THE

DAYBOOK®

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HAMPTON ROADS NAVAL MUSEUM
Local History. World Events.

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The HRNM reports to the Naval Historical Center's Museum Division. The museum is dedicated to the study of 225 years of naval history in the Hampton Roads region. It is also responsible for the historic interpretation of the battleship *Wisconsin*.

Call for information on the museum's and *Wisconsin*'s hours of operations. Admission to the museum and *Wisconsin* is free. *The Daybook*'s purpose is to educate and inform readers on historical topics and museum related events. It is written by the staff and volunteers of the museum.

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

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HRNM Staff

Director
Becky Poulliot
Curator
Joe Judge
Exhibits
Marta Nelson Joiner
Librarian/Admin Spec.
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U.S.A. vs. The World, 1778-1850: A Lesson in Humility

Cover Illustration: On the cover is the 1808 act announcing the embargo of American goods to overseas markets. The measure was President Thomas Jefferson's response to the firing on the American frigate *Chesapeake* by the British frigate HMS *Leopard*. The policy was highly unpopular as it cut off the livelihood of thousands of merchants and sailors for questionable gains. Jefferson called in local U.S. Naval warships to enforce what became known as the "Dambargo."

Loss of a Friend and Colleague

The Director's Column

by Becky Poulliot

Keeping with centuries old naval tradition, we raise our glasses to toast our shipmate and great friend Odean Vanthul who unexpectedly died March 3, 2008. Odean retired from a long U.S. Navy career with the rank of Senior Chief. After working at Nauticus as an educator, he joined our crew presenting the story of our Navy as Director of Education. Anyone who has ever gone into the noble profession of teaching will tell you that passion for the subject makes even the most reluctant student want to learn. Odean approached every one of his programs with such enthusiasm that it was infectious. It was not just limited to work. His zeal for life was incredible. There was never a gloomy or bad day in Odean's world. We will miss the man whose life "all started in a small town in Iowa."

In memory of our friend Odean, we have published a few pictures of his tenure here at the museum. More will come in a few months when we dedicate an education room in his honor.

Becky

From February 11 to April 15, an exhibit in the Forecastle Gallery featured eighteen cartes de viste *of Civil War personalities.* Cartes de viste *were popular 19th century photographs mounted on stiff cardboard as collectibles. (Photo by Marta Nelson Joiner)*

Civil War *Cartes de Visite* Exhibit On Display

From February 11 to April 15, the Hampton Roads Naval Museum exhibited a collection of Civil War photographs. These images are *cartes de visites* (pronounced kart dee vee SEET) from the collection of Ambassador John William Middendorf II who graciously loaned them to the museum.

The *carte de visite* is a small collection with a mounted photograph. These commercially produced cards were not visiting cards (in spite of the name). They were produced in the nineteenth century for people to see images of celebrated persons.

They became popular after 1854 when a Parisian photographer, Andre Disdéri, patented a way of taking a number of photographs on one plate (usually eight), thus greatly reducing production costs. The *carte de visite* soared into popularity in May 1859 when it was said that Napoleon III, on his way to Italy with his army, went into Disdéri's studio in Paris to have his photograph taken. While this story proved to be untrue, it garnered substantial publicity. In England, the *cartes de visite* craze took off when images of Queen Victoria and the Royal family were published and were enormously popular. Many people began to place these keepsakes in photographic albums The albums could be quite impressive themselves, often leather-bound with gold embossed decorations and brass clasps.

The height of the *carte de visite* craze coincided with the American Civil War. Political and military leaders were portrayed in the new art form. Images of Lincoln and Ulysses S. Grant allowed the public to match faces with headlines. Even President Lincoln's personal secretary John Hay collected the cards. Hay's album can be found today in the Library of Congress. The props used in *cartes de visite* seemed to follow certain fashions starting off with balustrades and curtains, and later featuring columns, palm trees and bicycles.

The Hampton Roads Naval Museum exhibit featured cards of Grant and Lincoln as well as several Navy officers, including:

William David Porter who distinguished himself for his courageous conduct, including the destruction of the Confederate ironclad *Arkansas* in the Mississippi River area.

David Dixon Porter, his brother, who commanded the Mississippi Squadron and the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron.

One of the cartes de viste *displayed was Captain John A. Winslow, most well known as commanding officer of USS* Kearsarge *in 1864.*

John A. Winslow who commanded USS *Kearsarge* in one of the Civil War's most notable naval actions, the battle between USS *Kearsarge* and CSS *Alabama*.

Samuel Francis DuPont who led the expedition that sailed from Norfolk in the following month to attack Port Royal, South Carolina, regarded as one of the most brilliant achievements of naval tactics.

The Fleet Heads South

With the send-off celebrations over, the Atlantic Fleet began its long journey to California by steaming south towards the Caribbean island of Trinidad. With a only a few reporters going with the fleet, news coverage of the operation fell off the front page and back to page six.

The Fleet's sailors got down to business, standing endless engine room watches, unloading untold amounts of coal from barges, and then cleaning all the coal dust off the white paint.

There were events that broke up the daily grind. Among these events, the most

Uncle Sam's Greatest Show on Earth

The Great White Fleet One Hundred Years Later

spectacular was the largest "Crossing the Line" ceremony in history.

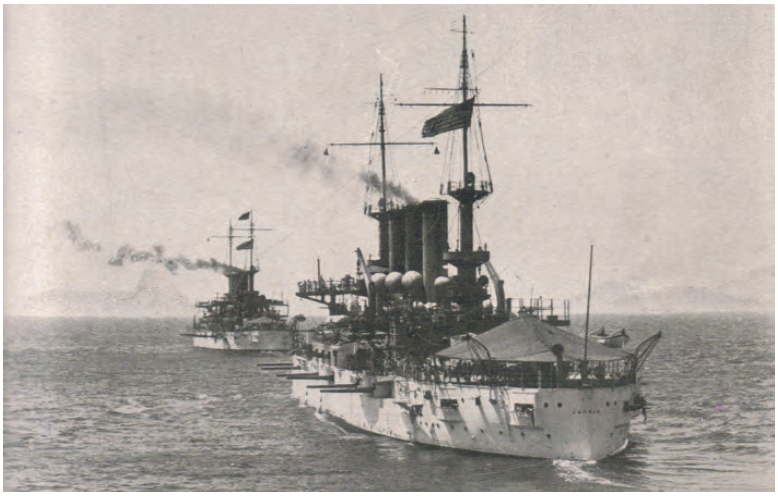
Here are elements of Elmor's diary from late December 1907 to mid-March 1908. Note that the text is taken directly from the diary and Stoffer did not have the best command of English.

Tuesday Dec 24 [Port of Spain, Trinidad]
At anchor off Port of Spain Trinidad. Coal colliers coming alongside we put on 1050 tons of coal in one day. It was not a very pleasant Christmas eve.

Wed Dec 25
This being Christmas there was no work done. There is boat racing and Bathing at this port the Kansas officers winning the race. The boys went ashore wearing white mustering and flat hats.

Sun Dec 29 [At sea, en route to Brazil]
It is getting hot down here and we are ready to start out again. The Maine finished coaling and we got underway about 4 P.M. going in single file.

Sat Jan 4 - 08
At sea-the Kearsarge and Alabama broke down and were out of position a few times otherwise everything is fine. The signal of Father Neptune coming aboard to report to the Captain and of his taking charge of ships was dropped from the flagship into the water at 7.30 P.M.



Machinist's Mate Second Class Elmor Stoffer's ship, USS Kansas *(BB-21), approaches Rio de Janeiro (notice the faint image of Sugar Loaf Mountain) on January 12, 1908. (Naval Institute photo)*

Jan 5 08
We will cross the Equator about 10 oclock tonight and we had quite a time started at eight oclock had quarters and then the Neptune party took charge and initiated about 741 men taking nearly all day. Gee, it was fun watching them. [See page 16]

Sun Jan 12 - 08 [Rio de Janeiro, Brazil]
We sighted land early this morning and keeping close along the coast until we reached the entrance to the harbor where the Brazilian ships came out and firing a salute gave us a hearty welcome. We anchored about 4.30 P.M. There was one German and one English cruiser and later an Italian cruiser came in.

