



The Day Book

Volume 4, Issue 3

March-April 1998

A Newsletter for the Supporters of the Hampton Roads Naval Museum



Forty-five miles northeast of Cape Henry, the American frigate *President*, under the command of Commodore John Rodgers, blasts away at the smaller sloop-of-war HMS *Little Belt*. Many in Hampton Roads cheered Rodgers' actions as they felt it was just payment for the ambush on the frigate *Chesapeake* four years earlier. Others cringed as they felt the incident was another step towards all out war with the British. (Naval Historical Center)

“What Ship is That?!”

During a confused nighttime incident, the American Frigate *President* Pounds the Sloop-of-War HMS *Little Belt* off the coast of Cape Henry, 1811

by Joe Mosier

In the middle of May 1811, rumors abounded in the Hampton Roads area of a sea battle between unknown forces in the vicinity of the Virginia Capes. The *Norfolk Herald* reported on May 20 that Capt. Garland of the schooner *Temperance*, which just arrived from Salem, “Thursday last

at 9 in the evening heard a brisk cannonading for the space of 30 minutes to the S.E....This account of the firing is corroborated by 4 or 5 other captains arrived here.” On May 24, *The Norfolk Gazette and Publick Ledger* carried the news that the master of the ship *Pallas* arrived in Baltimore reporting heavy firing about 20 miles east of Cape Henry for 20 to 30 minutes about 8 p.m. on the 16th. The paper cautioned, “A rumor is now circulating in many a shape and shade, relative to a supposed battle between the United States Frigate *President*, Commodore Rodgers, and a British frigate. The

firing heard by Captain West [of the *Pallas*], was not sufficient to induce a belief of such a combat. The *President* might have been scaling her guns.” It was not for another week that firm news was received to explain the incident. On May 29, both newspapers were “enabled to satisfy the public mind respecting the rumors lately circulating of an engagement off our coast.” According to reports just in from New York, the *President* had engaged HMS *Little Belt* in a short but bloody battle on the night of May 16.

This battle was the outcome of two
President continued on page 6

Inside The Day Book

The Director's Column.....	2
The Raid on Cardenas.....	3
The Seizing of the <i>Surveyor</i>	4
Volunteer News & Notes.....	9
The Museum Sage.....	11

A Splendid Little Series

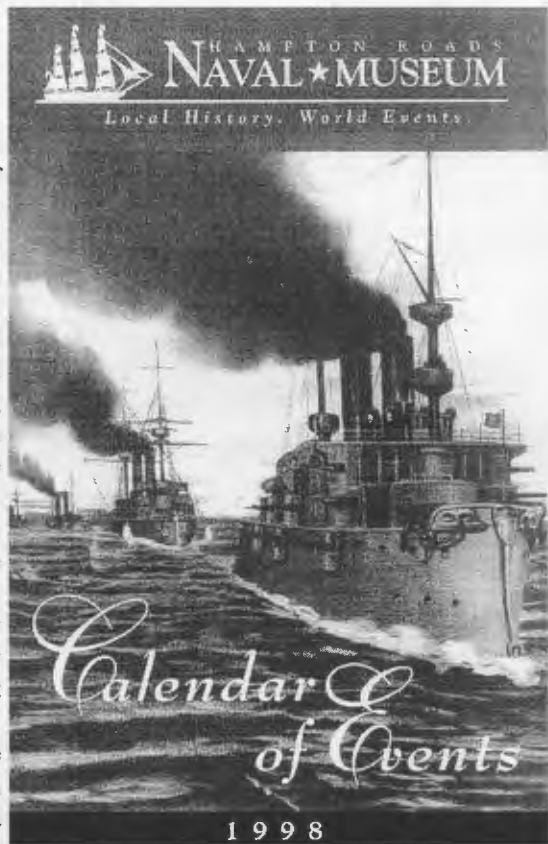
The Director's Column

by Becky Poulliot

By now, the 1998 Calendar of Events brochure should have found its way into your homes. What a great line-up! If you have not received one and would like a copy please contact us here at the museum. On March 5, Col. Joe Alexander, noted Marine historian and author, started the luncheon lectures series with a talk about an ancestor. This great-great-great uncle served as a midshipman aboard CSS *Virginia* and experienced one great roller coaster career in the Confederate States Navy.

The next presentation takes us to the Spanish-American War, with a performance by the Richmond-based first person interpreters Living History Associates (LHA). LHA has preformed several interpretations for us in the past including a fantastic presentation on the Battle of Hampton Roads. If you have not seen one of their reenactments, be sure to join us on **May 14 at 11:30 a.m.** at the Naval Station's Pier 26 Club (formerly called Norfolk Live!).

This performance complements the opening of "Cuba Libre!: The Spanish American War in the Caribbean," the museum latest temporary exhibit. The Hampton Roads Naval Museum staff has devoted much energy to researching and collecting items and events to commemorate the centennial of the Spanish-American War. Rare finds include: the original jack the battleship USS *Maine* which was recovered by Navy divers; a contemporary painting of the ship right before she sank; a 12' builder's model of the battleship normally on exhibit at the Smithsonian; a torpedo from the Spanish cruiser *Vizcaya*; and a contemporary model of the armored cruiser *Brooklyn*. The exhibit will open May 11 and run



through November.

Another famous sunken ship, RMS *Titanic*, will be the focus of the next quarterly docent meeting. The next meeting will take place on **April 9** at the Mariners' Museum in Newport News. Following the business meeting, the Mariner's educational staff will lead a guided tour of the newest exhibit on the *Titanic*. There will be a car pool forming from HRNM at **9:15 a.m.**

You now have a new way of reaching me or anyone else at the museum if you have a question or comment. You can now e-mail the museum at bapoulliot@cmar.navy.mil. As a reminder, we still have the web page at <http://naval-station.norfolk.va.us/navy.html>.

I end this director's column with a triumph. Gordon Calhoun, our splendid editor has received a well deserved promotion and placement in permanent civil service. Bravo Zulu.

