



H-Gram 062: "Battles That You've Never Heard Of"

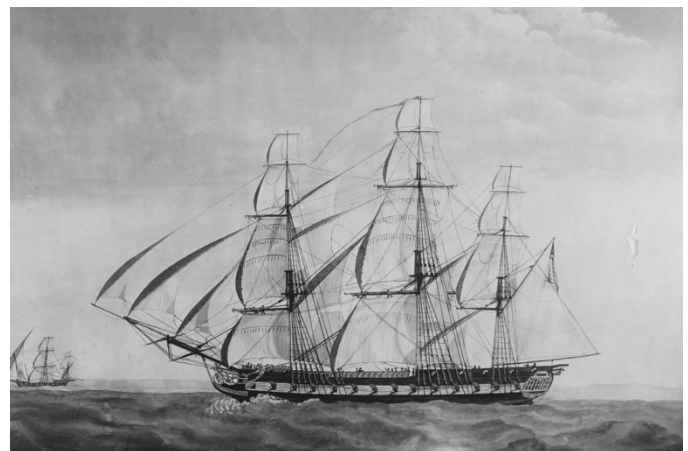
11 June 2021

Overview

This H-gram covers "Battles You've Never Heard Of": Nuku Hiva (1813), Negro Fort (1816), Quallah Battoo (1832), Muckie (1839), Drummond's Island (1841), Ty-ho Bay (1855), and the Water Witch Affair (1855).

The Battle of Nuku Hiva, Marquesas Islands, Polynesia, 1813

In November 1813, in what was probably the largest amphibious assault in the Pacific in the 19th century, Captain David Porter of the frigate USS Essex, hit the beach on Nuku Hiva with 36 Sailors and Marines (and a wheeled cannon), and 200 war canoes with 5,000 Te I'i and Happah tribal warriors. Having quickly grasped the implications of shipboard cannons, the Tai Pi warriors wisely chose not to defend at the beach. However, as Porter and his allied warriors (from the other side of Nuku Hiva) advanced toward a fortification held by 4,000 Tai Pi, ambushes and skirmishes increased, and Porter's native allies began to melt away. Porter's Marines used muskets to pick off Tai Pi warriors on the ramparts until they ran low on ammunition, but thick vegetation around the fort made the cannon ineffective. Short on ammunition and left to fend for themselves, Porter's force withdrew back to the beach. Displaying a healthy respect for musket fire, the Tai Pi did not seriously



The frigate USS Essex (1799-1814) (NH 61875).

challenge Porter's retreat to the ship and the Americans got off lightly with only one dead and two seriously wounded.

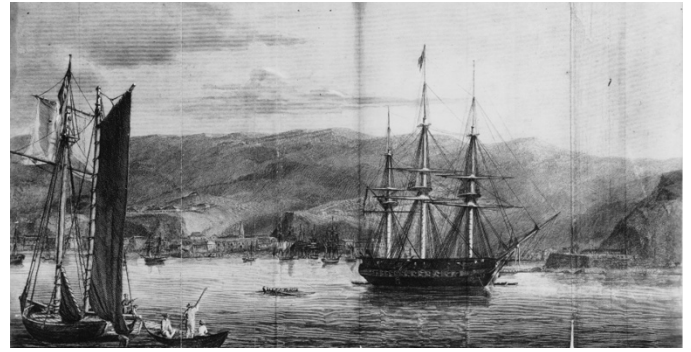
Despite the defeat, Porter would subsequently launch a surprise overland attack and burn the Tai Pi villages (for which the British would accuse him of excessive brutality). After the subsequent departure of Essex and most of the small flotilla of captured British whalers, the Nuku Hiva warriors would join together to drive the first U.S. naval base and colony in the Pacific ("Madisonville") off the island by the end of March 1814.

The Battle of Negro Fort, Spanish Florida, 1816

On the morning of 27 July 1816, U.S. Navy Gunboat No. 154 fired the deadliest cannonball in U.S. history. After several ranging shots, No. 154 fired her first "hot shot" up over the bluff and the rampart; the heated ball rolled right into the powder magazine. The resulting massive blast could be heard in Pensacola, over 100 miles away. Over 270 Blacks and Native Americans in the fort were killed instantly and another 60 were wounded, many grievously; only three survived unharmed (two of whom were subsequently executed). The fort was manned by about 200 armed fugitive Black slaves and 30 Native Americans, and the rest were women and children—families of the escaped slaves. Many of the fugitive slaves had been recruited, armed, and trained by the British during the War of 1812 for a force known as the Colonial Marines.

The combined Army and Navy assault on the fort had been ordered by General Andrew Jackson at the behest of Southern slave-holding plantation owners, who could not abide that the fort was a magnet for escaped slaves and wanted this symbol of Black freedom crushed. That the fort was in Spanish territory and the occupants flew the Union Jack (considering themselves British subjects) troubled Jackson not at all, although the U.S. government retroactively approved his action on grounds of "national defense." The destruction of the fort put an end to the largest concentration of armed free Blacks in North America and the subsequent flight of Black farmers from the surrounding area ended the largest community of free Blacks in North America (and Jackson would later destroy their subsequent refuge).

The Battle of Quallah Battoo, Sumatra, 1832



USS Potomac anchored in Valparaiso Harbor, Chile, circa 1834 (NH 42651).

On 5 February 1832, the most powerful and technologically advanced frigate in the U.S. Navy, USS Potomac, arrived off the Malay settlement of Qualla Battoo on Sumatra disguised as a merchant ship flying the flag of Denmark. Under cover of darkness, a landing party of 282 Marines and armed Sailors attacked and captured four of five palace forts defending Qualla Battoo. Taken by surprise, the Malay warriors nevertheless fought fiercely, including suicide charges, and none surrendered, preferring to fight to the death (wives would take up their fallen husbands' arms and were also killed). The Malays' arms were no match for those of the landing force, and an estimated 150 Malays were killed in the forts. U.S. casualties were three dead and about 10 wounded. After withdrawing the landing force the next day, Potomoc pulled in close to the shore and fired several devastating broadsides into the fifth fort and town, by some accounts killing 300 more Malays.

Under the command of Commodore John Downes, the mission of Potomac was President Andrew Jackson's answer to the plunder and murder of several crewman of the American-flag merchant ship Friendship off Quallah Ballou a year earlier. Downes was authorized to negotiate with a government, if he could find one, for restitution and punishment of guilty individuals. Failing that (he made at best a cursory attempt), his orders were to inflict such "chastisement" so as to ensure no further attacks would be made on U.S.-flag

ships. It worked for six years, and the "First Sumatran Expedition" is one of the first actions by the United States that would come to be known as "gunboat diplomacy."

The Battle of Muckie, Sumatra, 1839



USS Columbia (1836-61). Primitive watercolor, showing the frigate dressed with flags during her cruise around the world, 1838-40 (NH 85087-KN).

The hiatus in Malay piracy of U.S. merchant ships engaged in the pepper trade in Sumatra lasted only six years until the merchant vessel Eclipse was taken and her entire crew massacred in 1838. In 1831, it had taken a year before the first U.S. Navy ship had arrived to exact retribution. This time it only took 20 days from the time Commodore George C. Reade, commander of the East India Squadron, first learned of the massacre and the arrival off Quallah Battoo, Sumatra, by USS Columbia, the newest and most heavily armed frigate in the U.S. Navy, and the smaller battle-veteran frigate John Adams (history lesson: the importance of forward deployment of naval forces).

As a lieutenant, Reade had participated in the defeat of HMS Guerriere by USS Constitution and of HMS Macedonian by USS United States during the War of 1812. As commodore, he wasted no time, and after fair warning blasted the forts of Quallah Battoo. He then sailed his squadron a few

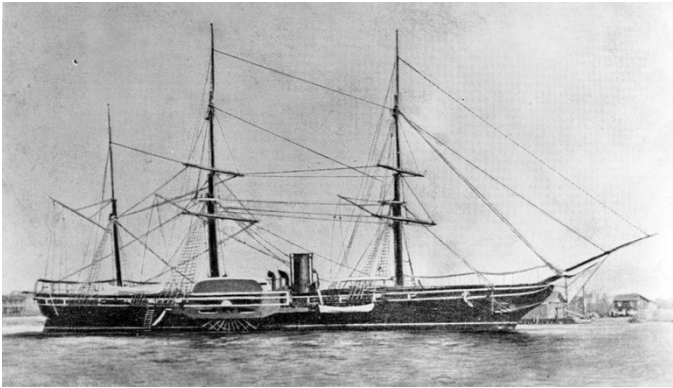
miles down the coast to the settlement of Muckie. Under covering fire from the frigates, a 360-man landing party of Marines and armed Sailors went ashore. Unlike the Malay warriors who had fought to the death against the 1831 expedition, the Malays had fled, and the fort and town were deserted. The landing party proceeded to burn the town and fort, and spike the guns. No remnants of Eclipse were found. Malay casualties at Quallah Battoo and Muckie are unknown, but there were no further attacks on American shipping in the area. No U.S. Marines or sailors died in the operation, although 20 sailors had previously died of dysentery on the voyage to the East Indies.

The Battle of Drummond's Island, Gilbert Islands, 1841

On 9 April 1841, over 100 years before the amphibious assaults on Japanese-held Tarawa and Makin atolls in the Gilbert Islands (now Kiribati), about 80 U.S. Marines and armed Sailors from the sloop-of-war USS Peacock and schooner USS Flying Fish engaged in a battle with almost 700 warriors on Drummond's Island (now Tabiteuea). Precipitated by the disappearance of a U.S. Navy Sailor, the purpose of the landing was to burn down the village of Utiroa in retribution, as ordered by the commanding officer of Peacock, Lieutenant William L. Hudson. The warriors met the seven U.S. boats at the beach and initially drove the boats back before volley fire from the boats repulsed the warriors, spears, stones, and clubs proving no match for modern muskets. Twelve warriors were killed and many were wounded, and the Americans burned the village (home to over 1,000 natives). This was one of several violent confrontations—to include incidents at Fiji and Samoa—between Pacific Islanders and ships of the United States Exploring Expedition (U.S. Ex. Ex.) under the command of Lieutenant Charles Wilkes. The scientific and exploration achievements of U.S. Ex. Ex. were extraordinary, including the discovery of the continent of

Antarctica. The three violent encounters were somewhat less than glorious.