Jan 13 - 08
All the boys were tired and after a good night's rest all hands turned to to get the ship cleaned and repaired for the next trip. Doctor vaccinated quite a number of the boys for fear they might contract some disease and bring it back to the ship. There were five naval colliers in the harbor and they went along side of the other ships to get done early to give the others a chance.

Fri Jan 17
All hands ready to coal ship. Colliers came along Port side and barges along Starboard side at 4.P.M. and worked until 7.P.M. The U.S. Torpedo Destroyers came to anchor at 4.30 being 2 days late. There was boat racing this morning but no liberty.

Sat Jan 18
Began coaling at 5.30 but was soon through. The USS Minnesota's race boat crew beat the Georgia's race boat crew and a lot of money changed hands. Torpedo Boats coaling.

Wed Jan 22
There was some excitement on board the ships for they dressed ships in honor of the Pres. of Brazil who came aboard the Connecticut to pay his respects to Fighting Bob [Adm. Robley Evans, commanding officer of the Fleet]. Getting up steam, we passed the Pres. firing a salute of 21 guns each leaving at 3.30 P.M. after a stay of 11 days. The Destroyers left early this morning.

Fri Jan 24 [At sea, enroute to Straits of Magellan]
At sea. A coal passer was almost killed at 3.30 P.M. this afternoon by getting hit on the head by an empty coal bucket and a seaman was hurt in the powder division.

Tues Jan 27 - Feb 1 Sat [Punta Arena, Chile]
At sea getting along fine. We had a heavy fog. Jan 29th, the sea was smooth until we entered the Straits yesterday afternoon when it began getting rough and we came to anchor 3.30 P.M. in Possession Bay Chile as we could not reach Punta Arenas until late at night. Getting up anchor at 4 AM we arrived in Punta Arena at 12.00 PM. A British and a Chilean cruiser was in the harbor.

Thurs Feb 6
Finished coaling ship having taken on 16 hundred tons of coal at 5 oclock. All

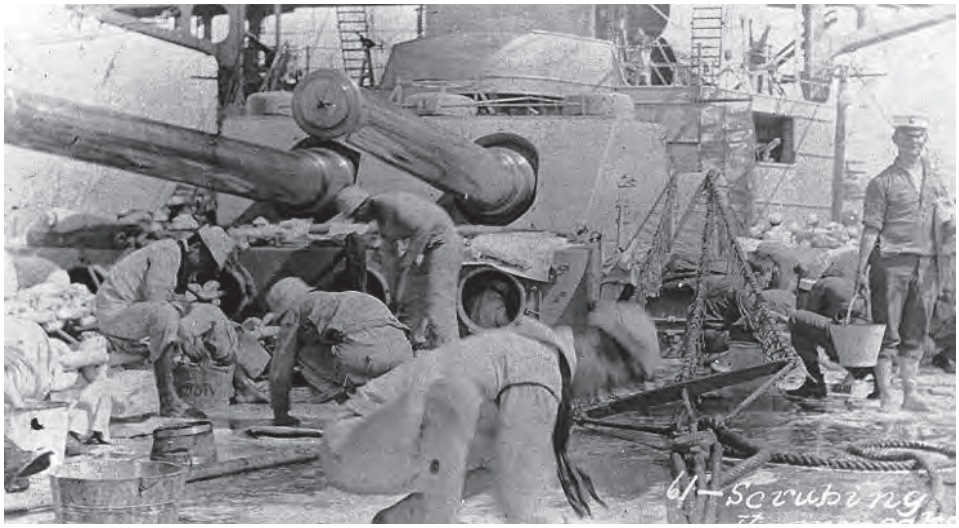
Greatest Show continued on page 5

Greatest Show continued from page 4

hands turned in and slept in until noon and then turn to and began cleaning ship. Illuminated ship.

Fri Feb 7
All hands cleaning ship. Getting ready to get underway quite a number of the boys are sick from the sudden change of climate. Got underway at 11.10 for Callao.

Sat Feb 8
Are getting along fine. We are being escorted by a Chilean cruiser and are followed by the destroyers. There were fine sights all the way through and the boys were taking pictures of many of the mountains. There was also a paper reporter aboard taking pictures.



Shown here are sailors scrubbing their hammocks on the decks of USS Kansas *(BB-21) during the journey to California, 1908. Modern technology brought more dirt and grime to warships then ever before. Cleaning and painting filled much of the sailors' day, especially after unloading bags of coal from barges during a refueling stop. (Naval Historical Center photo)*

Feb 14 1908 [Valpariso, Chile]
Arrived at Valpariso about 2 o'clock in the afternoon going half speed we passed the President firing a salute of 21 guns each which was returned and then we sailed north the weather was fine and nothing else of importance on this date.

Sat Feb 22
Washington's birthday and we had all the ships dressed and we did not turn to. The liberty party went ashore and will return at eight oclock P.M. It is a fine day and the people are visiting all the ships. They think a whole lot of the U.S.A. Pay day $40.

Mon Feb 24 [Callao, Peru]
Went ashore to the Bull fight and had a good time. Six bulls and one man were killed and one man and a horse was wounded. About two thousand of the sailors were there and it was a fine sight to see the sailors all together in whites with blue collars and black neckerchiefs. Bought a few souvenirs and returned to the ship at 8 P.M.

Saturday Feb 29
We raised anchor at ten oclock this morning the President of Peru passing us and we fired a salute he then escorting the fleet out of the harbor and turned around and we again fired a salute after which he returned to Callio and we steamed to the north. A man died on the Alabama and we went half speed and buried him at sea at 4.00 P.M. he being the second man the Alabama buried at sea.

Fri March 13 [Magdalena Bay, Mexico]
Started on the target again but were called in because the navigator did not know his business.

March 17 Tuesday
Began coaling again early in the morning and finished about 6 P.M. I slept on the deck both nights. Had a boil on my neck and opened it on this date.

March 18 Wednesday
Did not turn to before breakfast. After breakfast we turned to and began repairing the engines. Had a nice mess of fish for dinner. The boys went seining [fishing using big nets] last night and caught 850 lbs of fish.

March 21 Saturday
Worked all forenoon and stood the 12 - 4 watch and then we started for the range at 5 oclock in the evening but did not do any firing on account of another ship being on the range.

March 23 Monday
Turned to at 8.15 A.M. and worked all day the 4 - 8 steam watch. We are going out on the range. Finished up on the range at 12 P.M. and secured at 12.30. 3 in guns were fired.

March 28 Saturday
Full steaming watch went on at 8.00 oclock raised anchor about 11.00 A.M. and went out on the range for record target practice. We are making good records so far with the 7 in guns. Anchored about 6 P.M.

