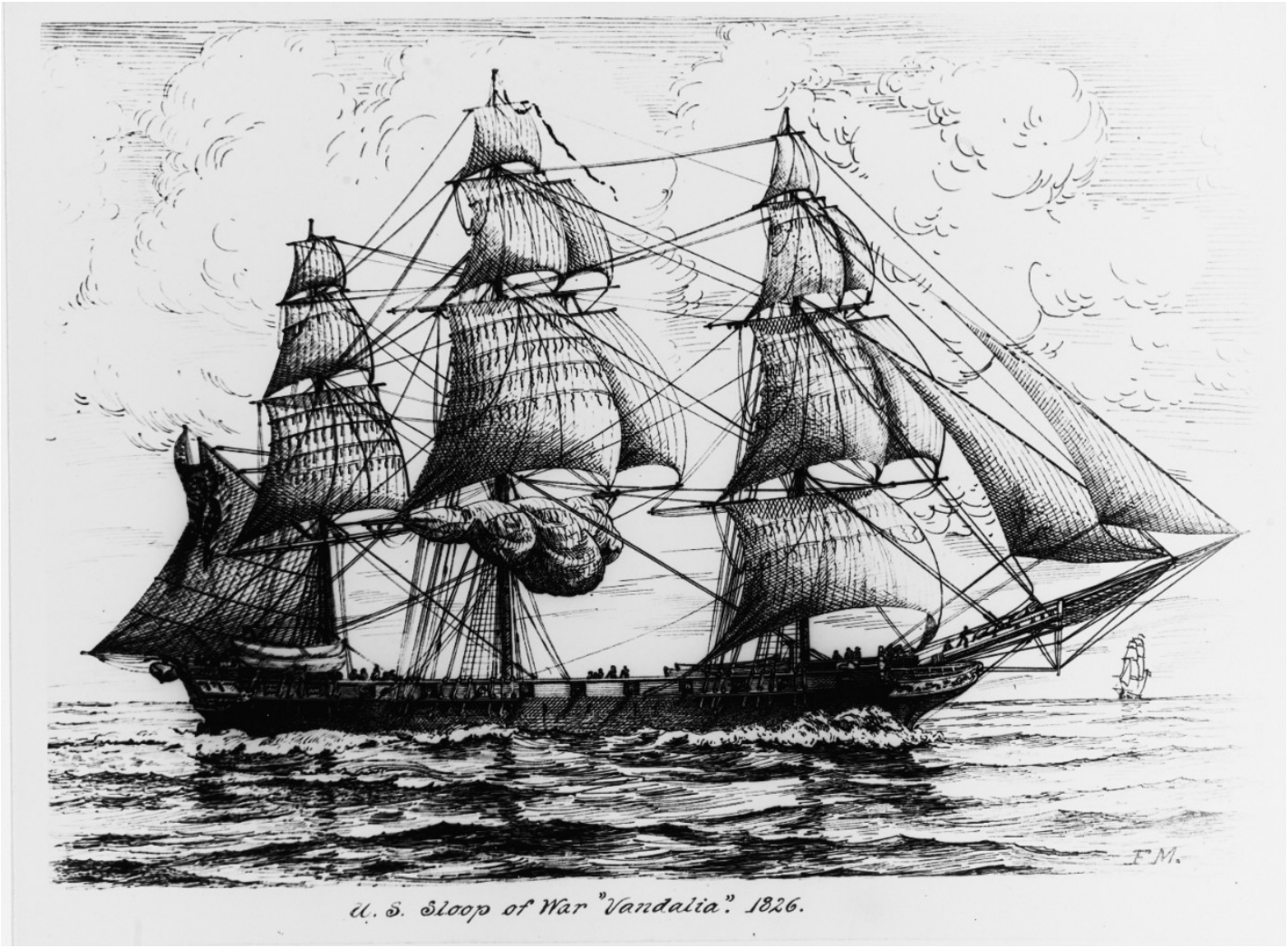
Commander Foote, commander of *Portsmouth*, went on to a very distinguished war record during the Civil War in command of the Mississippi Gunboat Flotilla during the battles of Fort Henry, Fort Donaldson, and Island No. 10. Foote was promoted to rear admiral in 1862, but died shortly after of natural causes. Three ships were named after Foote: *Foote*-class torpedo boat *TB-3* (1896–1920), *Wickes*-class destroyer DD-169 (1918, lend-lease to Britain in 1940, lend-lease to Soviet Union in 1944, scrapped 1952), and *Fletcher*-class destroyer DD-511 (1942–46, four Battle Stars). Fort Foote on the Potomac was also named for him in 1863.

San Jacinto served in the Africa Squadron in 1859–61, where she captured the slave ship *Storm King* near the mouth of the Congo River, and returned 616 Black slaves to Africa. During the early Civil War, under the command of Captain Charles Wilkes, *San Jacinto* became famous for her involvement in the "Trent Affair," a flagrant violation of British neutrality by Wilkes (see H-Gram 062). After otherwise creditable service during the war, *San Jacinto* ran aground on a reef in the Bahamas in 1865; the crew was saved, but the ship could not be.

Portsmouth departed the Far East in 1858, served during the Civil War, and then served as a training ship between 1878 and 1915. *Levant* was assigned to the Pacific Squadron in 1859. She disappeared with all 155 hands after departing Hilo, Hawaii, on 18 September 1860 (see H-Gram 060/H-060-2).

Sources include: The Battle of the Barrier Forts*, by Bernard C. Nalty, Marine Corps Historical Reference Series No. 6, Historical Branch G-3 , December 1958;* Far China Station: The U.S. Navy

in Asian Waters, 1800–1898*, by Robert Erwin Johnson, Naval Institute Press, 2013; and the NHHC* Dictionary of American Fighting Ships *(DANFS)*.



F. Muller, *U.S. Sloop of War* Vandalia*, 1826*, photo of original sketch (NH 43851).

H-Gram 063-2: The Battle of Somatti, Fiji, 1859

H-Gram 063, Attachment 2
Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC
July 2021

In the summer of 1859, two American merchant sailors were killed and eaten by tribesmen on the island of Waya in the Fiji Islands. When the American Consul on Ovalau, Fiji, learned of the incident, he requested that the sloop-of-war USS *Vandalia*, recently arrived from Panama, launch a punitive expedition against the offending Wayan tribe.

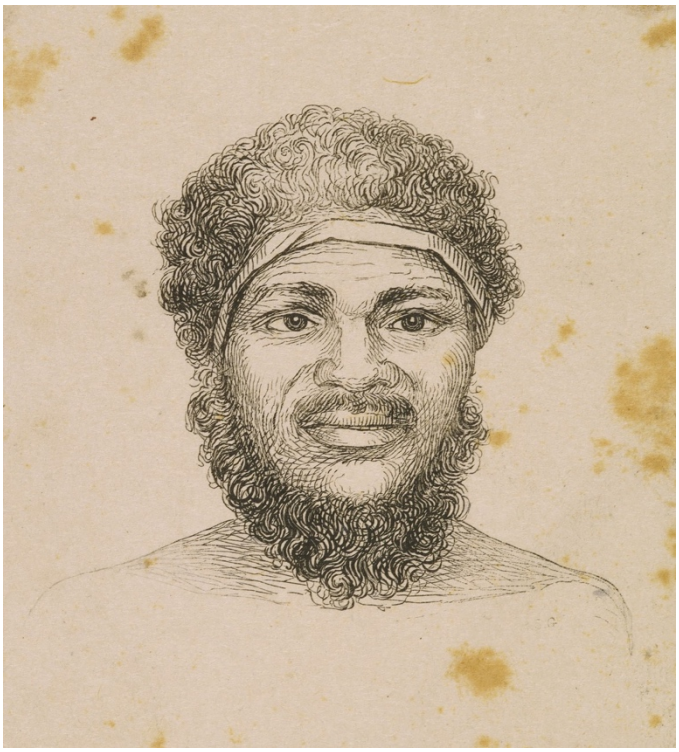
Fiji had a long-standing reputation for being dangerous to outsiders, and there were a number of recorded incidents of shipwrecked sailors being killed. During the first official U.S. Navy visit to Fiji in 1840 by Lieutenant Charles Wilkes's U.S. Exploring Expedition, natives had killed and mutilated Lieutenant Joseph Underwood and Midshipman Henry Wilkes (Wilkes's nephew). In retaliation, Wilkes landed about 60 Marines and sailors, torched two villages and killed about 80 Fijian natives (see H-Gram 062).

Trouble in Fiji flared again in 1849 when the house owned by U.S. agent John Brown Williams

was hit by cannon fire from natives reportedly celebrating U.S. Independence Day. By 1855, civil war had broken out on the islands, and Williams' house and store were burned and looted, as were other American-owned property. At that time, one of the stronger chiefs in Fiji, Seru Epenisa Cakabou, the Vunivalu of Bau, had proclaimed himself Tui Viti (King of Fiji). Not all the chiefs were inclined to go along, resulting in numerous fights and murders in the islands.

In October 1855, the veteran frigate USS *John Adams* arrived to monitor the situation on behalf of the United States. *John Adams* was under the command of Commander Edward B. Boutwell. Boutwell put parties ashore several times to monitor events and to provide some order. After learning about the burning of Williams' store, Boutwell demanded $5,000 dollars in compensation from Chief Cakabou. This demand escalated to $45,000 dollars as additional reports of property damage were received. This put Cakabou in a touchy no-win situation. The U.S. demand for compensation from him was a tacit recognition of him being the King of Fiji, which he sought. However, if he refused (or could not) pay, that would jeopardize his legitimacy in the eyes of some chiefs. On the other hand, other chiefs would view him as weak for capitulating to U.S. demands. Regardless, Cakabou missed Boutwell's deadline to pay. A short battle followed in which U.S. Marines routed Fijian warriors at a cost of one American killed in action and two wounded. However, Cakabou escaped into the interior. At this point, the situation in Fiji settled down for several years.

Things came to a head in Fiji again in 1859 in conflict between tribes that were friendly to Western trade and those that were hostile. (The situation was actually far more complex than I care to get into.) The hostile tribes were known to kill, and cannibalize, members of the friendly tribes. In 1859, tribesmen from the village of Somatti on Waya Island expanded their menu and ate a couple of Americans.



Alfred T. Agate, *Wild Feejee Man*, 1840, woodcut (98-089-AP).

Vandalia arrived in Fiji on 2 October 1859. *Vandalia* was an 18-gun sloop-of-war, commissioned in 1825, with a crew of about 150, armed with four 8-inch shell guns and 16 32-pounder broadside guns. *Vandalia* had served in the Brazil Squadron (1828–31) and the West Indies Squadron (1832–1839). She cooperated with U.S. Army forces during the Second Seminole War (1835–45). She then served in the Home Squadron until she suffered a Yellow Fever outbreak in 1845 and was laid up until 1849 (missing the Mexican-American War). It was not until the 1880s that it was understood that mosquitoes were the vector for Yellow Fever. When a ship suffered an outbreak, the standard solution was to decommission it for several years. *Vandalia* joined the Pacific Squadron in 1849 and then the East Indies Squadron in 1853. While with the East Indies Squadron, *Vandalia* was part of Commodore Mathew Perry's second visit to Japan and served to protect U.S. interests in China during the Taiping Rebellion. She rejoined the Pacific Squadron in 1857.

Under the command of Commander Arthur Sinclair, *Vandalia* stopped at Nuku Hiva in the Marquesas Islands on 5 August 1858, en route to Tahiti from Panama. While there, a small boat arrived with the captain, first mate, and two others of the U.S.-flag clipper ship *Wild Wave*. The clipper had wrecked on remote uninhabited Oeno Island on 4 March 1858 while sailing from San Francisco to Valparaíso, Chile. Captain Josiah Knowles and six of his crew set sail in the ship's boat to seek help, leaving 33 crewmen and passengers, plus Knowles' wife, marooned on Oeno Island. Knowles' boat had been wrecked on Pitcairn Island (of Mutiny on the Bounty fame). The entire population of Pitcairn Island had moved to Norfolk Island in 1856, and although some islanders later moved back. The island was deserted when Knowles and his boat reached it.

Eventually, Knowles and his men were able to build another boat and try again to get help, missing the populated islands of Polynesia; three of the men chose to stay on Pitcairn. If Knowles' boat had missed Nuku Hiva, they would have probably been lost in the vast eastern Pacific. If *Vandalia* had not been fortuitously at Nuku Hiva, the natives probably would have killed them (see H-Gram 062, Battle of Nuku Hiva). *Vandalia* then sailed far out of her way to Oeno Island, rescuing everyone from *Wild Wave* except one who had died, and then proceeded to Pitcairn Island and rescued the remaining three. The story of the rescue made *Vandalia* and Commander Sinclair quite famous at the time.

Once in the Fiji Islands, Commander Sinclair determined that the waters around Waya Island were too shallow for *Vandalia* to reach. As a result, Sinclair chartered a schooner, *Mechanic*. A landing party of ten Marines, 40 sailors, a lightweight 12-pounder boat howitzer, and three Fijian guides, under the command of Lieutenant Charles Caldwell, embarked on *Mechanic* and departed for Waya Island on 6 October 1859. The offending tribe was aware the Americans were coming and sent messages to villages along the way bragging about what great warriors they were and how many people they had cannibalized, specifically the two white men.

Lieutenant Caldwell's party landed on Waya at 0300 in the morning. They mounted the cannon on the wheeled carriage and proceeded to make a hair-raising climb in the dark up the steep mountainside to reach Somatti village. As they neared the crest by daybreak, the cannon broke loose, fell down a 2,300-foot drop, and was demolished. When they got to the top, the Americans found about 300 warriors arrayed in front of the village of Somatti in full Fijian "battle dress" including their "death robes" and headgear that was as much as six-feet wide (which a Marine later said made them a better target). The Fijians were armed with clubs, spears, arrows, stones, and a few muskets. The Americans were armed with swords and carbines.

Lieutenant Caldwell ordered a flanking maneuver that apparently caught the Fijians by surprise as that was not how they traditionally fought. In the 30-minute one-sided battle that followed, at least 14 Fijian warriors, including two chiefs, were killed and another 36 wounded, before they retreated into the jungle. Two Marines were wounded by musket fire, while a third was hit in the leg by an arrow. Two sailors were badly hurt by rocks, and one merchant sailor from *Wild Wave* (three had joined the expedition) was hurt. While Caldwell's group remained deployed to fend off any counter-attack, the gun crew set fire to the 115 huts in the village. With the village destroyed, Caldwell's group retreated back down the mountain, driving off a couple attempts by the warriors to get in parting blows.

Once down the mountain, Caldwell's group tarried in a friendly Fijian fishing village, whose inhabitants were quite pleased at what happened to the Somatti warriors, as they too had often been brutalized by them (and a few eaten). With the outbreak of civil war imminent, interest by the U.S. Navy in the South Seas islands diminished

considerably. Fiji largely became a British problem and later a British colony in 1874.

Charles H. B. Caldwell went on to serve with distinction in command of the Union gunboat *Itasca*, the ironclad *Essex* and two other ships on blockade duty during the American Civil War.

During the civil war, Captain Arthur Sinclair (III) sided with the Confederacy. In January 1865, he was aboard the blockade-runner *Lelia* (he was to assume command for the final run from Nassau, Bahamas to Charleston) when the over-loaded *Lelia* sank in a storm shortly after leaving Britain and he went down with the ship (only 12 of 47 aboard were saved). His son, Arthur Sinclair (IV), also fought for the Confederacy. He was the only officer to serve aboard both CSS *Virginia* in her fight with USS *Monitor* in 1862 and aboard CSS *Alabama* when she was sunk by USS *Kearsarge* in 1864 (and survived both). *Clemson*-class destroyer DD-275 (1919–35) was named for Sinclair's father, Arthur Sinclair (II), who served in the War of 1812. His grandson was Upton Sinclair, author of the famous muckraking book, *The Jungle*.