The Battle of Ty-ho Bay, China, 1855



USS Powhatan (1848-87) (NH 63305).

There was little love lost between the U.S. Navy and the British Royal Navy in the aftermath of the War of 1812. However, on occasion, the two navies found cause to cooperate, and suppressing piracy was something on which everyone could agree. On 4 August 1855, the steam vessel HMS *Eaglet* towed six boats with about 100 U.S. Marines and armed Sailors, and a roughly equal number of British Marines and Sailors, into the shallow water of Ty-ho Bay (on Lantau Island in present-day Hong Kong) to attack a Chinese pirate force of 14 cannon-armed large junks and 22 smaller junks with a total of about 1,500 pirates. The Sailors were from the paddle-wheel steam frigate USS *Powhatan* and screw steam sloop HMS *Rattler*, neither of which could enter the bay due to its shallow waters. Cannon fire from the pirate ships was heavy, but wildly inaccurate. Cannon and howitzer fire from the British and U.S. small boats was not (the U.S. boats were equipped with the new Dahlgren boat howitzers, considered the best boat guns of the day). Six pirate junks were sunk before the "Allied" boats grappled alongside.

When the Battle of Ty-ho Bay was over, all 14 of the large pirate junks were sunk or burned, along with six smaller pirate junks. About 500 pirates were killed, drowned, or wounded, and 1,000

captured; 16 small pirate junks escaped. The U.S. suffered five dead and six wounded, while the British suffered four dead and several wounded. The Battle of Ty-ho Bay would be the last major pitched battle between Chinese pirates and Western navies, and would be one of the very first "combined" operations by the U.S. and Royal Navies (although it wouldn't be until World War I, with a few individual exceptions, when relations could accurately be characterized as "friendly.")

The Water Witch Affair, Paraguay, 1855

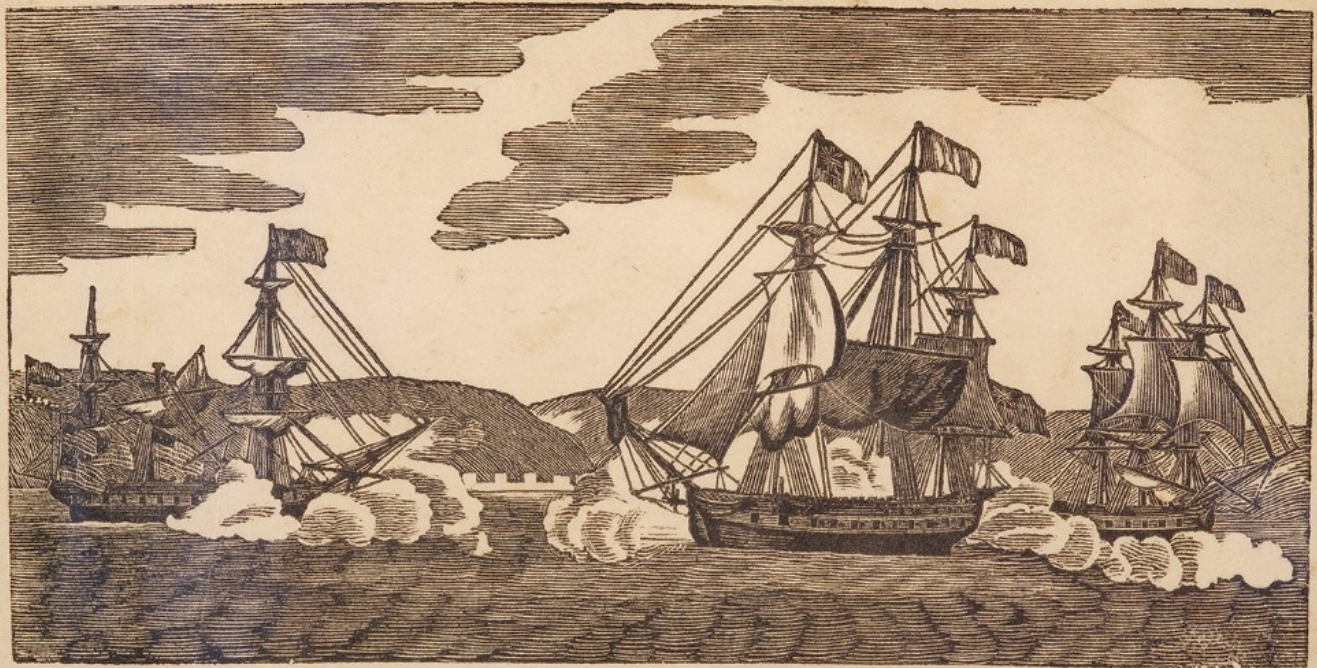
The largest U.S. Navy ship deployment prior to the Civil War was to—you guessed it—Paraguay (no, you didn't!). On 1 February 1855, the U.S. Navy steam paddle-wheel gunboat *Water Witch* entered Paraguayan territorial waters on the Parana River despite a decree from the president of Paraguay forbidding warships of any nation to enter, and despite multiple warnings by small boat, hail, and warning shots from Paraguayan Fort Itapiru. Finally, the fort fired a live round that killed the helmsman of *Water Witch*. *Water Witch* returned fire, but the fort got the best of the engagement, hitting the U.S. vessel multiple times with accurate fire, although *Water Witch* made good her escape.

Over two years later and pretty much out of the blue, President James Buchanan decided that this affront to the U.S. flag required a punitive U.S. naval expedition to compel an apology from Paraguay and financial restitution for other grievances. The expedition, under the command of Commodore William Shubrick, included 12 ships (plus seven more charters), over 200 guns, and 2,500 men, and cost over three million dollars. It didn't reach the Rio de la Plata until almost three years after the *Water Witch* incident. Woefully short on ammunition, coal, and just about everything else, the U.S. force was given completely unrealistic objectives. The deployment revealed just how far the readiness of the U.S. Navy had decreased since the end of the Mexican-American War. Fortunately, the Paraguayans did

not call the Navy's bluff and a face-saving diplomatic agreement was reached. Otherwise, this expedition might well have become one of the biggest fiascos in U.S. naval history.

For more on these battles, please see attachment H-061-1. As always, feel free to spread H-grams around so more people will know the valor of Sailors who did what their country asked, sometimes in a dubious cause, and gave their lives in faraway places in forgotten battles. Back issue H-grams may be found here [<https://www.history.navy.mil/about-us/leadership/director/directors-corner/h-grams.html>].

P.S.: I don't recommend the Secretary of the Navy name a ship after any of these battles.



THE ESSEX AND BRITISH FRIGATES IN THE BAY OF VALPARAISO.

The *Essex* and British Frigates in the Bay of Valparaiso," engraving print by Abel Bowen, circa 1815. The final battle of *Essex* took place on 28 March 1814, after the events of the Nuku Hiva campaign described below (2008-058-0745).

H-Gram 062-1: "Battles You've Never Heard Of"

H-Gram 062, Attachment 1
Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC
June 2021

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

Having missed a rendezvous with USS *Constitution* and USS *Hornet* for coordinated South Atlantic operations against the British in the War of 1812, USS *Essex* became the first U.S. Navy warship to round Cape Horn, proceeding alone into the eastern Pacific in February 1813 (she was also the first Navy ship to cross the Equator). Under the command of Captain David Porter, a veteran of the Quasi-War with France and the First

Barbary War, *Essex* had the distinction of being the first U.S. warship to capture a British warship during the War of 1812, the 18-gun sloop HMS *Alert*, on 13 August 1812. Aboard *Essex* as an 11-year old midshipman was Porter's stepson, David Glasgow "Damn the Torpedoes" Farragut, who would become a hero of the Civil War and the first American naval officer to achieve the rank of full admiral.

Essex was commissioned in 1799, built at a cost of \$139,362 (about half the respective cost of *Constitution* and of her sisters), contributed by the citizens of Salem and Essex Counties, Massachusetts. Although rated as a 32-gun frigate, and originally armed with 18-pounder "long guns," by 1812 *Essex* actually carried 40 32-pounder carronades, six 12-pounder "long guns," and several smaller chase guns. When given command of *Essex* in July 1812, Porter was quick to point out her key weakness. Although the carronades were powerful, they had a relatively

short range, and British frigates with more long guns could maneuver and stand off, bombarding *Essex* from outside of carronade range. Porter's warning was prescient, and, typically, nothing was done about it, probably due to cost. Porter would later blame the third Secretary of the Navy, Paul Hamilton, for *Essex's* armament.

Essex found an unexpectedly warm welcome in Valparaiso after being battered going around Cape Horn. Chile had just declared independence from Spain, at that time an ally of the British. While in Valparaiso, *Essex* masqueraded as the more powerful *Constitution* to confuse British Intelligence agents. Porter's first action was to recapture one of two American whalers taken by the Peruvian 15-gun privateer *Nereyda* (Peru was still a Spanish colony). Then, he captured the privateer, disarmed her, and returned her to Peru as a gesture of good will (and a warning not to interfere with American ships).

Although it took five months of hard sailing around the Galapagos Islands and the west coast of South America, *Essex* decimated the British whaling fleet in the Pacific, capturing 13 vessels, which inflicted serious economic pain back in Britain in lost investments and revenue. Most of the whalers were armed, some fairly heavily for their size, and some would do double duty as privateers if the pickings were right. Porter captured most of the whalers without a fight, by subterfuge. He flew British colors and invited the whalers' masters aboard *Essex*, only hoisting the U.S. colors after they had come aboard.

Eventually, Porter had amassed a small flotilla, with his own American crew of about 250 (and 40 Marines) stretched thin as prize crews on the captured whalers, with about 360 prisoners. He released a couple of the less-valuable whalers to "parole" prisoners to ports. Fortunately, many of the crewmen on the whalers were actually Americans, and most of the rest not inclined to hostile action as long as they got fed, and many

volunteered to serve under U.S. command (the British would later view the cooperative British sailors as "turncoats").