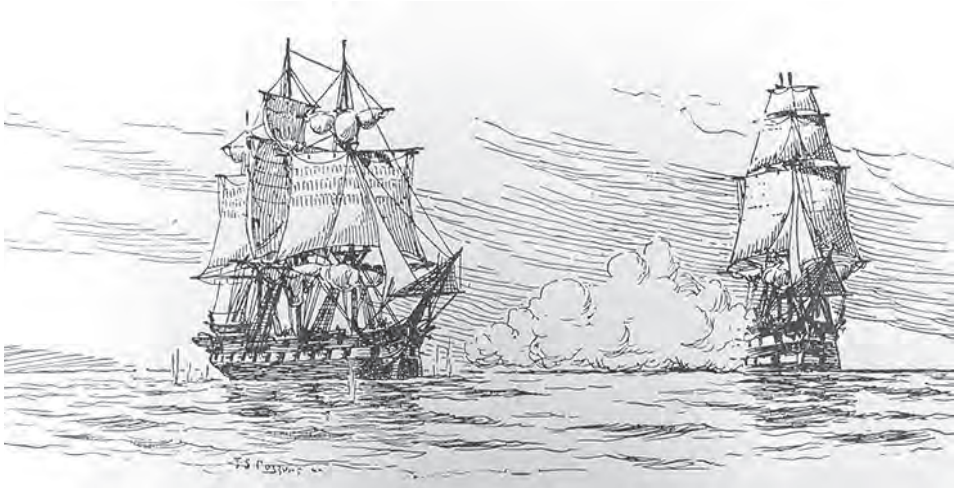
March 29 Sunday
Raised anchor early and started on the range. The ammunition hoist of the forward eight inch turret jammed into the gun before it went back into position and delayed the firing also yesterday one of the 7-in guns missed fire and they have not unloaded it yet.

Peru hosted over two thousand sailors from the Fleet, Stoffer being one of them, to watch a bull fight in Callao. South American nations enthusiastically embraced the Fleet. Argentina was not on the agenda, but instead of being insulted, sent ships out to greet the American ships when they passed by. (Naval Institute photo)

Enforcing the Dambargo

The U.S. Navy, Norfolk, and the Embargo of 1807

by Joe Mosier



The proximate cause of the embargo was the attack on the American frigate Chesapeake *by the British frigate* Leopard *off the Virginia Capes. Popular sentiment called for war with Britain, but President Jefferson decided on an embargo of U.S. shipping to Europe as a less aggressive response. (HRNM image)*

Captain Elijah Cobb of the New York brig *William Tell* decided it was time to get out of Norfolk. Rumors in Market Square said the port was about to be closed. Cobb drove the longshoremen to complete the loading of his cargo of flour. At nine in the morning on the next day in December 1807, the brig got underway for Cadiz, Spain. As he entered Hampton Roads, Cobb saw a small boat sailing toward him. Through his telescope Cobb saw one of the inspectors from the collector's office waving for him to stop. Fortunately for the master and his cargo, a favorable breeze arose and the *William Tell* cleared into the Chesapeake with the law in hot pursuit.

The motivation for Cobb's rapid departure was passage of the Embargo Act on December 22, 1807. The act forbade all trade with foreign ports in American ships. It was a direct outcome of the USS *Chesapeake* – HMS *Leopard* encounter on June 22, 1807. The British ship had stopped *Chesapeake* just outside the Virginia Capes and demanded the return of British deserters. When they were not forthcoming, *Leopard* fired into the American ship killing four and wounding seventeen. Most Americans were outraged. Popular sentiment demanded war with Great Britain.

President Thomas Jefferson, for all his dislike of the English, sought a less bellicose response. He saw American shipping as the most likely source of conflict with the world's two great powers, England and France, as they warred in Europe. Both refused to honor the neutrality of U.S. ships. England seized ships on the pretense that they had not cleared through a British port before going to the Continent. French privateers seized Americans on the grounds that by touching in England their cargos lost their neutral character. Having no American ships in the Atlantic seemed to Jefferson to equal having no quarrel with either great power.

Jefferson was a fan of embargo as a tool of American diplomacy. In 1774 he had authored the *Resolution of Albemarle County* calling for an embargo of imported British goods. His support turned out to be more symbolic than real. After his purchase of an English piano was questioned, Jefferson explained that he promised that he was not actually going to *play* the instrument during the embargo.

Still, as a theoretical response, embargo might just work. If the Continental Powers were sufficiently dependent on the import of American raw materials, they might just react favorably. On the U.S. side, there would be sacrifices, but most of them would be made by people Jefferson saw as his political enemies - the "money men," northern bankers and merchants.

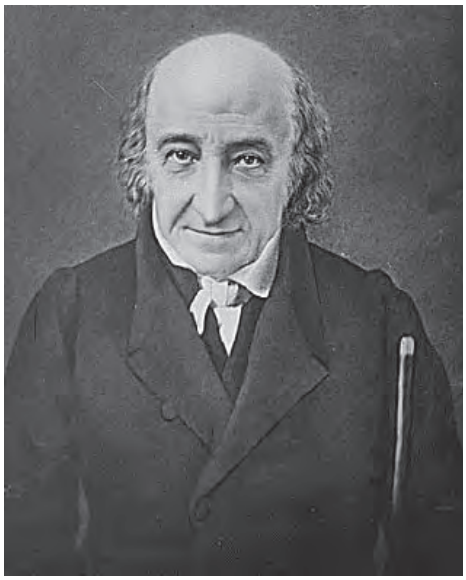
The act itself was based on a draft provided by Jefferson on December 18. It called for "the inhibition of departure of our vessels from the ports of the United States." The announced intention was to "keep our seamen and property from capture, and to starve the offending nations." The bill was "debated" in the Senate for only one day after the overwhelming Republican majority meeting in secret voted to suspend the required three days of readings. Action in the House was somewhat more tempestuous. The bill passed by a vote of 82 to 44, but only after three days of secret sessions.

Although Congressional action had been swift at Jefferson's urging, there were those in the administration opposed to the embargo. Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin wrote to Jefferson on December 18, 1807 "In every point of view, privation, suffering, revenue, effect on the enemy, politics at home, etc., I prefer war to a permanent embargo. Governmental prohibitions do always more mischief than had been calculated, and it is not without much hesitation that a statesman should hazard to regulate the concerns of individuals… The measure being of doubtful policy & hastily adopted …, I think that we had better recommend it with modifications. … As to the hope that it may have an effect on the negotiations with [British Envoy] Mr. Rose, or induce England to treat us better I think it entirely groundless."

Secretary of the Navy Robert Smith referred to the measure as "this mischief-making busybody." Their concerns were ignored by the President.

The result of Jefferson's carefully calculated embargo was the near devastation of the Atlantic seaboard. In Norfolk, for example, shipping was the lifeblood of the community. The city directory for 1806 shows over 30% of those listed were directly involved in entrepot activities, i.e. merchants, ship builders, mariners and others immediately employed in shipping trades. Certainly many others relied on shipping and the presence of ships for their livelihoods. Within twelve hours of the announcement of the embargo, the price of flour fell from $5.50 per barrel to $2.50, that of tobacco from $5 to $3. Imports fell similarly. Norfolk merchant Moses Myers wrote on January 3, 1808 that "Liverpool

Dambargo continued on page 7



Pictured here are President Thomas Jefferson (left), his Secretary of the Navy Robert Smith (center), and his Secretary of the Treasury, Swiss-born Albert Gallatin. Neither cabinet officer was in favor of the measure to which Jefferson was so intellectually wedded. Smith referred to the embargo as "a mischief making busybody." Gallatin who was generally opposed to naval expenditures actually calculated that war against England might prove cheaper. (All pictures, Library of Congress)

Dambargo continued from page 6

salt which sold at a dollar some days since may now be bought at 85 cents." Merchants went broke, seamen were tossed ashore and ships rotted at the wharf. The *Norfolk Gazette and Publick Ledger* reported on February 8, 1808: "A few weeks since there were a number of seamen in our town, and now there are scarcely any. The embargo has detained the shipping, but the seamen have disappeared." On March 16 the seamen who did remain petitioned the borough fathers soliciting relief from their present suffering. Some relief did come. The Thespian Society, for example, turned from putting on plays to establishing a victualing house on Granby Street in April to distribute provisions to the hungry.

The merchants of Norfolk responded as well as circumstances allowed. William Carmack, for example, as early as April offered wharfage at half price for the duration of the embargo. Some ship owners switched their vessels over to coastal trading. Most were saved only when the Virginia Assembly passed a law in March that placed a moratorium on debts.