Becky



About *The Day Book*

The Day Book is an authorized publication of the Hampton Roads Naval Museum (HRNM). Its contents do not necessarily reflect the official view of the U.S. Government, the Department of Defense, the U.S. Navy or the U.S. Marine Corps and do not imply endorsement thereof. The HRNM is a museum dedicated to the study of 220 years of naval history in the Hampton Roads region. The museum is open Mondays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Tuesday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is free.

The Day Book's purpose is to educate and inform readers on historical topics and museum related events. It is written by the staff and volunteers of the museum. The newsletter takes its name from a 19th century Norfolk newspaper.

Questions or comments can be directed to the Hampton Roads Naval Museum editor. *The Day Book* can be reached at (757) 322-2993, by fax at (757) 445-1867, or write *The Day Book*, Hampton Roads Naval Museum, One Waterside Drive, Suite 248, Norfolk, VA 23510-1607. The museum can be found on the World Wide Web at <http://naval-station.norfolk.va.us/navy.html>. *The Day Book* is published bi-monthly with a circulation of 1,200.

HRNM Staff

Director
Becky Poulliot
Curator
Joe Judge
Education Specialist
Bob Matteson
Exhibits Specialist
Marta Nelson
Museum Technician
Ofelia Elbo
HRNM OIC
Ensign Rod Hartsell
HRNM LPO/TPU Admin.
AZ3 (AW) Eric Minshall
Editor of The Day Book
Gordon Calhoun
Director, HRNH
Maj. Gen. Dennis Murphy,
USMC (Ret)

The Raid on Cardenas

Without Waiting for Orders, Two Hampton Roads Vessels Participate
In an Impromptu Raid Producing the First Naval Action of the War in Cuba

by Ensign Robert Bauge

This May, hundreds of newly commissioned ensigns join the ranks of the surface, air and submarine navy. Over one hundred years ago, Ensign Worth Bagley did the same. Then as now the United States was in a period of foreign political turmoil and possible war. Then, as is now, newly commissioned ensigns reported to their ships and began work on surface warfare qualifications, advancing in rank and position all the while trying to impress their commanding officer. It is no wonder then that this May 11, 1998 we honor the death of Ensign Bagley who was the only United States Naval Officer to be killed during the Spanish American War.

Worth Bagley was born in 1874 to a prominent well educated North Carolina family. Worth was the son of William Henry Bagley and Adelaide Worth. As a youngster Worth received his education at Centennial Grade School and Raleigh Male Academy. Only age 15, Bagley entered the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis,

100th Anniversary

The Spanish-American War 1898-1998

Maryland. In 1892, he was expelled for academic reasons. Shortly thereafter, Bagley pursued academic readmission to Annapolis and was reappointed. After seven years at the Naval Academy, Bagley graduated and received his commission as an ensign in the United States Navy. From 1896 until 1898, he served three sea tours, gaining valuable experience and position on various ships in the Atlantic. In early 1898, he was appointed executive officer of a small torpedo boat, USS *Winslow* (TB-5), based here in Hampton Roads.

Bagley's death occurred during a daring raid on the small town of Cardenas, Cuba during the early stages of the Spanish American War. *Winslow*



The Norfolk-based torpedo boat, USS *Winslow* (TB-5). Along with the Newport News-built patrol gunboat *Wilmington*, *Winslow* lead an attack on three Spanish gunboats tied up at Cardenas. (Navy Historical Center)

was part of a four ship squadron designated to blockade this section of Cuba. The squadron's search and destroy mission was premeditated by Cmdr. J.F. Merry, the commanding officer of the patrol gunboat USS *Machias* (PG-5). The revenue cutter USRS *Hudson* was already operating in the area and the Newport News-built gunboat USS *Wilmington* (PG-8) had been called upon to relieve the *Machias*. *Winslow* was low on coal and she was promised more fuel from the off going *Machias*. Cmdr. Merry, the senior officer in the area, believed there were three Spanish gunboats tied up at Cardenas' piers.

During turnover, Merry proposed his theory to Cmdr. Todd, commanding officer of the *Wilmington*. Todd agreed to carry out Merry's wishes, which included fueling the *Winslow* and pressing her into action. According to Merry, his fellow commander "was anxious to participate." Unbeknownst to Lt. Bernadou, commanding officer of the *Winslow*, who just wanted coal, he was going to lead the three ships into harm's way that afternoon.

Because Bernadou's torpedo boat was the smallest and most maneuverable, (one hundred sixty feet in length, 16 feet wide with a mean draft of only five feet) his ship was chosen to sound and minesweep one

of the channels that lead into the bay. Underwater mines were a huge concern for all participants and they had to be sure that one of the channels was clear before the ships could go dashing through it. The crew of the *Winslow* threw grappling hooks over the side to sweep the channel. They confirmed an early suspicion that the channel they wanted to use was already clear of any mines.

The attack began at high tide at 12:30 p.m. local time. *Machias* closed with the lighthouse and landed several armed landing parties. They seized the lighthouse looking for a underwater mine control device or wires connecting the mines. They found neither one. There were no Spanish soldiers there either as they had evacuated the lighthouse a few days before.

Still, Merry was convinced that there had to be wires somewhere and ordered the whole island dug up. The dig found nothing. The landing parties tore down the Spanish flag flying from the top of the lighthouse, raised Old Glory, and headed back to the ship. While they found no mines or wires, they did succeed in capturing several Spanish signal books.

While Merry and *Machias* captured the lighthouse, the other three ships
Cardenas continued on page 10

The Seizing of the Cutter *Surveyor*

by Jack Robertson

On June 3, 1807, Gabriel Christie, Collector of Customs for Baltimore, was advised by Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin that President Thomas Jefferson had authorized a new cutter for the Revenue Service for the port of Baltimore. The new cutter would replace *Dolly*, one of the cutters operating out of Norfolk. Gallatin asked Christie to forward his proposal for the new cutter. Christie suggested a boat along pilot lines, 75 tons carpenter's measure, draft 6 to 8 feet, with a copper line bottom to protect against marine life-forms, and to be a fast sailer. For armament, he preferred one large gun and four or five swivel guns, as smugglers in the Chesapeake Bay mounted 10 to 12 small guns.