Porter's flotilla included the liberated U.S. whaler *Barclay*, and nine captured British whalers including the 22-gun *Seringapata* (originally built as a warship for Tippu Sultan, ruler of Mysore, India, but taken by the British), *Greenwich* (10 guns), *Montezuma* (18 guns), *Hector* (11 guns), *Charlton* (10 guns), *Sir Andrew Hammond* (14 guns), *Catherine* (8 guns), and *New Zealander* (8 guns). The British whaler *Atlantic* (16 guns) had been renamed *Essex Junior* and served as a tender for *Essex*. Although impressive in number, none of these ships was a match for British frigate *Phoebe* and sloop *Cherub*, which were hunting *Essex* in the eastern Pacific.

By October 1813, *Essex* had been underway for a year and was in need of serious repair, bottom scraping, and was inflicted with a severe rat infestation. Porter knew that if he went into Valparaiso or any other South American port for any length of time, the British would find and trap him. Instead, he chose to go to Nuku Hiva, in the Marquesas Islands, one of the most isolated places on the planet, 4,000 miles west of Valparaiso. Arriving on 25 October 1813 with five of the whalers and finding a good anchorage, deemed "Massachusetts Bay," Porter established a four-gun fort and a small settlement ashore, which he named "Madisonville," after President Madison, claiming the island for the United States (with an official flag-raising ceremony on 18 November 1813, making this the first U.S. naval base and colony in the Pacific). Porter careened *Essex* to scrape her copper bottom (paying local natives with whale's teeth to do the work) and to fumigated the ship with smoke, suffocating over 1,500 rats (which were dumped into the bay).

The sailors found Nuku Hiva most acceptable as the native women didn't wear much and were especially friendly—really friendly. The Nuku Hiva

men, however, not so much. Ultimately, Porter had to make a deal with the local tribal chief, Gattanewa, leader of the Te I'i clan, whose tolerance of the American presence was conditioned on gaining American support to fight the Happah clan in the next valley over. Although Porter had a distinct advantage in technology (tribes on Nuku Hiva had a few matchlocks, but their primary weapons were clubs, spears, and stone slings), he was also greatly outnumbered. An Englishman named Wilson, who'd been marooned in the island for many years, and quite content, served as interpreter (and later, troublemaker).

Essex's executive officer, Lieutenant John Downes and leader of the Marine detachment, Lieutenant John Gamble, led 40 Marines dragging a wheeled 6-pounder cannon and a contingent of 200 Te I'i warriors, up to a Happah redoubt high in the mountains. Although the fort was occupied by 3,000–4,000 Happah warriors, the combined American-Te I'i force prevailed, despite some close-quarters combat. Lieutenant Downes used the cannon to blow open the gate of the fort. Musket fire convinced the rest of the Happah warriors to withdraw. Gamble was injured by a sling stone hit in the stomach, but survived. The Americans were then dismayed as the Te I'i warriors proceeded to massacre all wounded Happah warriors. U.S. reports did note that there was no cannibalism, but the Te I'i used Happah bones to make necklaces and fan handles. Happah leaders subsequently sued for peace and agreed to ally themselves with the Americans and the Te I'i, on a condition that the Americans help attack the Tai Pi clan on the other side of the island, over the sharp ridges. The Tai Pi were considered the strongest tribe on the island. Now even more outnumbered by the combined Te I'i and Happah force, Porter agreed.

Porter then took *Essex Junior* around to the opposite coast, accompanied by 200 war canoes and 5,000 Te I'i and Happah warriors. The landing was unopposed. Porter personally led 36 men

ashore, mostly Gamble and his Marines, and a wheeled cannon. As the force proceeded into the jungle, it was ambushed, with spears and stones coming in from an unseen enemy hidden in the trees. As the force approached a fortification with seven-foot high walls, skirmishing intensified and Porter's native allies began to melt away. The fort was actually held by about 4,000 Tai Pi warriors. Porter's sailors fired the cannon at the fort, while Marines picked off Tai Pi warriors on the ramparts. However, the dense thickets around the fort negated the impact of the cannon.

Finally, Lieutenant Gamble reported that his Marines were down to 3–4 cartridges and Porter gave permission for Marines to run back to the beach for more ammunition. About this time, it was clear that the Tai-Pi would prevail, and Porter's allies had fled, leaving the Americans to fend for themselves. The Tai Pi, wary of musket fire, did not press the Americans too closely. As the Americans reached the beach, several volleys from the Marines kept the Tai Pi at bay. The Americans suffered only one dead and two wounded, one of whom was Lieutenant Downes with a badly broken leg from a sling stone.

Following the defeat in Tai Pi Valley, there were signs that the Te I'i and Happah might turn on the Americans. Porter decided he would have to defeat the Tai Pi if he was to maintain the loyalty of his allies. So Porter took a mostly American force of over 200 men, and in a grueling moonlight slog through the jungle and up the steep knife-edged ridges, reached a position over-looking Tai Pi Valley. He had to hold there two nights because rain had dampened the powder, and thus lost the element of surprise. When the Americans started down into the valley on 30 November 1813 they were opposed by warriors from the first fortified village they came to. The warriors fought hard, but muskets prevailed. Porter ordered the village razed.

Porter sent a captured Tai Pi with message to the Tai Pi villages down the valley, telling them to

cease-fire or he would burn all their villages. The warning was ignored, and Porter proceeded to do just that. With many more American muskets and more ammunition, and a better plan than Porter's previous landing, the Tai Pi warriors were no match. By the time Porter was through with burning 12 villages that resisted, they were described as "a scene of desolation and horror," with an unknown number of women and children killed. The British subsequently said Porter was "guilty of wantonly murdering unoffending savages." Porter defended his actions, stating that when outnumbered (about 10,000 to 200) he had no choice but to demonstrate that any opposition would be ruthlessly crushed.

By 9 December 1813, *Essex* was ready to sail. Some of her sailors were not (nor were their female companions), and Porter had to suppress a potential mutiny. In the end, Porter banished one British-born sailor to shore (where he was probably done in by the natives), flogged three others, and the rest fell in line. Porter sailed with *Essex*, *Essex Junior*, and *New Zealander*, leaving whalers *Sir Andrew Hammond*, *Seringapatam*, and *Greenwich* behind, intending to return. Porter left Marine Lieutenant Gamble in command (making him the only Marine to command U.S. Navy ships), along with two midshipmen, 19 sailors, and six prisoners. Some of the sailors were actually British nationals, who had chosen to be cooperative (i.e., turncoats). With Porter and *Essex* gone, the natives became restless (sorry) with Wilson stirring the pot, saying *Essex* would never come back (and he was right).

On 7 May 1814, the British Sailors mutinied, released the six prisoners, attacked Fort Madison, and together took over *Seringapatam*, sailing her to New South Wales, Australia, and thence to Britain (where they collected considerable salvage money). Gamble was wounded in the foot and captured aboard *Seringapatam*, and was then left adrift in a boat with four other wounded sailors, but made it to *Sir Andrew Hammond*. On 9 May, the Te 'i finally turned on the Americans,

ambushing a group of six sailors ashore, killing four. Two escaped, one of whom was wounded. Meanwhile, two war canoes approached *Sir Andrew Hammond*. Fortunately the cannons had been pre-loaded, and Lieutenant Gamble hopped from one to another, single-handedly driving off the war canoes with cannon fire.

With the fort destroyed, the natives hostile, and down to seven men, including five wounded or ill, Gamble burned *Greenwich* and set sail in *Sir Andrew Hammond*, making it 2,500 miles before she was caught and captured by HMS *Cherub* near the Sandwich Islands (now Hawaii) on 12 June 1814. Thus ended the first U.S. naval base and colony in the Pacific. (The U.S. Congress showed no interest in pursuing Porter's claim to the island; in fact they were scandalized that U.S. sailors had "cohabitated" with native women.)

Meanwhile, *Essex* and *Essex Junior* pulled into Valparaiso Chile on 12 January 1814 for provisions, only to find that civil war had broken out in Chile. The extensive British Intelligence network in South America quickly reported *Essex's* location. On 3 February, frigate HMS *Phoebe* (36-guns—30 of them 18-pounder long guns) and sloop *Cherub* (18-guns—all carronades) arrived off Valparaiso and blockaded the two U.S. ships for six weeks. In fact, *Phoebe* nearly collided with *Essex* in port Valparaiso. Porter reached a gentleman's agreement with the British commander, Captain James Hillyar, that the British ships would not come into Chilean waters after *Essex*. During the ensuing exchange of prisoners, Hillyar gained a vital piece of Intelligence: that *Essex's* armament was almost entirely carronades. Hillyar also declined Porter's challenge to a one-on-one ship duel.

While *Essex* was trapped in Valparaiso, most of the captured whalers were re-captured by other British ships (or burned after British agents in Valparaiso thwarted their sale). *New Zealander* made it all the way to the approaches of New York Harbor before being recaptured by the British.

On 28 March, with an additional four British ships soon to arrive, Porter tried to take advantage of rough weather and a snapped anchor cable to make a break for it. The night before, he sent out a boat with lights and rockets as a decoy to draw Hillyar off, but the British didn't fall for it. However, as *Essex* made her escape attempt, a squall broke off the main topmast before she had gone very far, leaving her essentially unmaneuverable. Porter later claimed *Essex* was still in Chilean waters, although that does not appear the case. Hillyar's orders were to capture or sink *Essex* "at all costs," and since he was outside the range of Chilean cannons, he interpreted that as outside Chilean waters (which was the accepted definition at the time).

The two British ships engaged *Essex* and, as Porter had predicted, for the most part stayed outside carronade range, with *Phoebe* eventually taking up position astern of *Essex* to rake the ship, and *Cherub* off the bow. Despite the extreme disadvantage, *Essex* put up an incredible fight, at one point trying to board *Cherub*. In one case, the crew of one U.S. cannon was killed three times over (15 men total), but other sailors kept replacing those who fell. *Essex* hauled a couple of her few long guns to her stern to make *Phoebe* keep her distance, but she took position on *Essex*'s starboard quarter, where the long guns couldn't swivel and the carronades couldn't reach. Twice, *Essex* caught fire, which caused a number of her crew to jump into the only remaining serviceable boat, while others went overboard and tried to swim for shore. Some of those perished in the process, although British boats picked up most of them. About 40 sailors made it to shore.