Sources include: Charles H. Lagerbom,"Wreck of the Clipper Wild Wave," Courier Gazette*, last modified 15 April 2021;* NHHC Dictionary of American Fighting Ships *(DANFS); Arthur Sinclair,"Cruise of the US Sloop of War* Vandalia *in the Pacific in 1858 under the command of Commander Arthur Sinclair,"* U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, April 1889, Vol. 15/2/49; U.S. Naval Institute,"Irregular Warfare and the* Vandalia *Expedition in Fiji*," Naval History *blog, last modified 9 October 2010.*

First U.S. Navy visit to Japan, July 1846, depicted in an original Japanese painting showing USS *Columbus* and USS *Vincennes* at anchor in Edo (Tokyo) Bay, Japan (NH 63523).

H-Gram 063-3: The Battle of Shimonoseki Strait, Japan, 1863

H-Gram 063, Attachment 3
Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC
July 2021

Background: The Opening of Japan and Commodore Perry's "Black Ships"

When the great "*kamikaze*" typhoons of 1274 and 1281 wrecked two invading Mongol fleets, the Japanese killed anyone who made it to shore, except southern Chinese, whom the Japanese enslaved, believing the Chinese had been coerced by the Mongols and were entitled to a little mercy. For centuries, this was pretty much the standard Japanese welcome to anyone who washed up on their shores, including shipwrecked sailors. Almost from the very beginning of contact with Western nations, the Japanese were eager to adopt foreign weapons technology (to use on each other) but had no inclination to allow foreigners on to Japanese soil.

The Portuguese made the first successful Western trade inroads with Japan, beginning in 1543. The Japanese were keen to acquire matchlock firearms from the Portuguese, less keen about the Portuguese spread of Catholicism. The weapons played a key role in the unification of Japan during the Battle of Nagashino in 1575 (see the 1980 Akira Kurosawa movie *Kagemusha*), a process completed in 1603 by Tokugawa Ieyasu, who became the shogun of a united Japan. Technically the Shogun was the prime minister appointed by the Emperor, but, in effect, the shogun was the military ruler of Japan (the

emperor was "divine" but the shogun had the armies, and later, the guns and cannons). Christians were persecuted (and a number crucified) during the early years of the Tokugawa shogunate, especially after the death of Tokugawa Ieyasu. In 1638, the Portuguese were invited not to come back. For over 200 years after that, only the Dutch (enemies of the Portuguese) were allowed to trade with Japan, all limited to a small island off Nagasaki.

The first official attempt by the United States to open trade with Japan occurred in 1846. That year, Commodore James Biddle, commander of the U.S. East Indies squadron, successfully concluded the first American commercial treaty with China. Eager to replicate that success with Japan, Commodore Biddle arrived in Edo Bay (now Tokyo Bay) with USS *Columbus* and sloop-of-war USS *Vincennes* (the first U.S. Navy ship to circumnavigate the globe, in 1826–30 before serving as flagship for Lieutenant Charles Wilkes' U.S. Exploring Expedition in 1838–42. See H-Gram 062). As a 90-gun ship-of-the-line, *Columbus* was one of the two largest and impressive ships in commission in the U.S. Navy at the time (the other was USS *Ohio*. Of nine ships-of-the line built in the U.S. in the aftermath of the War of 1812, almost all spent virtually their entire service lives laid up due to lack of funding and crewmen).

The Japanese were not impressed. Biddle's two ships were quickly surrounded by a hundred or so small Japanese boats. The Japanese refused to allow anyone off the U.S. ships, until finally Biddle was invited to go aboard a Japanese junk to receive the Tokugawa shogunate's official response. Due to translation difficulty, a brief scuffle ensued between Biddle and a Japanese samurai guard (who drew his sword) as Biddle tried to board the Japanese junk, and Biddle withdrew to his own ship. Regardless, the Japanese answer was "ee-ye" (one of 20 ways in Japanese to say "no"). Due to adverse winds, the U.S. ships required tow by the Japanese guardboats in order to leave the bay.

In 1849, Commodore David Geisinger, commander of the U.S. Far East Squadron, ordered Captain James Glynn, commander of 16-gun sloop-of-war USS *Preble*, to proceed to Nagasaki and attempt to negotiate for the release of a reported 15 American sailors of the whaler *Lagoda*, shipwrecked and imprisoned under very harsh conditions by the Japanese (several died of exposure and one hung himself, and the Japanese left him hanging). The Japanese tried to prevent *Preble* from entering the harbor, but she forced her way through a line of Japanese boats. With the help of Dutch interpreters, Glynn succeeded in gaining release of 14 surviving sailors (their harrowing story caused a sensation in the U.S. press, although it turned out 13 had actually deserted from *Lagoda*, not been shipwrecked). In his after-action report, Glynn recommended that any future attempt to open Japan to U.S. trade to be accompanied by a sizable show of force.

In 1851, Secretary of State Daniel Webster drafted a letter, signed by President Millard Fillmore (and you thought he did absolutely nothing during his presidency) to the Emperor of Japan requesting "friendship and commerce" with no religious purpose. Commodore John Aulick, commander of the U.S. East Indies Squadron, was authorized to deliver the letter and attempt to negotiate with the Japanese. However, Aulick was relieved of command, apparently due to a quarrelsome and undiplomatic nature. Commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry (younger brother of War of 1812 hero, Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry), who had extensive diplomatic experience, was selected to replace Aulick. Perry avidly devoured every bit of "Intelligence" he could find about Japan in order to prepare for the voyage (much of it in books acquired by the Navy Department Library, now part of NHHC). As a result of understanding his "adversary," Perry took large stocks of arms and ammunition as his trade items (such as 100 Colt revolvers).

Perry also took to heart Glynn's advice on the need for a show of force. His flotilla included three sidewheel steam frigates: USS *Mississippi*, USS *Susquehanna* and USS *Powhatan*. *Mississippi* was armed with eight 8-inch Paixhans shell guns. *Susquehanna* had two 150-pounder Parrott rifles and twelve 9-inch Dahlgren smoothbore guns. *Powhatan* had one 11-inch Dahlgren gun and ten 9-inch Dahlgren guns. (Not surprisingly, ammunition logistics in the U.S. Navy was a real challenge at the time.)

Perry's force also included the armed store steamships *Lexington*, *Supply*, and *Southhampton*, and the sailing sloops *Macedonian* (36-gun), *Plymouth* (4 8-inch shell guns and 18 32-pounder guns), and *Saratoga* (same armament as *Plymouth*). Perry also hand-picked most of the commanding officers of the flotilla, including Commander Franklin Buchanan of *Susquehanna*. (Buchanan would go on to found the "Naval School" which became the U.S. Naval Academy and later to go on as the senior officer in the Confederate States Navy.) The commander of the Marine detachment was Major Jacob Zeilin, who would go on to be the seventh Commandant of the Marine Corps (1864–76), and the first non-brevet (i.e., permanent) flag officer in the Marine Corps.

Perry arrived at the entrance to Edo Bay on 8 July 1853, with four ships, *Susquehanna* (flagship), *Mississippi*, *Plymouth,* and *Saratoga*. The Japanese had not seen steamships before the "Black Ships," and their arrival got their attention (in fact, they quickly entered into negotiations with the Dutch to acquire steamships of their own). The other thing that drew the attention of the Japanese was that the steamships blew right past the Japanese guardships, with their guns trained on the first fortified Japanese village (Uraga) as they cut loose with blank shots from the 73 guns and cannons in the force, supposedly in honor of U.S. Independence Day. Perry had absorbed the lessons from Biddle's visit, particularly regarding Japanese hierarchy, specifically which emissaries to refuse to meet (as they were too junior) and which to meet with (as they had sufficient status). Perry also threatened the use of force against the Japanese capital (Edo) if his messages were not delivered at the appropriate level or responded to in a timely manner.

Perry's visit caught the Japanese at a particularly weak moment due to the illness of Shogun Tokugawa Ieyoshi, which resulted in government indecision. The Japanese had also obtained intelligence of their own regarding the relative ease with which the Americans had defeated Mexico in the Mexican-American War. They also realized they had no counter to steam warships armed with Paixhan and Dahlgren shell guns. The Japanese concluded that it would not violate their sovereignty to accept President Fillmore's letter and draft of a trade treaty. The Japanese then agreed to let Perry land at Kurihama, near Yokosuka, to formally deliver the letter, which was done with much pomp and circumstance on both sides (which was pretty much "kabuki" as the Japanese were stalling for time). Perry agreed to depart and give the Japanese time to think about it, promising he would return, leaving Edo Bay on 17 July.

Perry's proposals caused major splits among Japanese leaders, and the only thing they agreed on was the need to quickly bolster their coastal fortifications and to improve the defenses of the seaward approaches to Edo. Tokugawa Ieyoshi died a few days after, and he was replaced by his weak and sickly son, Tokugawa Iesada, leaving decisions in the hands of a council of elders. In a first for the Tokogawa Shogunate, all the major daimyos (feudal warlords) were actually asked their opinion about whether to accept Perry's demands. (Rather than being grateful for the "democratic" opportunity, a number of daimyos concluded that the Tokugawa Shoganate was weak, and ripe to be challenged by some of the stronger and more independent-minded daimyos. The result of the vote was 19 for, 19

against, 14 vague, seven suggesting temporary concessions, and two "whatever.")

True to his word, Perry returned to Edo Bay (actually ahead of schedule) on 13 February 1854, this time with eight ships and 1,600 men. *Susquehanna*, *Mississippi*, and *Saratoga* made their second visit, joined by *Powhatan*, *Lexington*, *Macedonian*, sloop-of-war *Vandalia*, and store ship *Southhampton*, and joined later by *Supply*. By this time, the Japanese agreed it was best to agree to American demands, although negotiations for a site for negotiations dragged on for weeks, prompting Perry to threaten to bring 100 ships within 20 days to take Edo (this was more ships than the entire U.S. Navy). Finally, a compromise was reached to conduct negotiations at Yokohama. On 8 March, Perry landed 500 Sailors and Marines in 27 boats to help with the discussions. Finally, after three weeks of massive gift exchanging, the negotiations concluded with the Convention of Kanagawa, which opened the ports of Shimoda and Hakodate to American trade, with provisions for the proper care of shipwrecked Sailors.

Despite all the bowing, exchanges of extravagant gifts and signing of papers, the contact with Perry and the U.S. resulted in major upheaval and dissension within Japan. Emperor Komei (121st in the line of Emperors) had come to the throne in March 1846 and was dead set against opening Japan to foreigners (weapons were OK). With the Tokugawa shogunate at its weakest level in 200 years, more and more daimyos began to gradually side with the Emperor. Much of the Japanese populace was of the same mind as the Emperor, and incidents of violence directed at foreigners (other European nations had piled on with trade treaties after Perry) became increasingly common in the early 1860's. Increasingly assertive, Komei broke with centuries of tradition by becoming actively involved in the affairs of state.

In an increasingly strong position, Emperor Komei issued a decree in March 1863 that all foreigners should leave Japan. In April 1863, Komei issued the "Order to Expel Barbarians" with the date of 25 June for all foreigners to leave. Anti-foreign riots broke out in Edo and elsewhere, and the American legation in Edo was burned. The American Consul in Edo moved to Yokohama as the Japanese made clear his safety could no longer be guaranteed in Edo.

Upon the outbreak of the American Civil War in the United States in 1861, almost all U.S. ships were recalled from far-flung regions of the world to support the blockade of Confederate ports. In the Far East, only the steam side-wheel sloop USS *Saginaw* (see H-Gram 057) remained on station. *Saginaw* was the first ship built at the Mare Island Navy Yard, in 1860. In July 1861, *Saginaw* was searching for a missing boat and sailors from the American bark *Myrtle* when she was fired on by Vietnamese batteries at the entrance to Qui Nhon Bay, Cochin China (now Vietnam). *Saginaw* raised a white flag to show peaceful intent, but the battery continued to fire. *Saginaw* returned fire for 20 minutes when there was a major secondary explosion in the Vietnamese-held fort. *Saginaw* continued to fire for another 30 minutes until the fort was completely wrecked. (And you probably thought it all began with the Gulf of Tonkin incident in 1964.)

During USS *Constitution*'s around-the-world cruise (1844–46), she stopped in Turon Bay, Cochin China (near present day Danang, Vietnam) on 10 May 1845 to provision and to bury a sailor who died from dysentery, Seaman William Cooke. (Cooke was one of 234 Sailors who died aboard *Constitution* from illness and a few accidents during her history; only 26 actually died during or the result of combat.) When informed that the Vietnamese were reportedly holding a French missionary under sentence of death, *Constitution*'s skipper, Captain John "Mad Jack" Percival, responded by demanding the missionary's release and taking three local officials

("mandarins") hostage along with three of the Cochin Emperor's war junks. The junks escaped during foul weather but were recaptured. Over the next days there were several incidents in which *Constitution* crewmen fired on local soldiers with muskets; the Vietnamese claimed scores were killed.

The Vietnamese refused to produce the missionary (who was not actually what he was claimed to be), but additional war junks arrived, along with preparations at the forts for battle, and the arrival of reinforcing Vietnamese troops. On 26 May, with obvious Vietnamese intent to defend against any further incursions and no sign of the missionary, Captain Percival opted to depart. Upon return to the United States, Percival was rebuked for his actions, and President Zachary Taylor issued a formal apology to the Cochin Emperor for Percival's actions, which may be unique in U.S. diplomacy in the 1800s. In the meantime, Vietnamese locals carefully tended Seaman Cooke's grave for over 160 years until it was apparently bulldozed for beachfront development within the last ten years. One of *Constitution*'s officers summed up the first U.S. armed conflict in Vietnam thus, "It seems…to have shown a sad want of 'sound discretion' in commencing an affair of this kind, without carrying it through to a successful conclusion," words that could have been spoken in 1975.

Meanwhile, back in the Far East during the U.S. Civil War, *Saginaw* was recalled to the U.S. West Coast in 1862, to protect American whalers in the eastern Pacific, temporarily leaving no U.S. Navy presence in Asia. However, reports were subsequently received that a Confederate raider was operating in Far Eastern Waters. Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles directed the commandant of the Mare Island shipyard to hasten the repair of the screw-sloop USS *Wyoming* and prepare her for 30-months of overseas service. Ordered to depart in June 1862, *Wyoming* was a new steam-powered vessel, commissioned in 1859, capable of 11 knots. She had a crew of about 200 and was armed with two 11-inch Dahlgren smoothbore guns (which could pivot from side-to-side), a 60-pounder Parrott rifle (an earlier shell gun of about 5.3-inch bore), and three 32-pounder broadside guns. *Wyoming* was named after a valley in Pennsylvania, as the state of Wyoming did not exist at that time.

Wyoming was under the command of Commander David Stockton McDougal. McDougal entered the U.S. Navy as a midshipman in 1828. He had extensive service in the Mediterranean, West Indies, Home and Great Lakes Squadrons. During the Mexican-American War, he served in Commodore Mathew Perry's "Mosquito Fleet" (capturing inland objectives via small-boat riverine operations) as well as participating in the blockade and siege of Vera Cruz. His first command was the sloop-of-war USS *Warren* in 1854-56, followed by command of the steam tug USS *John Hancock* in 1856. He assumed command of *Wyoming* in 1861. *Wyoming* arrived in the Philippines in August 1862 and, after a search, determined that the reports of a Confederate raider were false. The raider CSS *Alabama* was still in the West Indies at the time. Nevertheless, *Wyoming* remained on station. In March 1863, *Wyoming* struck a rock near Swatow, China. MacDougal ran her aground to keep her from sinking. She was repaired and refloated. *Wyoming* was preparing to return to the U.S. West Coast when the situation in Japan boiled over.

