The Daybook

Vol. 9 Issue 4

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HAMPTON ROADS NAVAL MUSEUM

Local History. World Events.

About The Daybook *and the Museum*

The Daybook 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. Book reviews are solely the opinion of the reviewer.

The HRNM is operated and funded by Commander, Navy Region, Mid-Atlantic. The museum is dedicated to the study of 225 years of naval history in the Hampton Roads region. It is also responsible for the historic interpretation of the battleship *Wisconsin*.

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

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

The Daybook is published quarterly with a circulation of 1,600. Contact the editor for a free subscription.

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Nineteenth Century Torpedoes and Their Inventors by Edwyn Gray. Reviewed by Howard Sandfer.

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What to Do With Commodore David Conner

Cover Illustration: USS *Cumberland* is featured prominently among other ships off the coast of Texas in 1846. This 1848 drawing entitled "The United States Squadron Landing Its Seaman and Marines at the Brazos de Santiago, May 8th, 1846" was originally published in a memoir of Rev. Fitch W. Taylor, who served as squadron chaplain on board "The Flagship" (i.e. *Cumberland*) during the Mexican-American War. See the entire drawing on page 7.

Fair Winds Ahead

The Director's Column

by Becky Poulliot

By the time you receive this issue of *The Daybook,* our foundation will have a new item in its gift shop inventory. Since the *Wisconsin* arrived, Volunteer Coordinator Tom Dandes has wanted a battleship challenge coin. Not sure what that is? Go to challengecoin.com, or look at the illustration below. This disc shaped "coin" is larger than a silver dollar and is sure to become a popular ship souvenir. Challenge coins are frequently used in today's Navy as mementos of a job well done. They are handed out at ceremonial events and by commanding officers as "job well done" gifts to sailors. A popular "coin check" game has evolved from these coins where one "challenges" his/her fellow patrons at a bar to see if they have their coins. The loser in such a contest typically has to buy a round for all.

Legend has it that the challenge coin dates to World War I when American volunteers from all parts of the country filled the newly formed flying squadrons. Some were wealthy scions attending colleges such as Yale and Harvard, who had quit in mid-term to join the war. One wealthy lieutenant ordered medallions containing the squadron emblem be struck and then disbursed to every member of the group. He himself carried his medallion in a small leather pouch around his neck. Shortly after acquiring the medallion, the pilot's aircraft was severely damaged by ground fire and forced down behind enemy lines. A German patrol immediately captured him, and removed all his personal identification, except for the medallion. He was taken to a small French town near the front, and during a night bombardment, he escaped. Eventually, he stumbled on to a French outpost. Unfortunately, saboteurs had plagued the French in this sector. Not recognizing his American accent, the French believed the pilot to be a saboteur and made ready to execute him. Just in time, the pilot recalled the coin around his neck and showed the medallion to the French captors. They recognized the squadron emblem, and allowed time for him to confirm his identity. Instead of shooting him, the pilot was awarded a bottle of wine.

Actual size Front and back of the new Battleship Wisconsin *challenge coin that will be for sale through the Hampton Roads Naval Historical Foundation, the Nauticus gift shop, and the USS Wisconsin Association.*

We do not expect our new *Wisconsin* medallion to carry such a lifesaving connotation, however, be assured that the coin represents the rich heritage of her battle service. The Kidder Corporation of Virginia has designed a beautifully detailed piece of art that may be purchased for $10. The first 100 *Wisconsin* coins minted were purchased by Nauticus director Rich Conti, and promised to the Hampton Roads Naval Museum volunteers at the annual picnic (sponsored by the Wisconsin Association) in appreciation for all they do.

Speaking of gifts, our museum staff needs to hand a big one over to Education Specialist Bob Matteson. After 11 years of service with the Hampton Roads Naval Museum, Bob has decided to retire from federal service. Bob has been instrumental in creating and sustaining an educational program for our institution. He was the museum's first official educator, and as such, created a volunteer program, and school programs for children. Thanks to Bob, thousand of children have been introduced to "life at sea," have learned about the African-American contribution to the U.S. Navy and now know about the wonders of underwater archaeology. The best part is that these children had fun here in the museum while learning these important topics that support the State's Standards of Learning. Bob has indeed taught tomorrow's Navy by reaching out to today's youth. For adult military and civilians, Bob developed a luncheon lecture series that has brought both provocative and nationally known naval historians and public figures. With his Speakers' Bureau, staffed entirely by museum staff and volunteers, literally thousands of community leaders and citizens have become familiar with regional history and the museum's offerings.

The museum's education specalist Bob Matteson is retiring from the Civil Service after several dozen years of service, including 12 with the Hampton Roads Naval Museum. Good luck Bob! (HRNM photo)

Bob's past military service includes retirement from the U.S. Army as a Major. Past professional museum work includes duty as an educator for the Army's Transportation Museum at Fort Eustis, VA. Bob may be retiring from Civil Service, but a new adventure awaits him in China, where he has found a position teaching conversational English. Bob, from all of us, thank you and we wish you Fair Winds and Following Seas in this next chapter of an interesting life full of service to others. We'll miss you, friend.

Becky

Museum Co-Sponsoring New Photo Exhibit

The Hampton Roads Naval Museum and Nauticus will open Marker Zero: 100 Years on the Water in Hampton Roads, on October 12, 2004. This photographic exhibit will feature 34 images of the harbor of Hampton Roads from the late 19th century through the 1960s. The name of the exhibit refers to Mile Marker Zero for the Intracoastal Waterway, which is found on the historic Elizabeth River.

"Mile Marker Zero" was made possible due to the finanical support from Wachovia Securites and the Norfolk Historical Society.

Lighthouses, ferries, warships and pleasure craft are featured in the photographs, which will give the visitor a taste of the incredible variety of maritime traffic that the "world's greatest harbor" sustains.

The images come from the collections of several area institutions, including the Hampton Roads Naval Museum, the Mariners' Museum, the Virginia State Library, the Kirn Library (Norfolk), the Portsmouth Library, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the U.S. Coast Guard and the Portsmouth Naval Hospital.

The exhibit is being mounted in support of the 7th Maritime Heritage Conference to be held in Norfolk in late October. The exhibit will be on view for six months.

Bush Bluff Lightship

Norfolk Navy Yard, 1902

Tangier Island Lighthouse

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***Wisconsin* Project Partners**
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USS *Wisconsin* Association
www.usswisconsin.org

Battleship *Wisconsin* Foundation
www.battleshipwisconsin.org

HAMPTON ROADS NAVAL ★ MUSEUM

Museum Receives U-boat Artifact

by Joe Judge

The museum has added a World War II German sextant to its collection. The sextant is a beautiful example of the work of the C. Plath Company, a German manufacturer of navigation instruments founded in the 19th century. The company had a close business relationship with the German Navy in World Wars I and II. The sextant was donated to the museum by Alan Hugh McKinley, a Norfolk resident and son-in-law of naval officer Jesse Gearing Johnson. Johnson, who eventually obtained flag rank, was the executive officer aboard USS *Guadalcanal*.

It is not completely certain that this sextant came from *U-505* or if Admiral Johnson acquired it from another source. Along with the sextant came a watercolor of the famous episode painted by one of the crew members of the *Guadalcanal* and owned by Admiral Johnson.

The museum recently received this sextant manufactured by the famous German insturment maker C. Plath Company. The sextant belong to Admiral Jesse Gearing Johnson, who was executive officer of the Norfolk-based escort carrier USS Guadalcanal *(CVE-60), when the carrier's task group captured* U-505. *It is possible that the sextant came from the submarine. (Photo by Joe Judge)*

Guadalcanal was the most important ship involved in one of the most spectacular incidents of the war: the capture of the German submarine *U-505* on June 4, 1944. This event marked the first time a U.S. Navy vessel had captured an enemy vessel at sea since the nineteenth century. The action took place in the Atlantic Ocean about 150 miles off the coast of Rio De Oro, Africa. The American hunter-killer force commanded by Captain Daniel V. Gallery was comprised of the escort carrier *Guadalcanal* (CVE-60) and five escort vessels under Commander Frederick S. Hall, USN: *Pillsbury* (DE-133) *Pope* DE-134), *Flaherty* (DE-135), *Chatelain* (DE-149), and *Jenks* (DE-665).

Alerted by American code breakers who—along with the British—had been decrypting the German naval code, the *Guadalcanal* task group knew U-boats were operating off the African coast near Cape Verde. By adding this regional information together with high-frequency direction finding fixes (HF/DF)—which tracked U-boats by radio transmissions—and air and surface reconnaissance, the Allies could narrow down a U-boat's location to a small area. The *Guadalcanal* task group intended to use all these methods to find and capture the next U-boat encountered through the use of trained boarding parties.

The task group sailed from Norfolk, Virginia, on May 15, 1944 for an anti-submarine patrol near the Canary Islands. For two weeks the force searched in vain to locate a U-boat. On Sunday, June 4 1944, with fuel running low, the warships reluctantly turned north and headed for Casablanca. Ironically, not ten minutes later at 1109 that morning, USS *Chatelain* (DE-149) made sonar contact on an object just 800 yards away on her starboard bow. *Guadalcanal* immediately swung clear at top speed, desperately trying to avoid getting in the way, as *Chatelain* and the other escorts closed the position.