Finally, hit 200 times, with 58 dead, 65 wounded, 31 missing, all but one officer wounded, and unable to defend herself, Porter tried to run *Essex* aground, intending to blow her up, but the wind changed direction and pushed her offshore. Ultimately, Porter had to strike his colors after a two-and-a-half-hour fight. One the British

side, *Phoebe* suffered four dead and seven wounded, while *Cherub* suffered one dead and three wounded (including her captain).

Essex would be taken into the Royal Navy as HMS *Essex*, but would not see active service as a warship and was scrapped in 1837. Porter, Farragut, and other prisoners were embarked on *Essex Junior*. The ship was released and those aboard were paroled (i.e., released under stipulation that they would not engage in combat against the British for the duration of the war). Arriving in New York in July 1814, *Essex Junior* was mistaken as a British ship and fired on, without effect, by American forts. Porter went on to command 30-gun frigate USS *John Adams*, with his ten-year old son, David Dixon Porter, as a midshipman. David Dixon Porter would go on to distinguished service in the Civil War and become the second U.S. naval officer to become a full admiral, after his step-brother Farragut.

Captain Porter would subsequently be tried by court-martial in 1825 for exceeding his authority by putting an armed landing party ashore at Fajardo, Puerto Rico (then a Spanish colony) in November 1824 to force an apology from the Spanish in retaliation for the jailing one of his officers, the commanding officer of schooner USS *Beagle*. He resigned his commission and became commander-in-chief of the Mexican navy from 1826-29.

On 28 August 1814, the frigate HMS *Briton* (38 guns) and HMS *Tagus* arrived at Nuku Hiva, found that the natives had razed Madisonville, and claimed the island for Britain. A few weeks later, the two ships stumbled across Pitcairn Island (which wasn't where it was charted to be) and found the last living survivor of the 1789 HMS *Bounty* mutiny. In 1842, a French squadron arrived at Nuku Hiva (and were met by Herman "Moby Dick" Melville, who had jumped ship from an American whaler). The French claimed the Marquesas Islands and Nuku Hiva remains as part of French Polynesia. However, the internecine

warfare, but mostly typhoid fever imported from Peru, decimated the population, reducing it from about 100,000 in 1820 to 2,200 in 1927.

Sources include: "Porter's Private War: The USS Essex in Polynesia" by Mike Coppock, originally in Military History magazine, July 2020; "War of 1812: Commodore David Porter and the Essex in the South Pacific" by Tom DeForest, originally in Military History magazine, June 1994; "The Story Continues: CAPT David Porter, USS Essex and the War of 1812 in the Pacific," NHHHC's The Sextant blog, 28 March 2014; and NHHHC's Dictionary of American Fighting Ships (DANFS).

The Battle of Negro Fort, Spanish Florida, 1816

Florida had first become a Spanish colony in 1565. During the War of 1812, Spain was allied with the British (against Napoleon), although the Spanish did little to help in North America. The British took advantage and in May 1814 began building a fort on Prospect Bluff on the remote Apalachicola River (15 miles upriver from the Gulf of Mexico, roughly halfway between present-day Panama City and Tallahassee, in Spanish Florida). The area had been a draw for fugitive Black slaves for decades from the British colonies and then the United States. A thriving area of Black farms lined the river for many miles. The native Seminole Indians got along well with the fugitive slaves, and the Spanish turned a blind eye if the fugitive slaves from the United States converted to Catholicism. The Spanish were less keen on Black slaves running away from the Spanish settlement at Pensacola, but lacked the resources to do much about it. Trading posts did considerable trade with Native Americans.

The unnamed fort was part of a British plan to invade Georgia. However, the War of 1812 ended before the plan could be executed. As part of the effort, the British aggressively recruited former slaves (including actively encouraging slaves throughout the South as far away as Virginia to

escape), into a Black Corps of Colonial Marines under the command of Edward Nicolls, an Irishman serving in the British Royal Marines. (Nicolls would later be knighted, having served in 107 engagements around the world, and among other things was an ardent abolitionist, sympathetic to Native Americans, and a supporter of temperance. He was described as possibly the most distinguished officer the Royal Marines ever had.) Nicolls found that the former slaves made great soldiers (and who never got drunk, unlike the British), and he ensured they were very well armed and trained in infantry tactics, although they lacked training as artillery gunners. He also recruited about 500 Native Americans, mostly from the Creek and Choctaw Nations, for the Colonial Marines, who were somewhat less amenable to British training.

When the War of 1812 ended with the Treaty of Ghent in December 1814, Nicolls was ordered to withdraw from Florida. Nicolls paid off the Colonial Marines (at the same rate as Royal Marines), but left the fort intact and the 3,500-man Colonial Marines fully armed. The fort continued to fly the British Union Jack as the Colonial Marines considered themselves British subjects. Nicolls also encouraged them to entice more slaves to run away from their U.S. masters.

After the war, the fort continued to be a magnet for fugitive slaves, and in many respects is the earliest manifestation of the "Underground Railroad." It was the largest such armed concentration of escaped slaves in North America, something that slave-owning plantation owners found to be intolerable, claiming also that the escaped slaves from the fort stole livestock, conducted small-scale raids, and helped other slaves escape. The plantation owners in Georgia (and throughout the entire South) loudly beseeched the U.S. Army to do something about it. It was during this period that U.S. government Indian agent (and "ruthless slave trader") Benjamin Hawkins bequeathed the name "Negro

Fort" on the location, which caught on in the South.

In response to the planters' entreaties, the U.S. Army established Fort Scott on the Flint River, an upstream tributary of the Apalachicola. Supplying Fort Scott was a challenge because much of the area north toward Georgia was wilderness. The most efficient means was to ship supplies up the Apalachicola, but this required taking vessels past the "Negro Fort." The defenders of the fort took a dim view of this. On 27 April 1816, by one account, supply vessels *Semelente* and *General Pike* made their way toward the fort, escorted by two U.S. Navy gunboats, and were fired upon by cannon from the fort, four 24-pounder cannons, four six-pounder cannons, and a howitzer and mortar. (I could find nothing else regarding what happened in this incident, whether the ships passed the fort or not, or whether it really happened on this date at all. Based on the events of 27 July 1816—when it was discovered fully laden schooners couldn't get further upriver from the fort, due to shallow depth—I would assess the ships either turned back, or the incident didn't actually happen.)

When word reached General Andrew Jackson (who had captured Spanish Pensacola on November 1814 before decisively defeating the British at the Battle of New Orleans in January 1815, and was a slave-holder owning hundreds), he requested permission from Washington to attack the fort. Without waiting for an answer, Jackson ordered Brigadier Edmund P. Gaines at Fort Scott to destroy Negro Fort. That the fort was in Spanish territory bothered Jackson not at all. The U.S. government belatedly gave permission. Secretary of State John Quincy Adams later justified the attack as national "self defense." This would be the first major operation of what would become known as the First Seminole War and the conquest of Florida by General Jackson.

On 20 July 1816, the troops under General Gaines' command, and some Creek allies who

had switched sides with the promise of plunder, approached Negro Fort from the north via boat. The force included 112 troops of the 4th Infantry Regiment and about 200 Creek Indians. The soldiers held short, awaiting the arrival of artillery on U.S. Navy gunboats that would be needed for the assault. The fort was almost entirely surrounded by swamp that the Americans found impenetrable, but the Creek Indians could get through it and skirmished for several days with the fort's defenders. Many of the Colonial Marines had left the fort by this time to tend farms. There were about 330 people inside at the time, including about two hundred former enslaved men, and about 30 Seminole or Choctaw Indians with their chief. The rest were women and children. The fort had ten cannon and dozens of muskets. Those in the fort were mostly escaped Spanish slaves, while those on the farms were mostly escaped slaves from the American south.

Two U.S. Navy "Jefferson" gunboats had arrived at the mouth of the Apalachicola River on 10 June and waited for word from Gaines' force to move up river, with the mission to escort the schooners *Semelente* and *General Pike* upriver past Negro Fort. *Semelente* was carrying ordnance and *General Pike* was carrying provisions.

Commodore Daniel Patterson, in charge of U.S. Navy forces in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, gave orders to *Gunboat No. 149* and *No. 154* that if they encountered resistance from the fort, they were to immediately take action to destroy it (this was easier said than done, given the limitations of the gunboats).

In overall command and embarked on *No. 149* was Sailing Master Jarius Loomis, while *No. 154* was under the command of Sailing Master James Basset. Attacking the fort would be a challenge because it was up on a bluff. As a result, the gunboats' four (two per side) 10-pounder carronades would be useless because they could not elevate enough. The 24-pounder cannon on the bow would have to be jacked up on blocks to fire over the bluff and the rampart. The four swivel

guns would not be of much use either. The gunboats had a crew of 45 on an open deck, which meant the crew would be exposed to fire from above.

While awaiting word from Gaines' force to commence movement, the gunboats began to run low on water. On 17 July 1816, two armed five-man parties were put ashore to replenish water, one under the command of Basset and the other under Midshipman Luffborough. Luffborough's party was ambushed in what was termed the "Battle of Bloody Bluff." Luffborough and two other sailors were killed. One wounded sailor, John Lopez, escaped. Another sailor, Edward Daniels, was taken prisoner and later found to have been tarred and set on fire, burned alive (this is from a 1937 account that may be suspect).

On 27 July 1816, General Gaines' troops drew up on the landward side of the fort while Navy gunboats under the command of Sailing Master Loomis approached on the river. The only land approach that wasn't a swamp was a narrow path that bordered the river. By 0530, the two gunboats began warping into position. At some point before the start of the main attack, Gaines demanded that the fort surrender. The leader in the fort, named Garçon (Boy), a former Colonial Marine and fugitive slave from Spanish Pensacola, raised the Union Jack and a red flag indicating no quarter would be given or expected, i.e., there would be no prisoners taken alive. He then fired one of his heavy cannons.