Operation "Expel the Barbarians"

Two of the most powerful daimyo clans, the Satsuma and Choshu, decided to side with the Emperor in defiance of the Tokugawa shogunate (which was viewed as the legitimate Japanese government by the United States and other Western nations). Under Prince Mori, the Choshu controlled the northern side of the narrow Shimonoseki Strait, which separates the main island of Honshu on the north and Kyushu on the south and forms the western entrance/exit

between the East China Sea to the west and the Japanese Inland Sea to the east. The Choshu had fortified the north shore of Shimonoseki Strait with six forts, armed mostly with older round-ball cannons, including five 8-inch Dahlgren smoothbore guns (courtesy of the United States). (Like Iranian Harpoon missiles and F-14s, we never learn.) The Choshu had also purchased three armed ships from the United States: the 6-gun bark *Daniel Webster* (Japanese name unknown), the 10-gun brig *Kosei* (originally *Lanrick*) and the 4-gun steamer *Koshin* (originally *Lancefield*).

In accordance with the Emperor's "expel the barbarian" order, the Choshu commenced action against foreigners on the night of 25–26 June 1863. At about 0100, two of the Choshu ships (still flying the flag of the Shogunate) opened fire on the American merchant *Pembroke*, which was anchored at the eastern end of the strait awaiting a pilot and turn of the tide. *Pembroke* was able to slip her anchor and backtrack into the Inland Sea and exit via the Bungo Strait (between Kyushu and Shikoku), suffering only minor damage. *Pembroke* continued her voyage to Shanghai, although she skipped a planned stop in Nagasaki, Japan.

Reports of the attack on *Pembroke* first reached American Consul in Yokohama on 10 July, and in keeping with the adage that "first reports are always wrong," the report was that *Pembroke* had been sunk with all hands. The next day, mail from Shanghai arrived, confirming that the attack took place, but that *Pembroke* had survived. By this time, *Wyoming* had arrived at Yokohama from Hong Kong after receiving word of the burning of the American legation in Edo. Pryun, with McDougal present, delivered a diplomatic protest to the Tokugawa Minster of Foreign Affairs, who begged for more time to deal with the situation. It appeared to the Americans that the Tokugawa either could not or wouldn't control the Choshu (and Satsuma). Actually, they could not. Although *Wyoming* was under orders to return to the States, McDougal informed Pryun that *Wyoming* would depart immediately for Shimonoseki Strait to take action, and Pryun agreed. (No need to wait for Washington.)

Unknown to the Americans at the time, the Choshu continued to attack ships trying to pass through the strait. Shortly after the *Pembroke* was fired on, the French dispatch boat *Kien-Chang* was hit and nearly sunk in the channel. The next ship through was the Dutch 16-gun steam frigate *Medusa*, under the command of Captain Casembroot. Because of the long centuries of friendly trade between the Japanese and the Dutch, Casembroot made the assumption he would be able to negotiate. Instead, *Medusa* encountered a hail of accurate fire, and was hit in the hull 31 times, suffering four dead and 16 wounded before she was able to extract herself from the situation. A couple days later, a French gunboat was hit in the hull three times. Then the Choshu mistakenly sank a Satsuma ship. In response to these attacks, the British, French and Dutch were gearing up for a coordinated response, but *Wyoming* got there first.

The First Battle of Shimonoseki Strait, July 1863

Wyoming planned to get underway from Yokohama at 0500 on 13 July 1863, but tarried an hour awaiting the arrival of the Tokugawa Foreign Minister, who was supposed to embark in order help with any negotiations. However, the Foreign Minister missed ships movement, later reportedly due to a severe case of diarrhea. *Wyoming* anchored off the island of Hime Shima, east of the approaches to Shimonoseki Strait, on the evening 15 July 1863. In discussions with a Japanese national who worked for the American legation, McDougal was informed (and convinced) that the Choshu would not negotiate and would fire on his ship. As a result, *Wyoming*'s crew made all preparations to be ready for battle.

At 0500 16 July 1863, *Wyoming* was underway from Hime Shima. At 0900, the crew went to

general quarters, with the pivot guns loaded and cleared for action, although the guns were kept under tarps in attempt to give the ship an appearance of being a merchant. At 1000, *Wyoming* commenced an approach to the channel, sighting the two Choshu sailing ships and one steam ship at the far end of the channel. The vessels were noted flying the Tokugawa and Choshu banners. *Wyoming* entered the channel at 1045, at which point Japanese signal guns ashore fired. *Wyoming* then hoisted her colors.

As soon as the *Wyoming* was in range, the Japanese forts opened fire with an intense bombardment. McDougal correctly deduced that stakes in the channel indicated that the Japanese had already calculated the range for ships in the channel and aimed their guns accordingly. As a result, McDougal steered so close to the north shore that the forts' guns could not depress enough, and numerous Japanese rounds whizzed by 10–15 feet overhead through the rigging. (The Japanese pilots aboard *Wyoming* had essentially gone catatonic by this point.)

As *Wyoming* passed through the narrowest point of the channel, McDougal aimed directly for the Choshu ships, which were still at anchor, and were heavily manned by what appeared to be highly motivated Japanese trying to get underway. The bark was anchored just off the town of Shimonoseki and the brig KOSEI about 50 yards beyond. The steamer *Koshin* was anchored beyond the two sail ships, anchored a bit further south in the channel. McDougal aimed to engage the two sail ships to starboard and the steamer to port. *Wyoming* passed the bark at pistol-shot range, as *Wyoming's* Marines picked off Japanese with musket fire. The muzzles of the big 11-inch guns were so close to the Japanese they almost touched. The parrot gun and 32-pounders blew holes in the bark. The bark put up a spirited fight, getting off three broadsides as *Wyoming* passed. *Wyoming* then did the same to the brig. It was during these exchanges that *Wyoming* suffered most of her casualties. The forward gun had six men down, including one dead, and a Marine was killed by shrapnel.

As *Wyoming* opened the range from the brig, aiming for the steamship, the brig was already starting to sink, but kept on firing. *Wyoming* then fired into the steamer with her portside guns. As *Wyoming* passed the steamer, she turned to port to make a second pass at greater range and to bring the 11-inch guns to bear. At this point, *Wyoming* ran aground. As *Wyoming* tried to back off, the steamer *Koshin* slipped her anchor and made a run at *Wyoming* in an apparent attempt to either ram or board. *Wyoming* freed herself before the on-rushing steamer could get too close. McDougal gave repeated orders to the closest 11-inch to fire, which the gun captain seemed to ignore. Finally, the gun captain fired, and an exquisitely aimed round hit the steamer right at the waterline into her boiler (and out the other side), but the boiler exploded, sending the steamer *Koshin* to the bottom in less than two minutes.

Having reversed course, *Wyoming* engaged the sinking brig *Kosei* with the 11-inch Dahlgrens, hitting her twice in the hull and expediting her trip to the bottom. *Wyoming* then inflicted more punishment on the bark, which was still afloat at the end of the engagement, but effectively destroyed. *Wyoming* then bombarded the forts with accurate fire until all were silenced. *Wyoming* ceased fire at 1220 and steamed out without further interference from Japanese guns.

During the one hour and 10 minute engagement, *Wyoming* fired 55 rounds of shot and shell (actually with very judicious and well-aimed fire, as it was still necessary to conserve ammunition in the event of an encounter with a Confederate raider). The Choshu had fired 130 rounds, of which only 22 were damaging; *Wyoming* had been hit in the hull 11 times without serious effect, although her rigging was extensively shot up and her smokestack perforated. *Wyoming* suffered four killed and seven wounded, although one of

the wounded subsequently died. McDougal initially considered burying his dead ashore, but decided against it, and all were buried at sea.

It should be noted that almost none of *Wyoming's* crew had any combat experience, yet performed with great coolness under fire. McDougal's astute tactical judgment in avoiding the worst of Japanese shore-based fire and in defeating three ships at once got him absolutely nothing in the way of commendation or promotion, with this battle being fought only three days after Gettysburg. President Theodore Roosevelt would later write, "had that action taken place at any other time than the Civil War, its fame would have echoed all over the world." In McDougal's after action report to Gideon Welles, he wrote, "the punishment inflicted…will I trust teach him a lesson that will not be forgotten."

Wyoming was the first foreign warship to respond to the Japanese violation of treaties (that the Japanese had mostly signed under duress, viewing them as "unequal"). A few days later, a French force showed up to respond to the attacks on their shipping. Led by French admiral Constant Jaures aboard his flagship, 34-gun steam frigate *Semiramis*, accompanied by gunboat *Tancrede*, the French bombarded the forts and put troops ashore while under fire. The French destroyed an ammunition magazine and burned the nearby village. *Wyoming,* in particular, taught the Japanese a lesson they did not forget; however, the Japanese, being Japanese, did not give up. The two sunken ships were raised in 1864, the forts repaired, and shelling of foreign ships continued, effectively blocking the strait for another 15 months.

The British Royal Navy took its own unilateral action in August 1863, as a delayed reaction to the killing of a British merchant by samurai of the Satsumo *daimyo*. On 15 August 1863, a Royal Navy squadron entered the harbor of Kagoshima (on southern Kyushu), the Satsumo capital, to extract reparations by force, seizing several Satsuma ships. The Satsuma fired on the British, who in turn bombarded Kagoshima (which the Japanese had evacuated). Three Satsuma steamships were sunk and about 500 houses destroyed, but the British actually suffered more casualties, with 11 dead. A single Japanese cannonball decapitated both the captain and second-in-command of Acting Vice Admiral Augustus Kuper's flagship, screw frigate HMS *Euryalus*. The British essentially ran out of ammunition and left, leaving the Satsuma to boast that they had driven the British off without paying anything.

Hunt for CSS Alabama

Wyoming's orders to return to the U.S. were rescinded with reports that the Confederate raider CSS *Alabama* was heading toward the Far East. *Alabama* was a screw steam sloop built in Britain (she never entered a Confederate port) with a crew of about 145 and capable of 13 knots. She was armed with one pivoting 110-pounder 7-inch Blakely muzzle-loader forward, and a pivoting 8-inch smoothbore gun aft, along with six 32-pounder broadside guns. Under the command of Captain Rafael Semmes, *Alabama* was the most successful commerce raider of all time. By the time she was ultimately sunk by USS *Kearsarge* off Cherbourg, France on 19 June 1864, *Alabama* had been in service for 657 days, 534 of which were underway. She had boarded about 450 vessels, captured 65 Union merchant ships (valued in current dollars at 99 million) and burned most, taking more than 2,000 prisoners without loss of a single life of passengers and crew.

Once *Alabama* was in the Indian Ocean, *Wyoming* was ordered to wait in the Sunda Strait between Sumatra and Java in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) and remained there for about a month. Semmes was aware that *Wyoming* was waiting and was actually eager to do battle, believing his ship matched up well with *Wyoming*. Semmes' plan was to catch *Wyoming* by moonlight while

she was anchored off the volcanic island of Krakatoa in the Sunda Strait. However, on 10 November 1863, *Wyoming* received word to investigate Christmas Island (south of Java) based on a report from the U.S. Consul in Melbourne, Australia that the island was being used to stockpile stores for the *Alabama*. As it turned out, *Wyoming* left Sunda Strait the day before *Alabama* passed through. The two ships were within 25 miles, but never saw each other. *Wyoming* found absolutely nothing at Christmas Island. *Wyoming* subsequently called at Singapore in late November, where local officials mistook her for *Alabama* and delivered *Alabama*'s mail to *Wyoming*, the first confirmation that *Alabama* had entered the Java Sea and was operating in the Far East.

The Far East proved to be not very lucrative for *Alabama* and she took only three prizes near the Sunda Strait before departing. Despite aggressively searching, *Wyoming* never found *Alabama*, and McDougal arguably missed his chance at immortality (one way or the other). With her boilers in serious need of major work, *Wyoming* commenced a three-month voyage home to the U.S. East Coast, arriving in Philadelphia in July 1864, after circumnavigating the globe.

The departure of *Wyoming* left the sail sloop USS *Jamestown* as the only U.S. warship in the Far East. Under the command of Captain Cicero Price, *Jamestown* had reached the Far East in June 1863. First commissioned in 1844, *Jamestown* was armed with four 8-inch shell guns and 18 32-pounder broadside guns. However, her lack of steam power essentially rendered her obsolete for her mission.

The Second Battle of Shimonoseki Strait, September 1864

By the summer of 1864, the European powers finally resolved to take coordinated action against the Choshu and Satsuma, and planning commenced. Britain, France and the Dutch all agreed to participate. Although the American Civil War was still raging, the United States agreed to a token participation. However, all the ships of the other navies were steam-powered by this time, making sail-powered *Jamestown* more of a liability than a help. As result, Captain Price charted the steamship *Ta-Kiang*, armed it with a 30-pounder Parrott gun with a crew of 70 (18 were Americans) under the command of Lieutenant Frederick Pearson, and placed the ship under the command of British Admiral Augustus Kuper (which may have been a first for the U.S. Navy).

In late August, most of the force departed Yokohama. *Jamestown* remained behind to protect the foreign enclave at Yokohama. USS *Ta-Kiang* rendezvoused with the force at Hime Shima Island. The fleet included eight British steam warships, led by Admiral Kuper on screw frigate HMS *Euryalus* and included the ponderous 89-gun steam ship-of-the-line HMS *Conqueror*. The French contributed three steam warships under the command Admiral C. Jaures, including screw frigate *Semiramis*. The Dutch contributed four screw corvettes. As the Choshu were considered the strongest and most aggressive of the rebellious daimyo, the first objective of the force was Shimonoseki Strait.

On 4 September 1864, the allied force formed up into three columns based on nationality, with *Ta-Kiang* bringing up the rear of the French column. The force then anchored in sight of the Choshu gun batteries, in an ostentatious show of force. On 5 September, the allied force arrayed itself with medium sized ships in range of the Choshu batteries, the smaller ships arrayed to provide flanking fire on the fortifications, and the two flagships, *Euryalus* and *Semiramis* and ship-of-the line *Conqueror* a bit further out, all with no reaction from the Japanese. However, with the first opening shot by *Euryalus* in the afternoon, eight Choshu gun batteries immediately returned fire. In the ensuing three-hour gunnery duel, in

which neither side accomplished much of anything, *Ta-Kiang* contributed 18 rounds from the Parrott gun. The Japanese guns finally fell silent, but the British and French admirals decided it was too late to put a landing force ashore.

At dawn on 6 September, the Japanese had the temerity to open fire first, quickly scoring multiple hits on two ships, before being overpowered by the combined guns of the allied force. Once the Japanese fire had been suppressed, *Ta-Kiang* and seven of the smaller ships towed boats with 1,000 Royal Marines and armed British, French and Dutch sailors to shore. The landing went off without a hitch, but the 17-gun corvette HMS *Perseus* was swept aground (she was later successfully refloated). The landing force overpowered opposition as it sequentially rolled up the Japanese batteries, spiking the guns and blowing up magazines. With the French and Dutch troops already re-embarking their ships, the last group of British sailors started their march back to the shore. A sudden surprise Japanese counter-attack threatened the British sailors, but was beaten off by Royal Marines.

Further attempts at Choshu resistance were met with overwhelming firepower from the ships. On 7 September, the allies carted off 62 Choshu cannons and destroyed the rest. On 8 September, the Choshu forces surrendered. *Ta-Kiang* (which had *Jamestown*'s surgeon embarked), served as a hospital ship for the allied force, returning 23 wounded personnel to Yokohama.

