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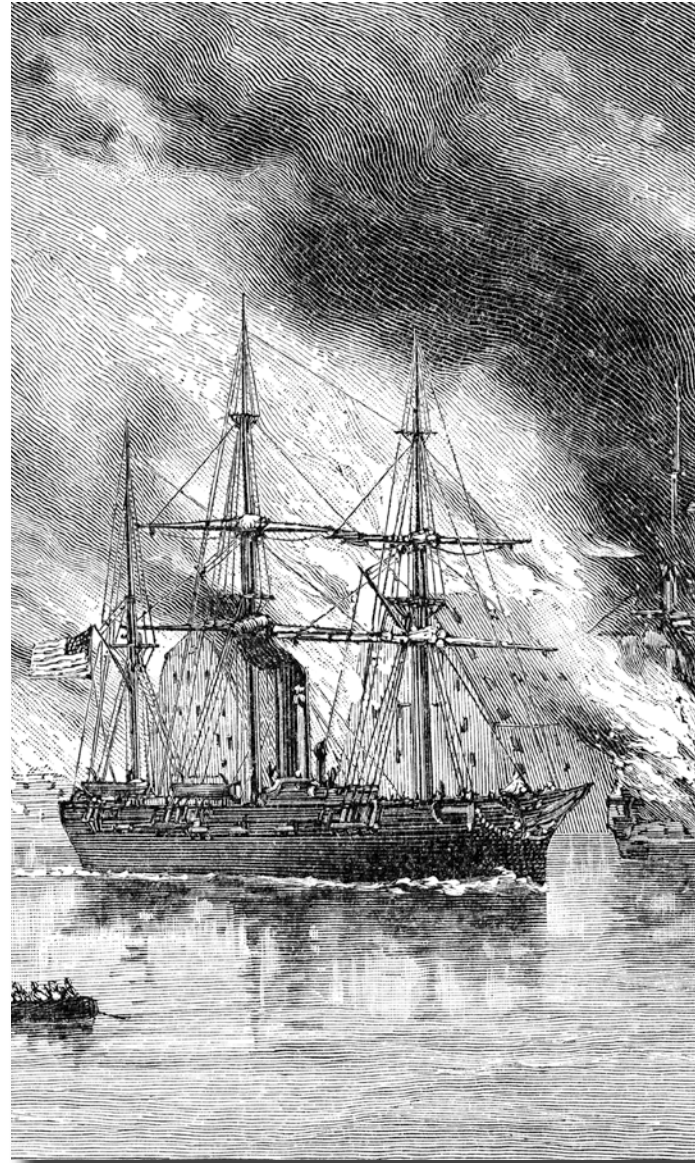
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*The Daybook's* purpose is to educate and inform readers on historical topics and museum related events. It is written by staff and volunteers.

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

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# Black History Month Essay- Rear Admiral Benjamin T. Hacker

by Nathan Hacker

*Editor's Note: In honor of Black History Month, the Hampton Roads Naval Museum's education department held an essay contest for local 5th to 7th graders. We asked students to write an essay about an African American in the U.S. Navy who best exemplifies the U.S. Navy's core values of honor, courage, and commitment. We present the 2011 winner.*

**M**y name is Nathan Hacker. I am in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade and I attend Kempsville Middle School in Virginia Beach. The person that I am writing about is my grandfather Benjamin Thurman Hacker. My grandfather was a man who possessed many great talents. Before I get into what his great accomplishments in the Navy were you should first know that he was born in Washington, D.C. in 1935. His father was a chaplain in the Army and his mother was a music teacher and a great piano player. He went to high school in Daytona Beach, Florida and college at Wittenberg University in Springfield, Ohio.


When my grandfather went into the Navy he was an Ensign. He was trained to be a

Naval Flight Officer (NFO). As a Naval Flight Officer he had to navigate and make sure that this plane went to the right place. His plane type was the P-2V and P-3C. Those planes are used for tracking enemy submarines. They fly out over the ocean and drop sonars in the water and then use them to track submarines. He served his country for many years and did many things.

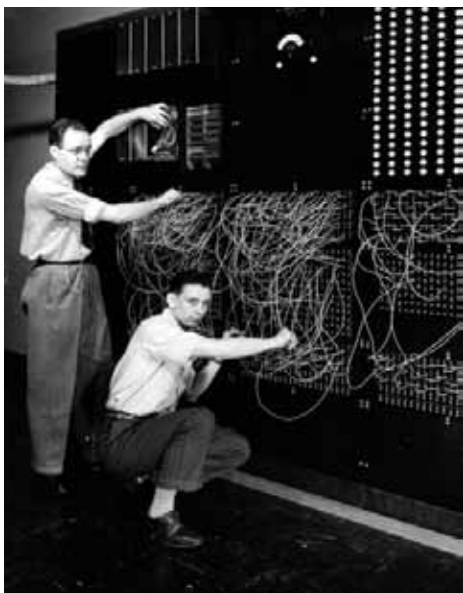
In his 30 years in the Navy he held ten commands. Some of these commands were, Commander Naval Facilities Barbados, Commander Patrol Squadron 24, Commander NROTC Florida A&M University, Commander Naval Air Station Brunswick Maine, Commander Military Enlistment Processing Command, Commander Task Force 67, Commander Fleet Air Mediterranean, Commander Naval Training Center Sand Diego, California, and commander Naval Base San Diego. He worked his way up to being the first Naval Flight Officer in the Navy to earn flag rank. When he retired in 1988 he was a Rear Admiral and was the highest ranking African American in the United States Navy.

He was awarded an honorary Doctor of

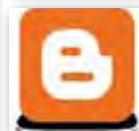


Education in 1986 by George Washington University. By being a great Naval officer, he opened many doors to others to follow in his footsteps. After the Navy he did many more important things like being the Director of Veterans Affairs for the state of California and a senior vice president for USAA, Inc. He passed away in 2003. In November 2005 the Navy honored him by naming the new headquarters building for Commander, Task Force 67 in Sigonella, Sicily in his honor. 

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# Leaders and Heroes of Lincoln's Navy, Part 2

This is part two of a four part series showcasing the important personalities who operated the U.S. and Confederate States Navy. Part 1 appeared in Volume 15 Issue 1 of The Daybook and Parts 3 and 4 will be in future issues.

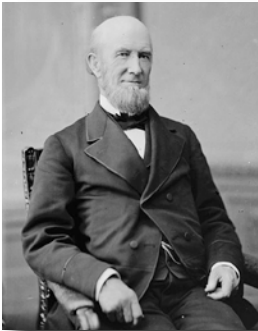


## Charles Francis Adams, Diplomat



Son of President John Quincy Adams and grandson of President John Adams, Charles Francis Adams did more damage to the Confederate Navy than any U.S. Naval warship. As the American ambassador to the Court of St. James, Adams tirelessly argued with British authorities about the construction and sale of warships to the Confederacy. He was somewhat successful, as many ships were seized by British authorities, though he failed at stopping the cruisers *CSS Alabama*, *Florida*, and others from putting to sea. Nonetheless, one contemporary writer observed that “None of our generals, not Grant himself, did us better or more trying service than [Adams] in his forlorn outpost of London.”

## James Eads, Engineer



Indiana native James Eads made a name for himself in St. Louis, Missouri as a civil engineer, boat builder, and salvager. At the beginning of the war, the government contracted him to quickly construct seven shallow-draft gunboats for riverine warfare. These ships, with flatbottoms, wide beams, and 2.5 inch armor plating, were known as the “City”-class ironclads. These gunboats became some of the more famous Union ships during the war, including *St. Louis*, *Carondelet*, and *Cairo*. Eads would earn greater fame after the war for his construction of the Mississippi River Bridge (later called the Eads Bridge), the world’s first steel alloy bridge, in St. Louis. Eads held more than fifty patents at the time of his death in 1887.

## John Winslow, Captain



A forty-year veteran of the U.S. Navy when the war began, this North Carolina native had already distinguished himself in several combat operations during the Mexican-American War. Assigned initially to service in the western rivers, he suffered serious non-combat injuries and a bout of malaria. After he recovered, the Navy gave him command of the new steam sloop *USS Kearsarge* in 1863. His ship finally, in 1864, pinned down *CSS Alabama* in Cherbourg, France. After a legendary battle, *Kearsarge* defeated the famous Confederate cruiser. Winslow’s insistence of frequent battle drills is credited as a primary factor in *Alabama*’s defeat. After the war, he retired as a rear admiral and was later buried in a coffin draped by *Kearsarge*’s battle flag.