Most accounts claim the fort opened fire on the gunboats first. However, with insufficient training, the fire was ineffective. The battle was over before it really started. The gunboats fired a series of shots to get the range. *Gunboat No. 154* fired the first "hot shot" (heated before firing to make it incendiary). This first shot rolled right into the fort's powder magazine, in what has become known as the deadliest cannon ball in U.S. history. The resulting massive explosion was heard in

Pensacola, over 100 miles away. Accounts at the time indicate that about 275 people in the fort were killed instantly and over 60 wounded, many grievously. Only three emerged unharmed, including one Indian and one Black. General Jackson ordered the Indian and Black executed. Accounts of the time describe a scene "horrible beyond description" and then go on to describe it in vivid gory detail. To General Gaines' credit, his first action was to try to aid the "unfortunate beings who survived the explosion." There were no U.S. casualties as a result of the explosion. Garçon and the Seminole chief survived the blast and were turned over to Gaines' Creek allies, who executed Garçon by firing squad (for being held responsible for the Luffborough ambush) and scalped the chief. The attack on the fort appeared to catch official Washington completely by surprise.

Those few Blacks who survived were sent to Georgia to be enslaved, including the former Spanish slaves. Spain squawked a little, but took no significant action. Some of those sent to Georgia had never been enslaved (a handful were actually freemen, others were the descendants of slaves). Georgia justified enslaving descendants on grounds that they had owned their ancestors, who had escaped, giving Georgia the "right" to enslave their children. Those Blacks who were not at the fort fled from their farms and took refuge farther south in Seminole territory near present-day Angola, Florida. Others fled as far as the Bahamas (a British territory) and established Nicholls Town. Angola was immediately destroyed on order of General Jackson (in defiance of orders from Secretary of War John C. Calhoun) when Florida became a U.S. territory in 1821. Jackson used Creek allies to do the dirty work, but Angola was burned to the ground and, when it was over, the thriving community of 600-750 people was no more.

The destruction of Negro Fort snuffed out a symbol of Black freedom, and put an end to the largest concentration of armed Black fugitive

slaves in North America. The flight of other Black farmers afterward ended the largest community of free Blacks in North America. This was also the largest battle between free Blacks and those seeking to re-enslave them.

In 1818, the U.S. Army built Fort Gadsden on the site in support of the Seminole campaign. It was used intermittently until Confederates abandoned it in 1863 during a yellow fever epidemic. The story of Negro Fort was almost completely forgotten for over 100 years, and even then the state of Florida was not inclined to ever commemorate it. The Fort Gadsden Historic Site was established in the early 1960s, with no real mention of the previous Negro Fort on the site—there wasn't even a historical marker until recently. The site has recently been renamed Prospect Bluff Historic Site, with the story of Negro Fort only recently being told.

Sources include: "Attack on the Fort at Prospect Bluff, Fort Gadsden Historic Site in FL: Deadliest cannon shot in U.S." by Dale Cox, 2014, at loresouthernhistory.com; "Fort Gadsden and the Negro Fort on the Apalachicola" also by Dale Cox, 2008, at loresouthernhistory.com (actually, Dale Cox has a number of articles on the same site that appear the most objective); The Battle of Negro Fort: The Rise and Fall of a Fugitive Slave Community, by Mathew J. Clavin: New York University Press, 2019; "Events at Prospect Bluff on the Apalachicola River, 1808-1818," by Mark F. Boys, in Florida Historical Quarterly, Vol. 16, Issue 2, Article 4, 1937 (this article appears biased against Black Fort, but does have useful detail).

The Battle of Quallah Battoo, Sumatra

On 7 February 1831, the master of the American merchant vessel *Friendship*, Captain Charles Endicott, was ashore in Quallah Battoo, Sumatra, with his second mate and four of his crew overseeing the loading of a cargo of pepper destined for his ship offshore. In the meantime, 20 Malay natives came aboard *Friendship* in the

guise of loading pepper (a violation of standard operating procedure to normally permit only a handful of natives on board). When the first mate turned his back, the Malays knifed and killed him. Five crewmen came to his aid; two were killed and three captured (and by some accounts were subsequently tortured and killed). Four other crewmen jumped overboard, leaving the pirates in control of the ship. The pirates then proceeded to strip the ship of practically anything of value; cargo, fittings, furniture, nautical instruments, etc. (including 12 chests of opium).

Endicott and his men then escaped by boat from the trading post under an unexpected hail of spears from other Malays ashore. With the help of a friendly *uleebalang* (chieftain), Po Adam, Endicott picked up the four men who had jumped overboard. He then proceeded by boat down the coast to the settlement of Muckie, where three other American merchant ships (*James Monroe*, *Palmer*, and *Governor Endicott*) were engaged in the pepper trade. The captains of those ships agreed to help Endicott recover his ship. The original plan was for *James Monroe* to go alongside *Friendship* and board her, but the pirates had taken *Friendship* into shoal water, so the boarding was made from small boats after a minor artillery duel with the guns ashore. The attempt was successful and Endicott subsequently sailed *Friendship* back to her homeport of Salem, Massachusetts, with nothing to show for the voyage. Total financial loss was estimated at \$40,000 dollars (about \$4 million today).

The arrival of the plundered *Friendship* back in America, sparked outrage among the citizenry and a corresponding press frenzy, demanding that the pirates be punished. Secretary of the Navy Levi Woodbury immediately launched an investigation. Endicott wrote to President Andrew Jackson, and several prominent citizens of Salem (who had probably lost a considerable investment) travelled to Washington to lobby Jackson to take action. Jackson didn't need much convincing, since he didn't take kindly to affronts

from “backward” non-white people. Jackson had Woodbury change the orders the new frigate USS *Potomac*, under the command of Commodore John Downes, which was supposed to take future President Martin van Buren from New York to his post as Ambassador to England and then sail around Cape Horn to become the flagship of the U.S. Pacific Squadron operating out of Valparaiso, Chile. Instead, she was to proceed to Quallah Battoo, Sumatra with all haste.

Potomac was the newest and most capable frigate in the U.S. Navy. Originally laid down at the Washington Navy Yard in 1818 and launched in 1822, she was not commissioned until 1831 due to funding shortfalls. However, the delay allowed for the incorporation of new weapons innovations, specifically 8-inch “shell guns.” Although originally classified as a 44-gun *Raritan*-class frigate, with a normal crew of 480, she was built to carry 32 carronades on the spar deck and 30 long guns on the gun deck, plus two bow and three stern “chasers” (smaller, long-range cannons). However, as completed in 1831 she carried 42 32-pounder carronades plus eight 8-inch shell guns, the latest weapons innovation from Europe, and in fact, revolutionary. For centuries, warships were limited to using solid cannon balls (sometime heated to cause fires) or other kinds of solid objects designed to kill personnel or shred rigging and sails. The latest innovation overcame the inherent danger of explosive shells. When a shell was fired at another ship, the shell would stick in the wooden hull and then explode, with devastating effect. It would still be a number of years before the counter to exploding shells, iron hulls, would make their debut.

Commodore Downes was a seasoned veteran of both Barbary Wars and the War of 1812. He had been Captain David Porter’s second-in-command on USS *Essex* (see Battle of Nuku Hiva, above) and had spent most of that voyage in command of *Essex Junior* (a captured British whaler, reconfigured as a warship). During the Second Barbary War in 1815, he commanded the 18-gun

brig USS *Epervier* (captured from the British by USS *Peacock* on 29 April 1814). *Epervier* played a significant role in the capture of the Algerian frigate *Mashouda*, and a leading role in the capture of the 22-gun brig *Estudio*. The capture of these two ships convinced the Bey of Algiers to sue for peace, bringing about the end of the war and piracy against American ships, at least for a while. Commodore Stephen Decatur then transferred Downes to his own ship, USS *Guerriere* (named for the victory of USS *Constitution* over HMS *Guerriere* during the War of 1812). Decatur then dispatched *Epervier* back to the states with a copy of the treaty and captured flags, but she vanished on the way to the United States (see H-Gram 060/H-060-2).

Commodore Downes may also have been one of the most corrupt officers ever to serve in the U.S. Navy. During a three-year (1818-21) deployment to South America in command of USS *Macedonian*, Downes turned the cruise into a serious personal money-making operation, using the ship as a floating bank and currency exchange for privateers and other unsavory groups, to the dismay of some of the junior officers. (*Macedonian* had been captured from the British on 25 October 1812 by Stephen Decatur in command of USS *United States*, the second British frigate lost in a matter of months and a profound shock to the Royal Navy).

Also aboard *Potomac* was Downe’s 10-year old son, one of 17 midshipmen embarked. The younger Downes would serve with distinction during the Civil War in command of the Union ironclad monitor USS *Nahant*, but would die shortly after being given command of the Gulf Coast Squadron at the end of the war. One of three surgeons on board, Jonathan M. Foltz, would become the second Surgeon General of the Navy in 1871. Passed midshipman Sylvanus Gordon would later command steam sloop USS *Mohican*, capturing the slave ship *Erie* and forcing it to unload her cargo of slaves at Monrovia, Liberia, in 1860; he served with

distinction in both the Mexican and Civil Wars, attaining the rank of rear admiral at the end of the Civil War.

Potomac departed New York Harbor on 27 August 1831, with orders from President Jackson to “vindicate our wrongs in that savage outrage.” Although Jackson’s orders to Downes stated that if he could find a legitimate civilized government to negotiate with, he could do so. Although his orders clearly stated that he was first to investigate and ascertain the facts (i.e., that the reports of plunder and massacre were not exaggerated), both Jackson and Downes anticipated the mission to be a punitive expedition resulting in military action. During the voyage, Downes ensured his Sailors and Marines were extensively trained and ready to fight as a force ashore. *Potomac* sailed with a plussed-up complement of 500, including 40 officers (presumably including the midshipmen) and 44 Marines. The ship sailed via Cape Verde, Rio de Janeiro, Cape Town, a violent storm, and Saint Paul Island, arriving off Quallah Battoo on 5 February 1832.