The accord drawn up after the cease fire was extremely punitive, requiring the Tokugawa shogunate to pay equivalent of 3 million dollars (even through the Choshu were operating in defiance of Tokugawa control – although a number of Choshu leaders ended up beheaded). The Tokugawa could not pay; they were forced to open another treaty port and make other trade concessions to the Western powers, further weakening the shogunate in relation to growing Imperial power, finally resulting in the Boshin War of 1868-1869 between the shogunate and forces loyal to Emperor Komei's son Emperor Meiji (Komei died in 1867). Emperor Meiji would rule Japan from 1867 to 1912, a period of rapid modernization known as the "Meiji Restoration." In 1883, the U.S. government returned the 750,000-dollar American share of the Shimonoseki indemnity to the Japanese.

The second battle of Shimonoseki Strait cost the allies 72 casualties. (The British suffered eight killed and 30 wounded.) The Japanese reportedly suffered 47 casualties. Three Victoria Crosses (Britain's highest award for valor) were awarded as a result of the action. One was American-born Ordinary Seaman William Seeley (serving in the Royal Navy) for a daring reconnaissance of a Japanese position, and although wounded, he continued in the final assault on the battery. Seeley was the first American to be awarded the Victoria Cross.

More Raider Chasing

Within days of her return to the United States, McDougal and *Wyoming* were ordered back to sea to hunt for confederate raider CSS *Florida*. However, after five days, her boilers (long overdue for serious repair) finally gave out. (Screw-sloop USS *Wachusett* captured Confederate raider CSS *Florida* on 4 October 1864 when Commander Napoleon Collins took *Wachusett* right into Bahia Harbor (in flagrant violation of Brazilian neutrality and territorial water) where *Florida* had taken refuge. After a brief exchange of gunfire, *Florida* surrendered. Brazilian guns fired on *Wachusett* as she towed *Florida* to sea. Commander Collins was subsequently court-martialed, and then immediately restored to his command by Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles).

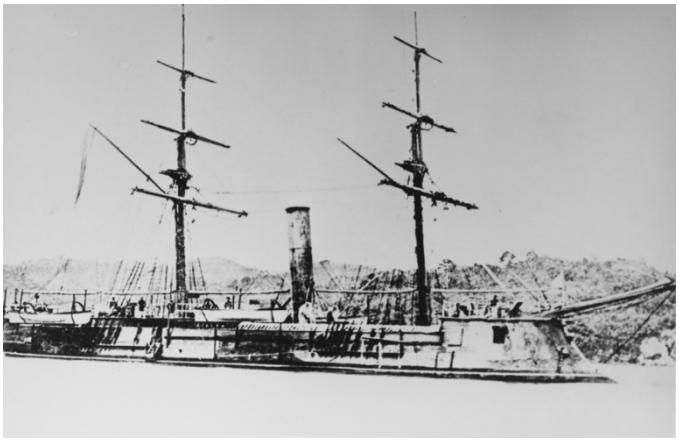
Wyoming remained in overhaul until the spring of 1865 when she was sent back to the Pacific in pursuit of Confederate raider CSS *Shenandoah*. After the war, *Wyoming* remained in the Far East

(1865-1868), then served in the North Atlantic, and European Squadrons, before being decommissioned in 1882, serving as a training ship at the Naval Academy until 1892. Commander McDougal received little acclaim at the time for the action in Shimonoseki strait; in 1869, he assumed command of the South Pacific Squadron; he was placed on the retired list in 1871 and promoted to rear admiral in retired status in 1874. Two ships were named for McDougal*; O'Brien*-class destroyer DD-54 (1914–36), and *Porter*-class destroyer DD-358 (1936–46).

The Confederate raider CSS *Shenandoah*, commanded by Commander James I. Waddell, CSN, arrived at Melbourne, Australia in February 1865 via the Cape of Good Hope. *Shenandoah* then headed for the north Pacific, capturing 20 of 58 American whalers operating in the Bering Sea, all more than a month after the war had ended (but word had not been received). In the spring of 1865, three Union steam warships were sent to the Pacific in pursuit of *Shenandoah*. *Wyoming* did not reach the Pacific until after the war ended. Screw-sloop USS *Wachusett* was delayed when she ran aground in the West Indies.

Screw sloop-of-war USS *Iroquois* rounded Cape Horn and finally reached Singapore in May 1865 and spent two months fruitlessly cruising near Sunda Strait, unaware of *Shenandoah*'s depredations in the Bering Sea. On 28 June 1865, *Shenandoah* fired the last shot of the Civil War, across the bow of a whaler in the Bering Sea. On 3 August, *Shenandoah* finally learned the war was definitely over (after having captured a total of 38 ships, burning most of them). *Shenandoah* exited the Pacific via Cape Horn disguised as a merchant. Having learned that all rebels had been pardoned, except the crew of *Shenandoah*, who were to be hanged as pirates if caught, Waddell steered clear of shipping lanes, until arriving at Liverpool, England, where her raiding voyage originated. Waddell surrendered the ship to 101-gun screw-ship-of-the-line HMS *Donegal* on 6 November 1865, lowering the Confederate flag (this was the last surrender of the Civil War and the last official lowering of a Confederate flag). The British paroled the ship's crew. The *Charles F. Adams*–class guided missile destroyer DDG-24 (1964–92) was named for Waddell.

Jamestown remained in the Pacific until she departed Macao on 17 June 1865 to return to the United States; she was the last U.S. pure sailing warship to serve in the Far East. *Jamestown* was converted to a transport and store ship, serving in that capacity from 1866–1881, including being present at Sitka, Alaska, on 18 October 1867, when the U.S. took possession from Russia. She then served as a training and hospital ship until she burned at Norfolk Navy Shipyard in 1913. *Jamestown*'s commanding officer, Captain Cicero Price, was promoted to commodore in 1866 in command of the U.S. East Indies Squadron, before being statutorily retired in 1867 at age 62. He was court-martialed in 1866 for neglect of duty in preparing muster rolls, but his punishment was suspended.



This ship, formerly Confederate ironclad *Stonewall*, was purchased from the United States in the late 1860s. Initially named *Kotetsu* in Japanese service, she was renamed *Azuma* in 1871 (NH 101772).

Postscript: The Saga of CSS Stonewall

A Confederate ironclad ram, the CSS *Stonewall*, played a decisive role after being renamed *Kotetsu* as the flagship of Imperial Japanese Navy forces. She served in the defeat of rebel forces loyal to the former Tokugawa shogunate in the Naval Battle of Hakodate, Hokkaido, Japan on 4–

10 May 1869, which ended the Boshin War (a civil war in Japan).

In June 1863, almost a year after the Battle of Hampton Roads between the ironclads USS *Monitor* and CSS *Virginia*, the Confederate commissioner to France, John Slidell, convinced Emperor Napoleon III of France to build ships for the Confederacy. Napoleon III agreed (to violate French law) on condition that the intended "end user" of the ships be kept secret, and that the ships be built in the yard of a personal friend. (John Slidell was one of two Confederate Commissioners taken from the British Royal Mail Ship *Trent* by Captain Charles Wilkes's USS *San Jacinto* in November 1861, nearly leading to war with Great Britain [see H-Gram 062]). He was subsequently released by the Union. He was also the older brother of Lieutenant Commander Alexander Slidell Mackenzie, killed during the Formosa Expedition of 1867) (see H-063-4).

The French built two ironclads for the Confederacy under the phony names *Sphinx* and *Cheops* (to suggest they were destined for the Egyptian Navy). However, an informant in the shipyard alerted the U.S. government, which lodged a diplomatic protest with the French. With the cover blown, Napoleon III disavowed the effort. The two ships were subsequently sold to Prussia and Denmark (which were at war with each other in the Second Schleswig War, although neither ship was delivered before the war ended, in Prussia's favor). The *Cheops* served in the Prussian Navy as *Prinz Albert*. Although *Sphinx* sailed to Denmark with a Danish crew as *Staerkodder* in June 1864, the Danes did not accept it in their Navy but rather sold it to the Confederacy in January 1865. On 6 January 1865, Lieutenant Thomas Jefferson Page of the Confederate States Navy took possession of *Staerkodder* (Page had been in command of the USS *Water Witch* during the Water Witch Affair with Paraguay [see H-Gram 062]). *Staerkodder* was underway the next day to France under a Danish captain. While off the coast of France to take on ammunition, provisions, and more crewmen, Lieutenant Page assumed command and the ship was commissioned as CSS *Stonewall*.

Stonewall was an ironclad ram. Her intended mission was to ram and sink Union ships on blockade duty off the Confederacy. The ship was steam powered, with a relatively new innovation – twin shafts, screws and rudders to improve maneuverability in restricted waters, and she could make 10.5 knots under steam. She was armed with a British-made 300-pounder 10-inch Armstrong rifled muzzle loader (RML), and two 70-pounder 6.4-inch RMLs. (These guns were accident-prone and were actually withdrawn from British service). The armor was designed to withstand hits by 15-inch guns and was 4.5-inches thick, backed by 15-inches of teak at its thickest. The ship also had "turrets" with 5.5-inch armor. Although called "turrets" they did not rotate but were actually fixed shelters with multiple gun ports, and the guns could swivel between the ports. *Stonewall* had a crew of about 135.

After leaving France, *Stonewall* ran into a severe storm in the Bay of Biscay, damaging her rudders, and forcing her to put into El Ferrol, Spain for extended repair. Union Intelligence quickly became aware, and within a few days, the steam frigate USS *Niagara* and steam-sloop *Sacramento* arrived off the port. On 21 March 1865, *Stonewall* was underway again en route Lisbon to re-coal. The wooden *Niagara* and *Sacramento* judiciously declined to engage in battle with the ironclad. *Stonewall* arrived in Nassau, Bahamas on 6 May 1865 and Havana, Spanish Cuba, on 11 May, where Lieutenant Page learned the war was over. Union ships arrived by 15 May to monitor *Stonewall*. Page turned over *Stonewall* to Spanish authorities in Cuba in exchange for enough money to pay off the crew. In November 1865, the U.S. reimbursed the Spanish and took possession of the *Stonewall*. On the way to the Washington Navy Yard, *Stonewall* accidentally rammed and sank a coal schooner in Chesapeake Bay; fortunately, no one was lost.

Representatives from the Japanese Tokugawa shogunate (then viewed as the legitimate Japanese government) came to the U.S. in 1867 seeking to buy surplus ships, and bought *Stonewall* for $400,000 on 5 August 1867. The Japanese renamed her *Kotetsu* (literally, "Ironclad"). *Kotetsu* arrived at Shinegawa Harbor (near Edo (now Tokyo) on 22 January 1868, under Japanese flag but with an American crew. By then, however, the Boshin War was in full swing between forces aligned with the new resurgent Emperor Meiji and those aligned with the ruling Tokugawa Shogunate. The United States took a neutral stance in the civil war. The U.S. Resident Minister to Japan, Robert Van Valkenburg, refused to turn over the *Kotetsu* and she resumed flying the U.S. flag. When Imperial Meiji forces were finally in ascendance, *Kotetsu* was handed over to the Meiji government in March 1869.

In the meantime, the vice commander of the Tokugawa Navy, Admiral Enomoto Takeaki, refused to accept defeat. On 20 August 1868, Enomoto left Shinagawa with his flagship, steam frigate *Kaiyo* and three other steam warships and four steam transports, heading north along Honshu. They immediately ran into a typhoon and one steam transport was lost, and the corvette *Kanrin Maru* (Japan's first screw driven warship, ordered in 1853 from the Dutch) was damaged and took refuge in a port, where she was bombarded and boarded by Imperial forces despite a white flag of surrender.

Enomoto's naval force (with a number of French advisors) and about 3,000 troops ultimately reached Hakodate, Hokkaido, where they established the Ezo Republic (with a government modeled after the United States and Enomoto was elected president). The Meiji government refused to recognize the breakaway republic and began moving forces to attack. The Ezo navy suffered a major setback when *Kaiyo* was wrecked in a storm in November 1868, along with *Shinsoku,* which went to her rescue.

On 9 March 1869, an Imperial naval force departed Tokyo Bay made up of eight steam ships provided by some of the major daimyo (feudal warlords), bolstered by the new ironclad *Kotetsu*. This force included the steam paddlewheel warship *Kasuga* (built in the Britain), thee smaller steam corvettes and three steam supply ships. On *Kotetsu*, the Japanese had removed one of the Armstrong 70-pounders and replaced it with two smaller cannons and a Gatling gun (early machine gun).

Recognizing that his wooden ships were at a severe disadvantage to the *Kotetsu*, Admiral Enomoto devised a daring plan to capture her. The plan called for three Ezo ships to conduct a surprise night attack on *Kotetsu* while she was in port Miyako Bay in northern Honshu. The new Ezo flagship, the paddle-wheel corvette *Kaiten* (built in Germany), would lead the attack, flying the American-flag to confuse the Imperial ships. Each ship carried a boarding party of elite samurai. The plan went awry when *Takao* (former U.S. revenue cutter *Ashuelot*) developed engine trouble and *Banryu* became separated by bad weather. *Kaiten* pressed on with the attack alone, achieving the desired surprise (and hoisted her colors only at the last moment).

On 6 May 1869, *Kaiten* rammed *Kotetsu* as planned, and the elite Shinsengumi ("new select brigade") began boarding *Kotetsu*. However, the nine-foot difference in deck height greatly impeded the boarding team, giving the *Kotetsu*'s crew time to overcome the shock of surprise and turn the Gatling gun on the boarding team, which was slaughtered, including the boarding team commander. *Kaiten* was able to pull away from *Kotetsu* and make a getaway, damaging three other ships on her way out, in what would be known as the Battle of Miyako Bay. *Takao*, slowed by engine trouble, showed up just in time to be beached and blown up to avoid capture (although her crew was captured).

On 9 April 1869, Imperial troops began landing near Hakodate, resulting in several land battles. The naval battle commenced on 4 May, with *Kotetsu* and *Kusaga* playing the key role with the Imperial forces. The Ezo ship *Chiyoda* ran aground and was captured by Imperial forces. The same day Ezo ship *Banryu* hit the Imperial *Choya Maru* in the gunpowder magazine, resulting in a massive blast that killed 86 of C*hoya Maru*'s crewmen and sank her in about two minutes. However, *Banryu* had taken so many hits that her crew ran her aground and then burned her. By 6 May, *Kaiten* was so badly damaged, that she too was run aground and burned. By the time the series of actions were over, the entire Ezo force was sunk, burned or captured. The Ezo Republic surrendered in June 1869.

With the victory at Hakodate Bay, led by *Stonewall*, the Imperial Japanese Navy was formally established. *Kotetsu* would be renamed *Azuma* in 1871 and played a minor role in the Formosa Expedition of 1874, the first overseas expedition by the Imperial Japanese Army and Navy. *Azuma* was stricken in 1888 and sold for scrap in 1889. Although Admiral Enomoto was initially imprisoned as a traitor, the Meiji government recognized his considerable talents; he was pardoned and went on to serve in senior cabinet and other positions, and was a major leader in the modernization of Japanese communications and the Imperial Japanese Navy. And, aboard *Kusaga* at both Miyako Bay and Hakodate was junior officer Togo Heihachiro, who would achieve one of the most decisive victories in naval history, against the Imperial Russian Navy in the Battle of Tsushima in May 1905.

Sources include: Lieutenant Commander Thomas J. Cutler, U.S. Navy (Retired), *"Lest We Forget: The Forgotten Battle of Shimonoseki Straits," U.S. Naval Institute,* Proceedings*, January 2019; Carl Herzog, "Consigned to a Seaman's Grave…" USS Constitution Museum, last modified 7 May 2019; Robert E. Johnson,* Far China Station: The U.S. Navy in Asian Waters 1800–1898 *(Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2013); Elijah Palmer, "Unexpected Enemies in the Civil War: The Japanese (Part One/Part Two), Hampton Roads Naval Museum's Blog; C.L. Veit, "The Battle of the Straits of Shimonoseki, July 16, 1863," Navy and Marine Living History Association,* On Deck.