The Treasury Department awarded William Parsons, a Baltimore shipbuilder, the contract to build the new vessel for \$10,000. Capt. Francis Bright, formerly captain of *Dolly*, oversaw construction and took command of the cutter in late September. Named *Surveyor*, Christie advised Gallatin that the vessel was ready to sail. Due to the negative atmosphere caused by the June 26 incident between the American frigate *Chesapeake* and British frigate *Leopard*, Christie requested instructions from Gallatin on how to act toward the British tenders which made frequent incursions into the rivers and creeks on both shores of the Bay seeking fresh water and provisions.

Gallatin responded with the following instructions—"While aboard the Cutter, regulate your conduct to the following directions, as far as possible: the Cutter is intended for protection of Revenue. She ought to be in port as little as possible. Board as many inbound vessels as possible—reviewing their manifests. When smuggling is suspected, use your best endeavors to bring the offenders to

justice. Keep a frequent look into the various rivers and bays of the Chesapeake. Check clearances and manifests of foreign vessels and inquire if any goods of foreign growth or manufacture, not intended for here, have been landed. Keep a look for cargo being transferred at sea or in our waters."

"As for conduct toward British tenders—as the question of peace or war is not yet ascertained, you will not seek an opportunity to come into contact with them. You should prevent the carrying

cutters were pressed into service to augment the small U.S. Navy fleet and assist defending the coastline against British raids. In early March 1813, a British squadron of three 74-gun ships-of-the-lines, four frigates, and several smaller vessels appeared in the Chesapeake under the command of Rear Adm. George Cockburn. Later joined by a smaller group under the command of Adm. John Warren, their orders were to blockade the Chesapeake and capture or destroy shipping in the James, York,



After rowing over thirty miles against the current, a group of fifty of British sailors and marines storm the United States Revenue Service cutter *Surveyor* off Gloucester Point in the York River, June 24, 1813. It should be noted that this particular painting is somewhat inaccurate as the action happened just after 8 p.m. and not during the daytime. (Mariners' Museum photo of a Lewis Bowman painting. Used with permission.)

of supplies to the British armed vessels and, as far as practicable, prevent any landings from those vessels, but you are not to urgently seek for them. But!—the Executive of the United States directs that it must be an invariable rule with you not to suffer, within our waters, any British armed vessel to 'bring to' the Cutter, much less search her."

Around this time, Collector Christie "borrowed" four six-pounder iron cannons from the U.S. Navy and found two brass four-pounders to arm the *Surveyor*. Very few records are available on *Surveyor's* activities between October 1807 and March 1813.

With war declared between the United States and Great Britain in 1812, the British sent a sizable force to blockade Hampton Roads. The Revenue Service

Rappahannock, and Potomac rivers.

From Westmoreland Courthouse, Col. Parker of the Virginia Militia wrote Gov. James Barbour on April 11, and described the British operations: "the heaving firing I mentioned previously came from the mouth of the Potomac where the English took 20 or 30 vessels. Capt. Samuel Travis commands a Revenue Cutter now in Yeacomico River and cooperates with our militia. Three other vessels are also there, chased in by the British. Last week the British captured three vessels in the Rappahannock. I understand the British have scurvy and are greatly in need of provisions. I believe we shall have many unpleasant visits, and more important places are 'threatened.'"

Surveyor continued on page 5

Surveyor continued from page 4

On June 11, 1813, while anchored off Back River, Capt. Lumley, commanding officer of the 32-gun frigate HMS *Narcissus*, got word of an enemy armed schooner laying in the York River off Gloucester Point. This "schooner" was the cutter *Surveyor* which had taken up station there in March. Thinking it practicable to capture or destroy her, Lumley sent the ship's barge, launch, and two gigs up river to try to take her. The flotilla, led by Lt. Cririe with 38 seaman, and six marines led by Lt. Patrick Savage, left the anchorage at 4:30 in the afternoon, rowing against wind and tide.

According to *Surveyor's* 3rd mate William Travis, his ship was anchored near Gloucester Point. At 8 p.m., he took the ship's boat with four men to row guard duty. It was raining with thick fog. After going some distance, the fog lifted slightly. Thinking he saw something move close to shore, he ordered the crew to "lay on" their oars. The darkness was intense. Seeing nothing, he directed the boat to continue toward Yorktown. He soon heard a peculiar noise and discovered it to be the regular stroke of a ship's boat. Then he saw them—two boats pulling for the *Surveyor* and one towards his boat. As they out-numbered him, it was impossible to return to the cutter, she headed for shore, firing five shots as they went. The British returned the fire. Travis and his men out-distanced the enemy and beached. Firing and shouting was heard from the direction of the cutter.

The *Niles Weekly Register*, a contemporary Baltimore newspaper, reported what happened next. "The deck watch of the *Surveyor* felt the beat of rain.

Gun ports were open, guns loaded and run out, with all gear handy. From the direction of the guard boat, shots were heard. The balance of the crew was called on deck. The shadowy outlines of two boats were seen at about 150 yards—pulling for the cutter. Seeing that the guns could not be depressed far enough to be effective, Capt. Samuel Travis directed each crewman to take, and load, two muskets, but hold fire until he gave the word. When the men in the boats could be seen, Travis gave the signal to fire. Despite this heavy fire, the attacking part came alongside and boarded. Hand to hand fighting followed. Although out-numbered almost three to one, the crew fought stubbornly—but to no avail. Capt. Travis 'struck.' He and his crew were

"Your gallant and desperate attempt to defend your vessel against more than double your number, excited admiration on the part of your opponents and induced me to return your sword. You have my most sincere wishes for immediate parole." -Lt. Cririe of HMS Narcissus writing to Capt. Samuel Travis of the Surveyor


taken prisoners."