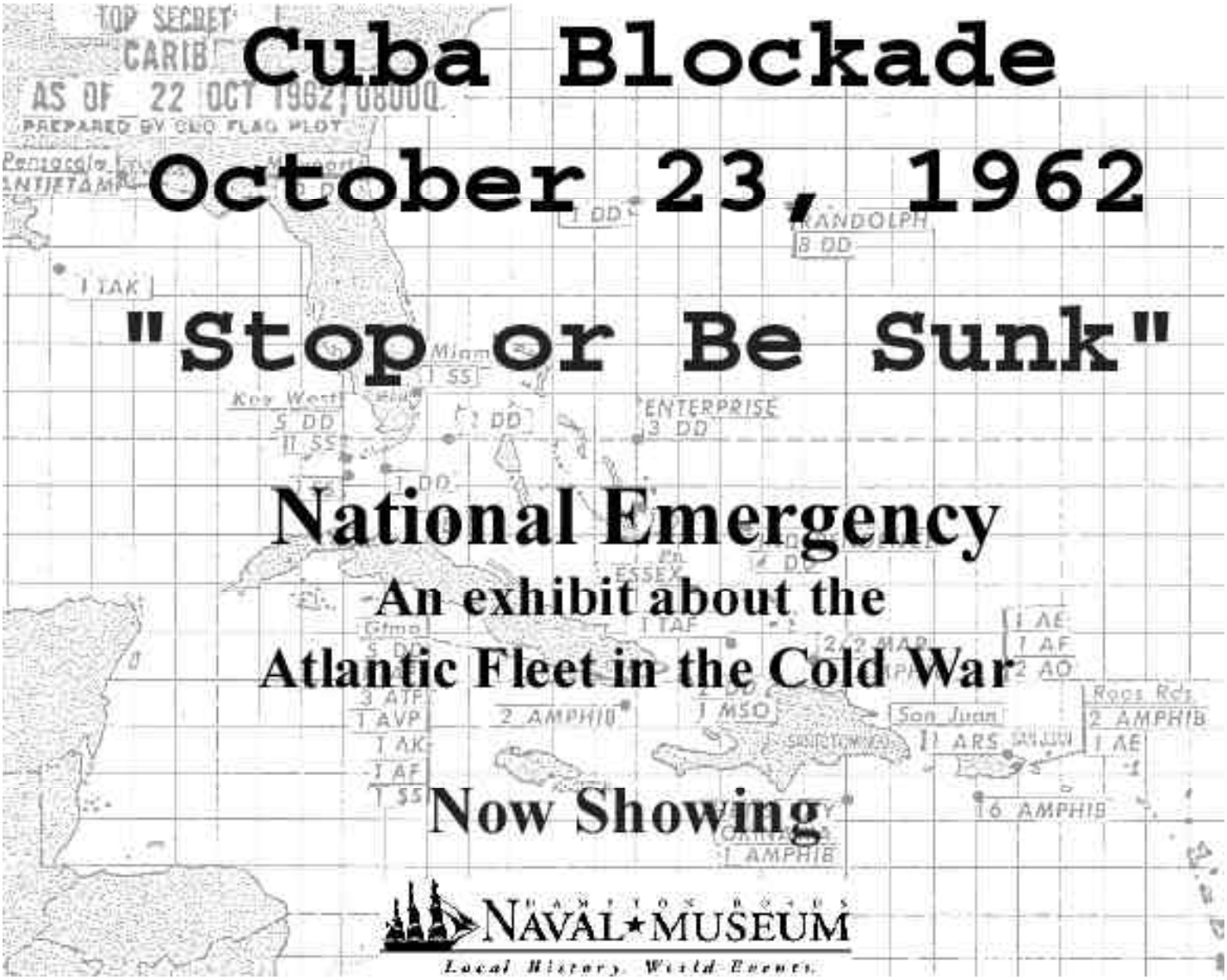
In the minutes required to identify the contact definitely as a submarine, however, *Chatalain* closed too rapidly and could not attack—as her depth charges would not sink fast enough to intercept the U-boat. The escort held her fire instead, opened range and attacked with her hedgehogs.

As the ship heeled over in her tight turn, one of two FM-2 "Wildcat" fighter planes launched by *Guadalcanal*, sighted the submerged U-boat and dived on it, firing into the water to mark the submarine's position. *Chatelain* steadied up on her sound bearing and moved in for the kill. A full pattern of depth charges set for a shallow target splashed into the water around the U-boat.

As the submarine broached only 700 yards from *Chatelain*, the escort opened fire with all automatic weapons that would bear and swept the U-boat's decks. *Pillsbury* and *Jenks*, farther away, and the two Wildcats overhead added to the intense barrage. Wounded in the torrent of fire and believing that his submarine had been mortally damaged by *Chatelain's* depth charges, the commanding officer of *U-505* quickly ordered his crew to abandon ship. So quickly was this command obeyed that scuttling measures were left incomplete and the submarine's engines continued to run.

While *Chatelain* and *Jenks* picked up survivors, *Pillsbury* sent its motor whaleboat to the circling submarine where Lieutenant (junior grade) Albert L. David, USN, led the

U-boat continued on page 5



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eight-man party on board. Despite the probability of *U-505* sinking or blowing up at any minute and not knowing what form of resistance they might meet below, David and his men clambered up the conning tower and then down into the boat

Meanwhile, *Pillsbury* twice went alongside the turning submarine to put over tow lines and each time the escort's side was pierced by the U-boats' bow plane. Finally, with three compartments flooded, she was forced to haul clear to attend to her own damage. The boarding party was then reinforced by a party from *Guadalcanal.* The carrier's men completed temporary salvage measures, and took a towline from *Guadalcanal*.

After three days of towing, *Guadalcanal* was relieved of her burden by the fleet tug *Abnaki* (ATF-96). On

Painting of the attack on U-505 by a Wildcat fighter from the Norfolk-based carrier USS Guadalcanal *(CVE-60) and the destroyer escort USS* Chatelain *(DE-149). The orginal work was painted by a former crew member of Guadalcanal and donated to the museum by the carrier's executive officer's son-in-law.*

Monday, June 19, 1944, *U-505* was brought into Port Royal Bay, Bermuda, after a tow of 1,700 miles. Here she was commissioned in the U.S. Navy as USS *Nemo* and evaluated.

The task group itself was awarded the Presidential Unit citation. More significantly, however, the capture of codebooks on *U-505* allowed American code breakers to occasionally break the special "coordinate" code in enciphered German messages and determine more precise locations for U-boat operating areas. These coordinants enabled Allied convoy commanders to route shipping away from known U-boat locations, greatly inhibiting the effectiveness of German patrols.

by Gordon Calhoun

After suffering through another cold winter in Boston, the new ship's company of USS *Cumberland* was preparing for deployment to warmer climates in the Mediterranean. Despite being called back early from her first cruise to the Mediterranean Sea in 1845 due to the crisis brewing on the Mexican border, the Navy Department had slated *Cumberland* in January 1846 as Commodore George Read's flagship of the Mediterranean Squadron. In addition, the Navy assigned the frigate to oversee the newly formed Africa Squadron with the difficult task of catching American-flagged slave ships.

The frigate's commanding officer Captain Bladen Dulany continued the strong family ties tradition of the U.S. Navy, as his younger brother was Brevet Major Thomas Dulany, commanding officer of the squadron Marines during *Cumberland*'s first deployment. Captain Dulany's son also was on board serving as his father's clerk. An additional officer on board with family connections to the Navy was Lieutenant Charles Morris, jr., son of Commodore Charles Morris, who was most famous for his service as Isaac Hull's executive officer of the frigate *Constitution* during the War of 1812.

Of all the officers and sailors assigned to the frigate, Rev. Fitch W. Taylor, an Episcopal pastor and squadron chaplain, was looking forward the most to this deployment. Taylor had already seen the wonders of the Far East on board the Norfolk-based frigate USS *Columbia* and now was eagerly looking forward to seeing the Holy Land. He busily prepared himself and other officers for what amounted to a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and other sacred Christian sites.

David Conner was the third commodore to choose Cumberland *as flagship. The Pennsylvania native had already served 36 years in the service, including combat actions during the War of 1812, when he took control of the squadron. (Naval Institute photo)*

Dreams and expectations of an easy deployment came to a sudden end when Commodore Read arrived on board with new orders. Secretary of the Navy George Bancroft ordered *Cumberland* to reinforce Commodore David Conner's Home Squadron off the coast of Mexico. The Home Squadron, also referred to as the Gulf Squadron, was currently off the coast of the port city of Vera Cruz preparing for a possible war with Mexico. Many of the ship's company were deeply disappointed. Taylor cynically commented "[Orders] directed that this fine frigate and in company with the forces already there should forthwith repair to the Gulf of Mexico to frighten the miserable Mexicans into a treaty with these magnanimous, *Texas-loving* United States. Well, well, so goes the world."