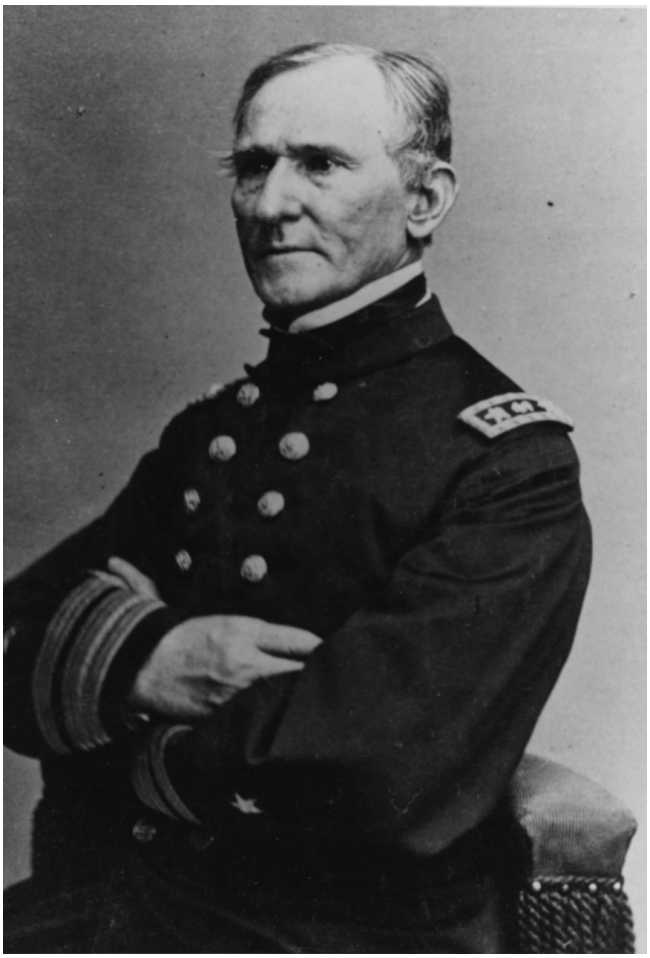
H-Gram 063-4: The Formosa Expedition, 1876

H-Gram 063, Attachment 4
Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC
July 2021

On 12 March 1867, the U.S.-flag merchant bark *Rover* wrecked in a remote area at the southern tip of Formosa (now Taiwan). Aboriginal Paiwan warriors killed all the survivors (some accounts say 14, others 24), including *Rover*'s captain, Joseph Hunt, and his wife, Mercy G. Beerman Hunt. One Chinese sailor was spared. The action by the Paiwan warriors was in retaliation for the killing of tribal members by other Europeans. Even so, the Paiwan had a long-standing reputation of hostility to outsiders.

The first ship on the scene was British screw sloop *Cormorant,* commanded by Commander George E. Broad, Royal Navy. Despite an offer to ransom any captive survivors, a British landing party was fired on. After recalling the party, *Cormorant* shelled the jungle, which hid the unseen assailants. *Cormorant* then proceeded to Amoy, China, where the commander of the U.S. East Indies Squadron, Rear Admiral Henry H. Bell, arrived aboard his flagship, screw sloop *Hartford,* while transiting to Yokohama, Japan.

Bell had previously been in command of screw frigate *San Jacinto* during the Battle of the Pearl River Forts in 1856 (see H063.1). Upon being informed of the fate of *Rover* by Commander Broad, Rear Admiral Bell dispatched the new iron-hulled "double-ender" gunboat *Ashuelot* to investigate and make contact with local Chinese authorities on Formosa. The steam-powered *Ashuelot* was armed with two 8-inch Dahlgren guns and was commanded by Commander John C. Febiger. Febiger was a survivor of the wreck of sloop-of-war *Concord* in the Mozambique Channel in 1842; the captain and two others were lost. (*Concord* had the distinction of being the first U.S. warship christened by a woman, in 1830.)



Rear Admiral Henry H. Bell, c. 1866 (NH 56140).

When Commander Febiger reached Formosa, he was able to confirm the account. Local representatives of the Chinese Qing Dynasty government in Formosa assured Febiger that the Paiwan tribesmen were operating outside the control of any lawful government, in effect indicating they would not interfere with however the United States chose to deal with the situation. The American consul in Xiamen, China, located across the strait from Formosa, arrived in Formosa and spent the month of April 1867 trying to make contact with the Paiwan, but the tribes remained implacably hostile and attempts at some sort of diplomatic solution failed.

After a delay of three months, which was blamed on red-tapeism in Washington, Rear Admiral Bell departed Shanghai in June 1867 on his flagship, screw sloop *Hartford,* in company with screw sloop *Wyoming,* bound for Formosa to conduct a punitive expedition. (Monthly U.S. steamer service had just been instituted between San Francisco and the Far East, enabling indecision in Washington to affect overseas operations—this might arguably be described as the beginning of the "8,000-mile screwdriver.")

Hartford, commissioned in 1859, had served with great distinction in the Civil War as flagship for Admiral David G. Farragut at the battles of New Orleans, Vicksburg, and Mobile Bay, as well as in numerous smaller actions. Her main armament consisted of twenty 9-inch smoothbore Dahlgren guns. *Wyoming,* also commissioned in 1859, had searched for the missing *Levant* in 1860. She spent much of the Civil War in the Far East in the fruitless search for the Confederate commerce raider CSS *Alabama* and had engaged Japanese warlords in 1863 (see H-063-3).

Bell's two ships arrived off southwestern Formosa on 13 June 1867 and anchored a half mile offshore, where *Rover* had wrecked. Paiwan warriors "painted red" were observed gathering in cleared spots, indicating they would not be surprised. Ship's boats landed 181 officers, sailors, and Marines under the overall command of Commander George E. Belknap (captain of *Hartford*). The group included Marine contingents from both ships, 80 armed sailors from *Hartford,* 40 armed sailors from *Wyoming,* and the *Hartford*'s light howitzer crew of five. The intent of the operation was somewhat vague—punish the Paiwan—and intelligence on the terrain and objective was completely lacking.

Commander Belknap's group split into two columns for the march inland. The second column was under the command of Lieutenant Commander Alexander Slidell MacKenzie. (MacKenzie's father was in command of the brig *Somers* in 1842 during the only attempted mutiny in U.S. Navy history to result in deaths; the elder MacKenzie ordered three crewmen hanged who were accused of plotting mutiny, one of whom was Midshipman Philip Spencer, the 19-year-old son of Secretary of War John C. Spencer. MacKenzie's decision to hang the accused mutineers—before they had attempted to mutiny—was highly controversial at the time, and still is. MacKenzie's brother was one of the Confederate commissioners intercepted and removed from the British Royal Mail vessel RMS *Trent* by Captain Charles Wilkes on *San Jacinto* in 1861 in what was known as the Trent Affair. See H-Gram 062 and H-063-1.)

As the two columns pressed inland, about 20 Marines under the command of Marine Captain James Forney formed a skirmish line ahead. The jungle environment was extremely hot and humid, and the U.S. force was inappropriately dressed in heavy woolen uniforms for shipboard warmth. After an hour of thrashing through the dense jungle, Paiwan warriors opened fire with muskets from a concealed hill ahead. No one was hit. MacKenzie's column and the Marines charged the position, but by the time they hacked their way there, the Paiwan had melted away into the jungle.

The two columns pressed forward, coming under fire from spears, rocks, and musket fire from a mostly unseen enemy. Each time the U.S. force charged, the Paiwan just retreated further into the jungle. After about six hours of this, a number of U.S. personnel had passed out from heat exhaustion and sunstroke, and others were delirious. Finally, unseen Paiwan warriors fired a volley of muskets. MacKenzie was hit and mortally wounded. At this point, Belknap, who was prostrated by the oppressive heat, made the decision to withdraw from the fruitless pursuit. Paiwan casualties, if any, are unknown.

After the failed punitive expedition, Rear Admiral Bell recommended that the only way to ensure

the area was safe was to enlist a powerful local ally to drive out the Paiwan natives. The American consul in Xiamen convinced the Chinese governor general of Fuzhou Province to send a 1,000-man expedition to Formosa. Although Bell declined to send a gunboat in support of this expedition, the American consul, Charles W. Le Gendre, actually wound up in charge of it; he succeeded in negotiating a treaty with the natives for the safety of shipwrecked sailors in exchange for keeping Chinese soldiers out of Paiwan territory. Le Gendre later reported that the Paiwan chief's willingness to negotiate was a result of the power demonstrated by the U.S. expedition in June, which perhaps wasn't such a failure after all.

Despite the agreement, Formosan natives continued on occasion to kill shipwreck survivors. The most egregious was the Mudan Incident in 1871, when 54 Ryukyuan sailors were beheaded by Paiwan natives. This incident provoked a Japanese military campaign in 1874—the first overseas campaign by the Imperial Japanese Army and Navy. The Japanese campaign succeeded where the American expedition failed, but at a cost of 12 Japanese killed in battle, and 561 dead from disease.

In late 1867, the U.S. East Indies Squadron was reconfigured as the U.S. Asiatic Squadron, with Rear Admiral Bell still in command. On 1 January 1868, Bell arrived in Osaka, Japan, aboard *Hartford,* in company with screw sloops *Shenandoah* and *Oneida* and screw gunboat *Aroostook*. The purpose of the port call was to pressure the Japanese into opening the port of Hyogo (near Kobe) to Western trade, as they had previously committed to do in the accord after the second Battle of Shimonoseki Strait. Despite rough weather on 11 January, Bell chose to go ashore for a meeting. The boat capsized when it was hit by "three heavy rollers"; Bell, his flag lieutenant, and 10 sailors perished (only three were rescued). Bell had been promoted to Rear Admiral (technically on the retired list) the previous year, which may make him the first U.S. Navy admiral to die in the line of duty. (Of note, *Oneida* was accidentally hit by the British steamer *Bombay* off Yokohama, Japan, on 24 January 1870 and sank with the loss of 125 crewmen; 61 were rescued by Japanese fishing boats.)

George Belknap was promoted to rear admiral in 1889; his son Reginald Belknap commanded the North Sea mine barrage in World War I and was promoted to rear admiral in 1927. *Clemson*-class destroyer DD-251 (1919–45) was named in honor of the elder Belknap. The guided missile cruiser CG-26 (1964–95) was named in honor of both Belknaps.

The iron-hulled gunboat *Ashuelot* struck a rock off the Chinese coast on 17 February 1883 and sank with the loss of 11 crewmen. *Wyoming* continued to serve in the East Indies, North Atlantic, and Europe until 1878; she then served as a training ship for midshipmen at the U.S. Naval Academy until she was sold off in 1892. *Hartford* survived in various capacities, due to her Civil War fame, until her final decommissioning in 1926. In 1938, she was moved to Washington, DC, to be part of a naval museum (in the Tidal Basin) envisioned by President Franklin Roosevelt, which was to also include *Constitution, Constellation,* and *Olympia*. The plan was abandoned as soon as Roosevelt died in 1945. After being poorly maintained, *Hartford* sank at her berth in the Norfolk Navy Yard on 20 November 1956.

Sources include: Far China Station: The U.S. Navy in Asian Waters 1800–1898*, by Robert Erwin Johnson: Naval Institute Press, 2013; "The Pirates of Formosa; Official Reports of the Engagement of the United States Naval Forces with the Savages of the Isle" in the* New York Times*, 23 August 1867;* NHHC Dictionary of American Fighting Ships *(DANFS).*

The Salee River, known as "the Gateway of the Empire," 1871 (NH 63673).

H-Gram 063-5: The Battle of Ganghwa, Korea, 1871

H-Gram 063, Attachment 5
Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC
July 2021

Background

The Joseon dynasty ruled the area known as Korea from 1392 to 1897, surviving Japanese invasions in 1592–98 (in which Korean "turtle ships," considered the first armored ships in the world, played a key role) and the Manchu invasions of 1627 and 1636–37. Although technically a vassal state of Qing dynasty China, the Joseon were permitted considerable autonomy. Following the invasions, the Joseon adopted a policy of strict isolationism (hence the moniker for Korea: "the Hermit Kingdom"). As the Joseon observed the humiliation of China and Japan at the hands of European powers (and the United States) with "unequal" treaties, the Joseon policy of isolation grew even stronger. Trade with the outside (besides China) was forbidden. Koreans who had contact with the outside were often executed. Unlike the Japanese, however, the Joseon did not make a practice of killing shipwrecked foreign sailors. As a general rule, such sailors were treated well, but were quickly transported out of Korea to China.

In 1864, the Joseon king died without an heir. In accordance with SOP, the dowager queens (there were three) selected the next king, Gojong, who was a minor (age 11). King Gojon's father, Heungseon Daewongun, was selected to be regent and ruled for the king until he became an adult. (This is the greatly simplified version of the process.) The Daewongun, translated as "Prince of the Great Court," was known to Western diplomats as Prince Gung. Although he instituted numerous positive reforms, he vigorously enforced the seclusion policy, to include yet another round of persecuting Korean Catholic converts (as many as 10,000 out of 23,000 were killed in four purges between 1839 and 1866). In early 1866, seven French Catholic missionary priests were beheaded.

On 24 June 1866, the American and Chinese survivors of the U.S.-flag merchant vessel (schooner) *Surprise* made it ashore on the northwest coast of Korea. They were treated well by the Koreans but quickly hustled out of the country via China on orders of the Daewongun. By 7 July, three French priests, who had survived the purge in Korea, made it back to China to tell their story, prompting the French to put together an expedition under the command of Rear Admiral Pierre-Gustave Roze, which would commence in September 1866.

The General Sherman *Incident, August 1866*

Into this tense environment, the U.S.-flag merchant schooner *General Sherman* sailed up the Taedong River in August toward Pyongyang, despite repeated warnings from the Koreans not to do so, in what became known as the *General Sherman* Incident. When the incident was over, by 2 September, everyone on the ship had been killed. Virtually every account of the *General Sherman* Incident conflicts with others. The best account actually appears to be in a 1911 book by William Elliot Griffis, *Corea, the Hermit Nation*. Subsequent accounts frequently mix up the ships involved and numerous other details (and I probably have too).

General Sherman was a centerboard schooner (not a steam vessel, nor an ironclad, as in most accounts). It was well armed for a merchant ship (accounts agree) with a number of 12-pounder cannons, and may have had some sort of armor protection (not confirmed). The ship's prior history is murky, but it appears to have been originally British owned, possibly named *Princess Royal*. The British firm Meadows & Co., based in Tianjin, China, financed the voyage and reportedly loaded "cotton cloth, glass, tin plates, and other items" with the intent to open trade with Korea. The Korean version of events is that the real purpose of the voyage was to loot Korean royal tombs northeast of Pyongyang, and there is sufficient circumstantial evidence to suggest this was in fact the real motive. The ship was acquired by an American owner, W.B. Preston, shortly before the voyage commenced, and the ship was then registered as an American-flag vessel under the name *General Sherman*.

The ship's captain (Page) and First Mate (Wilson) were Americans. The ship's American owner, W.B. Preston, was aboard the ship too. Also aboard was a Welsh missionary, Robert Jermain Thomas, who served as an interpreter, and by some accounts had an ulterior motive of his own for the encouraging the vessel to attempt trade with Korea: to spread the Gospel. This would be his second trip into Korea (his first was in 1865). Some accounts say there were two Americans aboard and some say three. Most say four or five "Westerners" were aboard, which would suggest three Americans plus the missionary plus someone else (identified in some accounts as a "British pirate"). The rest of the crew included 13 Chinese and three Malays (by most accounts) plus a Chinese "money changer." Most accounts indicate there were 20–22 aboard, although some suggest more.