The British boarding party returned victoriously to the *Narcissus* at 4:30 a.m. with the *Surveyor* in tow. "At 6 a.m." *Narcissus'* log reports, "the small gig came alongside with an account of the capture of the American schooner *Surveyor*, 6 guns, 15 men, commanded by Samuel Travis. We lost three men killed and three wounded. Five were wounded on the schooner." On June 13, Lt. Cririe returned Capt. Travis' sword to the captured officer saying, "Your gallant and desperate attempt to defend your vessel against more than double your number, excited admiration on the part of your opponents and induced me to

return your sword. You have my most sincere wishes for immediate parole."

Unfortunately, it did not come that fast. On June 21, acting Treasury Secretary R.G. Jones added insult to injury when he dismissed the entire crew of the *Surveyor* from the service. He explained to Baltimore Collector James McCulloch that "As a Revenue Cutter can be of no service in the Chesapeake during the present state of things, it will be proper for you to inform the officers and crew of the *Surveyor* that they are to consider themselves as being no longer in the service of the United States."

The *Surveyor* was taken into service by the British and participated in the raid on Hampton and the raid on Craney Island. Sometime after, she disappeared

from the records of the British Navy. Capt. Travis was taken aboard the frigate HMS *Junon* where he watched firsthand an attack on the frigate by 15 U.S. Navy gunboats operating out of Norfolk. He was aboard when the British went to Ocracoke Island and raided the small village of Portsmouth. Released on parole while in that area, he made his way to Washington, N.C., then back to Norfolk. He asked for back pay for the time he served as a prisoner of war and severance pay according to regulations. He had not heard that the Secretary had dismissed him from the service. It took almost two years for him to get his account squared away. 

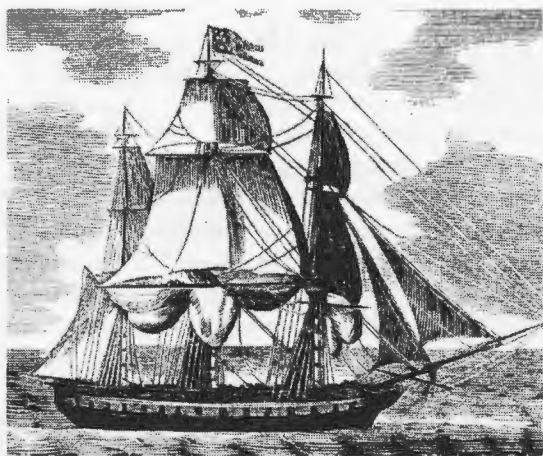
Vittles for Critters

program



The Hampton Roads Naval Museum and the Norfolk SPCA are still accepting pet food as part of the "Vittles for Critters" program. Drop off your contribution at the SPCA table located just outside of the museum entrance. We will be accepting donations until March 30.





Built in New York, the frigate *President* was one of the original six frigates ordered by the Navy. She was eventually overtaken by five British ships in 1815 and captured. (HRNM photo of an 1816 engraving from *Temple magazine*)

President continued from page 1 heavy grievances Americans felt toward the British. The first was outrage and humiliation engendered by the attack on USS *Chesapeake* by HMS *Leopard* in 1807. In that instance, the British ship had demanded *Chesapeake's* captain turn over British deserters reportedly onboard the American frigate. When he failed to do so promptly, *Leopard* fired two broadsides into *Chesapeake*, killing three and wounding 18. Four men were then forcibly removed to the British ship. The second factor was the long-standing British practice of impressing merchant seamen into Royal Navy service. Short-handed British officers were disinclined to believe protestations of American citizenship from a needed able seaman.

The latest case of impressment had occurred on May 1. The frigate HMS *Guerriere* had stopped the American brig *Spitfire* near Sandy Hook, New Jersey and had taken from her the master apprentice, John Diggio, a Maine native. In response, Navy Secretary Paul Hamilton ordered *President* and the brig *Argus* to patrolling stations off New York. *President* was then at Annapolis, Maryland while her captain, John Rodgers, visited his family at Havre de Grace. Rodgers immediately rejoined the ship and slipped down the *Chesapeake* on the 10th. Contrary winds slowed the trip, and it was not until late afternoon on the 14th that the frigate cleared the Capes. Rodgers

spent the next day aiding two ships in distress. Shortly after noon on May 16 while about 45 miles northeast of Cape Henry, *President* spotted a vessel to the southeast. From the shape of the sails, Rodgers determined her to be a ship of war, hopefully the *Guerriere*. He cleared his ship for action and turned to close the stranger.

The ship Rodgers was pursuing was HMS *Little Belt*. Referred variously as a sloop-of-war or corvette, *Little Belt* had started life as the Danish *Lille Belt*, but had been seized by the British following the Battle of Copenhagen in 1807. She was much the smaller ship, with a burden of 460 tons compared to *President's* 1576 tons. Her armament was correspondingly weaker, 18 32-pound carronades and two long 9-pounders.

The American warship, by contrast was rated at 44-guns, but in actuality carried 58 (32 long 24-pounders on her main deck, 16 42-pound carronades on her quarter-deck, eight 42-pound carronades and two long 24's as chase guns, on her fore-castle.) The British captain, Arthur Batt Bingham, had been ordered to join HMS *Guerriere* somewhere along the coast. If (as was the case) he did not meet up with that frigate, Bingham was to cruise alone in protection of British shipping. The Royal Navy commander at Bermuda, Vice Adm. Sawyer, told Bingham that, in view of the strained relations between the two countries, he must be especially careful not to offend the Americans.

Little Belt had spotted the taller *President* first at about 11 a.m. Determining her to be a frigate, Capt. Bingham closed her and hoisted the signal asking her to identify herself. He received no reply, but noticed the blue commodore's pennant which labeled the ship as American. Accordingly,

Bingham turned south to resume his course to round Cape Hatteras. Rodgers in turn was curious about the stranger and began pursuit. By 3:30 p.m. he had closed sufficiently to make out the upper portion of *Little Belt's* stern. From this angle, Rodgers maintained the sloop had the appearance of a larger ship. The wind decreased about this time, and *President* began to lose ground, preventing a closer look.