## William Truxtun, Commander



The grandson of legendary Age of Sail era Commodore Thomas Truxtun, William Truxtun’s career in the U.S. Navy successfully upheld the family name. In the years prior to the war, Truxtun had an active career. He served as a prize captain of a slave ship and later participated in laying the first trans-Atlantic cable. During the war, Truxtun commanded several different gunboats during blockade and combat operations in Hampton Roads and the North Carolina littorals. His superiors praised his role in the capture of Plymouth and Fort Fisher, both in North Carolina. In the 1880s, he settled down in Hampton Roads and took command of the Norfolk Navy Yard. As the Yard’s commandant, he helped the region rebuild its harbor and other infrastructure that had been destroyed during the war.



**John Lawson, Landsman**

Born in Philadelphia into slavery in 1837, John Lawson entered the Union Navy when the war began. He served as an ammunition handler on the berthing deck of USS *Hartford*. Lawson himself was thrown against the bulkhead of the *Hartford* from a shell blast, which killed or wounded all of the six man crew. Lawson was seriously injured both legs. He quickly gather his composure and returned to his station, refusing treatment, to finished the battle. For his gallantry in action, Lawson received the Congressional Medal of Honor. He became one of twelve sailors to receive the honor that day. Additionally, Lawson was one of eight African Americans to win the United States’ highest military honor during the American Civil War. Lawson left the Navy following the war and earned a living as a peddler in Philadelphia. He died in 1919 at the age of 81.



**William D. Porter, Commodore**

The lesser-known of Commodore David Porter’s children, William Porter could easily be mistaken for a Blackbeard-type pirate rather than a distinguished and innovative officer from one of America’s most famous Naval families. The Navy sent him to St. Louis to put his energy and zeal to work in 1861. He oversaw the conversion of the Mississippi River ironclads and took personal command of one he named after his father’s famous ship, USS *Essex*. After several combat operations in the Mississippi River basin, his health, which had never been good, declined further. He died of a heart attack in 1864.



**Samuel Dana Greene, Lieutenant**

The most famous executive officer of the Civil War was Samuel Greene. The Navy first assigned him as the executive officer of USS *Monitor*. He took command of the ship after Lieutenant John Worden was blinded by an exploding shell during the famous March 9 battle with CSS *Virginia*. Greene was later forced to serve under a series of officers despite having proven ability to command and lead men in battle. This pattern of serving under other officers continued during and after the war. He shot himself in 1884, while serving as the executive officer of the Portsmouth Navy Yard.



**Charles Ellet, Colonel/Engineer**

Charles Ellet gained early fame as a civil engineer and designer of suspension bridges in western Virginia and Pennsylvania. Seeing the success of CSS *Virginia*'s ramming blows at Hampton Roads, Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton grew convinced of the tactic. He offered Ellet a commission as an Army Colonel with money to construct the United States Ram Fleet. The Fleet operated in the Mississippi River in coordination with the Western Gunboat Flotilla. Each steam-powered ram was braced with iron bars along the bow, creating a powerful and centralized force. His design quickly proved adequate at the 1862 Battle of Memphis, where Ellet’s Ram Fleet decimated the Confederate River Defense Fleet. Fortune did not smile on Ellet, however, as he died two weeks later from a leg wound received during the melee.



**William Cushing, Commander**

His biographer called Cushing “Lincoln’s commando.” Fearless to the extreme, Cushing frequently volunteered to lead several commando-style raids throughout the war. Among his most famous feats was the sinking of the ironclad CSS *Albatross* with a small steam launch and a spar torpedo during an 1864 night raid. During the Fort Fisher campaign, he calmly took soundings of the Cape Fear River while Confederate bullets snapped all around him.

After the war, he took command of several ships, including one during the 1873 *Virginius* incident. He suffered from chronic back pain from his intense combat duty. He had trouble mentally adjusting to a life without combat and died in an asylum from a morphine overdose. He is one of the most honored alumni of the U.S. Naval Academy.



**Robert Smalls, Pilot**

**R**obert Smalls was born into slavery on a South Carolina plantation. During the early years of the Civil War, he became pilot of CSS *Planter*, a 300-ton side-wheel steamer operating out of Charleston. Smalls and a small group of African Americans, including his family, escaped on the side-wheel steamer just before dawn on May 13, 1862. He is credited as the first African American to captain a United States Ship as a token of his bravery onboard *Planter*. Smalls would go on to serve on the South Carolina state legislature and later in the U.S. House of Representatives as a Republican.



**Robley Evans, Acting Ensign**

**B**orn in southwestern Virginia and raised in the Utah Territory, the U.S. Navy pulled Evans from his studies at the Naval Academy in 1863 and assigned him to the Fleet. He served for a year as a junior officer before taking four bullet wounds during the ground assault on Fort Fisher in 1865. He adamantly refused to let surgeons amputate his leg and walked with a limp for the rest of his life. He went on to command several ships after the war, including the gunboat USS *Yorktown* (PG-1) during the 1891 Chilean Crisis and the battleship USS *Iowa* (BB-4) during the Spanish-American War. “Fighting Bob” Evans’ last assignment was as the senior flag officer in charge of the 1907 “Great White Fleet.”



**William Radford, Commodore**

**B**orn in southern Virginia, Radford chose to remain with the U.S. Navy at the time of Fort Sumter. An experienced combat veteran and world traveler, the Navy assigned him to command USS *Cumberland*. He was away at a court martial hearing when CSS *Virginia* attacked his ship and arrived in time to watch helplessly from shore as the ship sank. He was in such distress over the loss that he returned home and spoiled his children rotten for several months in order to find some measure of peace. After informing the Department that he was ready to return to duty, the Navy assigned him to the ironclad USS *New Ironsides*. His handling of the ironclad during operations off of Charleston and Fort Fisher were highly praised.



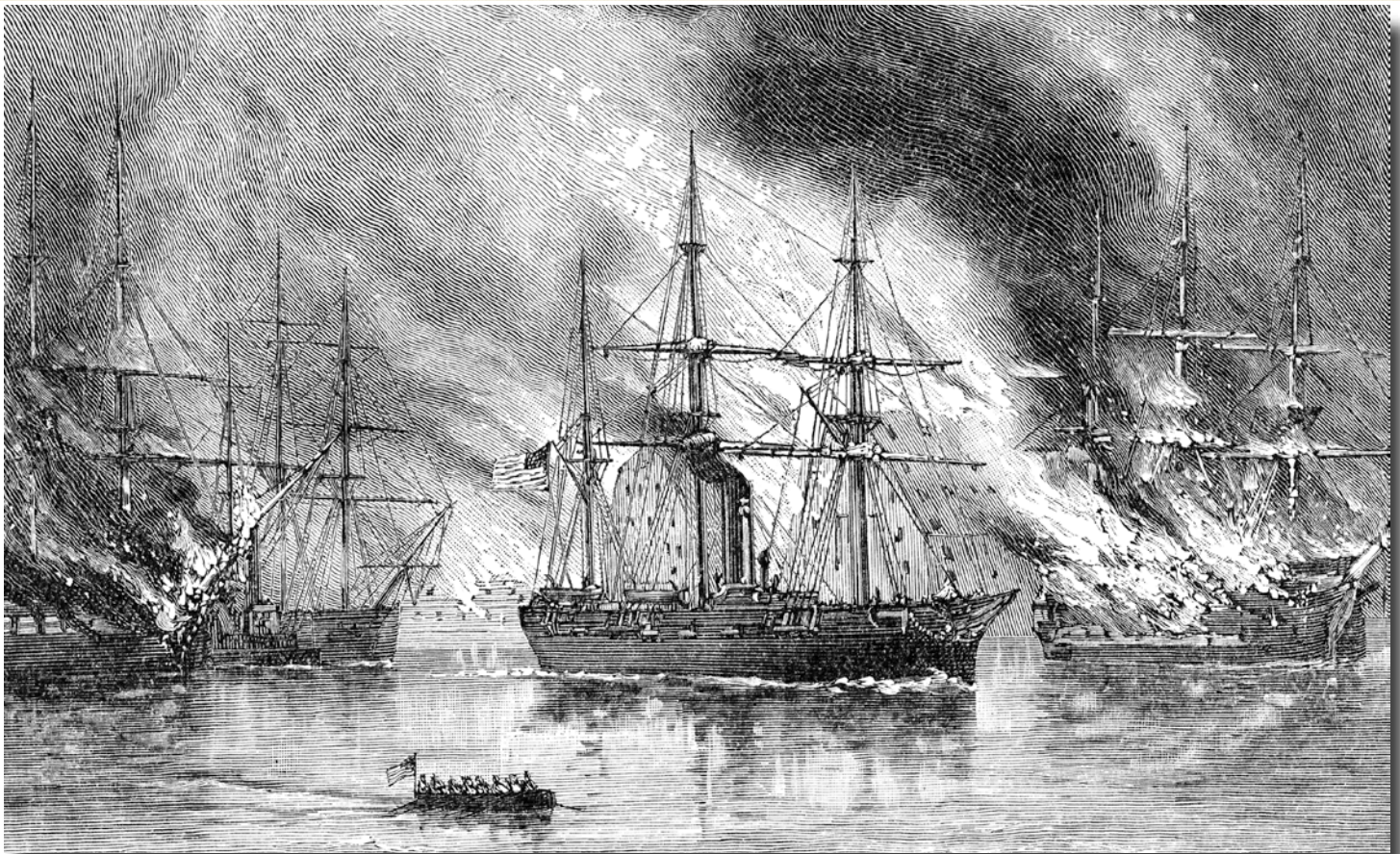
**Richard M. Meade III, Lieutenant Commander**