Anger against what came to be called the "dambargo" or the "ograbme" [embargo spelled backwards] was particularly strong amongst those of Federalist political leaning. The local anti-administration newspaper *The Norfolk Ledger* regularly reprinted satirical pieces from northern papers. From the *New York Gazette* came a New Year's poem that ended:

In haste we stop the press,
Just to announce in this address
That by the mandate of the wise
The America embargo'd lies,
Hemmed in by jacobinick rocks,
In one of Jefferson's dry docks.

Federalists saw the embargo as proof of Jefferson's pro-French bias. Philadelphia merchant Solomon Moses complained to Norfolk's John Myers on April 4, "Would it not be well if the Red Head would take it into his philosophical head and pay his friend Bonaparte a visit? … There is accounts today of four fine ships from Liverpool bound for America – having been burned at sea by two French ships. What if the British was to do this? Would it not be the subject for a wonderful warlike proclamation, interdiction, etc? I wish with all my heart this wise man of the South was embargoed in France."

Economist Adam Smith (himself a customs officer) claimed in his great work, *The Wealth of Nations,* that smugglers were essentially honest folk for whom unjust laws "made that a crime which nature never intended to be so." Certainly, he would have found agreement among many in Norfolk. The most common method employed to avoid the embargo was to license a vessel to a U.S. port and then, using the subterfuge of contrary winds or damage to the ship's rigging, sail to an overseas port. A stream of letters can be found in the National Archives from Gallatin to Norfolk's Collector of Customs Larkin Smith. On February 17, 1808 the Secretary complained that the schooner *James* landed at Havana under license to Charleston. He reported on March 7 that the schooner *Laurel*, Richard Hopkins master, licensed to New Orleans also ended up in Havana. Probably the most egregious case was that of the brig *Polly* which sailed for Charleston but arrived in Lisbon, Portugal where her cargo of provisions was sold at immense profit.

Meanwhile, the borders of the United States were hemorrhaging contraband goods. Passamaquoddy Bay between Maine and Canada as well as the St. Mary's River separating Georgia and Spanish Florida suddenly teemed with illicit trade in provisions. Customs collectors were overwhelmed by the volume of smuggled goods. Some, particularly in New England, turned a blind eye to violations. Those officials who were diligent in their efforts to enforce the embargo were sometimes personally intimidated. The collector at Eastport, Maine faced a mob which threatened to burn down his home.

Over-worked and in jeopardy, customs officials turned to Washington for support. As a result, Congress passed another piece of embargo legislation on April 25, 1808 authorizing the President to use U.S. military and naval forces to enforce the law.

The first Navy vessels to sail in support

Dambargo continued on page 8

ABSTRACT

OF THE

LAWS IMPOSING AN EMBARGO

ON THE

SHIPPING OF THE UNITED STATES.

PASSED BETWEEN DECEMBER 22, 1807, AND APRIL 25, 1808.

AN embargo is laid on all vessels within the jurisdiction of the United States, cleared or not cleared, bound to any foreign place. No clearance shall be furnished to any such vessels except under the immediate direction of the president, and the president is authorized to instruct the officers of the revenue, and of the navy and revenue cutters, so as shall appear best adapted for effecting the same. This prohibition shall not extend to any foreign vessel, in ballast or with the goods and merchandize on board when notified of this act.

After American public opposition to the embargo overwhelmed the efforts of U.S. customs and revenue officers, Jefferson and Congress took the next step and ordered the U.S. Navy to arrest its own citizens. (Library of Congress)

Dambargo continued from page 8

of customs collectors were the gunboats. Thought of as providing the ability to wage war on the cheap, gunboats had been the central focus of Jefferson's Navy policy. They were small (generally 70 feet in length and 21 feet in beam), shallow draft, cheap to build and considered easy to man. Should conflict arise, the boats could be taken out of storage, manned with local volunteers and with their one or two heavy guns, drive the enemy away from America's harbors. The administration's plan called for some 200 gunboats to be built throughout the country including on the inland rivers. This would spread the construction fees (and political patronage) widely.

The reality, of course, was somewhat different. The gunboats with their low freeboard and heavy armament were too unstable to proceed safely in deep water. None of the various rigging plans devised for the gunboats ever produced anything like a speedy vessel. Captain John Shaw, in command of the gunboat flotilla at Norfolk, wrote to Smith on August 6, 1808 to explain that the smugglers were "some of our quickest and best sailors … and would at all times, run a Gun Boat, out of sight in few hours."

Manning proved to be another problem. The embargo came into force in December 1807, but the decision to use gunboats didn't come until early 1808. By that time, few potential volunteers remained in Norfolk. Inability to man available vessels is a constant chord in the letters from local commanders to the Secretary of the Navy.

While it is difficult to get a firm count, there were probably 21 gunboats at Norfolk during the period of the embargo, of those generally only two were able to be manned at any given time. Throughout the embargo, one gunboat was detailed to Hampton Roads while another cruised the Chesapeake Bay. Additional gunboats were sent to St. Mary's, Georgia and New Orleans.

The first gunboat sent out to enforce the embargo was *No. 5* (no gunboat was christened with an actual name and went by its hull number) commanded by Lieutenant Robert Henley. She sailed on March 13 to assist the Collector of Customs in Baltimore, arriving five days later. At some point, Henley seems to have turned over command to Sailing Master B. G. Hipkins, because it was Hipkins who wrote Secretary Smith on 21 June 1808 to explain the loss of the ship. The *Norfolk Gazette and Publick Ledger* reported as follows: "In a sudden squall Saturday last, the 18th inst. at 6 o'clock in the morning, gun-boat *No. 5*, was upset off Holland's Island and sunk immediately. The purser's steward and two marines were drowned. The commandant, midshipman, and the remainder of the crew were taken up by Capt. Schneeman of the schooner *Victory*, which vessel was in sight when the accident happened, and in which they arrived at this port yesterday." *No. 5* must have been raised since she continued her career for another seven years.

How senior Naval officers felt about Jefferson's gunboats can be seen in Captain Stephen Decatur response to *No. 5*'s loss. The same day he read the newspaper's report, he wrote to Captain William Bainbridge then at Princeton, New Jersey. Decatur scoffed: "One of the Gun Boats has capsized in the Chesapeake Bay, where she now lays in about 6 fathoms water. – Query – What

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Dambargo continued from page 8

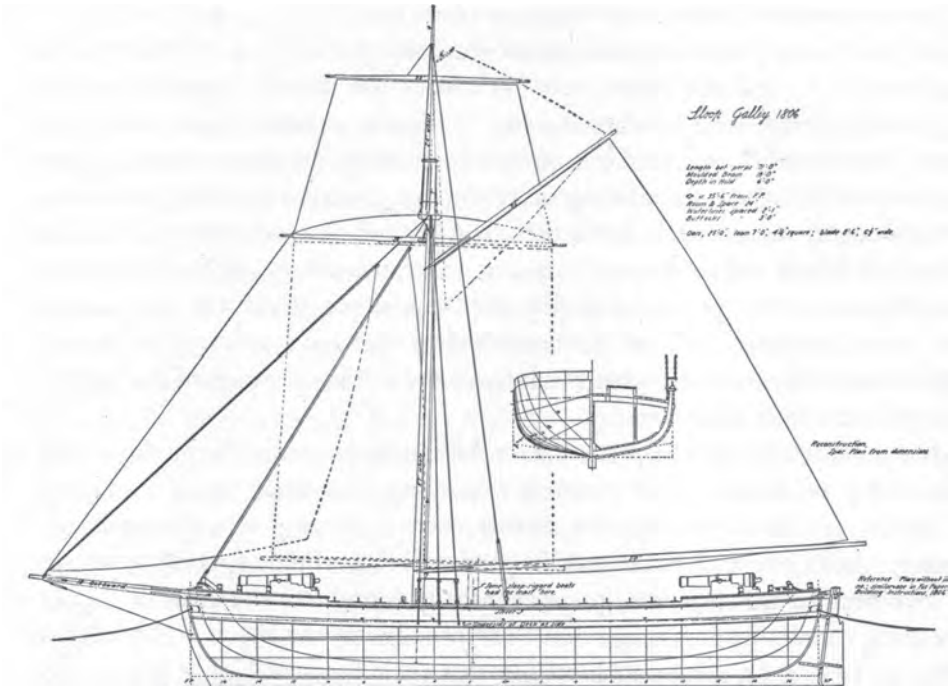
would be the real national loss if **all** the Gun Boats were sunk in 100 fathoms water?"