After waiting another week for the winter winds and tides to be more favorable for sailing, *Cumberland* began a long trek south towards Mexico on February 1, 1846. The ship's band tried to liven things up with happy tunes as the ship left Boston Harbor, but morale had already taken a major blow when a flu outbreak hit the ship. Sixty sailors were soon on the sick list. One junior officer, Passed Midshipman Ashton Young, and a few sailors had already died from the infection. Even as the ship headed south, the weather did not improve. The usual gale force winds hit the ship as it passed by Cape Henry and Cape Hatteras. After going through the storm, Taylor wrote down "No, no, Mr. Comfortable," Taylor's nickname for members of Congress, "not for all which the gentlemen of the Navy receive, or the prospect before them of a premature old age and a bare support for their families but a very small living when they die, would said Comfortable undertake, himself, to navigate our nation's ships."

The bad weather died down as the ship entered warmer climates. The ship sailed south past the Bahamas and to the north of Haiti before turning south towards the Jamaican coast. The frigate arrived off the

Cumberland ***continued on page 7***

This is part three of an ongoing series about the flagship and symbol for the Hampton Roads Naval Museum, the frigate/sloop-of-war USS Cumberland. *The museum is the only official repository for artifacts from the ship, which was sunk by the ironclad CSS* Virginia *on March 8, 1862.*

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Part 7-Sailing for the Union (Opening Operations in the Civil War)
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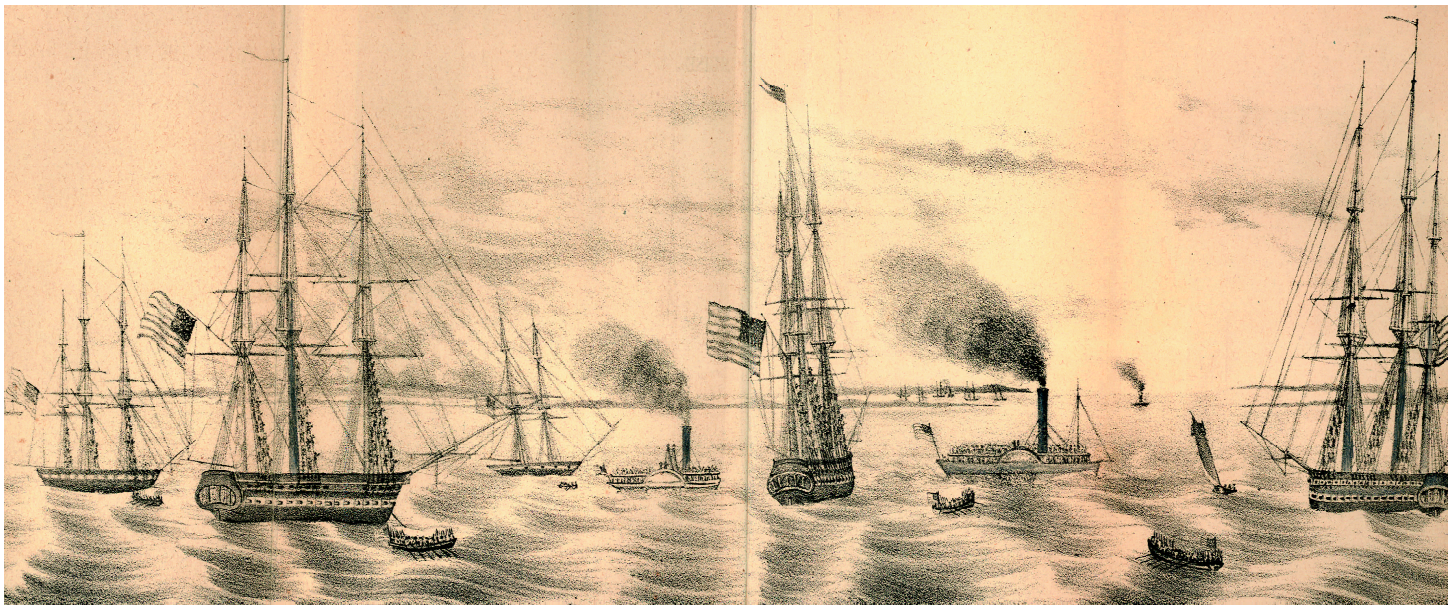
Conner chose the highly talented Raphael Semmes to be his flag aide and boarding officer. The future commanding officer of CSS Alabama *later took command of the brig USS* Somers *only to return to the position of flag aide after* Somers *was wrecked in a storm and Conner's next flag-aide, Lieutenant Charles Morris, was killed in action. (Naval Historical Center photo)*



When war with Mexico seemed imminent, the Gulf Squadron sailed from Vera Cruz, Mexico up to Brazos Santiago, an inlet just north of the Rio Grande, to assist General Taylor's "Army of Occupation." USS Cumberland*, in the center of the picture, flies the blue broad pennant, denoting her role as flagship of the squadron. In this particular illustration, U.S. Army coastal steamers load up squadron Marines and sailors to reinforce Point Isabel during the Battle of Palo Alto. Remaining sailors from the rest of the squadron man the rigging to cheer on the company. (1848 drawing by F. Mitchelin)*

Cumberland *continued from page 6*

coast of the walled port city of Vera Cruz, Mexico on March 1. Already present were the old, small frigate *John Adams*, the sloop-of-war *Falmouth*, and the sloop-of-war *St. Mary's*, which, like *Cumberland,* was originally bound for the Mediterranean before having her peacetime orders cancelled.

Upon her arrival, David Conner immediately selected her to be his new flagship as *Cumberland* was the biggest, and thus most accommodating to a squadron commodore and his desire for a large comfortable cabin. Two of *Cumberland*'s sister ships, *Potomac* and *Raritan*, had temporarily retired from the squadron and sailed to Norfolk and Pensacola respectively to conduct repairs. Three foreign ships, a Spanish frigate, a French brig, and the British frigate HMS *Endymion* (the same frigate that battled American ships in the War of 1812), were also present to represent their respective nation's interests.

*Guadalcanal*For David Conner, this was his first appointment as squadron commodore. The Pennsylvania native had served in the Navy for 36 years before placing his flag on *Cumberland*. Conner's initial task was to conduct a show of force off Mexico's main port while John Slidell attempted to negotiate a purchase of the disputed territory with the Mexican government.

While awaiting word on the outcome, a deep boredom set in among the crew. Since the United States was not officially at war, no blockade of the Mexican coast could be declared, nor could they conducted an assault on Mexican towns. At the same time, the squadron could not leave the coast. Its mission there was to demonstrate superior American firepower to coerce Mexican politicians to accepting Sliddel's land purchase treaty. All the crew could do was sit, smoke cigars, and watch Vera Cruz and an increasingly large number of sharks from anchorage. Rev. Taylor himself became so bored that he digressed from writing in his diary about his experiences aboard *Cumberland* and began writing about his previous experiences aboard the frigate *Columbia*.

The return of *Potomac* and *Raritan* from repairs, plus the addition of the steam frigate *Mississippi* with Commodore Matthew Perry during the later part of March, temporarily broke the boredom they delivered mail from home. As flagship, all mail and official dispatches were brought on board *Cumberland* to be sorted. Dulany formed the occasional shore party, but mainly for official purposes such as to collect water for the squadron, and not for liberty.

Conner and Dulany expected order on the ship, despite the boredom, and exercised swift punishment for minor infractions. Under Federal law, Dulany had the authority to order a maximum of twelve lashes on an enlisted sailor for a crime, without having to convene a court martial board. While some captains `bent the law by finding a sailor guilty of multiple crimes and then giving sailor several sets of twelve lashes, Dulany showed a "firm but fair" approach to naval justice and stuck to both the letter and spirit of the law. One to two times a week, Dulany issued the infamous order for the crew to assemble on the deck and "witness punishment." At least three to seven sailors and Marines at any given time were flogged nine to twelve times each for common offenses such as sleeping on watch, use of vulgar language, sulking, fighting, and talking back to an officer.

During one day in April, Dulany had two sailors flogged twelve times each for fighting, and stripped the ship's master-at-arms of his rate and demoted him to the rank of seaman for an unspecified charge. He then convened a court martial hearing for Seaman George Thompson. Dulany accused Thompson of showing disobedience and attempting to assault Dulany himself. The court found the sailor guilty and sentenced him to 100 lashes pending Conner's approval. In an odd and malicious way of showing leniency, Dulany informed Thompson that he would recommend to Conner that the sailor would not receive 100 lashes during punishment, as the evidence from one of the witnesses was somewhat shaky. Instead of a 100, Thompson received 75 lashes in one

Cumberland *continued on page 8*

Described by William Howard Parker as "the bravest man I have ever known," French Forrest, shown here in his Confederate naval officer uniform, served as Cumberland*'s third commanding officer. He frequently served as company commander when landing parties of sailors and Marines conducted ground assaults. (Naval Historical Center photo)*

Cumberland *continued from page 7*

flogging session and 25 a week later.