By 6:30 p.m. Bingham realized he would not be able to get away during the night. He decided therefore "to bring to and hoist colors." Rodgers in his report wrote that about 7:15 p.m. that *Little Belt* "hoisted an Ensign or flag at her Mizzen Peak, but it was too dark for me to discover what nation it represented."



The commanding officer of the frigate *President* was the strict administrator Commodore John Rodgers. Up to the time of his death in 1837, Rodgers dictated the way the Navy ran and operated. (HRNM photo)

[Sunset would have been about 7:10 p.m.] Rodgers also said that the ship finally offered a side-on view "but night had so far progressed, that altho' her appearance indicated she was a frigate, I was unable to determine her actual force." Bingham was concerned

President continued on page 7

The Boy Hero of the *President*


If Captain John Rodgers received criticism from some quarters, the actions of one member of his crew were universally applauded. As the *Norfolk Herald* reported it: "In the late conflict between the United States Frigate *President*, and the British ship of war *Little Belt*, a gunner's boy on board the frigate who had his arm broken by a shot, while under the hands of the Surgeon in the cockpit requested that he would make haste in dressing his wound, that he might get on deck again. On the surgeon's asking what he could do on deck, wounded as he was, the little American replied, 'if I can do no more, *I can at least be shot at!*' It is known that the heroism of this lad has attracted the earnest attention of the Secretary of the Navy."

In fact, Navy Secretary Paul Hamilton wrote Rodgers, "If in addition to his gallantry he is of good character generally, I would hug him to my

disappointing midshipman. Capt. Rodgers wrote "Enclosed is the resignation of Rodgers of the *Argus*, whom I have permitted to leave that

"If I can do no more, I can at least be shot at!"-- Walter Rodgers, a gunner's boy on the President

bosom (whatever may be his condition or circumstances in life) while I made him an officer in the American navy." The boy, Walter Rodgers, was granted a midshipman's warrant to rank from 16 May 1811 (the date of the action.) In a Horatio Alger world, Midshipman Rodgers would have gone on to fame and honor. In reality, his career was short.

vessel, his having been, a long time in confinement, and there being no opportunity of trying him by a court martial. Capt. Sinclair and other officers of the *Argus*, represent the character of this lad in such a light as induces me to believe that the service will do well to get rid of him, and this I am sorry to say, knowing as I do that you [Secretary Hamilton] promoted him as a reward for merit which he had at the time was supposed to possess." 

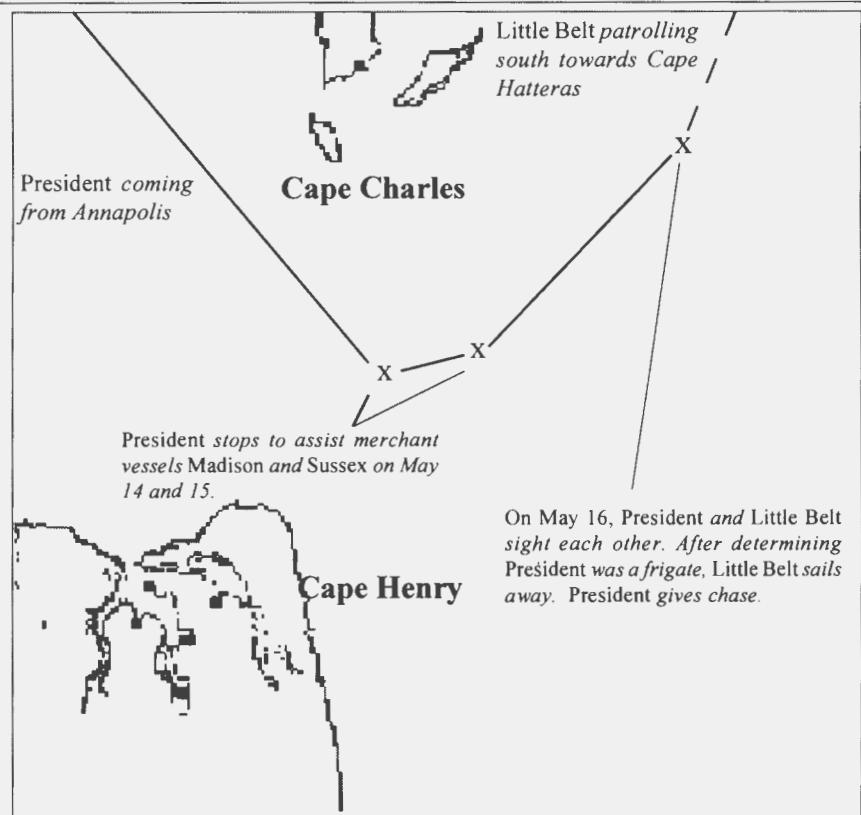
Early on in the War of 1812, Commodore Rodgers dismissed the

President continued from page 6

that *President* seemed to be trying to get into position to rake his ship. To prevent this, the British captain wore his ship [brought the ship about by bringing the bow through the wind] three times.

Finally, by about 8:15 p.m., *President* had gained a position about 70 to 100 yards distant and forward of *Little Belt's* weather beam. At this point, both captains called out the standard hail; "What ship is that?" Both failed to answer but instead hailed again. The official reports of Rodgers and Bingham differ as to who hailed first. Both stated they felt they deserved a reply having made the first hail.

According to the American account, just after Rodgers' second hail a single cannon fired onboard *Little Belt*. The shot struck *President's* main mast. Even before Rodgers could order a response, a single American cannon fired back. A ragged response from the British ship grew into a full broadside. Rodgers claimed he had been hesitant to respond initially. After the broadside, he "accordingly with that degree of repugnance incident to feeling equally determined neither to be the aggressor, or to suffer the Flag of my Country to be insulted with



impunity; gave a general order to fire." Bingham's account varies significantly. After his second hail, he states, "[Rodgers] again repeated my words & fired a Broadside, which I instantly returned. The Action then became general & continued for three-quarters of an hour." Rodgers puts the length of the action at only 12 to 15

minutes. At the end of that time, Rodgers again called out, "What ship is that?" and this time was informed it was a Royal Navy vessel.