**T**he son of a U.S. Navy captain and nephew of Army of the Potomac leader General George Meade, Richard Meade had a very active Naval career. His Civil War resume included suppression of the infamous New York City draft riots, and command of USS *Marblehead* in South Carolina waters, USS *Louisville* on the Mississippi River, and USS *Chocura* in the Gulf of Mexico. During his tour with *Marblehead*, he received the Medal of Honor for actions in the Soto River. A progressive-thinking officer, Meade spent much of his time after the war lobbying and researching new naval technologies. He made flag rank in 1894.



**Louis M. Goldsborough, Rear Admiral**

**T**he burden of leading the U.S. Navy at the time of Fort Sumter fell to a group of Naval officers who had been in the Navy for several dozen years. Goldsborough was one of these “old sea dogs” as he had already experienced forty-five years in the service, making him one of the most veteran officers in the fleet. He saw combat on multiple occasions, including personally leading men into battle against pirates in the Aegean Sea. He also served as one of the U.S. Naval Academy’s first commandants. When he took command of Naval forces in Hampton Roads in 1861, his younger peers and Washington politicians perceived him as being out of touch with modern-day warfare. After a lengthy internal fight with his superiors in Washington and charges of incompetence, he asked in mid-1862 to be relieved of command and given an administrative position.



In one of the most dramatic moments of war, the steam sloop *USS Pawnee* and sloop-of-war *USS Cumberland* make a hasty exit from the burning flames of the Gosport Navy Yard, April 23, 1861. Despite the image of a roaring inferno, much of the Yard's critical infrastructure was remained intact. (Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper engraving)

## Preparing For War

### Confusion Followed by Organizing and Light Sparring Mark the First Months of Conflict in Hampton Roads

Despite the fact that Fort Sumter had surrendered, and Virginia seceded from the Union, both Federal and Confederate forces in Hampton Roads were far from ready to conduct the serious



business of war. The Navy had no official strategy, much less enough and ships to conduct one. The Confederacy had no military to speak of, with the exception of a few prominent politicians and highly patriotic state militiamen. It was a chaotic situation, and during those first few months of war, military leaders in Hampton Roads,

Confederate and Federal, often made the wrong decisions.

The war truly began for Hampton Roads residents with the news of Fort Sumter and Virginia's secession. Residents nervously scanned the Norfolk/Portsmouth waterfront to see what the heavily armed sloop-of-war *USS Cumberland* would do: withdraw, or level Norfolk as the British had in 1775. Local governments mobilized militia, and out-of-town militiamen soon arrived.

*Cumberland's* company was unsure of her course of action. Ship lookouts observed fortifications being built opposite the Navy Yard. Other observers noted that obstructions were being built.

*Cumberland's* command staff, Commodore Garret Pendergrast and Captain John Marston, later met with the Navy Yard's commandant, Commodore William McCauley, and Commander James Alden,

who had arrived from Washington with specific orders to get the steam frigate *Merrimack* out of Hampton Roads. Alden was of the opinion that *Merrimack* could be moved and that any obstructions in the river could be bypassed. Pendergrast and Marston endorsed this view. Possibly believing that *Merrimack* could be used against a possible assault on the Yard, McCauley balked at Alden's suggestion.

However, for whatever reason, whether someone panicked or honestly thought the Yard was about to be taken, McCauley chose a third option. On the evening of April 19, he ordered *Merrimack* to be scuttled. As this was going on, Commander Hiram Paulding arrived from Washington with explicit instructions from Secretary of the Gideon Welles to take charge of the situation.

Seeing there was little left to save, Paulding ordered the Yard and any



The short-lived "Virginia State Navy" was short on ships, but long on talent. Shown here from left to right are three of the organization's senior officers: Samuel Barron, Jr., French Forrest, and William Randolph Tucker. These three men, along with several other ex-U.S. Naval officers, proclaimed loyalty to their home state. The Confederate States Navy soon absorbed Virginia's fleet and commissioned its officers into the national navy. (HRNM images)

decommissioned ships to be torched. A detachment of 100 sailors from *Cumberland* was assigned to spike the guns at the Yard. Unfortunately, they found that simple sledgehammers were not enough to break the metal on any of the guns. By 1:45 a.m. on April 20, the signal was made to return to the ship. Fifty sailors from the giant ship-of-the-line *Pennsylvania* departed their doomed vessel, docked at the Yard since the 1840s, and loaded up on *Cumberland*. A very emotional McCauley had to be practically dragged on to the ship as the commodore refused to leave his post. Using *Cumberland's* small boats, sailors lit the fuel and set fire to the Yard.

Towed out by the steam tug *Yankee*, *Cumberland* proceeded upriver at 4 a.m., past the great walls of fire that had engulfed the Yard. *Keystone State*, *Yankee*, and *Pawnee* escorted *Cumberland* over to a protected anchorage next to Fort Monroe. From there, Pendergrast caught up on several administrative matters. While at anchor, he officially received notice of President Abraham Lincoln's proclamation to extend the blockade to Virginia. Pendergrast in turn gave notice to local authorities in Norfolk and Hampton that Hampton Roads was under a state of blockade.

His squadron received a few ships to aid him in enforcing the blockade, including the steam gunboats USS *Quaker City* and *Monticello* and the revenue cutter steamer USRS *Harriet Lane*. With the additional ships, and Fort Monroe comfortably in the hands of the U.S. Army, Hampton Roads

became one of the most easily blockaded ports in the South.

Geography assisted the U.S. Navy with the blockade. Not only was Hampton Roads the closest Southern port to U.S. Naval bases in the North, but any possible blockade runner coming from Europe would have to enter the Chesapeake Bay and somehow make a run through Hampton Roads itself, before making a sharp turn to the south, and down the Elizabeth River to make it to port.

Virginia merchants who depended on the James River for their livelihood found out about the blockade the hard way. Either because they were ignorant of the blockade proclamation or failed to take it seriously, two ships and ten schooners became early victims of U.S. Navy boarding teams. All of them except one were carrying tobacco bound for Norfolk from warehouses in Richmond and Petersburg. Prize crews seized the ships and headed north for adjudication by prize courts in Philadelphia and New York. *Cumberland's* boarding teams seized an additional sixteen small coastal vessels that conducted business within the Hampton Roads area. Possibly the most unfortunate of this early group was a Richmond-based merchant vessel. A brig called *Amy Warwick* had been at sea for several weeks hauling back a load of fine Brazilian coffee beans from Rio de Janeiro. She arrived in Hampton Roads on July 11, 1861 only to discover a squadron of U.S. Navy ships. Boarding teams seized the ship and took her to Boston for processing

by a prize court.