General Sherman probably departed Chefoo, China, on 9 August 1866 and arrived off the western Korean coast on 16 August 1866. As the ship approached Korea, it was assisted by Chinese junks (the Chinese were allowed to trade). Thomas convinced a Chinese pilot, Yu Wen Tai, who he apparently knew from his previous missionary work in Korea, to guide *General Sherman* up the Taedong River. (Yu Wen Tai, or Yu Wautai in some accounts, appears to have been the only survivor of the incident, presumably getting off *General Sherman* at some point before things went bad.)

General Sherman sailed to a point on the Taedong River known as Keupsa Gate, where the ship was ordered by local Korean authorities to stop. The Koreans agreed to provide food and provisions to the crew while they consulted with higher authorities. Captain Page ignored the Korean order and proceeded to sail up the river to a point just west of Pyongyang, aided by the fact that the river was running unusually high due to rains and tides. The Koreans again ordered *General Sherman* to leave, but Captain Page refused. The Governor of Pyongyang, Bak Gyu-su (Park Gyu-su in some accounts), sent his adjutant general, Yi Hyon-ik, to not only provide the ship with food but also order it back to Keupsa Gate while the governor consulted with the Daewongun. The response from the Daewongun was leave or be killed.

At this point, accounts vary widely as to the order of events. *General Sherman* went even further up the river and ran aground. As the ship was approached by Koreans ashore and on boats, *General Sherman* fired into a crowd with 12-pounder cannons, killing five (or seven) and wounding seven. Yi Hyon-ik and two of his deputies were also seized as hostages (accounts vary exactly how). Ransom was then demanded for Yi's release. At some point Yi was rescued, but his two deputies were killed. The ship then sent a boat to sound the river north of Pyongyang (giving some credence to the tomb looting theory). Korean soldiers shot fire arrows and guns at the boat, which returned to the ship. By other accounts, *General Sherman* ran aground while trying to go back downstream as the river level was falling, and then fired into the crowd in panic. All accounts agree that by 31 August 1866, *General Sherman* was stuck fast on a sand bar near Yanggak Island in the river off Pyongyang.

Over the next days, skirmishing occurred between the Pyongyang militia and *General Sherman,* resulting in the death of at least one Korean, with the crew of *General Sherman* becoming increasingly desperate. On 2 September 1866, the governor of Pyongyang ordered *General Sherman* be burned with fire rafts; each raft consisted of three small boats lashed together and stuffed with wood, sulfur, and saltpeter. The first two fire rafts were unsuccessful, but the third caused *General Sherman* to catch fire. Trapped and unable to extinguish the fire, most of *General Sherman*'s crew died in the flames or drowned trying to escape the burning ship. Two made it to shore and were beaten to death by an angry mob. One of those killed ashore was the missionary Robert Thomas, although accounts vary on exactly how, where, and why he was killed (in some accounts he handed a Bible to his executioner). Thomas had apparently left Bibles on the riverbank during the voyage up the river, and his influence in death turned out to be far greater than in life. Within 15 years, Pyongyang had become the center of Christianity in Korea with over 100 churches.

Many accounts of *General Sherman* misidentify the ship. Some accounts say *General Sherman* was a steam side-paddle-wheel armored gunboat. This is actually confused with the USS *General Sherman,* a "tinclad" side-wheel river gunboat that served in the U.S. Civil War from 1864 to June 1865 on the upper Tennessee River. She was disposed of in 1865 and was not an ocean-going vessel.

Other accounts say *General Sherman* was an iron-hulled steam screw vessel, formally the British-built Confederate blockade-runner *Princess Royal*. *Princess Royal* was forced aground by Union ships off Charleston, South Carolina, on 29 January 1863. She was refloated, repaired, and incorporated into the Union Navy as USS *Princess Royal*. Armed as a cruiser, she captured several Confederate blockade-runners. Following the war, *Princess Royal* was decommissioned in July 1865, sold to William F. Weld and Co. of Boston at a public auction in August 1865, and renamed *Sherman* (after General William Tecumseh Sherman). Over the next years, *Sherman* made runs from Boston to New York to New Orleans until she sprang a leak and sank off Cape Fear, North Carolina, on 8 January 1874. Some accounts claim *Princess Royal*, renamed *General Sherman,* was the ship in the Korean incident. There is even an account that the Koreans repaired *General Sherman* after she had been burned, and it became for a while their only modern warship, but it was subsequently returned to U.S. custody, sailed to Boston via Cape Horn, and is the same ship that sank in 1874.

The North Koreans have fallen for the *Princess Royal/General Sherman* story hook, line, and sinker. In fact, the North Korean 2006 commemorative postage stamp, showing a steam screw vessel on fire and labeled *General Sherman,* is identical to a line drawing of USS *Princess Royal*. In the 1960s, North Korean propaganda began claiming that Kim Il-sung's great grandfather, Kim Eung-u, actually led the attack on *General Sherman,* thereby striking the first blow against American imperialism. (Kim Eung-u would be the great-great-great grandfather of current North Korean "Dear Leader" Kim Jong-un.) There is no evidence for this, but it is now accepted dogma in North Korea. In 1999, the captured intelligence collection ship USS *Pueblo* (AGER-2) was moved from Wonsan on the east coast to Pyongyang and moored at the location of the burning of *General Sherman* until 2012, when it was moved to the Fatherland War of Liberation Museum in Pyongyang (see H-Grams 014, 024, and 025 for more on *Pueblo*).

The First Battle of Ganghwa: The French Expedition, October–November 1866

On 23 September 1866, French ships arrived off the coast of western Korea to conduct surveys in advance of a punitive expedition following the Korean execution of French priests earlier that year. As a result of the survey, Rear Admiral Roze determined that the tides were so widely variable, and the waters so shallow and dangerous, that he could not risk sending his larger ships up the Han River to the Joseon capital of Hanyang (now Seoul). Instead, Roze planned to put troops ashore on Ganghwa Island, which covered the entrance to the Han River. By taking the island, the French could blockade the Han River and force reparations from the Joseon government.

On 11 October 1866, the French force got underway from Chefoo, China, and arrived off Ganghwa Island on 16 October. Roze's force included the frigate *Guerriere*. Originally built as a 56-gun sail frigate, *Guerriere* was extensively modified with the addition of a steam engine and a retractable propeller, which reduced her armament to 34 guns. The force also included two corvettes, two gunboats, and two avisos (dispatch boats) with about 800 troops. The initial landings were made by 170 *Fusiliers marins* (naval infantry, specially trained for operations ashore) from the French garrison in Yokohama, Japan. The French quickly captured the fortress overlooking the Han, as well as the fortified city of Ganghwa, plus cannons, 8,000 muskets, and boxes of silver and a few of gold. Roze then sent letters demanding reparations, which the Joseon declined to answer.

The French then sent troops across the Salee River, separating Ganghwa Island from the mainland of Korea (not far from Inchon). On 26 October, 120 *Fusiliers marins* landed on the mainland near the monastery of Munsusansong, which controlled the road to Seoul, but were met

with heavy fire from Korean defenders. The French tried again on 7 November, landing 160 *Fuseliers marins* at Munsusansong, which was vigorously defended by 543 Koreans. The French suffered three killed and 36 wounded before calling a retreat. At this point the French dug in around the city of Ganghwa.

Roze sent another letter, asking for the release of two French missionaries that he believed might still be alive. The French then tried to take a fortified monastery at the southern end of Ganghwa, only to discover the Koreans had been massively reinforcing the position with almost 10,000 men. The French were driven back with many casualties but no deaths. With the Korean refusal to answer any letters, except by mobilizing even more reinforcements, and with winter approaching and word that the two missing missionaries had made it to China, Roze opted to withdraw from Ganghwa Island.

Rear Admiral Roze, believing his force had inflicted more casualties than they had, reported that the murder of the missionaries had been avenged and the Koreans deeply shocked. Most of the French force returned to Yokohama, arriving on 13 January 1867. A majority of French forces in the Far East were then withdrawn as a result of the French suffering heavy casualties in the French intervention in Mexico (1861–67), in which the French suffered about 14,000 killed. The Mexicans suffered far more, but won, and Emperor Maximilian, installed by the French, was captured and executed by the Mexicans in June 1867.

U.S. Response to the General Sherman *Incident, 1866–1870*

As the French squadron returned from the Korean expedition, the Commander of the U.S. East Indies Squadron, Rear Admiral Henry Bell, first heard reports regarding the *General Sherman*. The United States had shown little interest in Korea since President Andrew Jackson's "special confidential agent," sailing on sloop-of-war *Peacock,* had recommended in 1832 that the United States try to open trade with the Hermit Kingdom. (See H-Gram 062 for more on *Peacock*'s diplomatic missions.) From the reports, Rear Admiral Bell was dubious regarding the legality of *General Sherman*'s actions. Nevertheless, in January 1867, Bell dispatched the large steam screw sloop-of-war *Wachusett* to investigate. He also recommended to Washington that additional shallow draft steamers and 1,500–2,000 troops be transferred from the North Pacific Squadron to the Far East. (Also in January 1867, the Pacific Mail Steamship Company commenced monthly steamer service between San Francisco and Shanghai.)

Wachusett, commanded by Captain Robert W. Shufeldt, departed Hong Kong on 29 December 1866, coaled in Shanghai, and received orders from Rear Admiral Bell on 23 January 1867 to proceed to Korea and deliver a letter requesting information on *General Sherman*'s fate. *Wachusett* embarked *General Sherman*'s former Chinese pilot (which strongly suggests he was not killed) as well as a missionary interpreter. Shufeldt meant to go to the entrance of the Han River to have the letter delivered to the Joseon capital in Seoul. Instead he wound up at the entrance to the Taedong River (some pilot!). Shufeldt met with a "haughty" Korean dignitary, who informed him that the Koreans considered the crew of *General Sherman* to be "robbers." By the time the letter reached Seoul, Shufeldt had been forced to leave by foul weather and worsening ice conditions. Shufeldt was able to determine that the crew of *General Sherman* was dead, at least most of them, but was not able to find out why.

Through 1867 and into 1868, Washington was focused on relations between the North and the South during the contentious Reconstruction period, ultimately leading to the impeachment of President Andrew Johnson in February 1868. It was also a presidential election year, and as usual, no decisions of consequence could be made.

There was no interest in Korea and no orders came regarding the *General Sherman*. Funding for the U.S. Navy had also gone into steep decline after the Civil War.

In early 1868, the East Indies Squadron was reorganized into the Asiatic Squadron. Rear Admiral Stephen C. Rowan assumed command of the Asiatic Squadron in April 1868 following the death of Rear Admiral Bell in a boating accident at Osaka, Japan, on 11 January 1868. Rowan was a veteran of combat in both the Mexican War and Civil War. He had been in command of the broadside ironclad USS *New Ironsides* when she was hit and damaged by a spar torpedo mounted on CSS *David* (one of over 20 semisubmersible torpedo boats operated by the Confederate Navy) off Charleston, South Carolina, on 5 October 1863, several months before the Confederate submarine *Hunley* sank USS *Housatonic* off Charleston.

One of Rowan's first actions was to order Commander John Febiger of the wooden screw sloop-of-war *Shenandoah* to proceed to Korea to investigate the fate of *General Sherman*. Commissioned in June 1863 (over a year before Confederate raider CSS *Shenandoah* was commissioned), *Shenandoah* weighed in at 1,375 tons, carried a crew of 175, and was armed with one 150-pounder Parrott rifle, two 11-inch Dahlgren smoothbore guns, one 30-pounder Parrott rifle, two 24-pounder rifled howitzers, two 12-pounder rifles, two heavy 12-pounder smoothbore howitzers (and a partridge in a pear tree).

On 11 April 1868, *Shenandoah* arrived in Korean waters off the Taedong River (repeating Shufeldt's mistake in understanding that Seoul on the Han River was the seat of Joseon power). Nevertheless, Febiger's contact with local officials bore some fruit on 1 May when a letter arrived signed by the governor of Pyongyang, Bak Gyu-su. The exact same letter had been sent to China following Shufeldt's visit, intended for Shufeldt but never received by him. The letter attributed the destruction of *General Sherman* to a "well-provoked" but unauthorized mob. The "well-provoked" part was true, but Bak had ordered the destruction; the mob had finished off survivors. Nevertheless, Febiger was impressed with the cordial tone of the letter, although *Shenandoah* was fired on by a shore battery while conducting surveys of the mouth of the Taedong River, but with no damage. *Shenandoah* departed on 16 May 1868 after learning from another official that, contrary to rumors, there were no survivors of *General Sherman*.

Rear Admiral Rowan received the report from Febiger and assessed the Korean letter regarding *General Sherman*'s fate to be accurate. He still considered it an affront to the U.S. flag and was inclined to send a punitive expedition, as had the French. However, Rowan had his hands full with events in Japan as a result of the Boshin War between the Tokugawa shogunate and the Emperor Meiji, as well as different daimyo clans jockeying for position (see H-063-3). In January 1868, a major battle occurred near Kyoto in which the imperial forces won. The defeated shogun sought and received asylum on screw sloop USS *Iroquois,* then in Osaka Harbor, on 31 January 1868, and was then quickly transferred to a Japanese ship still loyal to the shogun.

In February 1868, soldiers loyal to the Hizen daimyo (which sided with the Emperor) attacked foreigners in the treaty port of Hiogo (near Osaka). A boat from screw sloop USS *Oneida* was ashore, and one American Sailor was wounded. A force of 15 U.S. Marines pursued the Hizen troops out of the city and were joined in the effort by 50 British troops, members of the French legation guard, and a 150-man Navy force with wheeled boat howitzers from *Oneida* and *Iroquois*. Four Japanese steamers in the harbor were captured, but were returned after the imperial government committed to restitution and the officer responsible for firing on the foreigners committed public hara-kiri (ritual suicide) with the captain of

Oneida in attendance as the official U.S. observer. In March 1868, a midshipman and 10 sailors in a boat from French corvette *Dupleix* were attacked near Osaka. The Japanese government sentenced 22 Japanese to death for the attack, and 11 were beheaded before the French Admiral asked that the executions be stopped.

The former Confederate ironclad ram *Stonewall* also arrived in Yokohama in the spring of 1868 under Japanese flag but with a (very well paid) American crew. Although purchased from the United States by the shogunate, the emperor also claimed the ship. The U.S. consul, Minister Van Valkenburgh, refused to turn over the ironclad in order to maintain neutrality in the Boshin War. In order to save money, the *Stonewall*'s civilian crew was paid off and replaced with a detachment of sailors from the steam sidewheel gunboat *Monocacy*. In response to rumors (or intelligence) that an attempt would be made by a Japanese faction to take *Stonewall* by force, Rear Admiral Rowan ordered *Stonewall*'s machinery disabled and the crew to General Quarters after midnight, which deterred the boarding effort, if there actually was one planned.

In September 1868, a serious "liberty incident" occurred when two intoxicated U.S. midshipmen from *Oneida* and four French midshipmen got into an altercation with Japanese police in a "disreputable" district in Hyogo. The police responded with a thrashing by bamboo rods (instead of the usual swords) when challenged. The midshipmen responded by drawing at least one revolver and firing at the police. Luckily no one was hit, and the incident only resulted in a formal apology to the Japanese governor by the U.S. and French ship commanding officers, and not a Japanese demand for execution.

Meanwhile, the Boshin War developed into a naval phase, including the Battle of Miyako Bay and the Battle of Hakodate Bay, which ended the war in 1869. The United States maintained ships on station to observe the shogunate and imperial squadrons. However, much of Rear Admiral Rowan's time was spent working in concert with British Vice Admiral Sir Henry Keppel in trying to stamp out the venereal disease running rampant through foreign ships in Japan at this time. The material condition of Rowan's ships was also abysmal, with repeated boiler breakdowns, excessive (unaffordable) coal consumption, and other mechanical issues.