However long the firing may have lasted, it ended with the advantage to the Americans. *President* had only one boy wounded [see above] and slight

President continued on page 8

President continued from page 7

damage to shrouds, main and foremast. Bingham reported, "His Majesty's ship is much damaged in her Masts, sails, rigging & Hull...[with] many shots thro' between Wind and Water & many shot still remaining in her Side and Upper Works all shot away, Starboard pump also." Additionally, *Little Belt* suffered ten killed and twenty-two wounded. When daylight came on the morning of the 17th, Rodgers closed the injured sloop. He sent a boat across to

"It gave me pleasure as it stated things so entirely favorable to his [Rodger's] justification. I could wish him ready to resist any attack from a ship of any size, at the hazard of his ship & crew; or to punish any repetition of insult or aggression. But an unnecessary attack I should deplore, particularly against a vessel so much inferior." -*Norfolk merchant John Myers writing from London to his father Moses Myers, June 7, 1811.*

find out the extent of her injuries and to offer help with repairs. Bingham reported his discussion with the boarding officer Lieut. John Creighton thus: "He lamented much the unfortunate Affair (as he termed it) that had happened, that had he known our Force was so inferior he should not have fired at me. I asked his Motive for having fired at all, his reply was that we fired the first Gun at him, which was positively not the case...He offered me every assistance I stood in need of, and submitted to me that I had better put into one of the Ports of the United States, which I immediately declined." Creighton returned to *President* and the two ships parted. Creighton must have gotten some satisfaction out of this whole affair as he served as *Chesapeake's* fourth lieutenant during the *Chesapeake-Leopard* affair. Rodgers sailed directly to New York arriving on the 17th.

Little Belt proceeded more slowly to Halifax having to weather a gale on the second day. Her damage proved to be so severe that the sloop was sold out of service later in 1811. Rodgers sought a court of inquiry following American publication of Bingham's account. The court, comprised of Stephen Decatur,

Charles Stewart, and Isaac Chauncey, met in New York from August 30 to September 12. After interviewing 51 witnesses, the court found itself in full agreement with Rodger's original after action report.

American popular opinion strongly supported Rodgers actions. Still dissenting voices were heard in the opposition press. In an early 19th century example of spin-doctoring, a correspondent wrote the anti-

administration *Norfolk Gazette & Publick Ledger* on June 7: "The agitation produced upon the public mind by the affair between our 50-gun frigate, and the British 22-gun sloop, having in some measure subsided, our citizens are prepared I trust to take dispassionate view of the subject.

The conduct of Capt. Rodgers unquestionably sanctions the report (independent of other strong circumstances) that the frigate was sent out by the executive with orders to provoke a conflict with some British vessel. What does Capt. Rodgers say?

"There are men who consider this fracas an offset to the *Chesapeake* - I pray God it may not be an onset to War."

-*Norfolk Gazette and Publick Ledger June 7, 1811*

That he was himself 14 leagues out of the jurisdiction of the United States - that he saw a sail a long distance from him in the east and of course just so much farther from our coast - that this sail was coming toward him - that he pursued her - that she soon changed her course and ran from him - that this pursuit continued from noon until nine at night when the encounter took place!

What, let me ask, was the conclusion the British officer was to draw from such a pursuit? He knew very well the law of nations did not justify a neutral ship of war in pursuing any vessel at sea out of the jurisdiction of her own country, unless such vessel was first seen within that jurisdiction, and that was not in fact the case; and if such neutral vessel comes up with the vessel of any nation, he is bound to *make it known* he is a friend....

I have always understood and believed our armed vessels were built to convoy and protect commerce - The present (nor the last) administration have not used them for that purpose. The government avows us a neutral nation, enemies to no country; and if we wish to maintain this character we must not continue to pursue every vessel that is seen at sea and in every respect assume the conduct and vexatious policy of a belligerent. There are men who consider this fracas an offset to the *Chesapeake* - I pray God it may not be an onset to War. (signed) IMPARTIAL"

John Myers, then on a trip to England, was familiar with British response to the incident. A letter he wrote his father, Norfolk merchant Moses Myers, on July 17 reflected the opinion of many thoughtful Americans. "Last week I got Rodgers' excellent letter on the affair off our Capes with the *Little Belt*. It gave me pleasure as it stated things so entirely favorable to his justification. I could wish him

ready to resist any attack from a ship of any size, at the hazard of his ship & crew; or to punish any repetition of insult or aggression. But an unnecessary attack I should deplore, particularly against a vessel so much inferior. The letter perfectly justified his conduct to me, tho' the government will feel bound, I think, to inquire into the circumstances since

President continued on page 9

Volunteer News & Notes

The Party

We most certainly hope you had a wonderful time at the Jan. 27 docent recognition party. We would like to recognize once again Sally Tobin, Margaret Godfrey, Anne Prince, Gurley Ritter, Betty Ritter, and Harold Anten for putting it all together.

Docent Meeting

The next quarterly docent meeting has been set for April 9. The meeting will take place at 10 a.m. at the Mariners' Museum in Newport News. Following the meeting, one of their educational staff members will give us a tour of their new exhibit on the cruise liner *Titanic*. A carpool will form at HRNM at 9:15 a.m.


Ship Models

Over the last several months, Bob Comet and Pete Watson have been hard at work on ship models. We are pleased to report that they are both finished. Bob worked on a model of the Revolutionary War brig *Fair American* and Pete worked on the World War II escort carrier *USS Gambier Bay* (CVE-73). We hope to have them both on

display on a temporary basis soon.

Pete is currently working on a model of the *Gearing*-class destroyer *USS Perry* (DD-844) and Bob is working on a model of the torpedo boat *USS Winslow* (TB-5). See page 3 for more about *Winslow*.