Quallah Battoo (present day Kuala Batee) was an independent Malay city-state on the south coast of northwestern Sumatra near the north entrance to the Malacca Strait (on the opposite side of Sumatra). It was associated with the bigger and stronger (although declining) Sultanate of Aceh, at the northwestern tip of Sumatra. An agreement between the British and the Dutch (who controlled most of the East Indies from their capital at Batavia, now Jakarta) kept Aceh and other Malay Muslim city-states on Sumatra outside the control of the Dutch (basically so the British could trade for pepper and spices without paying any Dutch taxes). The Dutch used the attack on *Friendship* as a rationale for absorbing more of the independent city-states of Sumatra. Quallah Battoo had several *uleebalang* (chieftains) of which the strongest was Po Muhammed. The city was defended by five forts, four along the shore and one on the landward approach to the city.

Three armed proas (local boat design) also defended the harbor.

Having learned the art of subterfuge from a master (David Porter), Downes had *Potomac* disguised and rigged as a large Danish merchant ship (some accounts say she flew a Dutch flag, but since the Dutch were not welcome in this area, I go with the majority of accounts of a Danish flag). A group of local Malays came out by boat to talk pepper trade; after coming aboard the “Danish” ship, they were surprised when they were taken into custody and sequestered, thus preserving Downes’ element of surprise. At some point, Downes was able to contact Po Adam, who advised that Po Muhammad would absolutely not consider paying compensation. Downes wasn’t inclined to negotiate anyway, and this just confirmed to him that there was no “civilized” government to deal with. *Potomac* and her crew were fully prepared to attack, and that’s what they did.

At 1430 on 5 February, *Potomac*’s whaleboat, crewed entirely by officers under First Lieutenant Irvine Shubrick, left the ship to conduct soundings and a reconnaissance of the shore. The intent to go ashore and make contact was abandoned when Malay warriors observed seemed decidedly unfriendly, perhaps not completely convinced of the benign intent of the “Danish” ship.

The call to arms on *Potomac* came at midnight on 5/6 February 1832. Under cover of darkness, a detachment of 282 Marines and armed sailors boarded four small boats (cutters), one armed with a small “Betsy Baker” 6-pounder cannon, in addition to the lifeboat. (The cannon would be placed on a wheeled carriage for use ashore—some accounts say each boat had a cannon). Under the overall command of First Lieutenant Shubrick, the detachment was divided into four “divisions,” each assigned to take out one of the four forts. The forts were a combination fortification and palace for a local chieftain, some better armed and defensible than others.

The American force came ashore just at first light. Their orders were not to shoot first, and an attempt would be made to negotiate. As the division under Lieutenant Hoff approached the fort of Rajah Muley Mahomet, they were met by gunfire, which ended thoughts of negotiation. After two hours of fighting, Hoff's division took the fort. Marine Lieutenant Alvin Edson's division (which included the Marines) quickly took their assigned fort, but Lieutenant Pinkham's group couldn't find their assigned fort in the thick jungle. Lieutenants Shubrick and Ingersoll (apparently no close relation to the Admiral Royal Ingersoll family) with Lieutenant Totten (in charge of the cannon) attacked the largest fort, that of Chief Rajah Po Muhammad (spelled various ways in different accounts, and in fact his real name may have been completely different).

During the attack on Po Muhammad's fort, the outer palisade was quickly breached, but an inner raised platform with a cannon put up stiff resistance, driving off the first assault. One U.S. sailor was killed and one midshipman and three sailors wounded. Lieutenant Shubrick regrouped and divided his force to attack from two directions. While taking the 6-pounder around to the rear of the fort, the Americans discovered three proas (basically a schooner) being manned up by armed natives. The cannon raked the boats until most of their crews jumped overboard. The largest proa escaped upriver where it was ambushed by Po Adam's warriors, who decided to get in on the action. Shubrick then gave the order for a simultaneous attack on the fort, which then fell.

Then, the Americans discovered the fifth fort, which opened fire on them with a 12-pounder cannon. However, the river between the Americans and this fort was unfordable, so Shubrick decided to withdraw the force to the beach. At this point, the fort that Pinkham's group couldn't find gave away its position by opening fire. The Americans then stormed this fort, which resulted in a bitter struggle before it fell. One

Marine was killed and one mortally wounded. One sailor was severely wounded by saber cuts, while one officer and several other sailors were wounded by darts and javelins.

The Malays were for the most part caught by surprise, and their spears, darts, and a few matchlock weapons were no match for modern muskets. Nevertheless, they fought fiercely with suicidal charges, and in the largest fort they fought to the death and to the last man. In a number of cases, wives of the Malay warriors took up their fallen husband's weapons and fought, and were killed, too. When the forts were taken, an estimated 150 Malays were dead at a cost of two killed and eleven sailors and Marines wounded (one Marine subsequently died).

At this point, accounts become even more unclear and contradictory. The American force ashore did not try to attack the fifth fort, attacking the town instead (although they would have had to go through the town to get to the fifth fort, and other accounts say the river blocked the way). Some accounts claim that there was looting and "rapine" during this period, with some implying it was U.S. sailors responsible, others suggesting a general breakdown in law and order.

Having taken and destroyed the four forts (and spiked the few cannons) and burned the three proas, and with the surf getting increasingly rough, Downes recalled his force, and all were back on board by 1000. The next morning, *Potomac* moved close inshore and fired three broadsides into the fifth fort and the town, killing an estimated 300 Malay's in the process. Several chieftains came out on a boat and sued for peace (it's not clear what happened to Po Muhammad). The chieftains pleaded poverty and insisted they could not pay compensation. Only the medicine chest of *Friendship* was recovered of the items that had been plundered. Downes agreed to halt the operation with a warning that any further attacks on U.S. merchant ships would

be met with even greater force, and chieftains readily agreed.

The devastation of Quallah Battoo was so traumatic that neighboring towns and city-states sent delegations to Downes to plead for mercy and that their towns be spared. As Downes had no reason to attack other towns, their request was easily granted. Downes was convinced he had solved the problem of Malay piracy (and he had, but for only six years).

Potomac departed Quallah Battoo a few days later (after receiving her first "mail call" on 9 February from a passing American merchant brig 116 days out of Boston). She then sailed via the South China Sea to Honolulu, Hawaii, arriving 23 July. In August, King Kamehameha III (ruled 1825-54) and Queen Kalama came aboard and were entertained by the ship's chorus and players. This was the first time sitting royalty was aboard a U.S. warship. *Potomac* departed Hawaii on 16 August and arrived at Valparaiso, Chile, via Tahiti on 23 October 1832. She served as the flagship for the U.S. Pacific Squadron. (And why Valparaiso? Because California still belonged to Mexico and there wasn't much in Oregon except a trading post at the mouth of the Columbia, River.)

On 9 February 1834, *Potomac* departed Valparaiso and arrived in Boston on 23 May 1834, - thus becoming the second U.S. Navy ship to circumnavigate the globe (the first was sloop-of-war *USS Vincennes* in September 1826 to June 1830, under Commander William B. Finch, in the opposite direction).

Word of the attack on Quallah Battoo got back to the States long before Downes did, and caused yet another press sensation. The majority of press, and the American people, were completely satisfied with the outcome: the Malay's had gotten what they deserved as far as Americans were concerned. A minority (from the pro-abolition, pro-temperance and pro-Indian rights press), however, strongly criticized Downes for not

attempting negotiations and especially for the use of false flag, night attack, killing of women, and bombarding the town, all deemed ungentlemanly. During the administration of President Jackson, such views held little sway, and Jackson himself was satisfied with the outcome. Actually, Downes also came under some criticism from the bellicose and jingoistic factions who believed he should have sailed into Quallah Battoo with all the gunports open and the American flag flying high.

President Jackson summed it up in his 4 December 1832 "State of the Union" message to Congress thus:

An act of atrocious piracy having been committed on one of our trading ships by a settlement on the west coast of Sumatra, a frigate was dispatched with orders to demand satisfaction for the injury if those who committed it should be found to be members of a regular government, capable of maintaining the usual relations with foreign nations; but if, as it was suspected, and as they proved to be, they were a band of lawless pirates, to inflict such a chastisement as would deter them and others from like aggressions. This last was done, and the effect has increased respect for our flag in those distant seas and additional security for our commerce.

For the Navy's part, despite Downes' conspicuous corruption, three ships would ultimately be named after him. The first was *Cassin*-class destroyer No. 45 (1915-22), serving on the Queenstown Patrol during World War I and ultimately transferred to the U.S. Coast Guard for "Rum Patrol." The second *Downes* was *Mahan*-class destroyer DD-375 (1937-47). DD-375 was severely damaged in the drydock with destroyer *Cassin* (DD-372) and battleship *Pennsylvania* (BB-38) during the 7 December 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor. Machinery from *Downes* was salvaged and a completely new hull built around it, and the ship was recommissioned under the same name in

November 1943. The third *Downes* was Knox-class frigate FF-1070 (1971-92).

(Note; pretty much every account of this battle contradicts others, so this is my best reconstruction without benefit of the original primary sources).

Sources include: "Cruise of the United States Frigate *Potomac*" by Karen Goodrich-Hedrick, *Expedition magazine*, 14.2, 1971, at penn.museum.org; "Attack, Reprisal and dealing with Media Fallout: The Battle of Quallah Battoo in 1832" by Farish A. Noor, *Nanyan Technological University Singapore*, 2014, at core.ac.uk; "Gunfire at Quallah Battoo, 1832" by William H. Davis: *Warship International*, Vol 2, No.3/4, March/April 1965, at jstor.org; "The Storming of Quallah Battoo," by NHHC at navalhistory.org, 6 February 2011.

The Battle of Muckie, Sumatra, 1839

In August 1838, the U.S.-flag merchant vessel *Eclipse*, from Salem, Massachusetts, was trading for pepper off the Malay settlement of Trobongan, on the island of Sumatra. This was not far from the scene of the 1831 plunder of *Friendship*, also a U.S.-flagged merchant ship from Salem. The 1831 attack had provoked U.S. Navy retaliation that inflicted many casualties in the settlement of Quallah Battoo (see Battle of Quallah Battoo above). *Eclipse* was approached by 24 Malays in boats. The second mate allowed them on board after first disarming them. Disarming Malay traders was standard routine. Letting that many on board at once was not, nor was returning their weapons as a gesture of friendship as the second mate reportedly did. With their knives returned, the Malays then massacred the entire crew. A number of crewmen jumped overboard and swam to shore, but were also hunted down and killed. Although accounts on line give the number of Malays, none give the number of crewmen (or the exact date for that matter), just that the entire crew was killed.