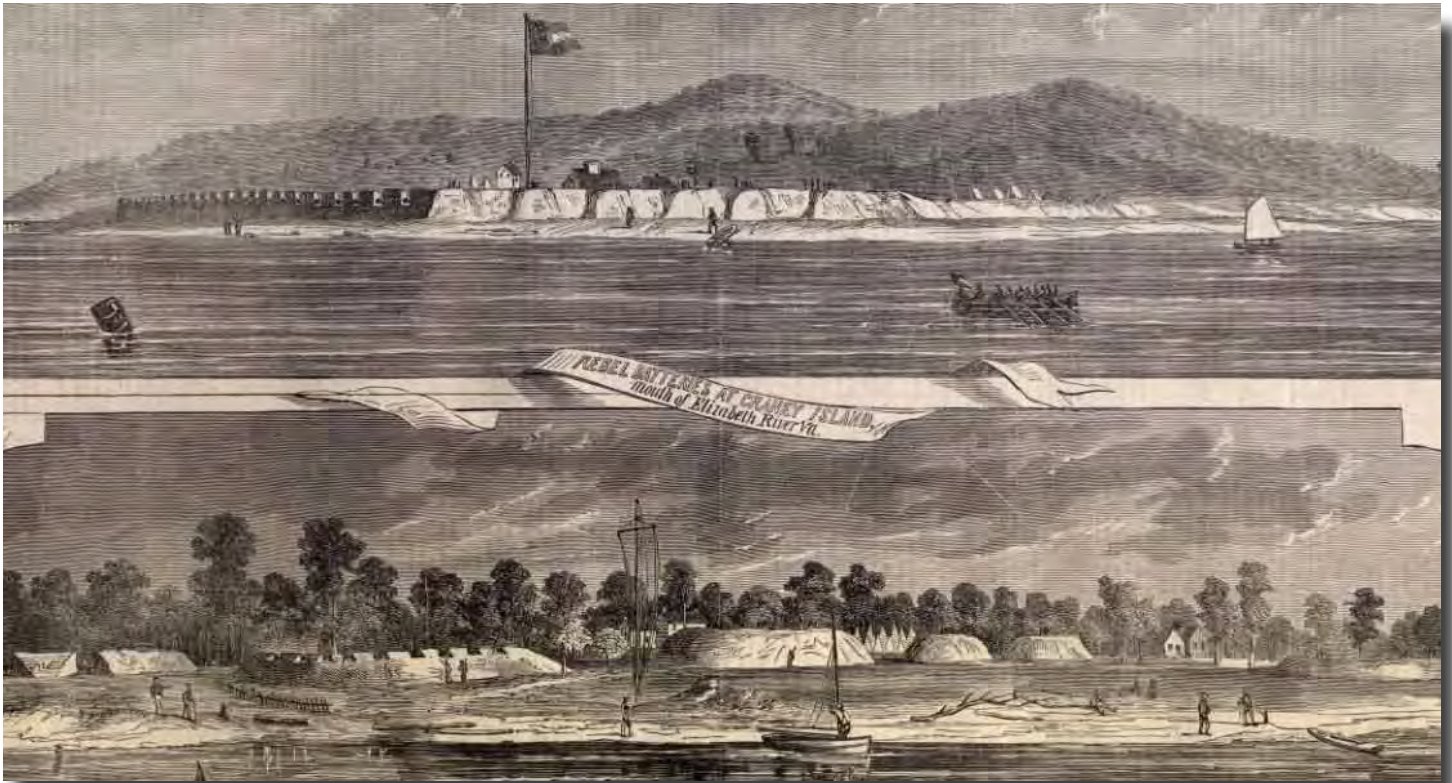
Reinforcements began to arrive at Fort Monroe beginning in May 1861 to tighten Among the ships arriving was the crown jewel of the U.S. Navy, the magnificently designed steam frigate USS *Minnesota*.

On board was Commodore Silas Stringham, with orders to take charge of the overall blockade operations on the Atlantic coast. His first official act was to establish the U.S. Naval Blockade Squadron, which had the responsibility of blockading not just Hampton Roads, but the entire Atlantic coastline.

By late June, Stringham reported that he had twenty-three warships in the squadron. While on paper it was an impressive



Commanding U.S. Naval forces in Hampton Roads and the entire Atlantic coastline in the early days of the war was Commodore Silas Stringham. By 1861, the New York native and combat veteran had served in the Navy for over fifty years. (Harper's Weekly engraving)



Using guns seized at the Gosport Navy Yard, Virginians constructed defenses at Craney Island (above) in the middle of the Elizabeth River. Additionally, in an early attempt to deny full control of Hampton Roads to the U.S. Navy, they placed guns at Sewells Point (below). (Harper's Weekly engraving)

number, in fact, it was barely enough to keep the line of communications open to the Potomac River. The commodore had the ships spread out from Charleston to Cape Henry with a few patrolling the Chesapeake Bay and local rivers.

The Virginia state government intended to challenge the U.S. Navy for control of its local waters. Since the Confederate States Navy was not yet established, the Virginia state government formed the Virginia Navy. A number of veteran Naval officers with Virginia ties resigned their commissions and pledged their loyalty to the new organization. Among them were Robert E. Lee's older brother Sidney Smith Lee, John Mercer Brooke, John Tucker, Matthew Murray, Catesby ap Roger Jones, William McBlair, and Samuel Barron. Fully expecting Maryland to secede from the Union, several officers with Maryland ties also resigned. When Maryland did not, and the U.S. Navy refused to let the officers back in, the Virginia Navy received a second group of talented officers. In this group was French Forrest and Franklin Buchanan.

A significant number of U.S. Naval officers with Virginia ties remained loyal. This group included David Farragut, Arthur Radford (commanding officer of USS *Cumberland* and *New Ironsides*), and

Sydney Phillips Lee.

After forming a naval organization on paper, the Virginia government then proceeded to find some ships and equipment. Virginia's naval officers started with Gosport and, despite the fires, found the Yard's infrastructure largely intact. The dry dock was in working order and many of the ship houses only lightly damaged. In the short term, the valuable cache of equipment found was the Yard's large stock of ready-to-use naval ordnance. According to a report to the

Virginia General Assembly, Virginia state troops found over 1,100 guns of varying calibers. Almost immediately, crews began moving the guns to several different locations around Virginia and established shore batteries at strategic locations on all of the state's major waterways. Virginia shared this treasure. Crews delivered more than 200 guns to other states throughout the South (see details in *The Sage*, page 12). Militiamen also took over the U.S. Navy's ordnance facility at Fort Norfolk, and seized

**Preparing for War Continued on Page 13**



North Carolina used its gift from Gosport to establish Forts Clark and Hatteras at the entrance to Hatteras Inlet. Commanded by Samuel Barron, the forts provided protection for privateers operating in the area. A U.S. Naval/Army expedition later captured the facilities. (Harper's Weekly engraving)





The gunboats *USS Freeborn* and *Reliance* and a U.S. Navy landing party battle Confederate batteries at Aquia Creek, June 27, 1861. The engagement was one of several that occurred between the ships of the Potomac Flotilla and Confederate shore gunners. The engagement were small, but critically important in keeping Washington, D.C.'s lines of communication open. (Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper engraving)

## Keeping the Nation's Capital Open

While the U.S. Navy busily sent ships to Hampton Roads to set up the blockade and newspapers were screaming "On to Richmond!", there was the very serious issue of the nation's capital being cut off from the rest of Union. Riots and political uncertainty in Maryland temporarily disrupted overland routes, namely the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, that connected the capital with western and northern cities. The Potomac River was the only alternative, and Confederate ground forces challenged control of it with armed outposts along the river. Admiral David Dixon Porter later commented in his history of the U.S. Navy in the Civil War,



that in May 1861 "the country was too busy watching the black clouds gathering in the South and West to note the ordinary events that were taking place on the Potomac."

At the suggestion of Commander James Ward, Secretary Welles established the Potomac Flotilla to address the problem. The squadron was small in size and stature. It never had more than a handful of ships and all of the vessels were small, lightly armed gunboats. Initially under the command of Ward, a man who had already seen action in the war trying to relieve Fort Sumter, the squadron set out to patrol the Potomac with three hastily acquired vessels, the gunboat *Thomas Freeborn*

and armed tugs *Reliance* and *Resolute*. On the squadron's first patrol in May 1861 it encountered a Confederate battery at Aquia Creek, about 45 miles downstream from Washington. The battle, considered by many to be the first true naval conflict of the war, was inconclusive. The Flotilla would do battle with the Confederates at Aquia on many occasions.

Welles reinforced the squadron with *USS Pawnee*, one of the Navy's few pre-war warships built for littoral action. Over the next few months the squadron engaged with several other Confederate batteries at strategic points along the river. It was during one of these successive engagements that a sniper shot Ward.

Neither side was able to get the upper hand on. The Flotilla kept the river open, but the Confederates were still able to harass Northern shipping. Confederate gunners had become quite skilled at setting up guns, firing a few shots, and disassembling them before the U.S. Navy could respond. The obvious answer to securing the Potomac was to remove and/or occupy the fortified positions. The Flotilla did occasionally assemble landing parties of armed Sailors and Marines, but these raids were not a permanent solution. In what was a sign to come, Union generals refused to cooperate with their U.S. Navy counterparts. Of course, the U.S. Army was not completely at fault as the Flotilla did not receive sufficient men or firepower for the

task given them.


The 1862 Peninsula Campaign, General George McClellan's ambitious offensive to take Richmond via the Virginia Peninsula, had the effect of better securing the river. Not only were more ships on the River, but the Army established permanent fortified bases on shore to provide supplies for the operation.