Third Grade Program is Back

Last year the museum participated in La Nauticus-sponsored education program for third graders. It was a great success and we are doing it again this year. The current program is already underway and many of you are already participating in it with great enthusiasm. For those of you who like to participate, please contact Bob at 322-2986. The program runs until the end of March. 

In the upper right corner is a model of the brig *Fair American* built by Bob Comet. To the immediate right is a model of the escort carrier *USS Gambier Bay* (CVE-73) built by Pete Watson. (Photos by Gordon Calhoun and Bob Comet)



President continued from page 8


the statement of Capt. Bingham as published officially yesterday, gives a diametrical contradiction in all the most material points. I have my own opinion on the letter of the English officer, from its general tenor, as well as my knowledge of Rodgers & his boarding officer Creighton; but not withstanding the unbearable aggression we have suffered, I wish with us in the conflict, if one is to ensue, the approbation of the World - & would establish the good conduct of an officer. I look forward to a repetition of this business on the first meeting of any ship of ours with any of the squadron of Sir Joseph Yorke which appears still to be off Plymouth, or in case of a meeting with any ship stationed on our coast, in which case, I do not see that hostilities

can be avoided."

Fortunately, such British retribution did not appear immediately. Incidents of impressment did continue. A few months after the *President* - *Little Belt* affair, HMS *Tartarus* impressed three seamen off the Virginia brig *Orion* off the Capes. But no significant action occurred between warships of the two nations.

President James Madison used the air of tension to bring Congress into action to "feel the duty of putting the United States into an armor and an attitude demanded by the crisis." Although Congress was willing to vote money to bring some mothballed ships into readiness, it refused to authorize any new construction.

This had been predicted by the

Norfolk Gazette & Publick Ledger shortly after the *President* and *Little Belt* had met. The paper had editorialized on June 7: "The wonderful regard which the Democrats have recently manifested for our Seamen, and the Navy, would be pleasing, if we could believe it sincere. But when we recollect that only three years since these very democrats passed that cruel law [the Embargo Act of 1807], which left our brave seamen no alternative between starving in their own country, and seeking their bread in a foreign service, we cannot but doubt the sincerity of such professions. The same as the Navy - The opposition to the navy by the ruling party, is too well known to require proofs - and at this moment, the same hostility exists to a naval establishment." 

Cardenas continued from page 3

began their attack. After sounding and sweeping the channel between Romero and the Blanco Keys, the *Wilmington* flanked by the *Winslow* (port) and *Hudson* (starboard) entered the bay. The *Hudson* under the direction of Cmdr. Todd was sent along the western side of the harbor to search for gunboats and the *Winslow* along the eastern side to do the same. The *Wilmington* lay nearly two nautical miles from the small town of Cardenas, to block the escape of any enemy gunboats. Not finding any gunboats, *Winslow* returning to within signaling distance of the *Wilmington*. Cmdr. Todd, who had spotted the trappings of a small gunboat moored to a wharf in the far section of town, sent the *Winslow* to investigate.

Lt. Bernadou obeyed and made his speed for twelve knots to the gray

before the *Wilmington* and *Hudson* could maneuver to assist the *Winslow*, she had suffered major casualties. The *Winslow*'s steering gear had been shot away and the rudder was inoperative, one of her two

"I take great pleasure in testifying to the remarkable bravery displayed by Lieutenant Bernadou and the men of the *Winslow*, and consider it as one of the greatest privileges of my life to have been witness of their conduct. With such officers and such men, the American nation may well be proud of its Navy."

-1st Lt. Frank Newcomb of the USRS Hudson

boilers had been lost, and the port main engine was disabled. Bernadou had Bagley run back and forth between the engine room and the shattered pilot house to navigate. Bagley was now acting as the communications officer,


secured, *Winslow*'s pilot house was struck again. This shell hit the pilot house and killed Ensign Bagley and three other sailors. Tunnell was among the three sailors killed. The dying Tunnell asked

Bernadou whether or not the ship had been saved. When Bernadou said it had been, Tunnell replied "Then I may die a happy man."

Within an hour the shore batteries and moored gunboat had been silenced by shells fired from the *Wilmington*, *Hudson*, and *Winslow*. The *Winslow* was then towed by the *Hudson* out of the harbor and to Key West for repairs.

Newcomb later paid the highest compliment to the crew of the *Winslow*. "I take great pleasure in testifying to the remarkable bravery displayed by Lieutenant Bernadou and the men of the *Winslow*, and consider it as one of the greatest privileges of my life to have been witness of their conduct at a time when many men would have felt justified in abandoning all hope. With such officers and such men, the American nation may well be proud of its Navy," he wrote in his after action report.

Bradly, Johnson, and Cooney were each later awarded the Medal of Honor for their heroic acts in saving the *Winslow*. Bradly received a warrant officer's commission as an additional reward.

The Navy granted a high honor to the one time Academy dropout Worth Bagley. Between 1900 and 1940, they named three ships, a torpedo boat (TB-24) and two destroyers (DD-386 and DE-1069), after Ensign Bagley. Today, Bagley's persona, his commitment to the Navy, his hardworking diligence and stoicism is encased in a bronze statue in Raleigh, North Carolina. 



In this dramatic painting by Henry Reuter Dahl, Winslow is struck for a third time by Spanish shore batteries, killing Ensign Worth Bagley and three sailors. One of the sailors killed was Josiah Tunnell, an African-American mess cook from the Eastern Shore of Virginia. He was killed just after he succeeded in grabbing and tying the tow line from Hudson. (HRNM photo of a painting by Henry Reuter Dahl)

object of question. After having traveled about a half-mile inside of the position of the *Wilmington*, the moored vessel opened fire on the *Winslow*. Within a mile of the shore the *Winslow*, armed with only three one pounder guns and three readied torpedo tubes, was a moving target not only for the gunboat but also for hidden shore battery defenses. Because the torpedo boat was in the line of fire, the *Wilmington* could not immediately return fire. The *Hudson* still exploring the western edge of the harbor was jolted into action by the sonic booms of cannon. Her commanding officer First Lt. Newcomb promptly made best speed in the direction of the *Wilmington*.