The next unit to deploy from Norfolk was the brig *Argus*. On May 5, Smith ordered her commander, Philemon Charles Wederstrandt, to "immediately weigh anchor and proceed to St. Mary's Georgia, for the purpose of enforcing the laws relative to the embargo. … By the time you reach St. Mary's there will be 3 Gunboats at that place which will act under your command so long as you shall remain at St. Mary's." Smith directed Wederstrandt "to seize the boats and vessels of American Citizens that may be found to violate the Embargo Laws." Also *Argus* was "to prevent any of our boats & vessels going within the Spanish lines; to watch any deposit made on our side with intention to carry them across – and assist if requested the revenue officers to take such deposits into custody – and generally to enforce the embargo Laws."

Argus sailed from Hampton Roads on May 19. Wederstrandt was effective in closing the southern border. He took several prizes into Savannah for adjudication. By the beginning of June, Secretary Smith turned his attention to the north. He ordered *Argus* to cruise up the coast to Passamaquoddy Bay. In August, the brig patrolled the channel between Nantucket and the Georges Bank.

After six months at sea, *Argus* arrived at New York. One of the ship's officers, Lieutenant Johnston Blakeley, summarized the voyage in a letter to friends: "Our cruise has been a varied one; our course was first to the river St. Mary, where the summer season rendered the climate intolerably warm, and the state of society made no return for the heat of the weather. … From Savannah it was expected that we would return to Norfolk – but this embargo (I could almost swear at it to you who never heard me do so) ordered us to this place to prepare for another cruise, which has kept us for the last three months off the coast of New England, where by way of compensation for the beating sun of Georgia, we have been refreshed with bleak north-easters and cooling showers of snow. This has afforded considerable amusement, in keeping up the circulation of our blood, by blowing our fingers to communicate, if possible, a little heat. It is only since our arrival here [New York] a few days ago, that I have been able, with the aid of a good warm fire, to restore them to their former feeling and appearance."

Dambargo continued on page 14



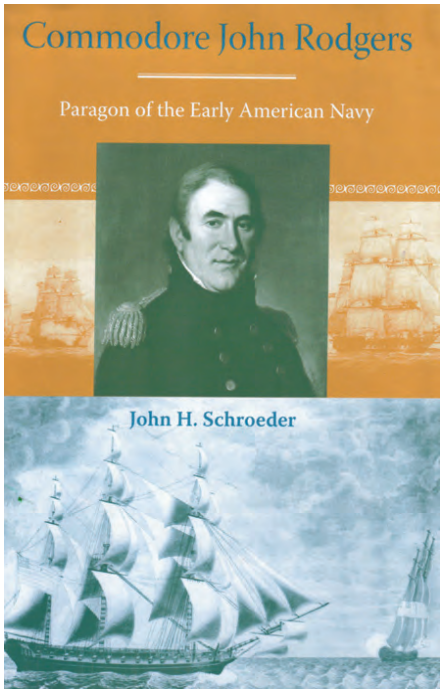
Of the 200 gunboats authorized, about twenty-one were based in Hampton Roads. These ships carried either one or two heavy guns. However, they were not the best sea keepers and were barely capable of coastal service. (National Archives)

Even the immortal Stephen Decatur was pressed into embargo enforcement duty. Sailing out of Norfolk, his patrols did lead to the arrest of several merchants planning to smuggle shipments out of New England. (Naval Historical Center photo)

*"One of the Gun Boats has capsized in the Chesapeake Bay, where she now lays in about 6 fathoms water. – Query – What would be the real national loss if **all** the Gun Boats were sunk in 100 fathoms water?"*

-Captain Stephen Decatur to Captain William Bainbridge about the loss of the Norfolk-based Gunboat No. 5 *in the Chesapeake Bay during an embargo patrol, 1808*

Book Reviews



Commodore Rodgers: Paragon of the Early American Navy

By John H. Schroeder
Reviewed by Howard Sandefer

"They also serve who only stand and wait."
-Lord Nelson

The remarks of those who have won the Congressional Medal of Honor are instructive, particularly those of men who have been leaders, such as submarine captains. Almost all invariably accept the honor as representatives of their crews, and not as a personal honor. These men realize the contribution of many others, some of whom they had never met, but whose contributions are vital to the success of the mission.

John H. Schroeder. *Commodore Rodgers: Paragon of the Early American Navy.* Tallahassee, FL: University Press of Florida, 2007. ISBN 0-8130-2963-5. $59.95.

The early days of the U. S. Navy are garlanded with men who became famous as dashing frigate captains (Hull, Porter, Bainbridge, Truxtun), daring lieutenants (Decatur), and fleet actions (Preble, Perry, McDonough). John Rodgers was not one of them. He would have been equally famous, had events taken a different turn. He was not in the top tier of successful combat leaders, but his contributions were vital in the continued success of the U. S. Navy.

John Rodgers began his career at sea as a merchant mariner, then joined the Navy as it was being formed. He engaged in one real battle in his life during the quasi-war with France in 1798-1800. Serving under Thomas Truxtun, he was assigned as first lieutenant aboard the frigate USS *Constellation* when she fought the French frigate *L'Insurgente*. Truxtun regarded him highly until later in life, when disagreements marred their relationship. What this disagreement was, and how it came about is one of the unexplored mysteries and disappointments of this book.

After a brief period in the Merchant Marine due to lack of prospects in the Navy, he was recalled as a captain, and served in several frigates in the Caribbean and Mediterranean. Just before the War of 1812 he was involved in the *Little Belt* affair when his ship fired on a British sloop-of-war. He later claimed "mistaken identification," and the incident faded into insignificance as war was declared.

Rodgers also dealt with Robert Fulton's claims for his "torpedo," or mine. Fulton was portrayed by the author as something of a fanatic, proclaiming the torpedo as the ultimate sea weapon. Rodgers organized a test, and demonstrated that the torpedo, or mine, would be a useful adjunct to harbor defense, but not the ultimate weapon.

He had several chances for battle at sea during the War of 1812, but was stymied by circumstances including overestimation of the strength of several possible opponents. His major contribution was ashore in the defense of Baltimore. He was profusely commended by the commanding general for his work directing the Navy contingent of the engagement.

After the War of 1812, Rodgers entered the "…only stand and wait" portion of his career. He was assigned as the senior member of the Naval Commissioners for two terms, interrupted by a tour as commodore in the Mediterranean Sea. It was as a commissioner that he made his major contribution to the Navy.

The Navy was maturing, and the excitement of the war years was fading, as was the opportunity for fame and rapid advancement. Prosaic activities gave full scope to the prickly notions of honor and insult, which led to a number of duels. Poor behavior on foreign stations further diminished the laurels won by the Navy during the War of 1812. Rodgers is credited by Schroeder with establishing procedures to dampen and eliminate these problems. He emphasized professionalism which paved the way for the tedious but necessary diplomatic duties, as well as the more exciting anti-pirate activities.