Unacceptable behavior was not limited to the enlisted ranks. Dulany found several junior officers not showing the proper respect to their superiors, as they were caught slacking off in their duties, talking in the ranks during inspections, and talking back to their division officers. One passed midshipman was found half asleep on one of the guns and at first ignored a demand by his division officer to wake up.

Slidell arrived on *Cumberland* from his voyage to Mexico City a few days after Perry's arrival in late March and spent the night on board before leaving for Washington. The ship received him with a 17-gun salute. What the diplomat said to the ship's officers is not known, but we do know that the mission was a failure as Mexican politicians refused to even grant Slidell and his somewhat insulting offer an audience. From that moment, rumors circulated throughout the ship that the squadron was moving out and mobilizing for war. The rumors turned out to be true as the squadron weighed anchor and sailed north to join General Zachary Taylor's army in southeastern Texas.

On May 6, 1846, the squadron arrived at the *Brazos de Santiago* (Arms of St. James), an inlet just north of the Rio Grande. The squadron found the American brig *Lawrence* already at anchor. Her commanding officer Commander Samuel Mercer immediately came on board and briefed Conner and the frigate's officers on the tense situation brewing between Taylor's army and a Mexican army camped on the other side of the Rio Grande. The situation on land turned violent that afternoon as the two armies clashed at the Battle of Palo Alto. Cannon and musket fire could be heard from miles around.

Both U.S. Army and Naval officers became concerned about the very real possibility of defeat, particularly when there was no word on the course of the battle. The post commander of Taylor's supply base at Point Isabel, sent a note to Conner requesting that the squadron provide reinforcements for the fort's garrison as he feared a routed American army being pursed by a large mob of Mexicans.

Conner summoned all ship commanders to the *Cumberland* for an emergency council of war. One unnamed commander, possibly Mercer, boasted he could have 250 men ready in 15 minutes. Not to be outdone, Captain Francis Gregory, *Ratarin*'s commanding officer, requested that he be allowed to send his entire ship's company not to the fort, but rather directly to the front lines. Conner wisely dismissed the latter request by pointing out that any Naval landing party caught in an open battlefield would be cut to pieces by Mexican lancers. Conner instead ordered that the squadron assemble all of its Marines with several hundred sailors into a 1200-man brigade under the command of *Cumberland*'s senior Marine officer Captain Alvin Edison to assist the Army's garrison. Two coastal steamers arrived from Point Isabel and took the brigade to shore with the remaining sailors cheering them on from the rigging.

Soon after the brigade arrival at Point Isabel, the squadron received the good news that Taylor had achieved a major victory, and signaled back to the flagship. A team of the squadron's surgeons, headed up by *Cumberland*'s Dr. Walters Smith, soon arrived at Point Isabel to help Army surgeons tend to the wounded.

General Taylor came to the frigate for a meeting with his Naval counterpart requesting Conner assemble a landing force and seize the Mexican towns of Bartia and Matamoros. These two small towns were being used as Mexican supply bases on the

A frequent visitor to Cumberland*'s wardroom, Matthew Perry initially served as vice commodore of the Gulf Squadron, until relieving Conner in February 1847. He transferred his flag to* Cumberland *upon the frigate's return to the region in late 1847. (HRNM photo of an 1858* Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper *engraving)*

Rio Grande. Taylor wanted to secure the flank and his own supply routes for his army. Marine and sailor detachments from both *Cumberland* and *Potomac* assembled in small boats around the flagship, but delayed the operation for two days due to heavy surf. Many of the junior officers grumbled that weather was not the real reason for the delay and privately blamed Conner for being too timid. The expedition eventually got underway on May 20 and arrived at Matamoros a day later. Much to the Navy's annoyance, it arrived only to find that soldiers from the U.S. 1st Infantry had already taken possession of the undefended town.

With war all but official, Conner broke up the squadron, with some ships heading to Vera Cruz to establish a legal blockade of Mexico and some, such as *Cumberland*, retiring to Pensacola to resupply. After a month of loading up the frigate with several dozen barrels of general staples such as fresh water, sugar, salt, butter, beef, pork, bread, tea, coffee, and whiskey, the ship got underway for its wartime station off Vera Cruz. The frigate received no fresh fruit and outbreaks of scurvy were common.

As *Cumberland* sailed back towards Vera Cruz, she encountered and challenged several foreign-flagged, mostly Spanish, merchant ships. Conner's new flag aide,

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Cumberland ***continued from page 8***

the highly talented Lieutenant Raphael Semmes, also served as boarding officer. The future commanding officer of CSS *Sumter* and *Alabama* checked the papers of the ships and interviewed the captains. All of the ships boarded claimed to have received notice about the war and were heading back to Cuba, rather than challenge the blockade. All of the ships were allowed to freely pass.

Cumberland reached her station on June 22 and began the long and tedious mission of blockading the coast. Even though the war was now official, blockade duty for *Cumberland*'s company was no more exciting than it was during the pre-war show of force demonstration. Mexico did not have much of a maritime tradition, much less a navy capable of challenging the squadron. The squadron not only lacked the firepower to assault Vera Cruz on its own, but also lacked sufficient shallow draft vessels to seize smaller towns.

Semmes wrote in his memoirs that it was the worst kind of boredom. "No duties could have been more irksome," he commented. "We looked from [*Cumberland*], as from a prison, upon glittering specks of sand…without other variation than the occasional arrival of one of the blockading squadron and depart again on her cruise." Semmes was equally "irked" by having to eat ship's rations only and having to clean his clothes using a bucket of salt water.

The Fourth of July brought a welcome break as gun and alcohol salutes were conducted throughout the squadron. Conner invited all officers from the squadron to the flagship for food and wine. As July 5 was coronation day for Queen Victoria, officers from HMS *Endymion* even came aboard and held joint festivities with their American counterparts. *Cumberland*'s band attempted to play patriotic tunes. Rev. Taylor, however, reported that the band played some tunes "so harsh that the composers would hardly have recognized their own pieces; or if they had recognized them, it would have crazed their system of nerves, and made them mad."

Shortly after the festivities, Dulany fell seriously ill and requested to be relieved from command. More than likely, he was one of many officers and sailors in the squadron to contract yellow fever, which reached epidemic levels by the end of the war. The disease forced the Navy to constantly rotate in replacement officers and sailors to keep the company at minimal operational levels.

Conner accepted Dulany's request and appointed Captain French Forrest as *Cumberland*'s new commanding officer. Forrest received little time to familiarize himself with his new ship, as the squadron needed water, but Conner was reluctant to pull ships off the blockade to retrieve water from Pensacola. *Cumberland*, *Potomac*, and the newly arrived, state-of-the art steam sloop USS *Princeton*, detached from the squadron and sailed to the mouth of the Antigua River near Vera Cruz. Small boats from each ship rowed up the river to collect water with Captain Edson's Marines standing watch on nearby hills.

A few of the Marines came running back from the hills yelling that several hundred Mexican soldiers had spotted them and were in pursuit. All Marines and sailors on shore piled into the expedition's boats and rowed for open water. *Cumberland*'s cutter was the first to escape to safety. Some thought *Cumberland*'s company escaped just a bit too fast and questioned its bravery. In his memoir *Recollections of a Naval Officer*, William Howard Parker, at the time

John A. Winslow, shown here as a captain, transferred to Cumberland *as a lieutenant about halfway through the war and was commended for his leadership during a raid on Tabasco. Raphael Semmes never mentioned in his various memoirs that he had served with the future skipper of USS* Kearsarge. *(Naval Historical Center photo)*

a midshipman assigned to *Potomac*, noted that several sailors from the other boats sarcastically commented, "Well, I will tell you what, *Cumberland*'s cutter is a fast

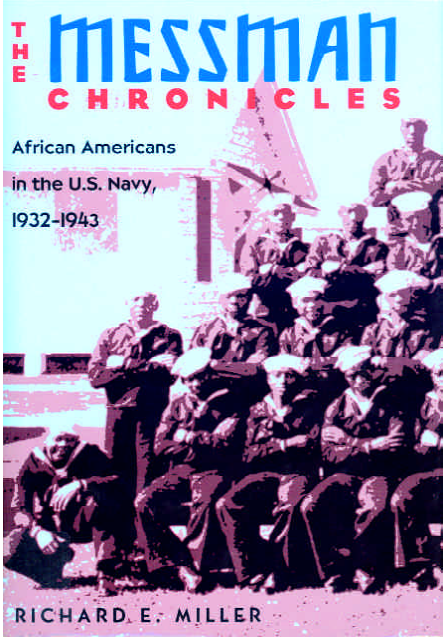
Cumberland ***continued on page 13***

Cumberland*'s company spent much of its time staring at the fortress city of Vera Cruz while orchestrating the operations of the Gulf Squadron. The squadron took advantage of the large coral reefs and small islands off the coast of the Mexican port to shield itself from frequent gale force winds. The city eventually was taken after the squadron assisted an army led by General Winfield Scott that landed south of the city. (1846 map from Library of Congress)*

Book Reviews

The Messman Chronicles: African-Americans in the U.S. Navy, 1932-43

by Richard E. Miller
Reviewed by Ira R. Hanna



In 1932, after more than a decade in which it prohibited the enlistment of African-Americans, the U.S. Navy changed its policy. It began to enlist blacks again, but only as messmen, no matter what their intelligence or education. As a result, these new enlistees became bitter and resentful about the way the Navy and the nation's leaders were treating them. Even so, the messmen served diligently, fought valiantly when needed, and many died in defense of their country.