In approximately twenty minutes,

officer of the deck, and helm steering officer. Bagley was greatly assisted by *Winslow*'s three chief petty officers: Chief Gunner's Mates George Bradly and Hans Johnson, and Chief Machinist's Mate Thomas Cooney. The three chiefs help keep the ship afloat by putting out fires, working small miracles with the damaged engineer plant and its boilers, and in directing the torpedo boat's small guns.

Hudson came over to *Winslow* to throw the disabled ship a tow line. The first two attempts failed. On the third attempt, *Winslow*'s African-American mess cook, Virginia Eastern Shore native Josiah Tunnell, succeeded in grabbing the line and connecting the two ships. Shortly after the line was



Sage Stumper VII-The Spanish Are Coming! The Spanish Are Coming!

We present the first of a series of trivia questions and answers on the Spanish-American War. The Sage is pleased to announce that **Steve Kennedy** and museum docents **Bill Ely**, **Ed Cox**, and **Hunt Lewis** correctly answered both questions.

The first set of questions posed in the last issue concerns the Spanish squadron sent to defend Cuba against an American invasion. The American press dubbed it the "Cape Verde Fleet" as the last place the group of seven ships was spotted, before appearing in the Caribbean Sea, was around the Cape Verde Island off the coast off North Africa. It consisted of four cruisers-

100th Anniversary The Spanish-American War 1898-1998

Infanta Maria Teresa, Vizcaya, Almirante Oquendo, and Cristóbal Colón and three destroyers-*Furor, Plutón, and Terror*. On paper, some of the Spanish warships were not half-bad warships, particularly *Cristóbal Colón*. Colón was originally the Italian armored cruiser *Giuseppe Garibaldi* and was the fourth ship in a very successful class of ships. She had a good balance of speed, armament, and protection and was built to stand up in a heavy, high seas fight.

But, as the other part of the joke goes, the Spanish ships were not half-good either. When the Italians delivered *Colón* to the Spanish in 1896, she did not have her main armament installed. When war with the United States broke out in 1898, the guns had been delivered but had yet to be installed by Spanish yards.


The Museum Sage

In addition, several of *Vizcaya's* and *Oquendo's* guns did not work properly and *Vizcaya* had a defective engineering plant. Much of the ammunition was the wrong size or in short supply. It is somewhat appropriate that one of the artifacts the museum is putting on display for its exhibit is a solid brass caliper, a device used to measure ammunition size from *Colón*.

The squadron's commander Adm. Cervera protested several times to his superiors to no avail that his fleet was in no shape to sail, much less fight a better equipped American fleet. He faced a major logistical problem as well, as coal would be hard to come by.

However, none of these problems were ever called to the attention of the U.S. Navy or anyone for that matter. Defense planners treated the Cape Verde Fleet as the return of Attila the Hun and prepared for any eventuality.

Even after it was reported that the Spanish squadron left Cadiz, the Army and the Navy worried that the squadron would intercept the invasion convoy loaded with Army troops. As a result, both branches exercised extreme caution and delayed the convoy's departure from Tampa on several occasions.


Fortunately for all, the scout ships spotted the squadron in the French colony of Martinique and latter at the Dutch colony of Curaçao. The squadron still managed to slip past the American blockade only to be bottled up in Santiago. 


Sage Stumper VIII-Do You Accept Visa? The Navy Goes Shopping for Ships.

In March 1898, Congress authorized the Navy and Army \$50 million for "national defense." Congress passed this particular spending resolution just in the case war did break out with Spain. The Army took the words "national defense" quite literally and spent its share on improving its coast defense forts like Ft. Monroe. They did not spend much on mobilizing for an offensive war.


The Navy, on the other hand, went out and bought or leased a herd of ships to augment its existing fleet. Several of these ships were passenger ships and yachts, many of which made excellent scout cruisers and fast gunboats. They also would have made excellent troop transports if the Army had bought them first. The Navy also went looking overseas to see what European and South American navies would be willing to sell.

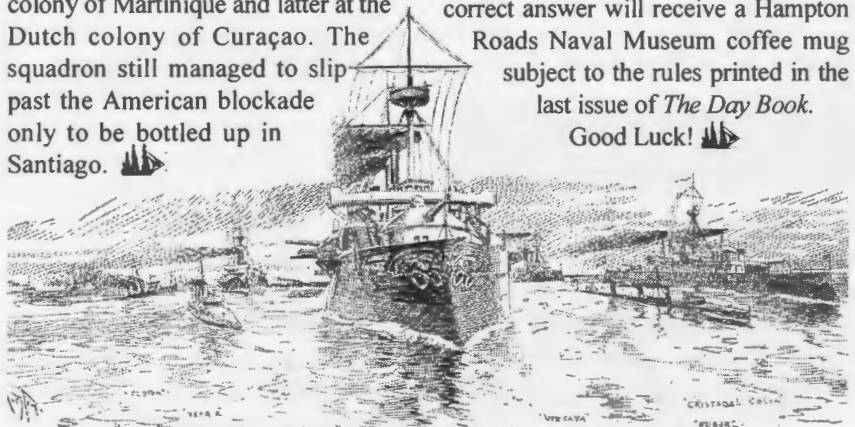
The questions are:

 Name the large passenger liners purchased that were used as scout cruisers.

 Name the warships purchased overseas.

As always, the first person with the correct answer will receive a Hampton Roads Naval Museum coffee mug subject to the rules printed in the last issue of *The Day Book*.

Good Luck! 



A contemporary drawing of Adm. Cervera's "Cape Verde Fleet" that caused much panic in America. From left to right are the torpedo boats Plutón and Terror, the cruisers Almirante Oquendo, Infanta Marita Teresa, Vizcaya, the torpedo boat Furor, and the cruiser Cristóbal Colón (HRNM photo of an 1898 Henry Targern drawing taken from the Pictorial Atlas of the Spanish-American War)