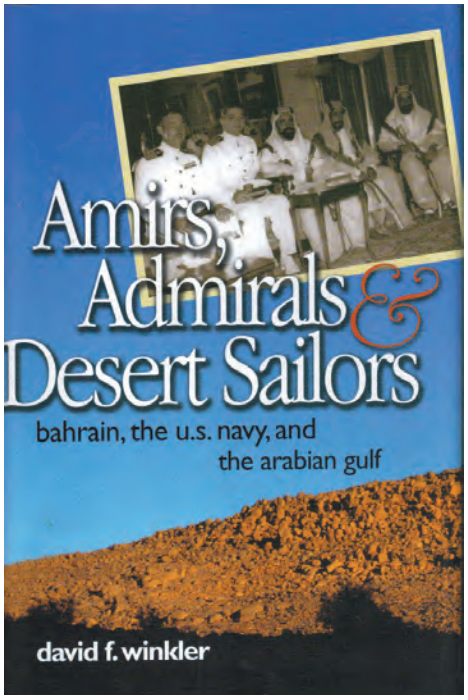
Two years in the Mediterranean, 1825 to 1827, with the mission to tighten discipline and to deal with various diplomatic problems separated Rodgers' first term and second term. He did solidify an arrangement with Turkey, and reinforced the notion that U. S. commerce was to be left alone.

His return to the Board of commissioners brought him to examine steam propulsion and the use of far-flung Navy ships in scientific exploration and data gathering. Rodgers tended to oppose these changes as his conservatism was challenged. A new age was dawning, and the Navy commissioners were being left behind.

Schroeder has written a "first cut" biography of John Rodgers, but has left some unanswered questions. Several mentions were made of the "Rodgers' system of discipline," but it was never revealed what the system involved. He also did not detail any of the disputes except the James Barron-Stephen Decatur duel in 1820. Even the souring of the relationship with Truxtun was not examined. More details of this sort would have been beneficial to the book.

Amirs, Admirals, and Desert Sailors: Bahrain, the U.S. Navy and the Arabian Gulf

By David F. Winkler
Reviewed by Jennifer Hurst



The small Middle Eastern island kingdom of Bahrain has been a consistent home of U.S. Naval ships since 1944. In subsequent decades a strategic partnership developed for both countries. U.S. Naval presence has provided Bahrain with lasting security and prosperity while surrounded by hostile neighbors. The region's geographic importance has grown exponentially since the first Gulf War and even more so after September 11, 2001. His Highness King Hamad bin Essa Al Khalifa and his predecessors' support of American actions in the region did not develop solely on political gains, but rather the interpersonal relationships established by the people of Bahrain and the U.S. Naval ambassadors who resided in their host's country. David F. Winkler offers fascinating accounts of both Bahraini and American participants in this accord. He offers stories that weave a detailed history of the relationship between these two countries through personal details of sailors, admirals, office boys, and shaikhs.

David F. Winkler. *Amirs, Admirals, and Desert Sailors: Bahrain, the U.S. Navy, and the Arabian Gulf.* Annapolis: Naval Insitute Press, 2007. ISBN 1-5911-4962-2. $34.95.

In the year 1833, the tiny mid-eastern island kingdom of Bahrain was visited by the sloop-of-war USS *Peacock* and the schooner USS *Boxer*. This visit marked the first diplomatic ties between the Arabian Peninsula and the United States, and a commercial treaty was signed.

At the turn of the 20th century, having found oil reserves a few years earlier, an American oil company broke ground for a new refinery. During World War II, the Bahraini oil fields provided the United States with thousands of barrels of aviation fuel, as well as full support of the Allied efforts. After World War II, Bahrain still remained under the protection of the British, but its importance had not gone unnoticed by the U.S. Navy. The resulting Middle East Force Command was established in 1949. The original ships stationed to MEF had to be reconfigured for hot weather endurance. Capt. W.T. Rassieur described the command while on board USS *Greenwich Bay* (AVP-41), "You couldn't have enough air conditioning against the heat there. She was painted white to reflect the sun's heat." The unbearable heat was also recorded by Capt. Blackburn aboard USS *Duxbury Bay* (AVP-38). He reports the summers reached 112 Fahrenheit with high humidity, and water temperatures of 103 Fahrenheit. Wind and dust were also difficulties for the "desert sailors" to overcome.

Unstable conditions in the Gulf required constant mediation between the Americans and Bahrain. The 1967 Six Day War and 1973 Yom Kippur War ostracized the Israel-supporting Americans in the Middle East. Oil embargoes and internal turmoil amongst Arab countries changed both the American and Arab perceptions of the region. Soviet ships were a constant presence in the region, and Britain decided to close its Bahraini operation in 1969. Winkler recounts these difficult times through experiences of the Middle East Force commander, Rear Adm. Marmaduke Gresham Bayne.

Bayne had to persuade not only the amir, Shaikh Isa, and the ruling family of Bahrain, but the U.S. Navy, bent on downsizing, to keep the headquarters of the Middle East Force in Bahrain. After the 1970s, the small command had all but turned into a "Sleepy Hollow" post until Operation Desert Storm, where the population grew 100 fold and the quiet desert paradise turned into the Navy's base of operation for an attack on Iraq. This military presence was most beneficial since although Iraq was defeated, their was still a formidable foe to Bahrain's north in form of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Throughout the 1990s, the U.S. Navy is portrayed by Winkler as a police force in the Gulf, watching for infractions among ships and protecting treaties and borders and maintaining stability among the Arab states.

Winkler's history of the U.S. Navy in the Arabian Gulf is precise and accurate, stating events and facts that read like a ship's log. These accounts often include entertaining insights into the social lives of officers and official meetings with Bahraini leaders. Like a log, this history includes the mundane comings and goings of U.S. ships stationed at Bahrain as well as any service performed on them and where.

In between the formal historical documentation of the American Naval presence, one can find humorous quips and interesting characters. It was these friendships that maintained the Navy's presence in the desert for many years, The book is detailed to the point of explaining the price of each barrel of oil and the number of hands on each ship. The history of the U.S. Navy's involvement with Bahrain and the Arabian Gulf is extremely thorough, detailed, descriptive and often entertaining in David F. Winkler's account of *Amirs, Admirals, and Desert Sailors.*

U.S.A. vs. The World, 1778-1850

A Lesson in Humility

One possible explanation for President Thomas Jefferson's embargo policy in response to the *Chesapeake-Leopard* Affair can be found in the numbers. Two issues ago, The Sage showed how the U.S. Navy stacked up against Japan and Germany in 1907. In that year, for the first time in its peacetime history, the United States Navy had reached parity with its rivals.

But this was far from the case in the years before the American Civil War. In fact, the data is quite humbling when compared to the British and the French, the two dominant naval powers for much of the 18th and 19th centuries. It is fair to say that in terms of numbers, we were pretty weak in the 19th century, and we should look back with pride to see just how far we have come.

There are at least three reasons for

The Museum Sage

the large gap between the American fleet and the European ones. First, Europe had a 100 year head start in shipbuilding and infrastructure needed to build ships. Second, there was a more immediate need for ships, especially on the part of the British and thus their fleets received generous budgets. Third, and probably most importantly, was a lack of American political will to build a fleet. As it has been pointed out in this issue's main article, Jefferson's idea of national defense rested on gunboats instead of frigates and sloops (example: one to two guns per gunboat times 200 gunboats equals five to seven frigates.)

The War of 1812 altered that thinking.