Richard E. Miller, the author of *The Messman Chronicles*, believes that they were heroes who were given little recognition and even less respect. The purpose of his book, he said, was "to elevate them to the status they deserved but were denied." Through numerous personal interviews, he told their stories with details that expressed their emotions as well as the facts as they perceived them.

Richard E. Miller. *The Messman Chronicles: African-Americans in the U.S. Navy, 1932-1943*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2003. 390 pages. ISBN 1-55750-539-X. $32.95.

Many of the stories in this book have a direct connection to Hampton Roads. In 1933, the first training area for messmen, known as Unit K, was established in the western portion of the Norfolk Naval Base, not far from what is now Gate 2. By 1939, the mess attendant school had been relocated to larger facilities in the eastern portion of the base called Unit B. That year, for the first time in the 20th century, a number of African-Americans in the Navy exceeded that of Filipinos 2,384 to 2,216.

Blacks knew Norfolk as a vulgar epithet used by the interviewees frequently because that was the way they felt they were treated by the community. Although it could not be verified by Navy reports or newspaper accounts, an amusing story was told by messman Hadwick Thompson. Late one night, he boarded a streetcar to return to the base. When the motorman told him to sit in the "colored section," even though there was no one else on the car, Thompson threw the motorman off his car and drove it himself to the base, avoided the police who were waiting for him at the gate, and got back to his ship without being caught.

To stories like these, Miller added his own interpretations. This made the book problematic as it was almost written as a personal statement rather than a historical publication. Certainly, Miller exerted every effort to record the facts as the black messmen saw them, but he admitted that sometimes they embellished the truth and that he was unable to substantiate some stories. He included them anyway because of the emotional impact that those events had on them for the rest of their lives. Miller also stated that he "speculates on the motivations of contemporary activists, naval officers, and political officials who used the messmen as pawns." This caused his conclusions to be suspect and sometimes unsubstantiated by his references.

There were several glaring typographical errors in this book as well as repetitious quotes, which indicated a need for more editorial oversight. The bibliography showed that the author's research was centered on personal interviews and left out some sources that could have provided additional perspectives and authenticity to his interpretations. Among those works was C. Vann Woodward's *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, which is a seminal work by the most respected authority.

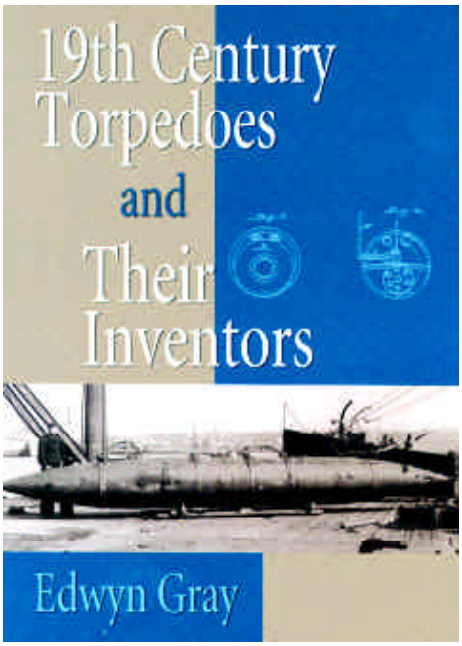
Miller also missed an opportunity to compare the plight of Filipino messmen with that of African-Americans. As late as the 1950s, Filipinos still were permitted only to enlist as stewards. Blacks gained the right to enlist in ratings other than messmen fully ten years before the Filipinos.

It is regrettable that the chronology of this book could not have extended to other important events concerning African-American enlisted men during World War II. An extension to 1944 would have reached the explosion and so-called "mutiny" at the Port Chicago naval magazine in California where 250 black sailors were killed. The investigation of this event exonerated those who refused to load ammunition and safety procedures were improved. Thus, they saved the lives of untold thousands of sailors of all races during some of the fiercest battles of the war.

This book included extensive endnotes. If one chose not to read them, many important details would be missed. It is not a novel, but it certainly makes the reader feel the emotion of the events. *The Messman Chronicles* provides a glimpse into the lives of African-Americans during a very difficult time for all Americans. It is well worth reading, not just to understand what the messmen endured, but also to appreciate their fortitude and perseverance toward their goal of equal opportunity in the U.S. Navy and the respect they deserved.

Nineteenth Century Torpedoes and Their Inventors

by Edwyn Gray
Reviewed by Howard Sandfer



This book is delightful from at least two points of view. One perspective is that Edwyn Gray is obviously a man who found an enjoyable and profitable occupation, writing about subjects that fascinate him. A second angle is that he is fascinated with the 19th Century, understandable because it was possibly the time period with the greatest collection of individual eccentrics, innovators, and inventors. The Industrial Revolution was in full swing, rules and procedures for development were in flux, science and technology were developing and imaginations could be freely exercised. Advances were made in many fields. Toward the latter part of the century, inventors were fascinated by electricity and rocketry.

Edwyn Gray. *Nineteenth Century Torpedoes and Their Inventors*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2004. 248 pages. 1-59114-341-1. $32.95.

Gray previously wrote the history of the Whitehead torpedo, the weapon that provided the submarine with its primary weapon. Apparently he had a great deal of research left over which did not fit into the Whitehead story, and the result was this book. In it we meet a collection of characters that can only be true; fictional treatment would be dismissed out of hand. Present, and filing copious patents, were such luminaries as Robert Fulton, John Erickson, R. J. Gatling, and Hiram Berdan. They were joined by lesser known lights and intellects, but with the same imaginations and desires.

It is of note that this is the time of Jules Verne. His books and stories inspired millions, and the reality of the 19th century was that there was a desire to see the invention of the imaginative fictional creations of Verne and like authors. Some of these creations had to wait for technology to improve, but the inspiration was there.

Torpedoes exerted huge magnetism for inventors. Robert Fulton wanted to merge the torpedo with the submarine as far back as 1801. Fixed mines were used in the American Civil War, as were spar torpedoes delivered by small boats manned by adventurous sailors. Investigators continued to move toward a self-propelled torpedo, with some detours along the way. These detours provide some of the most interesting reading of the book.

The inventors realized that problems facing them in creating torpedoes were enormous. The problems included getting the torpedo to a target, steering, depth keeping, launching, and an effective explosive charge. The variety of solutions was as ingenious as the difficulties facing the weapon. Mechanisms to get the torpedo to a target included fixed spars, separate pivoting warheads, towed bombs, rocket propulsion, and various types of engine. Engines used a variety of propulsion fuels, including clockwork mechanisms, and heated compressed air.

Engines generated a number of configurations for varied numbers of propellers and the arrangements of them. The torpedo had to be steered to the target, and the solutions for this problem ranged from the sublime to the imaginative to the ridiculous. Some of the solutions were well ahead of their time. Guidance schemes included inertia (launching and hoping), steering by means of ropes, wire guiding, and gyro stabilization. Depth control was necessary to put the explosive below the waterline where it would do the most damage. Depth keeping solutions included ballast tanks and floats.

Launching devices incorporated davits to lower the torpedo to the water, tubes, and guns that fired above and below the waterline of the launching platform. One of the most complicated involved a spar device with many arms and levers. Various types of guns were proposed to send the torpedo as a projectile to a point near the target before it entered the water. This idea foreshadowed the modern Anti-Submarine Rocket torpedo (ASROC).

Experiments in explosives proceeded to give the torpedo a lethal punch while keeping weight within reason. Explosive charges were formulated and calibrated. Electrical current, percussion, and contact fuses were used to set off the explosives, usually near the target. An appendix gives a listing of the known British and U.S. patents issued for torpedo development during the 19th century.

Gray completed his work by detailing the combat results of the various weapons in wars that are now almost forgotten such as the Chili-Peru War (1879-82), the Russo-Turkish War (1877-78), the Sino-Japanese War (1894-95). All saw some form of torpedo warfare, and are examined in depth.

The attempts to create a workable torpedo generated a number of ideas. Some were useful, some fanciful, some had to wait for developing technology. This book lovingly recounts the experiments, patents, trials and results, and is a fascinating read. An expert wrote this book, perhaps *the* expert in torpedo development. He obviously enjoyed his work and his vicarious association with some of the most original and inventive characters in the developing technological age.