If *Eclipse's* crew was the same size as *Friendship* (or the replica of the earlier East Indiaman *Friendship* at Salem), her crew was probably about 15.

News of the massacre reached Commodore George C. Read in December 1838 as his two-ship squadron was in port or near Colombo, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), where he was serving as the commander of the East Indies Squadron before continuing on with a circumnavigation of the globe. Without waiting for orders, Read immediately sailed for Sumatra on the new frigate USS *Columbia* along with the smaller veteran frigate USS *John Adams*.

Commodore Read was battle-hardened. Born in Ireland in 1788, he became a midshipman in the U.S. Navy in 1804, serving aboard the frigate USS *Constitution* (44 guns), then under his uncle's command. He had returned to *Constitution* as third lieutenant under Captain Isaac Hull by the outbreak of the War of 1812, and was aboard for *Constitution's* famous defeat of British frigate HMS *Guerriere* (38 guns) on 19 August 1812. He was ordered by Hull to embark on *Guerriere* to accept her surrender and assume command of the ship. However, Read determined that *Guerriere* was too badly damaged, and the ship was scuttled. Upon *Constitution's* return to the U.S., Read transferred to the frigate USS *United States* (44 guns), under Captain Stephen Decatur. He was onboard when *United States* defeated and captured the British frigate HMS *Macedonian* (38 guns) on 25 October 1812. He commanded the brig USS *Chippewa* (16 guns) in Commodore William Bainbridge's squadron at the end of the Second Barbary War in 1815. In 1825, he became the 14th commanding officer of *Constitution*, although his tour was spent entirely at anchor.

Columbia, under the command of Lieutenant George A. Magruder and with Commodore Read embarked, had departed Hampton Roads, Virginia, on 5 May 1838 in company with *John Adams* en route the East Indies via Rio de Janeiro,

Brazil, and the Cape of Good Hope. The voyage was in conjunction with, but not part of, the United States Exploring Expedition of 1838-42, under Lieutenant Charles Wilkes (more on them later). Read's two ships arrived at Rio on 9 July 1838, but departed separately. *John Adams* stopped at Zanzibar, before rejoining *Columbia* at Bombay, India (now Mumbai), and then the two sailed to Goa (a Portuguese colony in India) and then Colombo, Ceylon. The two ships were to form the East Indies Squadron, which had first been established in 1835, when the sloop-of-war *USS Peacock* (10 guns), escorted by the schooner *USS Enterprise* (10 guns—the fourth *Enterprise*) carried a U.S. envoy for trade talks with Cochin China (now Vietnam), Siam (now Thailand), and Muscat (now part of Oman).

Columbia was the newest frigate in the U.S. Navy. Rated as a 50-gun *Raritan*-class heavy frigate, she was laid down at the Washington Navy Yard in 1825, but not launched until March 1837 (budget problems, cost overruns, technology challenges—some things never change). The circumnavigation would be her first extended operation. *Columbia* was armed with eight of the new 8-inch smoothbore “shell guns,” plus 28 32-pounder long guns (bigger than the 24-pounders on *Constitution*) and 22 42-pounder carronades (bigger than the 32-pounder carronades on *Constitution*). The new types of guns represented significant technological improvements over the War of 1812-generation weapons. *Columbia's* normal crew was about 480 officers, sailors and Marines, but for this operation she embarked almost 500.

The 30-gun frigate *John Adams* was battle-tested and would go on to be one of the longest active-serving warships in U.S. Navy history, serving from 1799 to 1865. Commanded by Commander Thomas W. Wyman, she carried an outdated armament of 24 12-pounder and six 24-pounder cannons, with a crew of about 220 total.

During the Quasi-War with France (1798-1800), JOHN ADAMS captured or re-captured nine vessels from the French, including a couple privateers. During the first Barbary Pirate War (1801-1805), under the command of Captain John Rogers, *John Adams* boldly attacked Tripolitan forts and gunboats before capturing the 28-gun Tripolitan corsair *Meshuda* in 1803. Later, under the command of Captain Isaac Chauncey, *John Adams* teamed up with the third *USS Enterprise* (14 guns) to defeat a 22-gun Tripolitan warship. *John Adams* spent most of the War of 1812 bottled up in New York Harbor, but under a flag of truce in 1814 carried two of the five U.S. delegates (including Henry Clay) to Europe for negotiations that led to the Treaty of Ghent, which ended the war. In 1817, *John Adams* forced the surrender of Amelia Island, then part of Spanish Florida and a base of operations for pirate Louis-Michel Aury (interesting but complicated story). In 1819, *John Adams* embarked Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry (famed victor of the Battle of Lake Erie in 1813) as an envoy to newly independent Venezuela (from Spain). Perry's negotiations were successful, but he died on board *John Adams* of yellow fever. She subsequently took retired Commodore David Porter to Constantinople for his posting as envoy to the Ottoman Empire.

After departing Colombo on 2 December, *Columbia* and *John Adams* arrived off Quallah Battoo, Sumatra, on 21 December. Initial discussion with village leaders indicated the individuals involved in the massacre were mostly from Muckie, with a few from Quallah Battoo and Soo Soo. The leading chieftain promised to bring in the miscreants in two days, which he failed to do, although he had promised not to attack American ships again. Warning was given and most of the inhabitants had time to flee for their lives before the two frigates, on Christmas Day, blasted the five defending earth and wood forts for 38 minutes, causing major destruction, although casualties are unknown. The forts returned fire with three ineffective shots before

running up the white flag. Read decided it was not prudent to send a landing party ashore, but remained anchored off the coast until 29 December to ensure the Malays didn't think they had driven him off. This was the second time U.S. warships would devastate Quallah Battoo.

Columbia and *John Adams* then proceeded a few miles down the coast to the settlement of Muckie. Once again, Read sent an officer ashore to demand that the guilty individuals be given up. This time, the attitude of the chieftains was more belligerent and it was clear they would resist giving up anybody. The next morning the two frigates opened fire to cover the landing of a party of 360 officers, Marines and armed sailors under the command of Commander T. W. Wyman (skipper of *John Adams*). As the landing party formed up to assault the defending forts, they discovered that these were abandoned. The party then moved to the town, to find it deserted as well. Along the way, a few Malay warriors attempted to resist, but were quickly overpowered. Commander Wyman's party then burned the town and forts. As in Quallah Battoo, most of the inhabitants had time to flee before the U.S. force burned the town, and Malay casualties are unknown.

Read and his ships then proceeded to Soo Soo, but found the inhabitants so "inoffensive" and so pathetically defenseless, that he let the town off with a warning. While at Soo Soo replenishing water, other chieftains ("rajahs" in some accounts, *uleebalang* in others) came from other ports to express their friendship and their desire that the pepper trade not be interrupted. On 7 January 1839, the two frigates then continued on to the South China Sea. Although Quallah Battoo and Muckie were severely "punished," nearby Trobongan, site of the actual massacre of the crew of *Eclipse*, seems to have gotten off scott-free. Nothing from *Eclipse* was ever recovered. There were no recorded U.S. casualties during these actions, although *Columbia* had lost 20 men during the transit due to dysentery and an

apparently mild (or at least not very contagious) form of smallpox.

Although Martin Van Buren was president, his views on the matter were not much different than those of his predecessor, Andrew Jackson. There was no great outcry in the United States over Read's unilateral action; the prevailing view was that the Malays had been duly warned in 1832 and this was a predictable consequence. American citizens were also primarily concerned with the effects of the Panic of 1837 and resulting economic depression (which also resulted in a drastic decrease in the Navy's budget). The United States was hardly alone in the practice of gunboat diplomacy, and the 1800s are replete with examples of "civilized" European navies bombarding "backward" people in response to some transgression or affront to the flag, usually in a very heavy-handed way. The United States was not much different. As brutal and one-sided as the bombardments were, no U.S. ships were attacked by Malay pirates again.

Read's squadron spent the next several months in Macau, China, as tensions between Britain (primarily), and other western nations and the Chinese increased as the Chinese tried to put a stop to the opium trade. The Opium Wars began in 1839. In the opium trade, the western nations (including U.S. merchant ships) were the "pushers." European and U.S. merchants traded opium for Chinese goods, because opium was about the only thing from the West that any Chinese wanted. The Chinese Ching (or Qing) dynasty was fed up with their people being turned into addicts. Trying to put a stop to it would prove even more disastrous for the Chinese.

After watching out for U.S. interests (including protecting U.S. opium traders), Read departed Macau on 6 August, partially because both crews were being ravaged by dysentery. Before going 30 miles, the ships were battered for 36 hours by a violent storm. Then, in the ten weeks it took to tack against the wind to Honolulu, scurvy and

dysentery killed another 30 men aboard the two ships. The squadron then proceeded to Tahiti, Callao, Peru, around Cape Horn, and arrived in Boston in June 1840.

Commodore Read would go on to command the African and Mediterranean Squadrons. During the Civil War, he would be promoted to rear admiral in July 1862, only to die of natural causes a month later. Commander Wyman would go on to command two U.S. ships-of-the-line in the 1840s and 1850s. His son Henry, who was a midshipman on *John Adams*, would go on to serve in the Civil War and later attain the rank of rear admiral.

Columbia would serve in various capacities. She was in repair status when she had to be burned and scuttled at Norfolk Shipyard on 21 April 1861 to keep her from falling to the Confederates. *John Adams* had a more interesting subsequent career. She served on blockade duty off the East Coast of Mexico during the Mexican-American War (1846-48). She served in cooperation with the British on anti-slave trade patrol off Africa (1848-53) during a period when very aggressive British operations under Admiral Sir Barrington Reynolds effectively swept the sea of slave trading ships. *John Adams* was in Siam at the outbreak of the Civil War and returned to participate in the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron (off the east coast of Confederate States), serving for a time as the flagship for the inner blockade of Charleston Harbor.