Finally, to cap off a challenging year, *Oneida* (one of only two vessels Rowan assessed as "serviceable") got underway from Yokohama en route to Hong Kong on 24 January 1870. In the darkness, *Oneida* was rammed in the starboard quarter by the much larger British steamer *Bombay*. As *Oneida* began to sink, Commander Edward P. Williams tried to sail her to shore, but her steering gear had been ripped away. *Oneida*'s gig was crushed and another boat smashed by her falling smokestack. Three boats previously lost in a typhoon had not been replaced, leaving only two boats for the crew. In the end, Japanese fishing boats saved 61 sailors, but 125 were lost with the ship, including Commander Williams. A British court of inquiry found the officers of *Oneida* responsible but blamed the captain of *Bombay* for not remaining on the scene to rescue survivors. A U.S. court of inquiry placed blame entirely on *Bombay*.

Rear Admiral Rowan's tenure as commander of the Asiatic Squadron ended in June 1870. Rowan had requested to return to the United States on his flagship *Delaware* (renamed from *Piscataqua* in May 1869) via the newly opened Suez Canal but was ordered to proceed via the Cape of Good Hope. Rowan was promoted to vice admiral upon return but never went to sea again, serving in a series of shore commands until his retirement in 1889 after 63 years of service. *Delaware,* on the other hand, was decommissioned a month after her return to New York and sank at the pier in 1876.

The Asiatic Squadron in 1871

The new commander of the U.S. Asiatic Squadron in 1871 was Rear Admiral John Rodgers, son of Commodore John Rodgers, famous hero of the early American Navy in the Quasi-War with France, both Barbary Wars, and the War of 1812 (he fired the first shot of the War of 1812 while in command of the 44-gun heavy frigate *President*, sister ship of *Constitution*). The younger John Rodgers was born in 1812 and became a midshipman in 1828. He commanded an expeditionary Navy-Marine detachment during the Seminole Wars in Florida, and then commanded the North Pacific Exploring and Surveying Expedition (1853–56). Promoted to commander in 1855, he became head of the U.S. Navy's "Japan Office" in Washington, DC.

When Virginia voted to secede from the Union, Rodgers was sent to Norfolk to save as many ships as possible from being captured; however, most of the ships had already been scuttled and the yard burned. His attempt to destroy the Gosport drydock failed (and it's still there and in use), and he was captured when the Virginia state militia took the shipyard (and subsequently carted off 1,195 guns for use throughout the Confederacy). Since Virginia hadn't joined the Confederacy yet, Rodgers was released.

During the Civil War, Rodgers commanded the Western Gunboat Flotilla (which became the Mississippi River Squadron) and supervised the construction of the "Pook Turtles," the U.S. Navy's first ironclad warships, armored steam gunboats that served on the Mississippi and other western rivers. In 1862 he was given command of the experimental wooden-hulled ironclad *Galena,* and then command of the entire James River Flotilla, which was stopped eight miles below Richmond by the Confederate fortifications in the Battle of Drewry's Bluff in May 1862, during which *Galena*'s armor was demonstrated to be not thick enough.

In July 1862, Rodgers assumed command of the ironclad monitor *Weehawken* (an improved version of the original *Monitor*), and in December 1862, Rodgers and *Weehawken* survived the same storm that sank *Monitor* off the Outer Banks of North Carolina. On 17 June 1863, Rodgers and *Weehawken* defeated and captured the Confederate casemate ironclad ram CSS *Atlanta,* which won him the "Thanks of Congress" and promotion to commodore. Following an illness, he was given command of the *Dictator,* designed as an advanced technology sea-going turret monitor, which encountered technological problems during construction, as well as cost overruns, delays, and an unreliable engineering plant (some things never change). Following command of the Boston Navy Yard, he was promoted to rear admiral in December 1869 and given command of the U.S. Asiatic Squadron.

The flagship of the U.S. Asiatic Squadron in 1871 was the wooden steam screw frigate *Colorado* (named for the river). One of five *Franklin*-class frigates, *Colorado* was commissioned in March 1858. At 3,400 tons, with a crew of 674, she was capable of nine knots. Her armament included two 100-pounder rifles, one 11-inch smoothbore, and forty-two 9-inch smoothbore guns, plus two 20-pounder howitzers and six 12-pound wheeled boat howitzers. *Colorado* served with distinction during the Civil War, including both battles at Fort Fisher (Wilmington, North Carolina) in December 1864 and January 1865, during which her executive officer was Lieutenant George Dewey (future hero of the Spanish-American War in 1898 and the only officer to hold the rank of Admiral of the Navy). Under the command of Captain George H. Cooper, *Colorado* arrived in the Far East and became the flagship in April 1870.

The Asiatic Squadron in 1871 also had two newly constructed (very rare in the years after the Civil War) wooden steam (twin stack) screw sloops-of-war, which were considered on par in capability with any in the world of that type at the time. (This

was an answer to the sorry state of the Asiatic Squadron in the preceding years.)

Alaska was commissioned in December 1869 and was commanded by Commander Homer C. Blake. *Alaska* was 2,400 tons, with a crew of 273, and capable of 11.5 knots. Her armament included one 11-inch smoothbore gun, six 8-inch smoothbore guns, one 60-pounder (5.3-inch) Parrott rifle, and two 20-pounder guns. She got underway from New York in April 1870 and transited to the Far East in company with *Colorado*.

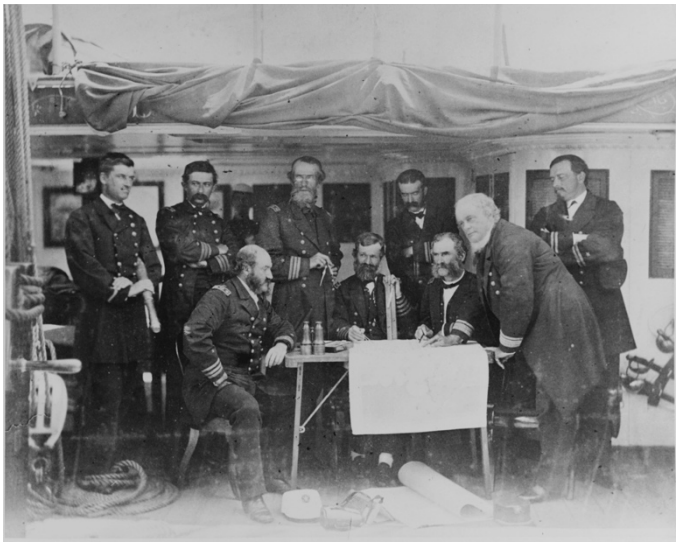
The wooden steam (two stacks) screw sloop-of-war *Benicia* was commissioned in December 1869. *Benicia* was 2,400 tons, with a crew of 291, and capable of 11.5 knots. Her armament included one 11-inch smoothbore gun, ten 9-inch smoothbore guns, one 60-pounder rifle, and two 20-pounder breech-loading guns. Under the command of Commander S. Nicholson, *Benicia* arrived in the Asiatic Squadron in March 1870.

There were three gunboats in the Asiatic Squadron. *Ashuelot* (see Formosa Expedition H063.4) needed extensive dock work and was unavailable for the Korean expedition. *Monocacy* was a sidewheel gunboat completed in 1866. She was 1,392 tons, had a crew of 159, a top speed of 11.2 knots, and was armed with six guns. She participated in the opening of the Japanese ports of Osaka and Hyogo in 1868, conducted a survey of Japan's Inland Sea, and sailed up the Yangtze River in China making charts.

The gunboat *Palos* was an iron-hulled screw tug commissioned in 1870 and modified to carry two guns. In 1871, she carried six 24-pounder howitzers. She was only 420 tons and capable of 10.35 knots. During her transit to the Far East, *Palos* gained the distinction of the first U.S. warship to transit the Suez Canal, on 11–13 August 1870. (The Suez Canal officially opened on 17 November 1869.)

One officer of particular note serving in the Asiatic Squadron aboard *Benicia* was Lieutenant Commander Winfield Scott Schley. Schley graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1860 and participated in multiple battles during the Civil War in the Western Gulf Squadron and on the Mississippi. In 1864, he was sent to the Pacific to serve as executive officer on sidewheel gunboat *Wateree*. *Wateree* almost didn't make it around Cape Horn and was badly battered. After the war, *Wateree* operated along the west coast of Central and South America. Schley participated in operations ashore in La Union, El Salvador, to protect U.S. interests during a revolution. In 1866, at the request of Peruvian authorities, *Wateree* played a key role in the suppression of a rebellion by Chinese laborers in the Chincha Islands. (Known as "coolies" at the time, a term that is now a pejorative, the Chinese were virtual slaves, laboring under the most appalling conditions mining guano. Almost none survived their term of indentured servitude and the mortality rate on ships bringing Chinese laborers to Peru was 40 percent, rivaling that of the worst of the African slave trade. The Chinese who were imported to American to work on the railroads didn't fare much better.)

After Schley detached, *Wateree* was driven 400 yards ashore during an earthquake (the most devastating ever recorded in South America) and tsunami at Arica, Peru, (now in Chile) on 13 August 1868. Only one man from *Wateree* died ashore, but the accompanying stores ship *Fredonia* was destroyed with a loss of 27 crewmen (five survived). The ships were in Arica to avoid a yellow fever outbreak in Callao, Peru.



Council of War on board *Colorado*, June 1871. Rear Admiral John Rodgers stands to the right of the table, leaning on the chart (NH 63678).

The 1871 Korean Expedition

One person who had been particularly outraged by the *General Sherman* Incident was Secretary of State William H. Seward. Seward is more commonly known for his purchase of Alaska (denigrated at the time as "Seward's Folly," although his push for a Korean punitive expedition would later be known as "Seward's real folly"). Seward was out of office with the change of administrations in the spring of 1869, but the former U.S. consul in Shanghai and current secretary of state, Hamilton Fish, took up the cause. Fish directed the U.S. minister to China, Frederick Low, to enlist and accompany the Asiatic Squadron on a mission to open Korea for trade, or, failing that, to punish the Koreans.

With a more operationally capable force than Rear Admiral Rowan had had, Rear Admiral Rodgers was much more inclined to pursue such an expedition to Korea. Low and Rodgers spent almost a year gathering and digesting every bit of intelligence they could find on Korea, which actually proved quite difficult due to Korea's isolation (some things never change). Rodgers was able to obtain a useful hydrographic chart prepared during French Rear Admiral Roze's expedition to Ganghwa in 1866. No other Western nations showed an interest in joining the expedition (perhaps having actually learned from the French experience). The attempt to gather allies and information was not especially discreet, so the Chinese were well aware of a forthcoming U.S. expedition and passed that on to the Koreans.

The flagship *Colorado* and gunboat *Palos* arrived at Woosong, China, in April 1871 to embark Minister Low, as well as five shipwrecked Korean sailors to be returned to Korea as a gesture of goodwill. However, the Koreans were so fearful that they would be executed on return for being tainted by the outside world that Rodgers left them in Nagasaki. The rest of the Asiatic Squadron rendezvoused at Nagasaki, except for gunboat *Ashuelot,* which required extensive repairs and was deemed unfit for service without dockyard work. All but 20 of *Ashuelot*'s crew were subsequently distributed throughout the rest of the squadron.

On 16 May 1871, Rodger's squadron departed Nagasaki, Japan, for the west coast of Korea. Gunboat *Monocacy* was damaged in a gale but continued ahead to the rendezvous point in the Yellow Sea. The squadron was then delayed by thick fog. On 24 May, the force arrived at Roze Roads (named after the French admiral of the 1866 expedition). *Palos* was sent ahead with four steam launches from the other ships to sound and survey the approaches to the mouth of the Salee River. In the meantime, the other four ships waited at Roze Roads while the Marine detachment, under Captain McLane Tilton, USMC, conducted extensive infantry battle drills. Minister Low also drafted a letter regarding the purpose of the expedition (trade) and provided it to local Korean authorities. After four days, the *Palo*s and launches returned to report the channel was navigable to an anchorage (Boisee) at the mouth of the Salee River, but the larger ships could not go up the Salee River. Fog delayed the ships arrival at Boisee until 30 May.

Upon arrival at Boisee, a Korean junk arrived and reported that Low's letter had been delivered and three emissaries would arrive to parley. Low declined to meet them when he determined they were too junior. He sent word back that the U.S. force had no hostile intent but would only negotiate with diplomats of the highest level. Low also stated that boats would need to survey the Salee River, and that forts on both sides of the river should be ordered not to fire on them.

The Salee River runs north–south and connects the estuary near present day Inchon (south) with the Han River (north), which runs east–west at that point. The Salee River separates the island of Ganghwa to the west from the mainland of Korea to the east. On the Ganghwa side of the river were several Korean forts and gun batteries overlooking the river. On the mainland side was one larger fort across the river from the northernmost Ganghwa fort. Near the location of the last forts, the river makes a sharp jog to the east, and then loops back to the west, before resuming its north–south track.

The (Second) Battle of Ganghwa, June 1871

On 1 June 1871, the steam launches entered the Salee River to conduct the survey, covered by the gunboats *Monocacy* and *Palos*. The survey operation was commanded by Commander Homer Blake (commanding officer of *Alaska* but embarked on *Palos*). It was immediately noted that all the Korean forts appeared fully manned with flags and banners flying. The strong current played havoc with the survey boats, but they continued to press northward into the river and past the first two forts to the west.

Without warning, Korean batteries fired on the survey boats. This was in accord with Korean rules of engagement that forbid any foreign vessels from entering the Salee or Han rivers, as the Han was the direct path to Hanyang (now Seoul), the Joseon dynasty capital. The survey launches immediately manned their boat howitzers and returned fire. The gunboats *Monocacy* and *Palos* drew up and added their heavier firepower to the barrage on the forts. The current actually swept all the launches and gunboats past the Korean forts. *Palos* was damaged by the muzzle blasts and recoil of her own guns. *Monocacy* struck an uncharted rock, which put a hole in her hull. Two sailors were wounded. Commander Blake ordered the force to anchor until the tide turned, while continuing to fire on the forts until it appeared the Koreans had abandoned them. The steam launches expended almost all their ammunition in the bombardment. Blake then brought the force back out of the river, firing at the forts as they went, with no response from the Koreans.

Rear Admiral Rodgers and Minister Low immediately wanted to take punitive action, but then had second thoughts, concluding the forts possibly opened fire on the authority of lower ranking officers without the approval of the Korean government. The Americans were able to establish communications with Koreans ashore by means of a flagpole on an island to which messages were attached. Rear Admiral Rodgers gave the Koreans 10 days to commence negotiations and demanded an apology. *Monocacy* was repaired by letting the tide ebb as she was over a shallow mudbank, then patching the hole before the incoming tide lifted her off. Two 9-inch smoothbore guns were then offloaded from flagship *Colorado* to *Monocacy* to give her more firepower.

While awaiting an authoritative Korean response (the locals kept signaling some Korean version of "Yankee go home"), Rodgers and his commanders drew up a battle plan. *Palos* and *Monocacy* remained fully manned in order to provide gunfire support. *Colorado, Alaska,* and *Benicia* then contributed enough men to form an infantry battalion, artillery battery, and hospital parties. All told, 109 Marines and 542 sailors formed the landing party, while another 118 sailors manned four steam launches. Commander

Blake, once again embarked on *Palos,* was given overall command of the landing and support force, while the skipper of *Benicia,* Commander Lewis A. Kimberly, was given command of the landing force.