What to Do With David Conner

David Conner, commodore of the Gulf Squadron in the Mexican War, is not one of the better known American Navy figures of the 19th century. His career was one of quiet competency. He was a combat veteran from the War of 1812, which left him with permanent facial neuralgia. He rose to a senior bureaucratic position within the Department. However, it would seem he has been short changed.

Jack Bauer, author of two histories on the Mexican War, including the only history that focuses exclusively on the Navy, described Conner as a thoughtful, prudent, and judgmental officer who was one of the best seamen, dressers, and dancers in the Navy. Though Bauer goes on to say that Conner, "lacked the capacity for making

The Museum Sage

quick decisions, and this unfortunately strengthened his natural over cautiousness."

This is one of the most ugly phrases in military history writings: over cautiousness. No one has ever liked a flag officer that likes to take his time. We want bold decisive action out of our military leaders, "loser" would be a kinder description for a flag officer than "timid."

This concept was not lost upon many of the junior officers of the Gulf Squadron who had no doubt heard many great personal tales of naval battle from their fathers or friends of their fathers. Raphael Semmes spoke for this group when he noted in his memoir of the Mexican War that "the war became more endurable" when the sailors went on small expeditions to raid Mexican towns. However, Semmes also commented, "We still pined for something to do, that [Conner] should give us more *éclat* [i.e. fame] and better satisfy our countrymen at home. It became a common saying with us, that the navy stood in need of a big 'butcher's bill.'"

Even the kind hearted, warm spirited Rev. Fitch Taylor wanted to see some action. "So obviously did it appear to others that Commodore Conner's naval reputation, as well as the reputation of the Navy itself, required some action of the fleet. Those high expectations of a people, who had always contemplated the service with fondness and liberality, while it *should and would* maintain the glory, which it had so honorably and so gallantly in other days achieved," he commented.

In other words, War of 1812 or Napoleonic-like naval battles were desired. Never mind that these junior officers would have borne no political responsibility for a defeat.

Conner's problem was a classic naval problem faced by commanders before and after the Mexican War. It is a dilemma of being in command of a powerful naval force with clear naval superiority, but with no practical way to assist your nation in bringing the war to a successful and decisive conclusion.

Complicating matters, Naval resources are far more difficult to replace than Army resources and there is evidence that this was in the back of Conner's mind at all times. It is one thing to train a battalion of men in basic tactics, drill, and weaponry. Its quite another, to build a ship and train its 400-man crew how to operate said ship. As a result, Naval commanders have a natural tendency to be timid.

There was one option that could have shot Conner's prestige straight to the Moon. Guarding the ocean side of the City of Vera Cruz was the large castle named Castle of San Juan de Ulloa. It was well known for being among the more formidable fortresses in the Western Hemisphere. Conner wrote Secretary of the Navy George Bancroft that he needed several ships-of-the-lines to take the fortress. The United Ships had the ships, but not the personnel.

There is evidence that Conner wanted a victory just as badly as everyone else. When *Cumberland* ran aground during the first attack on the Alvarado River, Conner was advised to back up the ship immediately and abandon the attack. Rather stubbornly, he refused to listen and attempted to force his way through and almost sank the ship.

Conner resorted to the only strategy left open to him: blockade the Mexican coast with far fewer ships than needed as best he could and attempt to seize ports through landings. This strategy took time and patience, something that neither junior officers nor historians have been willing to grant the commodore.

When Mathew Perry officially relieved Conner as commodore of the squadron, many actually felt badly for their commander-in-chief as the siege of Vera Cruz was going well and Conner's planning had much to do with the success. Unfortunately, he headed home before the city surrendered to General Scott. Scott has received the bulk of the credit for the city's capture while Conner has been largely ignored.

Bauer does give Conner credit for one accomplishment. The operations by the Gulf Squadron is estimated to have denied Mexico $500,000 in import tariffs, money that Mexico desperately needed to continue fighting the war against the "Yanqui" invaders.

"We still pined for something to do, that [Conner] should give us more éclat*, and better satisfy our countrymen at home. It became a common saying with us, that the navy stood in need of a big 'butcher's bill.'"*

-Raphael Semmes, Conner's flag-lieutenant and future skipper of CSS Alabama*, on what he thought his commodore's problem was in the Mexican War*

***Cumberland* continued from page 9**

boat." *Princeton* came to the expedition's rescue by coming closer to shore and firing her shell guns at the Mexican force. The volley failed to hit anyone, but caused the Mexicans to call off their attack. Rev. Taylor called the encounter the "Battle of the Squibs" as he believed both sides seemed unprepared for the serious business of war. Conner decided never again to risk a watering expedition on Mexican soil. The expedition was not a total loss. Shortly after the "Squibs" expedition returned, Passed Midshipman Robert Calhoun arrived with *Cumberland*'s first prize of war. He and a few sailors had captured a small coastal schooner carrying 106 pounds of corn and beans.

Lacking the firepower to take Vera Cruz, with naval superiority easily achieved, Conner organized the first of many armed expeditions against Mexican towns. He selected Alvarado as his first target and he hoped to capture a squadron of Mexican ships. The town was located at the mouth of the river of the same name, just north of Vera Cruz. *Cumberland* took the lead on July 28, followed by *Potomac*, *Raritan*, and the schooners *Reefer* and *Petrel*.

As the squadron approached the entrance to the town, the pilot on board *Cumberland* warned Conner that the ship was heading towards a coral reef. Conner ignored the warning. Captain Alick, *Potomac*'s commanding officer, however, did notice that the squadron was heading into danger and had his ship come from astern of *Cumberland* to her port. The pilot was correct. *Cumberland* struck the reef with a tremendous amount of force. As the frigate came to a crashing halt, everyone on the ship went "flat aback" according to one entry in the logbook. Observing from *Potomac*, Parker thought *Cumberland* hit the reef so hard that he thought the ship's masts were going to break off.

Damage to the ship was extensive, but not severe. The false keel did its job and took the blunt of the blow, saving the main keel from any damage. A few of the copper plates on the hull of the ship were destroyed, but no major breach occurred. With the damage assessed, Conner and Forrest went about trying to figure out how to get the ship off the reef.

Over the next two days, sailors unloaded guns, ammo, water, and stores to lighten the ship. Conner then summoned both a steam tug and Perry's steam frigate *Mississippi* to pull *Cumberland* off. After several hours of pulling, however, *Cumberland* was still stuck. Very depressed, Conner is said to have looked at Forrest and said, "Come Forrest, it is in vain, let us take it quietly and now get a cup of tea." Conner was ready to take the blame for what might have been a career-ending incident, but fate was with the commodore. As he began to retire to his cabin, the winds picked up and with *Mississippi*'s continued help, the ship freed itself.

Though they had mostly had transferred over to Cumberland'*s sister ship,* Raritan*, many officers continued to identify themselves with* Cumberland*. Even after their ship was taken back to Norfolk for repairs by a caretaker crew,* Cumberland*'s orginal company saw significant action during the rest of the war. The men participated in the landing and seige of Vera Cruz, where one detachment manned the gun on the far right of the picture shown above, and in several littoral actions including the assault up the Tabasco River. (University of Texas-Arlington photo of an 1851 painting by Carl Nebel)*

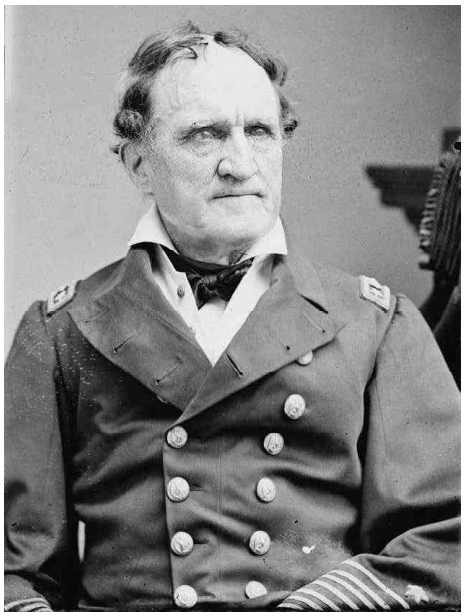
Forrest read and recorded an official letter of commendation in honor of the crew's behavior and performance during the situation. He was pleased to see that everyone finally worked hard with no signs of laziness or disobedience. Forrest wrote, "Your faithful and unremitted exertions not only contributed to saving the ship from her perilous situation, but afforded sufficient evidence that in an emergency you would not be found wanting."

Not discouraged by the failure, Conner organized a second attack a month later. *Cumberland*, once again in the lead with seven other ships, opened up a bombardment of Alvarado. The bombardment had little effect as many of the shells landed short of their targets. One Mexican officer taunted the squadron by riding up and down the beach on a black horse waving a red flag, demanding the Americans land their Marines. Conner declined the offer and called off the attack for a second time. The squadron returned to its anchorage off Vera Cruz.