As the war progressed, the Flotilla received more ships including several captured blockade runners. The Flotilla remained for the rest of the war, conducting yeoman's work of mine sweeping (both



Confederate gunners at Budd's Point fires a few shots at Union supply schooners along the Potomac River, 1861. (London Illustrated News engraving)

on the Potomac and Rappahannock) and patrolling the Potomac's many tributaries.

Porter did not forget their work. At the time he wrote his history, Porter was among the senior flag officers in the Navy. He was also the Navy's number one fan. He lauded his fleet whenever he could, especially the Potomac Flotilla. He wrote, "[the public] never stopped to consider the importance of such tedious work as occurred on the great highway from Washington to the sea, nor did they ever seem to reflect that if the river was once closed, the very life of the Union would be imperiled." 

## Book Reviews

### *The Long Road to Annapolis: The Founding of the Naval Academy and the Emerging American Republic*

By William P. Leeman

Reviewed by Ira R. Hanna

How interesting, a book about a significant part of Naval Academy history written by a professor at the Military Academy! This book is an expansion of the author's 2006 Ph.D. dissertation, "The Long Road to Annapolis: The Naval Academy Debate and Emerging Nationalism in the United States, 1775-1845." In it, Leeman described the Congressional debates lasting seventy years concerning the need for and the location of a naval academy, and during the same period, the development of

William P. Leeman. *The Long Road to Annapolis*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010. ISBN 978-0-8078-3383-4

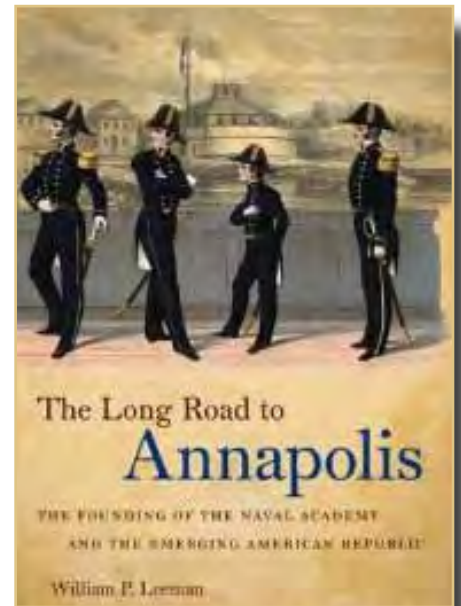
middle class values and their effect on the culmination of those debates. Although his dissertation ended with the founding of the Naval Academy in 1845, the book expanded the discussion of the purpose of the Academy into the early 20th century and the emergence of American nationalism. It is a bit like reading a report on the result of the Army-Navy football game as written by the Army quarterback – the details are accurate, but the perspective of the opposing players is lacking.

For instance, in the chapter entitled "A West Point for the Navy?," Leeman cited Sylvanus Thayer, the superintendent of the Military Academy for twenty-six years, as having influenced the curriculum of the fledgling academy. This may be true, but the first instructors at the Naval Academy were more influential. Another missed perception concerned the absence of discussion concerning the mission of the academy. There is a small but very important book that contributes to the successful completion of the plebe (freshman) year at the Naval Academy. It is called *Reef Points*. On the first page of

that mission is stated. The Navy developed and refined the publication during the 1850s to help young men from all walks of life, rich or poor, and from all areas of the country, to transition from civilian to military life. It states that the mission of the Naval Academy is "to develop them morally, mentally, and physically, and by precept and example to indoctrinate them with the highest ideals of duty, honor, and loyalty." The history of this mission could have added much to the conclusion of this book.


On the positive side, Leeman is at his best when he detailed the process through which the Naval Academy was established. Leeman's use of Congressional debates during the early 1800s provided an insight into the struggles to develop the parameters of the American character, and how the rest of the world perceived Americans up to the Civil War. After the Revolutionary War, Americans knew they needed a standing army and professional officers to lead it. It was easy for Congress to agree to provide funds for the establishment of a military academy, but few understood the need for a large naval force, much less for a naval academy. The ancient tradition of training naval officers aboard ships had been used effectively for centuries. What influenced the public's change in perception of the need for a naval academy? The 1840s were times of technological and scientific advances, thus naval officers needed to be better educated. This could be done best at a dedicated naval academy.

Since the Military Academy at West Point was established in 1802, it is often asked why it took the United States forty-three more years to create a similar school for the Navy. Lennan's answer began to emerge from his study of the Secretaries of the Navy in the early 1800s. One of those was Abel P. Upshur, who reformed the Navy's officer ranks and in 1842 sought Congressional approval to combine the five shore-based naval schools into a single school to be located in the Chesapeake Bay



area. But it was not until February 1845 that the Senate Naval Affairs Committee endorsed the establishment of a naval academy and that it be located at Fort Norfolk, Virginia, on the Elizabeth River. Because of an anti-West Point (thus anti-naval academy) group in Congress and the fiscal austerity of the time, it never happened.

A creative person was needed to accomplish the establishment of a naval academy. George Bancroft, Secretary of the Navy later in 1845, met the challenge. He obtained a place for the academy by getting the War Department to transfer an unused U.S. Army Fort (Severn) to the Navy, and staffed it with forward looking instructors. He took funds already in the Navy department's budget for educators at all the shore-based schools and used the funds to pay the academy's faculty. Some Congressmen were upset but could do nothing to stop the process. Today, the huge dormitory is named in his honor.

In great detail, Leeman told about the many changes in curriculum and discipline during the academy's first seventy-five years. He stated that by the early 1900s, the Naval Academy represented the values of the American middle class, and was a prestigious and respected national institution. This book tells the story of how the Naval Academy was founded, and how it is the institution it is today. Every graduate could learn a great deal about the Naval Academy, as well as themselves, by reading it. 

*U.S.S. Cyclops*

By Marvin W. Barrash

Reviewed by Stephen Hebert

The annals of U.S. Navy history are replete with stories of daring exploits, of epic engagements, and of beating the odds in the face of superior forces. There are, however, stories of intrigue and mystery, the kind of stories that make Sailors a tad more superstitious. Marvin W. Barrash takes on the subject of a U.S. Navy collier, a ship of great importance in Naval logistics, which is usually not in the sole limelight of Naval history like the battleships, aircraft carriers, and submarines. His work, *U.S.S. Cyclops*, is an in-depth study of a U.S. Navy collier

Marvin W. Barrash. *U.S.S. Cyclops*. Westminster, Maryland: Heritage Books, Inc., 2010. ISBN 978-0-7884-8417-9.

which disappeared mysteriously with all 306 crew members after sailing from Barbados, West Indies sometime after March 4, 1918.

Barrash contributes the authoritative operational history of the Hampton Roads-based USS *Cyclops* (AC-4), from her construction to her disappearance. Encompassing some twelve chapters and 698 pages, *U.S.S. Cyclops* resembles a desk reference rather than an illuminating historical narrative. In a very systematic, but dense, composition, Barrash begins with the need for the construction of more colliers and the building of *Cyclops*, and ends with her last fateful voyage disappearing into a mysterious abyss. From start to finish Barrash leaves nothing out, discussing the outfitting and complexity of the collier to ship-life on board. Barrash also takes personal looks into the characters of the ships' commanding officers. The book makes good use of photographic images taken of *Cyclops*, schematics, and a complete listing of the ship's entire crew.

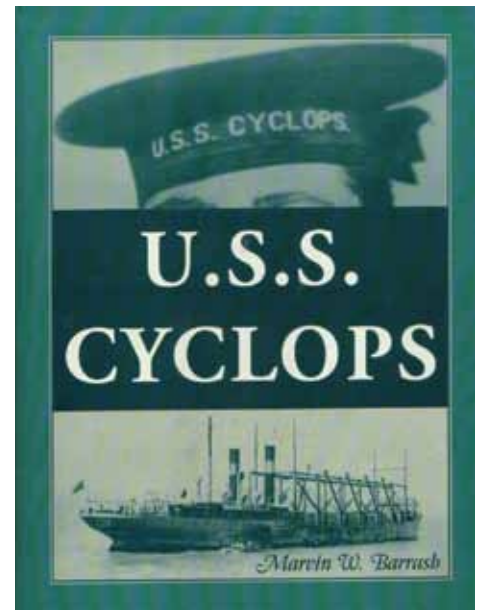
Not to be overlooked is Barrash's attention to the operational aspect of Fleet

Collier No. 4. The story of *Cyclops* is told chronologically by means of existing log books, naval memoranda, and cargo manifests. Barrash uses these, not just to fill the pages, but to highlight the importance of a ship which is not famous for heroism in the face of extreme peril. Perhaps more correctly, this is the only way to tell the true history of Fleet Collier No. 4.