On 10 June 1871, with no satisfactory reply from the Koreans, Commander Blake gave the order to execute in accordance with the preapproved plan. *Colorado*'s steam launches lead the way into the Salee River, taking soundings as they went. *Monocacy* followed to provide support with her enhanced armament. *Palos* then followed, towing 22 small boats with the landing party embarked. Steam launches from *Alaska* and *Benicia* brought up the rear.

Just before noon, *Monocacy* opened fire on a Korean battery on the west bank, which was apparently abandoned. *Monocacy* then took the southernmost fort (Ch'o ji jin/Fort Du Conde) on the west bank under fire. The Koreans responded with heavy fire at 300 yards, but most rounds went high, causing minor damage to rigging. *Monocacy*'s skipper, Commander Edward P. McCrea, ordered his ship to anchor above the fort and fire until the fort was silenced.

The Korean fire had been more vigorous than expected, so Commander Blake changed the location of the landing to a less exposed spot. However, when the landing party jumped off the boats, they sank into knee-high mud, and the march ashore turned into a slog under the June sun—and would have had severe consequences (like those faced by the British and French at the Taku Forts in 1859) had not most of the Koreans manning Ch'o ji jin not already fled. The Marines occupied the fort with relative ease, although the same could not be said for getting the seven 12-pounder wheeled howitzers through the muck (75–80 men per gun had to pull). Commander Kimberly opted not to advance further as his men were completely exhausted by the mud. (Note, I use the Korean names for the forts when known because the American names assigned after the battle just cause confusion.)

In the meantime, *Palos* maneuvered to take the second fort (Tokchin/Fort Monocacy) on the west bank under fire until she stuck fast on an uncharted rock. As the sun began to set and *Palos* was still aground, Commander Blake transferred to *Monocacy*. Fort Tokchin then took *Monocacy* under fire, but *Monocacy* responded with accurate fire at 500 yards, silencing the fort. *Palos* got off the rock overnight, but her rudder was jammed and her steam pumps could barely keep up with the leaks. She was out of the battle. *Monocacy* dragged her anchor overnight and scraped her hull on rocks, fortunately without significant damage.

On the morning of 11 June 1871, the landing force completed the demolition of Ch'o ji jin and commenced the march on Tokchin, the second fort to the north. *Monocacy* bombarded the fort and disrupted apparent Korean attempts at counterattack. The Marines then occupied Tokchin without opposition and demolished it. The combined Marine-Navy advance continued up the west side of the river through very difficult terrain under a scorching sun. Korean infantry attempted ambushes and skirmished with the Marines but were driven off by a howitzer that sailors had to carry up a steep slope. By noon, the Marines and sailors were within 150 yards of the primary objective, the fortress of Kwangsong-chin (Fort McKee), which had fired the first shot on 1 June and was the most formidable of the forts.

Just after noon, after determining the Korean defenders only had single-shot weapons, 350 U.S. sailors and Marines, supported by two howitzers, charged down into the gully outside the fort and up the other side. The steep slope might otherwise have been impassable had it not been chewed up by shellfire, creating handholds. Korean fire was mostly inaccurate, and the defenders resorted to throwing stones. The first American over the parapet was landsman Seth

Allen of *Colorado,* who was killed. He was followed by Lieutenant Hugh McKee, who was mortally wounded by gunfire and spears. But the approximately 300 Koreans in the fort could not keep up with the rush of Marines and sailors over the parapet, and the battle turned into a vicious 15-minute close-quarters fight with spears, swords, and stones against cutlasses, bayonets, rifle butts, and revolvers.

The commander of the fort, General Eo Jae-yeon, was killed by a Marine sharpshooter during the hand-to-hand fighting. The Koreans broke and fled for the river (General Eo had deliberately burned a bridge over a ravine to preclude escape) but in doing so exposed themselves to withering fire from two directions from Americans outside the fort; many were cut down by the two howitzers, others drowned in the river. Although the Koreans in the fort fought bravely, their weapons were hopelessly outdated (some of their matchlocks were a couple centuries old) and no match for the Remington rifles carried by the Americans.

At this point it was discovered that a Korean infantry force estimated at four or five thousand men was preparing a counterattack. The wheeled boat howitzers kept the Korean force at bay until ammunition ran low. *Monocacy* responded to emergency signal by sending a boatload of howitzer shells ashore. Two half-hearted approaches by the Koreans were repelled. When the Koreans realized the fort had fallen, they opted to break off the engagement. As the American flag went up over the fort, the crew of *Monocacy* responded with a rousing cheer, which was cut short when the Korean fort on the opposite side of the river opened fire. *Monocacy* turned her guns on the offending fort (Fort Palos) until the defenders were seen to flee. After being informed of the victory, Rear Admiral Rodgers ordered the force to remain in the fortress of Kwangsong-chin overnight to demonstrate to the Koreans that the United States could hold the fort. At dawn on 12 June, the U.S. force withdrew back to the ships.

Rear Admiral Rodger's force suffered three dead and 10 wounded. Additional personnel ashore and aboard ship, especially *Monocacy,* suffered sunstroke but survived. The two gunboats were sufficiently damaged by hitting rocks as to require additional repair. Korean casualties were far higher, with 243 bodies counted. The number killed by naval gunfire and in the aborted counterattack is unknown. Commander Kimberly's adjutant, Lieutenant Commander Winfield Schley, estimated total Korean dead at 350. Twenty Koreans were captured, many of whom were wounded. Many Koreans committed suicide to avoid being captured. Forty Korean cannons (from 2-pounders to 24-pounders) were captured or destroyed. The forts on the west bank of the Salee were blown up, as was an extensive quantity of munitions and stores. The Americans captured 47 flags and standards, including the *sujagi* (general officer's flag) of General Eo.

After the battle, Minister Low attempted to continue the flagpole conversation with the local officials ashore, even succeeding in getting a lengthy letter addressed to the king to the shore, which explained the situation. The letter was returned with a note that said the king was so angry at the United States that the official didn't dare deliver it. The Korean position was that had the United States not forced their way into the Salee River, the battle would not have happened. The U.S. position (which was the same as that of European imperial and colonial powers of the day) was that ships of White people's nations had every right to steam around in the territorial waters of non-White nations without being fired upon.

At the end of June 1871, the German frigate *Hertha* showed up from Chefoo, China, having heard that Rear Admiral Rodger's squadron had been destroyed (i.e., first reports are always wrong) and the *Hertha* was searching for

survivors, an appreciated but unnecessary gesture.

As the Koreans refused to budge, Rear Admiral Rodgers determined that waiting around any longer was a waste of time, and without his gunboats, he was in no position to continue the attack. On 3 July 1871, Rear Admiral Rodger's squadron departed for Chefoo. Although the Koreans had been punished for being bad, and many had been killed, little else had been accomplished. In his after action letter to Secretary of the Navy George Robeson, Rear Admiral Rodgers stated that only the occupation of Seoul would cause the king of Korea to admit defeat, and with 3,000, or better yet, 5,000 troops, Rodgers could do it. With the United States still reeling from the carnage of the Civil War, even Rodgers understood the United States would not make that commitment for a faraway country like Korea. The United States would not have a trade treaty with Korea until 1882, the Treaty of Peace, Amity, Commerce and Navigation, also known as the Shufeldt Treaty. The treaty was negotiated by none other than Commodore Robert Shufeldt, who in 1866 had served as commanding officer of *Wachusett* (the first ship to react to the loss of *General Sherman*).

The Battle of Ganghwa resulted in the awarding of 15 Medals of Honor, nine to Navy personnel and six to Marines, none posthumously. These were the first Medals of Honor awarded for overseas service against a foreign adversary. At the time, the Medal of Honor was the only award for valor and could be awarded for combat and noncombat courage. Standards for the award became more rigorous over the years, especially beginning in World War II. Nevertheless, for sailors to charge the ramparts of a heavily manned and defended fort, armed with rifle and bayonet, took a high degree of courage. Most of the Medals of Honor were awarded for the hand-to-hand combat inside the last fort. Carpenter Cyrus Freeman Hayden, the color bearer for *Colorado,* was awarded the Medal of Honor for planting the flag on the ramparts while under heavy fire (the flag had multiple bullet holes). Marine Private James Dougherty shot and killed Korean General Eo Jae-yeon, and Corporal Charles Brown captured Eo's standard (*sujagi*). The only person to receive a medal for action outside the last fort was Ordinary Seaman John Andrews of *Benicia* for standing in the open on *Benicia*'s launch taking soundings "with coolness and accuracy" despite being under heavy fire. Interestingly, Lieutenant Hugh McKee, who personally led the attack into the fort, and was mortally wounded as a result, was not awarded a Medal of Honor. However, three U.S. Navy ships were named after him: *Dahlgren*-class torpedo boat *TB-18* (1898–1912), *Wickes*-class destroyer DD-87 (1918–1936), and *Fletcher*-class destroyer DD-575 (1943–46, 11 Battle Stars in World War II).

View inside Fort McKee after its capture on 11 June 1871 (NH 63666).

Aftermath

After the Battle of Ganghwa, *Colorado* remained in the Asiatic Squadron until March of 1873. She met a rather ignominious fate. After being sold in 1885, she was waiting to be broken up at Port Washington (Long Island) when she caught fire and sank. Not only that, but the fire spread and burned five other decommissioned U.S. Navy ships; the *Minnesota, Susquehanna, South Carolina, Iowa,* and *Congress* all burned and sank (according to the *New York Times* 22 August 1885 issue, although some of the names are incorrect).

Alaska departed from Hong Kong to return to the United States in October 1872. She was subsequently assigned to the European Squadron. On 30 November 1873, *Alaska* and the rest of the squadron departed station and joined with the South Atlantic and Home Squadrons off Cuba in reaction to the Spanish capture of the American sidewheel steamship *Virginius,* hired by Cuban rebels to run guns. The Spanish executed 53 of the crew, including eight Americans (one of which was the American master) by firing squad. The Spanish then decapitated them and trampled the bodies with horses for good measure. Intervention by the Americans and the British (who sent the sloop HMS *Niobe*) resulted in 91 being spared. War was averted, but this incident was a key event eventually leading to the Spanish-American War.

In December 1875, the U.S. ambassador to Liberia (James Milton Turner, the first African American U.S. ambassador) requested a U.S. warship as a show of force to avert a war between the indigenous Grebo people and descendants of freed Black American slaves, who had established an independent nation of Liberia in 1847 (not recognized by the United States until 1862) and a de facto U.S. colony during much of the 1800s. *Alaska* arrived in February 1876. The show of force worked and a negotiated solution was found. *Alaska* then served in the Pacific Squadron from 1878 to 1883, reacting to Alaskan native unrest at Sitka, Alaska, in 1899. On 14 September 1881, under the command of George Belknap and at anchor off Callao, Peru, *Alaska* suffered a fire in the boiler room. Two sailors were awarded the Medal of Honor for fighting the fire. It was the second Medal of Honor for 1st Class Fireman John Lafferty (also spelled Laverty), whose first was during the Civil War during a daring attempt to destroy the Confederate ram CSS *Albemarle*). With her material condition badly deteriorated, *Alaska* was decommissioned in 1883.

Benicia subsequently served in the North Pacific Squadron until she was decommissioned in 1875, after only six years of service, during a nadir of U.S. Navy funding and capability. In November 1874, *Benicia* had the distinction of taking King Kalakaua (the last king of Hawaii) to San Francisco (following the riots of 1874), leading to the Reciprocity Treaty of 1875 and exclusive use of Pearl Harbor by the U.S. Navy.

Monocacy would continue to serve in the Far East until 1903 (and will appear in some future H-grams).

Palos would continue to serve in the Asiatic Squadron until 1893. During anti-foreign riots in 1891, *Palos* transited 600 miles up the Yangtze River to Hankow to protect American interests in China.

Rear Admiral Rodgers returned to the United States after his tour in command of the Asiatic Squadron and assumed command of Mare Island. He served as president of the U.S. Naval Institute from 1879 to 1881. He died in 1882 as superintendent of the U.S. Naval Observatory.

After serving on *Benicia,* Lieutenant Commander Schley served as head of modern languages at the Naval Academy. As commodore of the "Flying Squadron," Schley would be the victor in the decisive defeat of the Spanish Squadron in the Battle of Santiago in July 1898, during the Spanish-American War (see H-gram 020).

The Third Battle of Ganghwa, 1875

The Japanese had better luck than the French or Americans. In the 1870s, tensions were rising between Korea and Japan over the Koreans refusal to recognize the Japanese emperor (Meiji) as the equal of the Chinese emperor (now there's an excuse for war!). Emulating the United States and European powers, the Imperial Japanese Navy steam screw gunboat *Unyo* was conducting survey operations near Ganghwa Island on 20 September 1875. This appeared to be a deliberate provocation. The Korean forts fired on

the Japanese. The Japanese put troops ashore, burned some houses, captured weapons, and killed about 35 Korean soldiers in exchange for two Japanese wounded. The Japanese demanded an official apology, which they got. This outcome was significantly aided by the fact that the Daewongun had been forced into retirement by his son, King Gojong, who was more open to interacting with the outside world. The Daewongun's forced retirement was in part due to the decisive defeat of Korean forces in the second Battle of Ganghwa with the United States and the recognition by the king and other senior leaders of the Joseon government that Korea was in desperate need of modern weaponry. As a result of the Japanese incursion, the Treaty of Ganghwa was signed in 1876, making Japan the first outside nation (besides China) allowed to trade with Korea. The Japanese would eventually turn Korea into a colony in 1910 that they would rule with extreme brutality.

Sujagi *and Flags*

By U.S. law (issued by President James K. Polk in 1849), the U.S. Naval Academy is the repository for enemy flags and battle standards captured by the U.S. Navy. General Eo's *sujagi* (literally, general officer's flag) was kept at the U.S. Naval Academy Museum until it was returned to South Korea on a 10-year loan in 2007. This is the only *sujagi* still in existence. It is still in South Korea at the National Palace Museum of Korea. And for you math majors, yes we are in year 14 of the 10-year loan, as the Koreans are reluctant to give it back. In December 2017, faded British ensigns from the War of 1812 on display in Mahan Hall for many years were taken down for conservation. The big surprise was that behind the British flags were the flags and banners captured from the Korean forts in 1871 and missing for many years (since at least 1913). Because the Korean flags were covered, their colors are still in extraordinary condition. As the U.S. Naval Academy Museum is part of the Naval History and Heritage Command museum system, valuable artifacts are no longer kept on display until they are irreparably damaged by UV light, as in the past. NHHC also has a state-of-the-art Smithsonian-caliber conservation laboratory where some artifacts that are not too far gone can be restored.

Sources include: Far China Station: The U.S. Navy in Asian Waters 1800–1898*, by Robert Erwin Johnson: Naval Institute Press, 2013; "Korean and American Memory of the Five Years Crisis, 1866–1871," by James P. Podgorski, MA thesis, Purdue University, May 2020;* Corea, the Hermit Nation*, by William Elliot Griffis: W.H. Allen & Co., London, 1911 (first published 1882); "Our First Korean War," by Midshipman Second Class Bryce Kleinman, U.S. Naval Institute* Naval History *Blog, 3 July 2019;* The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power*, by Max Boot: Basic Book, Persus Book Group, 2002; "SS General Sherman (+1866)," wrecksite.eu; "SS General Sherman Incident," global security.org; "Not USS General Sherman," by Mark Peterson,* Korea Times*, 19 January 2020; "General Sherman Incident," New World Encyclopedia; "The Forgotten Korean War (of 1871)," by Sebastien Roblin,* The National Interest*, 20 December 2020;* Forty-Five Years Under the Flag*, by Winfield Scott Schley, Rear Admiral, USN: D. Appleton and Co., New York, 1904; "Korea, US and General Sherman Incident," by Kyung Moon Hwang, Korea Times, Korea Times, 16 August 2017; NHHC Dictionary of American Fighting Ships (DANFS).*