While at anchor during August, the sloop-of-war *St. Mary's* sent a series of perplexing signal flags to *Cumberland*. The first flags spelled the letters "T-R-U," which Forrest happily interpreted as "truce," meaning that the war was over. His happiness turned to confusion when the next set of signal flags spelled out "Truxtun annihilated, request steamer." It was assumed that *St. Mary's* signal officer had made a mistake and meant to say "ashore," which turned out to be a correct assumption. The brig had run aground while on blockade duty and some of her crew had been captured. Rev. Taylor, always ready with a cynical observation, noted in his diary, "Another of our fleet is making experiments on the coral reef, as if *Cumberland* had not given a sufficient demonstration."

Cumberland captured its second prize on the same day. On August 19, a small Mexican lugger (a coastal fishing vessel) was brought to and interrogated. Forrest decided not to seize the ship and gave the Mexican captain a stern warning that he was not to conduct any kind of trade. While he let the Mexican go free, Forrest noticed that

Cumberland *continued on page 14*



Francis Gregory served as Cumberland*'s fourth commanding officer. After being away from home for over three years, Gregory and his 400-man company from the frigate* Raritan *swapped with* Cumberland's officers and sailors *and served as* Cumberland*'s caretaker while the ship headed to Norfolk for repairs. (Naval Historical Center photo)*

Cumberland *continued from page 13*

the vessel was carrying bags of fruit and corn. Desperately needing fruit to combat scurvy outbreaks, the bags were seized.

Several weeks into the war, discipline continued to be a problem not only on board *Cumberland*, but also throughout the squadron. Despite weekly floggings, officers and sailors continue to violate basic rules of discipline. In one case, Conner had to dispatch Semmes over to one of the smaller ships to investigate reports of alcohol abuse by the ship's commanding officer who liked to shout vulgar language at passing ships while he was drunk.

Tired of the chaos, Conner decided to make an example of one sailor. The unlucky fellow was Seaman Samuel Jackson of *St. Mary's*. Jackson had assaulted his division officer. Though everyone in the squadron, including the lieutenant who was attacked, thought it to be excessive, an execution went forward. Rev. Taylor made many trips over to *St. Mary's* to see the condemned man and to convert him to Christianity before his death. After *Cumberland* raised a yellow flag on the morning of September 21, Jackson was hung from the yardarm in front of the entire squadron. While many disagreed with Conner's decision, there were far fewer discipline problems for the rest of the war.

The next day, *Truxtun*'s surviving officers and sailors were freed and arrived on board *Cumberland* for much needed medical attention. Rev. Taylor conducted a funeral for one sailor who had died from alcohol poisoning while in captivity. The funeral prompted Taylor to renew the call for a complete ban on the grog ration. He also cynically commented that many officers came to *Cumberland* allegedly to discuss official business with the commodore, but in reality came to take advantage of *Cumberland*'s brandy supply.

Despite Taylor's cynicism, Conner and his officers were busy with official business, specifically the next assault. They had yet to accomplish a major victory in the war. They selected Alvarado again and a third assault was organized. For two weeks, Marines and sailors landed on small islands and conducted small arms tactics in preparation for an assault using small boats.

The third attempt to take the port city commenced with the small boats from all ships rallying around *Cumberland* and then hitched towing lines to the small steamers *Vixen* and *McLane*. *Mississippi* joined the group to provide fire support. As the vessels approached the river, complications immediately arose. First, the Mexicans had become more alert to another attack and built a new fort complicating the original plan. Secondly while *Mississippi* attempted to provide gun support, *McLane* ran aground, throwing the entire assault into chaos. Junior officers wanted to keep moving, but Conner, seeing the attack lose direction, called it off.

The same junior officers continued to privately complain that Conner was being too timid. Unbeknownst to them, Conner and Perry were already planning yet another attack and convened a council-of-war in Conner's cabin. They decided to change targets and selected Tabasco, another small coastal town near Vera Cruz.

Forrest took charge of a 253-man company of Marines and sailors that left the very night of the planning meeting. Assisting Forrest were 78 of *Cumberland*'s sailors and Marines, Captain Edson, Lieutenant Morris, and two replacement officers, lieutenants James L. Parker and John A. Winslow. Parker and Morris waited off shore ready to take the town by sea, while Winslow and Edson led a ground force. The future captain of USS *Kearsarge* wanted to storm the town once the ground force had taken up positions, but Edson restrained his fellow officer and reminded him that Perry wanted them to wait.

Mississippi's shell guns opened a small bombardment of the town causing the local government to quickly raise the white flag. As the Americans approached the town from land and sea to accept the surrender, Mexican militiamen opened fire on one of the boats. Morris himself was struck by a musket ball in the throat when he ordered his boat into action. Infuriated by the treachery, Edson and Winslow's company stormed the town and routed the militiamen. Equally angry, Perry decided not to spare the town and ordered Edson and Winslow to put Tabasco to the torch. The expedition returned with several small Mexican ships as prizes.

Morris was brought to Conner's cabin on *Cumberland* where the fleet surgeon worked through the night trying to save his life. As a Navy chaplain, Rev. Taylor had several roles. Along with providing spiritual guidance to Navy personnel, chaplains severed as schoolmasters and taught younger officers non-maritime subjects. Taylor also served as the squadron's casualty assistance officer. Before risky expeditions such as the one on Tabasco, officers and sailors alike handed over wills and last testaments to Taylor in case the worst should happen. Morris was particularly nervous about these expeditions. He reported that the lieutenant walked passed his cabin several times one day before finally coming in and expressing his last wishes. Morris' greatest wish was that the U.S. Government grant his son an appointment to West Point should he die.

Unfortunately, the surgeon failed to save the lieutenant. Morris said a final few words to his commodore and then died. The funeral the next morning was particularly emotional as Morris was a well-liked officer. Edson's Marines formed an honor guard and Taylor gave final rites. They buried the lieutenant on a small island off the coast of Vera Cruz.

As soon as the funeral was over, Conner gave the squadron little time to mourn any further. He and Perry planned a new expedition against the town of Tampico. Taylor was furious. He was not angry that the sailors and Marines had just

Cumberland *continued on page 15*

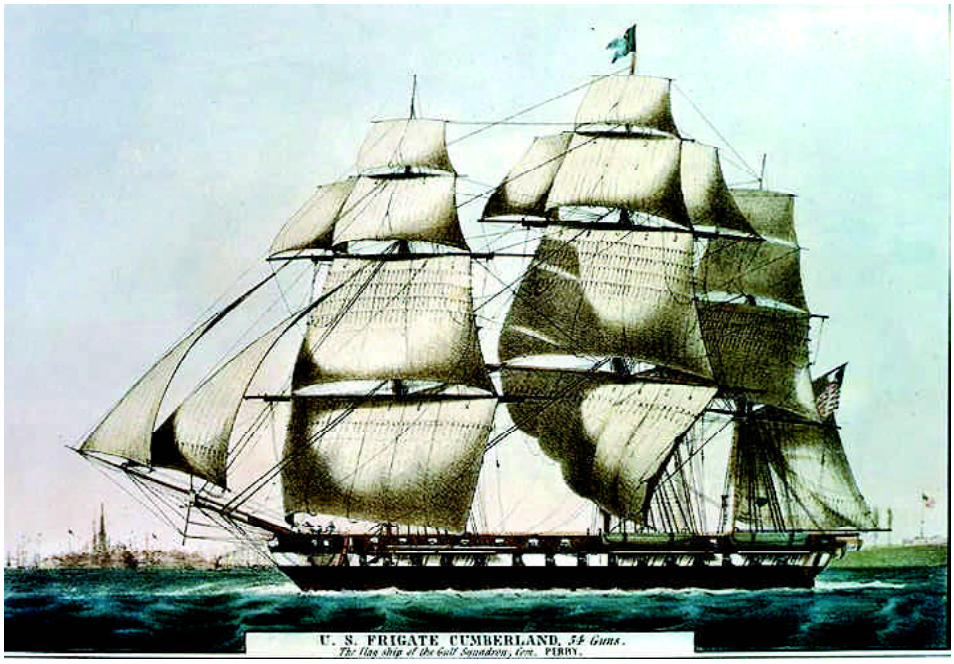
Cumberland ***continued from page 14***

lost a beloved officer and needed more time to mourn. He was angry because it was Sunday and no one, including sailors in the U.S. Navy in the middle of a war, should have to work on the Sabbath. "Was this right, on board of a Man-of-war of a Christian nation, whose *laws direct* that the Sabbath day shall be hallowed by religious worship?" the chaplain commented.

He wisely kept his views to himself. Conner had received word that Tampico was ready to surrender and he would have probably ignored Taylor's Biblical views and Federal law, if approached. The whole squadron was preparing to move to seize the town in a joint expedition with the Army. *Cumberland* did not join the expedition. The ship's carpenter reported to Forrest that the damage done to the ship by the coral reef had gotten worse. Teredo worms, small sea-born worms that like to feed on the hulls of wooden ships, had gotten into the ship's hull where the copper plating had been destroyed and were fouling the stern. Conner immediately ordered the frigate to make sail for Hampton Roads for repairs.