Although the main focus here is to give a definitive operational history of a U.S. Navy ship, the evidence and story collected by Barrash cannot escape the enigma of the ship's disappearance. The last five chapters of the text focus on the disappearance of *Cyclops*, legal claims of next of kin, and the legends and investigations attached to the ship.

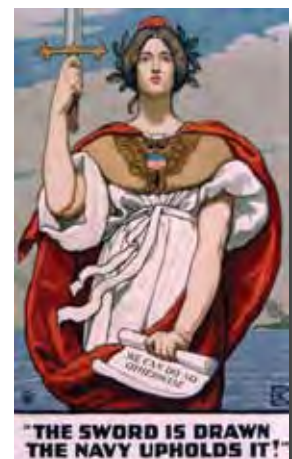
Barrash briefly looks at the rumored stories as to the fate of the ship, ranging from its sinking at the hands of a German U-boat, to the "spontaneous" combustion of her last cargo of highly volatile manganese, to the more ominous Bermuda Triangle. Barrash does not go into any great detail behind the stories. He simply acknowledges the stories, provides details in opposition or support, and moves on, thus never accepting one story over another, leaving the readers to their own conclusion with the information at hand.

If one is interested in stories of unsolved intrigue, this is not that book. If the goal is a truly informative account of a single ship's history, then Barrash's *U.S.S. Cyclops* is the perfect choice. Barrash states his reason for undertaking this subject was his family connection by way of his great uncle, who was declared lost at sea when the ship vanished during World War I. He goes on to relay some of his frustration when initially researching the collier. There were books tackling the subject, but only concerning its connection with the Bermuda Triangle. Disappointed in finding no single book offering a complete operational history of the collier, Barrash decided to write the book he "would have



eagerly purchased." He humbly wishes to act as a guide "through the multitude of stacks of documentation of a yet-to-be solved case."

Perhaps one day the mystery surrounding U.S. Navy collier *Cyclops* will be laid to rest and the final chapter can finally be written, but until then readers will have to be satisfied with a complete operational history of the ship. It is somewhat striking that Fleet Collier No. 4, which shares her name with an eighth century Homeric creature, Polyphemus, in similar ways suffered the same fate. Polyphemus, whose name means "everywhere famous," was ill-fated to be blinded and never know the true identity of the robber of his sight. Thus suffers USS *Cyclops*, whose own fame exists as the first U.S. Navy ship believed to fall victim to the shrouded secrecy of the Bermuda Triangle. Like her mythical namesake, the true identity of *Cyclops*' last voyage will perhaps remain unknown. 





The guns captured at the Gosport Navy Yard ended up as far away as the Mississippi and Tennessee Rivers. Fort Henry on the Tennessee River, shown here being attacked by U.S. Navy river gunboats, was one of the recipients. (Harper's Weekly engraving)

## Christmas in April-The Guns of Gosport

Who doesn't like getting gifts? At the beginning of the war, the U.S. Navy handed one to the Confederacy that had everything except the gift bow and the wrapping paper. When the Virginia state forces moved to



### *The Museum Sage*



occupy the Yard, they found several items of military use. The most often cited is the dry dock and the hull of the steam frigate USS *Merrimack*. But there was something even more valuable: 1,198 cannons.

It would be wrong to second guess (but that rarely stops us historians, now does it?) the U.S. Navy's attempt to scuttle the guns. A hundred men were given only a few hours to scrap all the guns. It was enough guns to equip sixteen old ships-of-the-line or 200 to 300 army artillery batteries. Most of the weapons were old 32-pounder long guns, the Navy's standard weapon before

the introduction of Phaxian, Dahlgren, and Columbiad shell guns in the late 1840s.

Almost as soon as the guns were discovered, troops began putting them to use defending Virginia's waterways. Virginia officials did share some of them with other states. These guns were used to build defenses at Island Number 10, Fort Donaldson, Fort Henry, and other western river fortifications. Union forces later recaptured many of the guns during the course of the war. Today, some of these weapons remained preserved at battlefiled parks.

#### James River Defenses:

- Fort Powhatan: Eight 32-pounders
- Jamestown Island-Three IX-inch Dahlgrens, Nine 8-inch Columbiads, Six 32-pounders, two 12-pounders
- Pig Point: Four VIII-inch Dahlgren, Four 32-pounder

#### York River Defenses:

- West Point: Two IX-Inch Dahlgrens, One 32-pounder`
- Gloucester Point: Eight IX-Inch Dahlgrens, Four 32-pounders
- Yorktown-Eight 8-inch Columbiads and barbette guns

#### Potomac River defenses:

- Potomac Creek: Two VIII-inch Dahlgrens
- Aquia Creek: One VIII-inch Dahlgren, One Parrot rifle field piece
- Simms' Point: One VIII-inch Dahlgren, Three Parrot Rifle field pieces
- Harpers Ferry: Two 32-pounders

#### Elizabeth River defenses:

- Fort Norfolk: Twelve IX-inch guns, four 32-pounders
- Craney Island: One X-inch Dahlgren, Sixteen VIII-inch Dahlgrens, four 32-pounders
- Fort Nelson (Naval Hospital): Two VIII-inch Dahlgren, Five 32-pounders
- Bush Bluff: Five 32-pounders
- Pinner's Point: Twelve 32-pounders
- Sewell's Point: Six IX-inch Dahlgrens, four 32-pounders
- Lambert's Point: Six 32-pounders
- Barrett's Point: Six 32-pounders

#### Ships:

- Frigate *United States* (in Norfolk)-Three IX-inch Dahlgrens, Sixteen 32-pounders
- Steam Tug *Teaser* (in Norfolk)-Two 32-pounders
- Steamer *Yorktown* (in Richmond)-One X-Inch Dahlgren, Six VIII-inch Dahlgrens, One 64-pounder

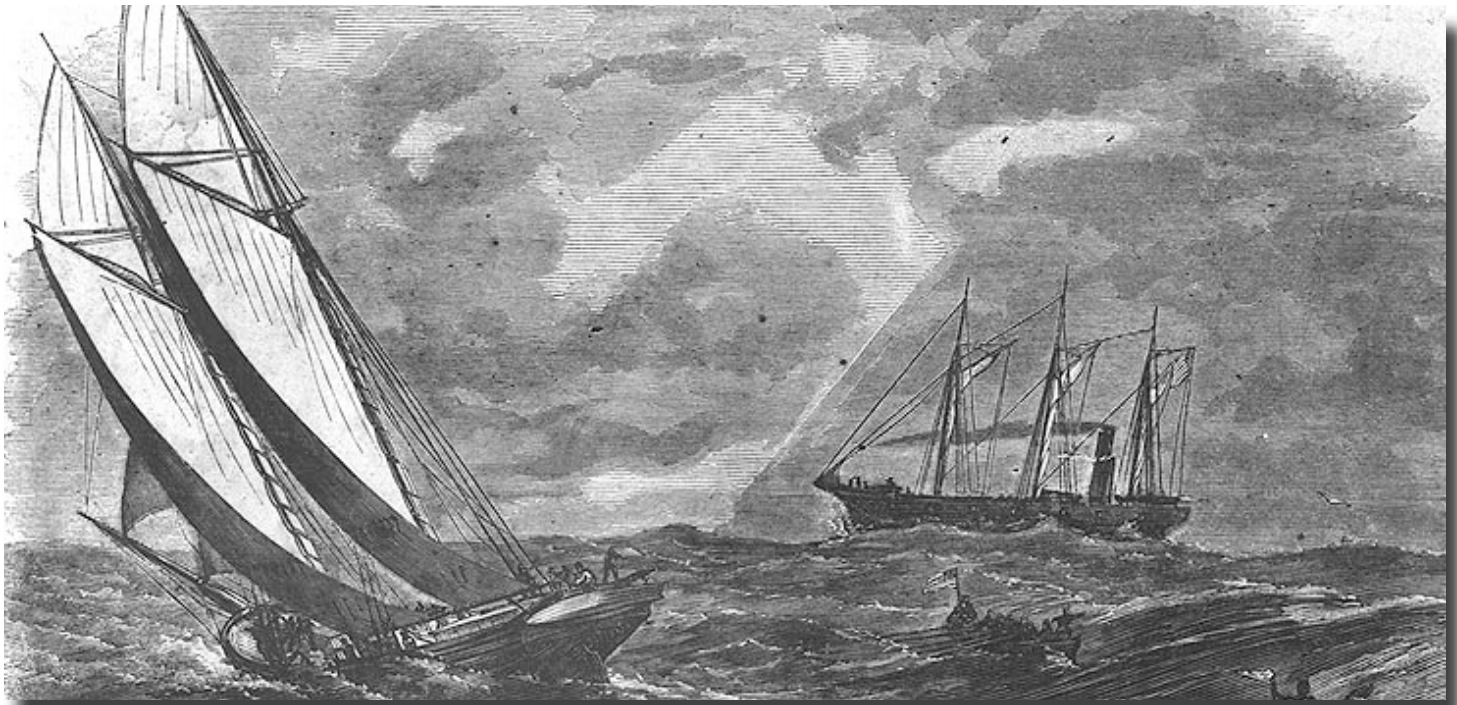
For the City of Richmond-Sixty guns of unspecified calibers