USA vs. The World continued on page 13

Fleet Comparisons, 1778-1850

	England	France	U.S.A.	Notes
1778				
Ships-of-the-Line	126	68	0	French Intervention in the American Revolution
Frigates	126	126	13	
Brigs and Sloops	71	96	13	
1794				
Ships-of-the-Line	145	77	0	Department of the Navy Created, French Revolution
Frigates	176	176	3	
Brigs and Sloops 67	N/A	11		
1804				
Ships-of-the-Line	175	50	0	Quasi-War with France, 1799-1800, Jefferson's Gunboat Doctrine
Frigates	244	32	18	
Brigs and Sloops171	N/A	11		
1812				
Ships-of-the-Line	245	113	0	War of 1812
Frigates	272	72	13	
Brigs and Sloops314	N/A	22		
1815				
Ships-of-the-Line	218	69	1	Treaty of Ghent/Napoleon Exiled
Frigates	309	164	16	
Brigs and Sloops	261	N/A	18	
1820				
Ships-of-the-Line	146	58	6	Congress Passes the "Act for a Gradual Increase of the Navy."
Frigates	164	39	16	
Brigs and Sloops145	38	18		
1825				
Ships-of-the-Line	120	56	6	Steam powered warships commissioned, shell guns introduced
Frigates	156	42	10	
Brigs and Sloops173	61	18		
1830				
Ships-of-the-Line	106	53	6	Public Debt of the United States Government goes from 400% of budget to 1.1%
Frigates	144	67	11	
Brigs and Sloops102	83	18		
1840				
Ships-of-the-Line	89	88	6	Disputes with Britain Over the Oregon Country
Frigates	106	56	16	
Brigs and Sloops 87	89	22		
1850				
Ships-of-the-Line	86	45	8	Mexican-American War
Frigates	104	56	27	
Brigs and Sloops 79	87	25		

USA vs. The World continued from page 12

Shortly after the second war with the British Empire, Congress authorized the Navy to build a fleet and not just a small collection of ships. It helped that the Naval officers and sailors proved themselves to be equals or better in terms of quality to British officers and sailors as they scored several victories at sea.

Authorizing a fleet and actually building it, however, were two completely different issues. The authorization came in form of a long title law called "An Act for the Gradual Increase of the United States Navy." It allowed the Navy to build six ships-of-the-lines of not less than 74 guns and six frigates of not less than 44 guns. Unfortunately, there was what can best be described as a lack of follow through. The Federal budget from 1817 to 1837 increased from $21 million a year to $37 million a year. The Navy's budget in 1817 was $3.5 million a year and remained flat or dropped until 1837 (The Royal Navy, by the way, in peace time had a budget of about $20 million.)

The Navy faced other problems that prevented a large shipbuilding program. One was the rapid advance of technology. Steam powered ships and shells guns were making big sailing ships somewhat pointless. The second was the need to improve and build up an infrastructure to handle the fleet (i.e. the Navy yards).

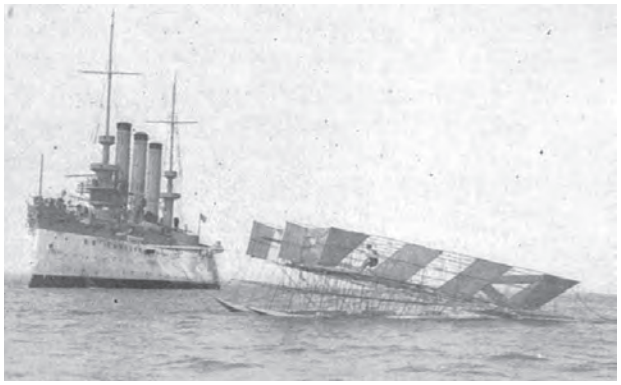
A fictional portrayal of the post-War of 1812 Navy showing the 120-gun USS Pennsylvania, 74-gun *USS* North Carolina, *the 18-gun brig USS* Hornet, *and the 18-gun brig USS* Enterprise. *(Naval Historical Center image of an 1893 painting by Fred S. Cozzens)*

The explanation for Congress' lack of financial support wasn't so much that it had turned its back on the Navy, but more to do with a determined policy to pay off the public debt incurred by previous Presidential administrations. After the War of 1812, the public debt of the United States had hit a record high of $127 million (or 400% of the budget). By 1837, that number was **$400,000** (1.1 % of the budget), the lowest the debt has ever been.

The lack of ships or technology, however, does not seem to have made the U.S. Naval or foreign policy any less aggressive. While the sub-title of this article is titled "A Lesson in Humility," the Navy had a squadron of ships in almost every part of the globe by the 1850s. The U.S. Navy became involved in a major war with Mexico, almost got into a third war with the British over the issue of Oregon, tried to catch slave ships, and engaged in several smaller conflicts.

Correction

A flood of e-mails came in concerning the photo on page 16 in the last issue of *The Daybook*. They all said the same thing: "That's not USS *Minnesota*!" No, it is not. That is the armored cruiser USS *Brooklyn* (ACR-3), which served as the permanent station ship for Hampton Roads in 1907. Part of the blame lies with the *Official Blue Book of the Jamestown Ter-centennial*, which identified the ship as *Minnesota*, but most of the blame goes to the editor for not fact checking. The actual, USS *Minnesota* (BB-22) at the Jamestown Exposition is shown at right (the big letters spelling out "Minnesota" would be the first hint). So, thanks to all for spotting the error.



USS Brooklyn *(ACR-3) (not* Minnesota*) at the Jamestown Exposition with J.G. Mass' waterborne flying machine. (*Official Blue Books of the Jamestown Ter-centennial Exposition*)*

The real USS Minnesota *(BB-22) at the Jamestown Exposition. How do we know for sure this time? The big letters spelling out the word MINNESOTA in the front of the bridge is our first clue. (National Archives)*

Dambargo continued from page 9

The dramatic changes in weather and the arduous nature of patrolling seem to have brought physical ruin to Wederstrandt. On December 15, he wrote the Navy Secretary asking to be relieved for reasons of ill health. Lieutenant Jacob Jones was ordered from New York to take command, which he did in early January. *Argus* proceeded to Boston to assist the collector there. Within two months, with both men and vessel exhausted, the brig sailed to the New York Navy Yard for a refit. Wederstrandt, seemingly unable to recover, resigned from the Navy in May 1810.

The northern patrols of *Argus* reflected the fact that, increasingly, New Englanders actively rejected the embargo. Contraband goods flowed into Canada across the ill-defined boundary between Maine and New Brunswick and the northern border of Vermont. Gallatin informed Collector Larkin Smith that two Norfolk vessels *Hope* and *Polly Rogers* had been seized in Barnstable, Massachusetts with flour on board. In the future, even the stated intention to ship provisions to the New England commonwealth would be sufficient cause to detain a vessel.