Here the story of *Cumberland*'s history in the Mexican War splits in two. *Cumberland* would be going home, but *Cumberland*'s company would not. Conner informed the frigate's ship company that Captain Gregory and his men aboard *Raritan* had been at sea for three years. Conner came up with an interesting solution: *Cumberland* and *Raritan* would swap crews. Forrest's company would take over *Raritan* and stay on station in the Gulf. Gregory's company would take *Cumberland* home to Norfolk, affectionately labeled, "that olden city of naval association," where the frigate would be repaired and the crew paid off.

The swap took place on December 1. Both ships' bands played several rounds of "Home Sweet Home" while a large send-off party took place on board *Cumberland*. Taylor had the option of going home on *Cumberland* and decided that one year at sea was enough. A widower, Taylor had one son at home in Massachusetts that he dearly missed. Even though the companies had swapped ships, both continued to associate themselves with their original frigate and considered the other one just to be a caretaker crew. In his memoirs of his time in Mexico, for example, Taylor continued to follow the events of the



With a new crew, a new false keel, and a repaired hull, Cumberland *left Hampton Roads and returned to the Mexican coastline in late 1847. While peace was being negotiated and a cease fire was in effect, the frigate found major turmoil within Mexico. (Naval Historical Center photo of an 1847 Currier & Ives lithograph)*

Mexican War as it pertained to *Cumberland*'s original crew.

Cumberland left the theatre of war on December 7 and sailed northeast for Hampton Roads, first to Havana and then east to the Florida Keys. Taylor got to know *Raritan*'s surgeons, Dr. Jonathan Messersmith Foltz and Dr. Hazard Arnold Potter, both of whom would go on to fame within the medical field. Foltz later became personal physician to President James Buchanan and served as fleet surgeon in Admiral Farragut's squadron. Potter at 36-years old, later became nationally known for his pioneering work in high risk surgeries such as tumor removals from ovaries**,** gastronomies, and jaw removals.

The only newsworthy event was the fishing. While fishing in the Windward Passage, one officer caught a large horse mackerel, which he shared with the wardroom for lunch. After passing through yet another Cape Hatteras storm, the frigate arrived off of Cape Henry on December 29.

Once the ship arrived at Gosport, Taylor and the officers headed to Trinity Episcopal Church in Portsmouth the next day for divine services and were joined by officers, David Farragut among them, from the sloop *Saratoga*. Taylor was ordained into the ministry at Trinity so the church held special meaning for him. The pastor publicly recognized the service of both ships from the pulpit and even asked Taylor to give an impromptu sermon.

While Taylor made preparations for the trip home to New England, and Gregory and *Raritan*'s company decompressed from three years of sea duty, *Cumberland*'s original company was busy with the war. Raphel Semmes returned as Conner's flag aide as *Sommers* was hit by a sudden squall and sunk, taking 36 sailors down with her. As an aside, Semmes never mentions in any of his future books that he served with John Winslow, the man who later sank CSS *Alabama* in 1864.

After a lull for several weeks, U.S. forces prepared for their second big movement of the war in March 1847. Conner and General Winfield Scott planned and launched a major amphibious landing south of Vera Cruz. With the assistance of small boats from Conner's squadron, over 12,000 soldiers landed and began to invest the fortress city. As Scott's army surrounded the city, Conner landed six heavy guns from the squadron including a 32-pounder long gun from *Raritan* under the command of Lieutenant Ingersoll, to augment the army's siege guns. Edson's Marines formed a picket line in front of the two batteries, keeping an eye out for any Mexican sortie from the city. Along with an attack by the squadron's smaller ships, the two batteries bombarded the city for 15 days. The city surrendered on March 26.

Cumberland **continued on page 16**

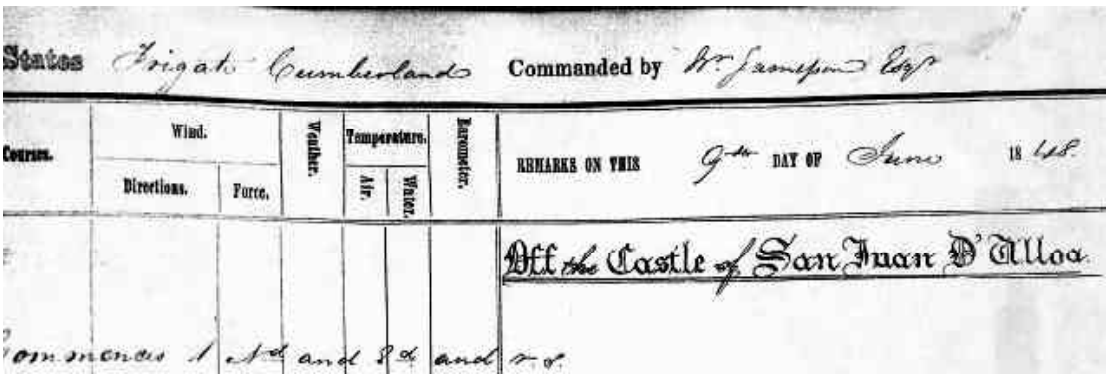
***Cumberland* continued from page 15**

While Scott's army made plans for its advance on Mexico City, Perry planned a series of raids on Mexican ports. Conner's time as commodore came to an end and he handed control of the squadron to Perry, shortly before Vera Cruz's surrender.

Perry's strategy called for the squadron's small ships to travel up Mexican rivers and carry a 200-man company of Marines and sailors under the control of Forrest, Edson, and *Cumberland*'s former commanding officer Samuel Breese who was serving as commanding officer of the sloop *Albany*. Over the next eight weeks, the squadron and its landing company did battle with Mexican soldiers and captured the ports of Tabasco (again) and Tuxpan. Lieutenant Parker, who was nearly shot during the first Tabasco raid, was mortally wounded during the Tuxpan raid.

Shortly after the second raid and second evacuation on Tabasco ended in mid-July, *Cumberland*'s original company received word that it was going home. Yellow fever continued to ravage the fleet. On any given day, 80 sailors were on the sick list trying to recover. Captain Edson was among the ill. Shortly before the frigate left the region, the Marine officer and veteran of several battles died on July 15, 1847. *Raritan* headed home with three captured guns from a Tabasco fort on July 17, and arrived in Norfolk a few weeks later.

With all of the frigates heading home and major combat operations winding down, Perry was suddenly in need of a proper flagship. The commodore liked and even advocated for more ships like his current flagship, the steam frigate *Mississippi.* But he wrote to Secretary John Mason that he had put up with *Mississippi*'s discomforts such as cramped spaces long enough and wanted a warship like *Cumberland*. Mason obliged the commodore and ordered *Cumberland* to prepare for her second deployment to Mexico. While Mason ordered the frigate to deploy in late July, she was not ready to leave Hampton Roads until early December.


States Frigate Cumberland Commanded by W. Jameson Capt

Courses.	Wind. Directions.	Wind. Force.	Weather.	Temperature. Air.	Temperature. Water.	Barometer.	REMARKS ON THIS 9th DAY OF June 1848.
							Off the Castle of San Juan D'Ulloa
Commenced 1st and 8th and ended							

As *Cumberland* sailed for Mexico, Mexican and American negotiators began to discuss a peace treaty. Perry officially transferred his flag to the frigate on December 20. The commodore tried at first to be a kind commodore. Since hostilities had ended, he allowed *Cumberland*'s sailors liberty in American-occupied Vera Cruz so long as they dressed in their formal uniforms and had liberty passes. Six weeks later, Perry cancelled liberty and locked the ship down permanently. "The conduct of many of the men who have been permitted to visit Vera Cruz, liberty has been so improper that I am [obligated] to issue this order, that no Seaman or Marine will hereafter be allowed to visit Vera Cruz," he ordered.

The frigate arrived in Mexico to help Perry straighten out a major political mess. Various political factions on the Yucatán Peninsula were fighting for control of the province. Some wanted to remain part of Mexico, while others wanted to declare independence. One faction even offered up the region to the United States. Making the situation worse, Mayan Indians rebelled against anything Mexican.

From *Cumberland*, Perry was not really sure what to do. He tried to shuttle diplomacy between various points in Mexico in order to bring peace but achieved little permanent success. The commodore had also contracted yellow fever, but Mason refused to relieve him of command.

Fortunately, the U.S. Senate saved Perry. He received word in May that the Senate had ratified the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, bringing the Mexican-American War to an end. *Cumberland* sailed for New York on June 15, 1848.

Cumberland provided two years of service in Mexico. Her grounding off Alvarado has become the ship's signature moment in most naval histories. Fortunately for the flagship, Rev. Taylor took his diary and published a book, his second one, about his experiences aboard the frigate. Given the lengthy title, *The Broad Pennant or A Cruise in the United States Flag Ship of the Gulf Squadron During The Mexican Difficulties*, the book highlighted "The Flag Ship" for what it was: a major asset for the Navy.

In The Next Issue...

- *Hidden Assests-A Look at St. Julien's Creek*
- *Book Reviews:* Resurrection: Salvaging the Battle Fleet at Pearl Harbor *and* Inside the Iron Works: How Grumman's Glory Days Faded