For the State of North Carolina-Ten VIII-inch Dahlgrens, seventy 32-pounders

For the State of Tennessee-Fifty-two 32-pounders

For the State of Louisiana-One IX-inch Dahlgren, Eight VIII-inch Dahlgrens, twelve 32-pounders

For the State of Georgia-Two 32-pounders



Many Northern merchants conducted business with West Indies ports and used the Gulf Stream for the trip home. North Carolina and South Carolina-based privateers found Cape Hatteras a perfect hunting ground for these prizes. Patrolling U.S. Navy warships did capture or destroy several privateers, but only with the capture of Cape Hatteras itself did the practice come to a halt. Shown here is the gunboat USS Albatross (right) recapturing one of the privateer's prizes, the schooner Enchantress. (Harpers Weekly engraving)

### Preparing for War Continued From Page 8

thousands of pounds of gunpowder.

But guns and men alone do not make a fleet, and Virginia's naval officers knew they needed ships. The government seized the steamers *Yorktown* and *Jamestown* in Richmond and attempted to purchase or lease other coastal steamers. Forrest

reported the greatest success at the Navy Yard. His crews had raised the hulk of the steam frigate *Merrimack* and placed her into dry dock.

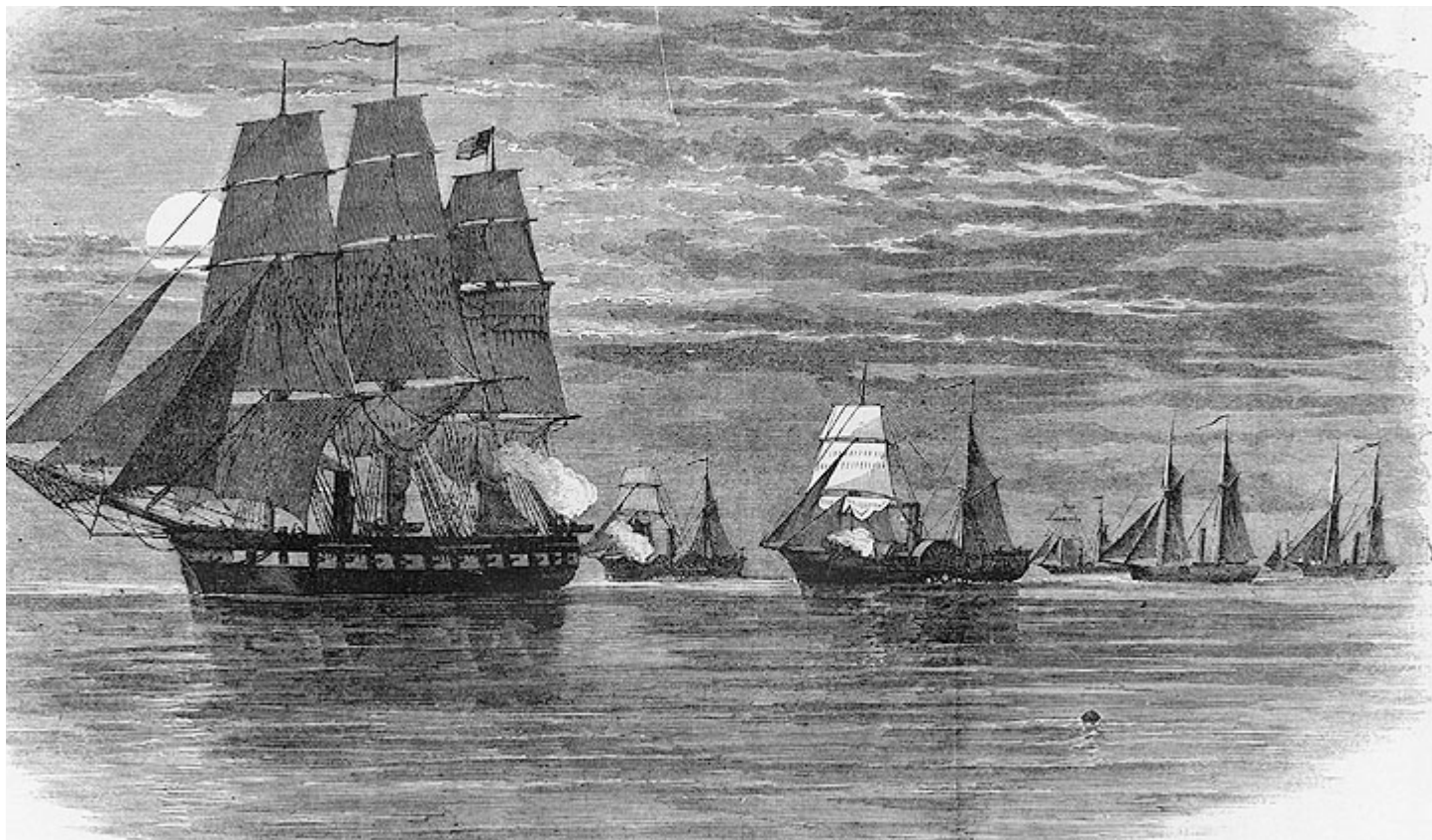
Working from ideas provided by his technical advisors, Confederate Secretary of the Navy Stephen Mallory believed he had

found a weapon against the U.S. Navy's blockade. Mallory reported that even if *Merrimack* was built back to its original form, any attempt by the vessel to attack the blockade would fail.

He commented, "It has therefore been determined to shield her completely with 3-inch iron, placed at such angles as to render her ball-proof, to complete her at the earliest moment, to arm her with the heaviest ordnance, and to send her at once against the enemy's fleet. It is believed that thus prepared she will be able to contend successfully against the heaviest of the enemy's ships and to drive them from Hampton Roads and the ports of Virginia. The cost of this work is estimated by the constructor and engineer in charge at \$172,523, and as time is of the first consequence in this enterprise I have not hesitated to commence the work and to ask Congress for the necessary appropriation."



One of the vessels seized by the Virginia government in the early days of the war was a steamer called *Yorktown*. Armed with guns captured at Gosport and later renamed CSS *Patrick Henry*, the ship was active in Virginia waters throughout the war. (HRNM image)



*Ships and soliders for the Hatteras Expedition began arriving in Hampton Roads from northern ports in mid-July 1861 (left). By mid-August, the harbor was filled with several dozen U.S. Navy ships to date. (Harper's Weekly engravings)*

to construct the Confederacy's most famous warship. Since this project was several months from completion, the Confederacy had to rely on more traditional forms of warfare to defend the Southern coastline, such as commerce raiding and fixed fortifications.

A skirmish at one of the Hampton Roads fortifications demonstrated that Mallory's forces were, at the very least, enthusiastic and patriotic. On May 19, USS *Monticello* patrolled near the mouth of the Elizabeth River. Her commanding officer noticed a fort being built at Sewells Point and decided to disrupt activities by firing a few rounds at it. During this light bombardment, Virginia and Georgia militiamen mounted three 32-pounders seized from Gosport, put them into position, and returned fire. Lacking a national or even a Virginia state flag, a member of Georgia's City Guard unit placed a Georgia flag on the fort's ramparts. *Monticello* mistook the flag waving as a surrender flag, only to be corrected by a few more shots from shore. *Monticello* eventually retired, and the first skirmish in Hampton Roads ended with no casualties on either side.

Mallory own motivation to attack the

U.S. Navy, led him to risk sending his new ships on suicide missions. He ordered Tucker to take the steamer *Yorktown* down the James River to Hampton Roads and to run the blockade. Tucker was then to make for the open sea, find another war steamer, capture her and bring her back to Norfolk. Cooler heads prevailed, and wisely the mission was cancelled.

Private citizens, however, did make it to the open seas. Operating with the official blessings of the Confederate government, a number of these small, privately-owned commerce raiders deployed out of Charleston, Savannah, and North Carolina's coastal towns starting in May 1861. As U-boat commanders in 1942 later discovered, Confederate privateers found that the geography of Cape Hatteras made it a perfect place to raid. The Gulf Stream ran close to the Cape, which brought merchants engaged in the West Indies trade close to shore. Additionally, the Cape's lighthouse keepers notified raiders of potential targets.