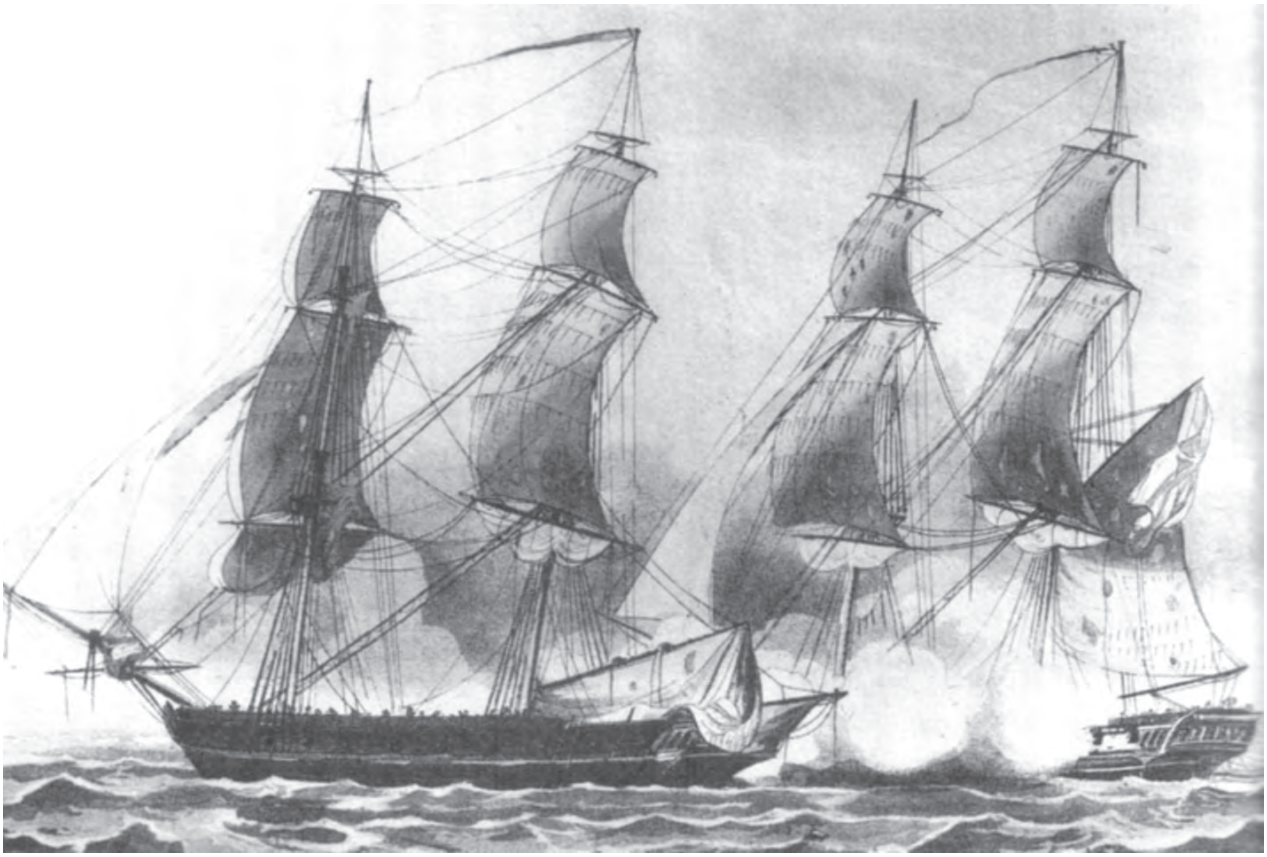
On July 1, Smith ordered Decatur to "immediately weigh anchor [in *Chesapeake*] and proceed to coast it Northwardly as far as Passamaquoddy. … My wish is that you should continue cruising until you shall receive orders to return to Norfolk." After several days' delay caused by contrary winds, *Chesapeake* sailed to the mouth of the Delaware Bay. Decatur examined traffic there for six days before proceeding to Sandy Hook, New Jersey.

After checking for dispatches, the frigate continued to Newport, Rhode Island. Patrolling in the waters of Long Island Sound and Narragansett Bay proved fruitful. One of Decatur's lieutenants, Rhode Island-native William Henry Harrison, thought it was a little too fruitful. As he wrote his father, "I regret much that any of our friends are unfortunate by the *Chesapeake*, had it not been for the fool that commanded the *Mount Vernon* we should not have molested them." It seems that *Mount Vernon* had acted suspiciously while leaving harbor. After Decatur stopped the brig, her captain, exclaiming "Misery lik'd company," blew the whistle on other ships planning to break the embargo.

Secretary Smith wrote Decatur on August 2,"The evasions of the embargo laws in the ports of the eastern States from Rhode Island eastward have become so general and of so serious a nature, that nothing but an active naval force upon our eastern coast, can command the respect of the Law." Decatur was ordered to patrol the eastern seaboard "especially north of Cape Cod." Before he could do so, however, a side trip to New York was necessary to retrieve crewmen sent there as prize crews. That accomplished, *Chesapeake* sailed immediately for Boston, arriving August 29.

As he cruised along the coast, Decatur sent his officers into harbors to check with local customs officials. Despite what he was hearing from Washington, the commodore

Dambargo continued on page 15



The 18-gun brig Argus *sailed from Norfolk in 1808 to enforce the embargo first in the hot, humid weather off the Georgia – Spanish Florida border and later on the snowy coast of Maine.* Argus *is pictured here on the left engaged with the British brig HMS* Pelican *during the War of 1812. (HRNM image of a print by Thomas Whitcombe)*

After the incident with HMS Leopard, *Captain Stephen Decatur took command of the frigate* Chesapeake *from Commodore James Barron. The Navy ordered the Norfolk-built and based ship to enforce Jefferson's embargo in northern waters in mid to late 1808. (Naval Historical Center image of a painting by F. Muller)*

Dambargo continued from page 14

got a different read on the situation. At Portland, Machias and Eastport, collectors all denied the occurrence of recent attempts to violate the embargo. Was Washington responding to a false alarm or were local officials lying? Decatur could not tell. By early September, he could not see either as late summer fogs shrouded the coast. To an experienced seaman like Decatur, a big ship fog-bound against close rocky shores was a recipe for disaster.

From Boston, Decatur wrote Smith explaining that it was too dangerous to keep *Chesapeake* on the coast after the end of November. Smith concurred and ordered the frigate home on November 10. After a side trip to Long Island Sound, *Chesapeake*'s log recorded on December 8, "at ½ past 9 [p.m.] came to with Larboard anchor in Lynnhaven Bay." Decatur would shortly be transferred to command of the frigate *United States*. His replacement, Isaac Hull, would take *Chesapeake* north again in February 1809, but the embargo would end on March 4 with the inauguration of James Madison as Jefferson's successor.

How effective did Jefferson's experiment in peaceful coercion prove to be? If America was absolutely necessary to England and France, the embargo would have been disastrous to Europe, but that proved not to be the case. Workers in some British industries that required peculiarly American raw goods were hurt. Some French colonists were wounded. But neither of these groups had political clout. Britain did face a decline in its trade with the United States because of the embargo. The date shows a 56% decline in 1808. Yet British trade totals world-wide were largely unchanged. This occurred because, simultaneous with the embargo, Spain revolted against Napoleonic rule and South American markets became available to England.

Meanwhile, Napoleon rather liked the embargo. True, the American action hurt the French West Indies, but the Emperor cared little for his few remaining colonies and the embargo was scarcely felt in metropolitan France. It did give him the opportunity to abolish the concept of neutrality. In the Bayonne Decree of April 17, 1808, Napoleon declared all American private ships arriving in Europe as coming illicitly from British ports, in violation of the embargo and thus in British service. Therefore, all American ships became good prizes.

The embargo came to an end only when Jefferson left office. Retiring to Monticello, the ex-president wrote to Treasury Secretary Gallatin, "I place immense value in the experiment being fully made, how far an embargo may be an effectual weapon in future as well as on this occasion." Forgetting the desired outcome was a change in European policy toward American neutrality, the embargo was seen as successful only to the degree United States trade was disrupted.

From the beginning of the embargo throughout fifteen months of agonizing national trial, Jefferson's conduct impaired public liberty. Seaports like Norfolk were devastated as almost the whole of the shipping industry shut down. Even Jefferson's mythic yeoman farmers were injured as their access to lucrative overseas markets closed. The men of the Naval establishment were called to enforce a vastly unpopular law upon their neighbors. That they did so fairly despite their own expressed distaste for the embargo spoke well of the emerging professionalism of the U.S. Navy.

The author expresses his thanks to Professor Joshua Smith of the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy for his help in locating source materials for this article.

The Ceremony to End All Ceremonies

On January 5, 1908, the ships of the Atlantic Fleet crossed the Equator at 10 p.m. In one of the largest "Crossing the Line" ceremonies in history, King Neptune and his court initiated about two-thirds of the fleet (or several thousand sailors) into his domain (731 aboard USS *Kansas* alone) the next day. Shown here are various scenes aboard USS *Wisconsin* (BB-9) and USS *Georgia* (BB-15) courtesy of Bill Stewart. More images of Mr. Stewart's collection of the ceremony and the fleet's voyage can be seen at www.greatwhitefleet.info.

In Our Next Issue...

-The Fleet Arrives in California

-*Cumberland*'s Silent Hero

-Book Reviews: *Black & Gold: Racial Integration of the Naval Academy* and *Scorpion Down*