Between May and August, North Carolina entrepreneurs sponsored five privateers in the Cape Hatteras region: the steamer *Winslow*, the schooner *Gordon*, the side-wheel steamer *Coffee*, the steamer *Marion*, and a former

Norfolk pilot boat called *York*. Privateers out of Charleston such as *Jefferson Davis* and *Savannah* joined in the attacks. All of their victims were small vessels engaged in the West Indies trade and most of the cargo seized was sugar, molasses, or fresh fruit.

The privateers captured only a few vessels between May and August. However, the vessels' value was enough to get Massachusetts and New York merchants annoyed enough to write President Abraham Lincoln. The President passed the notes to Secretary Welles, who in turn pressed Stringham to do something about the situation. In addition, the Secretary would also comment to the commodore about the ease with which ships travelled in and out of Southern ports.

To add further aggravation, Stringham received a note from Commander Henry Hickley of the steam frigate HMS *Gladiator*. While the British ship was patrolling off the Virginia Capes, Hickley decided to notify Stringham that he did not believe the current state of the blockade would pass international muster and not be considered a legal blockade. "I beg leave most respectfully," Hickley wrote, "to you the open state of the blockade of the inlet and ports under



ten warships. The expedition caused a positive buzz about the war in Northern newspapers, particularly after the painful rebuke at Bull Run. The force was the largest assembly of

mentioned off the coast of North Carolina.” Stringham’s typical reply to such reminders was that he was doing his best given the number of ships available to him. It was a valid argument. As many warships had yet to return from overseas and the acquisition of new warships was still ongoing, the Atlantic Blockade Squadron had only a handful of ships to watch hundreds of miles of coastline.

A group of learned men in Washington, D.C, however, had some suggestions for the commodore. Known as the Blockade Strategy Board, this group of military officers and oceanographers surmised that the best way to block the Cape Hatteras inlets was to put physical obstructions in the port channels. Specifically, they suggested filling old whaling ships with stones and sinking them in shipping channels.

The commodore wisely rejected the idea after hearing from people with more local knowledge of the area. Specifically, he pointed out that any ship sunk in the inlet would wash away due to constantly shifting sands. A more permanent solution, he suggested, would be to attack the forts guarding Hatteras Inlet and to occupy them. Merchant captains who had fallen victim to

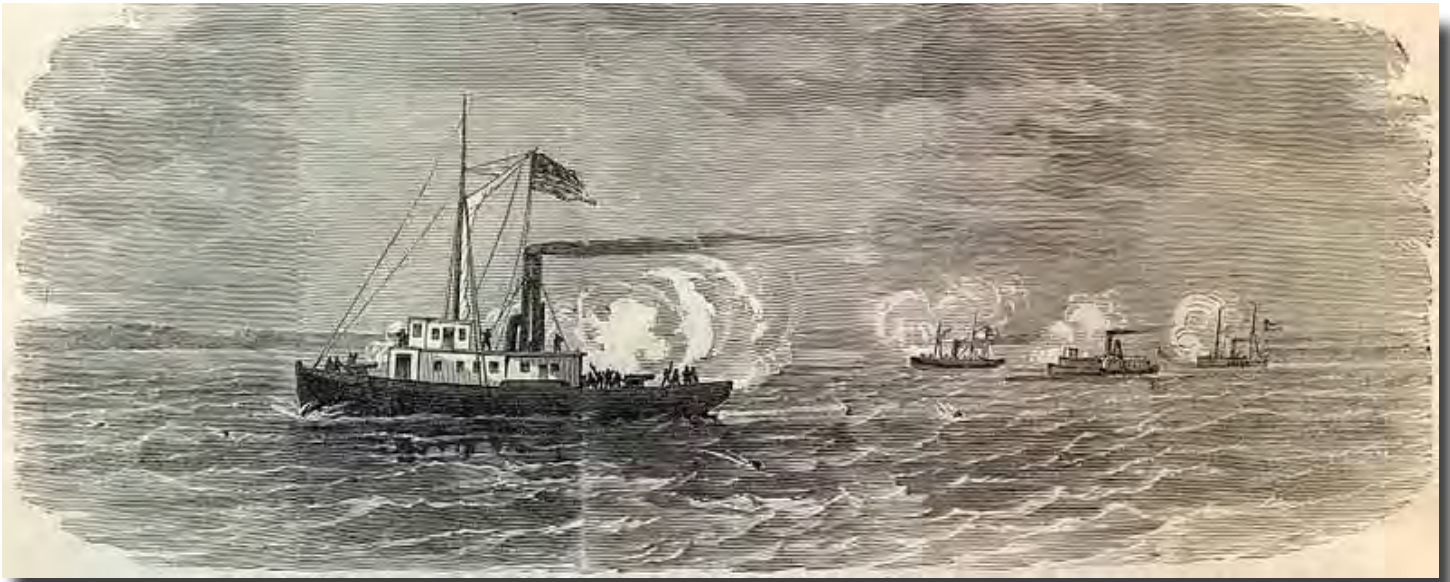
the privateers provided the commodore with a wealth of intelligence about the status of the forts. Even though they were supposed to be prisoners, the captains had been allowed to wander freely around the forts. Once released, they gave Stringham a detailed description of everything, from how many African American slaves were working as

laborers, to the number and caliber of guns at the forts, and how the fort’s freshwater well worked.

Between July and August, the Navy began to assemble a battle squadron. Meanwhile, the Army assembled a ground assault force of about 2,000 men under the command of Major General Benjamin Butler. *Minnesota*,



Once the squadron assembled, it attacked on August 27, 1861. Outgunned, the forts soon surrendered. (HRNM image)



While innocently steaming along in Pamlico Sound towards Chicamacomico region of Cape Hatteras, a squadron of three Confederate gunboats ambushed and captured the U.S. Army tug *Fanny*. The vessel was bringing supplies to an Indiana unit at Chicamacomico when she was captured. (Harper's Weekly engraving)

*Wabash*, *Susquehanna*, and *Monticello*, along with the contract Army transports *Adelaide* and *George Peabody*. All departed from Hampton Roads on August 26. The ships towed schooners and surfboats in the anticipation of conducting an amphibious assault. *Harriet Lane* and *Cumberland* joined the squadron later.

Soundings of the waters around Hatteras Inlet had determined that the squadron could not get closer than one mile from the Confederate forts, because no ship drew less than eighteen feet of water. The attack began on the morning of August 28. With *Wabash* towing *Cumberland*, the two ships approached Fort Clark. From about 1,300 yards from the Confederate fortification, *Wabash* began the battle with her two pivot guns, both X-inch Dahlgrens, followed by *Cumberland* and *Minnesota's* X-inch Dahlgrens. The rest of the squadron's smaller guns then engaged. The squadron steamed in a clockwise circle south and then


back to the north.

Barron had earlier travelled down from Portsmouth to take charge of Forts Clark and Hatteras. Using guns captured from Gosport, Barron ordered his garrison to return fire. Finding Clark outgunned, He ordered that the garrison to retreat to Fort Hatteras. After several more hours, Barron believed the situation hopeless and surrendered. Stringham shipped the Confederate commodore and the garrison to prisons in the north.

To reinforce their position, Union ground forces landed on Chicamacomico, north of the Hatteras Inlet in mid-September. Upon hearing about the advancing Yankees, the Confederates counter-attacked. The local commander dispatched three gunboats, *Curlew*, *Raleigh*, and *Junaluska*, and came across the U.S. Army steamer *Fanny* loaded with supplies and soldiers from an Indiana regiment. The two sides exchanged shots with their pivots guns before *Fanny*

surrendered.

Confederate Colonel A.R. Wright continued the operation by landing Georgia and North Carolina soldiers to the north and south of Chicamacomico in an attempt to trap the Union garrison. The garrison saw the trap unfolding and decided Chicamacomico was not worth defending. In what local historians have since called the "Chicamacomico Races," both sides scrambled to put their plans into action with neither side presenting themselves very well. The Confederate landing boats grounded far from the beach. The Indiana soldiers abandoned the fort in disarray and staggered south down the Cape, back to Fort Clark.

The Chicamacomico operation symbolized the chaos of the state of both Union and Confederate units in Hampton Roads during the first few months of the war. By the end of October, both sides had learned valuable lessons in preparation for the hard fight yet to come. 

## In Our Next Issue...

-Book Reviews: *One Hundred Years of Navy Air Power* and *Perilous Fight: America's Intrepid War with Britain on the High Seas, 1812-1815*

-The War Escalates: The Civil War Navy in Hampton Roads, October 1861 to February 1862