On the night of 1/2 June 1863, the frigate led three Union steam vessels in the raid on Combahee Ferry near Port Royal, South Carolina. The vessels embarked 300 Black troops of the 2nd Carolina Volunteer Infantry Regiment (Colored) made up of former Black slaves from territory liberated by the Union. Covering artillery on the boats was provided by the 3rd Rhode Island Heavy Artillery. Although one boat ran aground, the raid went ahead, destroying several southern plantations and liberating over 750 Black slaves (many of whom then volunteered to

enlist in the Union army). The raid was planned and led by Harriet Tubman, herself an escaped slave (in 1849), and relied on local Black mariners to avoid Confederate mines and obstacles. Only one Union soldier was killed in a raid that resulted in enormous consternation among Southern leaders.

After the war, *John Adams* was sold to the British for use as a barracks by the Hong Kong police until she burned in February 1884. She was subsequently towed to sea and torpedoed and sunk by British torpedo boat HMS *Merlin* in September 1884. Although not in combat, that would make *John Adams* one of the first ships sunk by a self-propelled torpedo (the first was Turkish steamer *Intibah*, sunk by Russian torpedo boats on 16 January 1878 during the 1877-78 Russo-Turkish War).

(As in the First Sumatran Expedition, sources are contradictory or vague. Without online access to original sources, this is my best attempt at a reconstruction).

Sources include: Far China Station: The U.S. Navy in Asian Waters, 1800-98 by Robert Erwin Johnson: Naval Institute Press, 2013; "The U.S. Navy's Sumatran Expeditions 1832 and 1838," by Antoine Vanner in the Dawlish Chronicles at dawlishchronicles.blogspot.com; "George Campbell Read, Ship's Crew" at ussconstitutionmuseum.org; Around the World, Vol. 2 of 2: A Narrative of a Voyage in the East India Squadron Under Commodore George C. Read (Classic Reprint): Forgotten Books, 6 October 2016.

The Battle of Drummond's Island, Gilbert Islands, 1841

USS *Peacock*, a 22-gun sloop-of-war, arrived at Drummond's Island (known then as Kingsmill Islands and now part of the independent island nation of Kiribati) on 6 April 1841, based on reports that a ship had run aground on the island

a few years earlier, and its crew massacred by the islanders, except for a white woman and child who might still be alive. (Drummond's Island was known then and now by the native islanders as Tabiteuea (translation "no chiefs.") The largest village on the island was (and is) Utiroa, home to about 1,000 people. The natives practiced an indigenous form of egalitarianism, i.e., everyone is equal, hence "no chiefs." In the center of the village was a massive maneaba, basically a civic center. Utiroa was also the location of the reported massacre.

Peacock was in the third year of the United States Exploring Expedition (known at the time a US Ex. Ex., for short and also known as the Wilkes Expedition). *Peacock's* skipper, Lieutenant William L. Hudson, was second-in-command of the expedition under Lieutenant Charles Wilkes, who embarked on 18-gun sloop-of-war USS *Vincennes*.

The original *Peacock* was a sloop-of-war built in 1813 and armed with twenty 32-pounder carronades and two 12-pounder bow chasers. *Peacock* captured the British brig HMS *Epervier* on 28 April 1814, and in the very last action of the war (six months after the Treaty of Ghent was signed) captured the 18-gun brig *Nautilus* of the British East India Company in the Sunda Strait (now Indonesia). After the War of 1812, she served a flagship for Commodore David Porter's West Indies Squadron, capturing pirate vessels before her crew was debilitated by Yellow Fever and she was temporarily decommissioned. (I cannot find the number of crew losses on *Peacock*, but the 38-gun frigate USS *Macedonian* (Captured from the British in the War of 1812) suffered 76 dead from Yellow Fever in the same time frame, and she too had to be laid up.) In 1827, *Peacock* was in Honolulu for the signing of a trade treaty with King Kamehameha III. On the way back to the U.S. East Coast via Callao, Peru, she struck a whale and suffered serious hull damage, but she was able to complete the trip home.

In 1828, *Peacock* was completely broken up and rebuilt to serve as flagship for the U.S. Exploring Expedition and her armament was reduced to eight 22-pounder long guns and two 9-pounders. President John Quincy Adams approved the expedition, and the House of Representatives approved, but it got bogged down in the Senate for eight years (some things never change) until President Andrew Jackson pushed it through. However, due to interminable delays, the expedition leader, War of 1812 hero Commodore Thomas Ap Catesby Jones, quit in disgust. Other senior leaders refused the assignment, which is how Lieutenant Charles Wilkes got the job - although he was an ideal fit due to his extensive education in hydrography, geodesy, geomagnetism, triangulation; he was also trained in math by the great Nathaniel Bowditch (author of "The New American Practical Navigator"). However, Wilkes would prove to be from the Captain Bligh school of naval leadership.

During the delay, the Navy reconfigured *Peacock* as a 22-gun warship. She was then sent on two diplomatic missions to Cochin China (now Vietnam), Siam (now Thailand) and Muscat (now part of Oman). On 10 August 1832, she was nearly sunk in the Indian Ocean by a "wave of uncommon height and volume." Seven of her crew also died from cholera (and a number of those who survived it died later of other diseases, presumably due to weakened immune systems). On 21 September 1832, *Peacock* ran aground on Masirah Island (hitting a whale is bad luck!) *Peacock's* crew threw half the guns overboard to get the ship afloat while fighting off Arab marauders intent on scavenging the ship. The ruler of Muscat, Said bin Sultan, later sent an expedition to recover the cannons, which he returned to the U.S. free of charge.

The U.S. Exploring Expedition departed Hampton Roads on 18 August 1838, with five vessels; Sloops-of-war *Vincennes* (18 guns), and *Peacock* (22-guns), brig *Porpoise* (10-guns), schooners *Sea Gull* (2-guns) and *Flying Fish* (2 guns), plus the

full-rigged supply ship *Relief*. Wilkes was embarked on *Vincennes*. The expedition had a total of about 350 men, including a scientific team that included naturalists, botanists, a mineralogist, a taxidermist and a philologist (study of language).

Wilkes' flagship *Vincennes* had been the first U.S. Navy ship to circumnavigate the globe, under the command of Commander William B. Finch, between 3 September 1826 and 8 June 1830. Aboard *Vincennes* for the circumnavigation was a young Mathew Fontaine Maury, who would become known as the "Pathfinder of the Seas" and "Father of Oceanography and Naval Meteorology." *Vincennes* subsequently served in the West Indies suppressing piracy, but she had to be decommissioned for a time due to an outbreak of yellow fever. In 1833, *Vincennes* was the first U.S. Navy ship to visit Guam.

As this article is about battles, I will give short shrift to the amazing scientific discoveries on the voyage. The group sailed via the Madeira Islands, Cape Verde Islands, Rio de Janeiro and Cape Horn. In March 1839, *Porpoise* (with Wilkes embarked) and *Flying Fish* went south to break the record of 70-degrees south latitude; she did and discovered mountains later determined to be part of Antarctica. *Flying Fish* later joined with *Sea Gull* to await replenishment from *Relief*. The two schooners were then supposed to rejoin the rest of the group in Valparaiso, Chile, however *Sea Gull* vanished in a storm near Cape Horn (see H-Gram 060/H-060-2).

The remaining ships left Callao, Peru on 12 July 1839, reached the Tuamotu Islands on 13 August and Tahiti on 11 September. Then they sailed to Samoa and Sydney, Australia, unintentionally slipping past the harbor defenses during the night. In December 1839, *Vincennes* and *Peacock* headed south until on 16 January 1840, crewmen on *Peacock* sighted Antarctica. After surveying about 1,500 miles of coast of what became known as Wilkes Land (and still is), Wilkes logged on 12 February that Antarctica was a

seventh continent. The group then headed back to the southern Pacific, arriving in New Zealand in February 1840, Tonga in April, and Fiji in May 1840.

Wilkes' expedition was the first official U.S. presence in the Fiji islands, which had a reputation as a dangerous place for outsiders. In 1836, the U.S.-flag brig *Charles Dagget* was set upon by local natives led by Ro Vendovi, and ten members of the 25-man crew were killed, including the First Officer, and five wounded. Wilkes had orders when he departed the United States that if he could find the perpetrators of the attack, he was to bring them to justice. As the ships surveyed different islands in the Fiji archipelago, and established trade and conduct agreements, Lieutenant Hudson on *Peacock* received a report on Vendovi's location. Hudson induced Vendovi to surrender by taking his three brothers hostage. In this case, the locals were glad to see Vendovi go, as he was a troublemaker. He was shipped back to the States (not clear how) where he died the day after he arrived in New York in the Brooklyn Naval Hospital. His skull was made part of the expedition's display.

In July 1840, Lieutenant Joseph A. Underwood and Midshipman Wilkes Henry (Wilkes' nephew) were ashore on Malolo Island (part of Fiji) bartering for food, when a Fijian chief being held captive jumped out of a boat. The Americans fired on the chief as he made his escape. The American account is that the chief's escape was a signal for the Fijians to attack. The Fijian account is that the U.S. gunfire is what provoked the attack. Whatever really happened, Lieutenant Underwood and Midshipman Henry were killed and mutilated.

Wilkes was enraged, and sent 70 Marines and armed Sailors to the village of Yaro with orders to burn everything and kill all the men. When the shore party arrived, the village was deserted. The Fijian men had consolidated in a nearby village

and the women and children had taken to the hills. After burning Yaro, the shore party proceeded to the other village. The village chief came out with a peace offering of pigs, claiming his village had nothing to do with the killing. Wilkes was of no mind to negotiate, and the Americans opened fire. Fijian arrows, clubs and spears were no match for muskets. Although Wilkes marveled at the ability of Fijian warriors to "dodge shot at the flash of a gun," about 60-80 Fijians were killed. There were no U.S. casualties. Wilkes waited overnight. The village made another peace offering in the morning, which Wilkes rejected, insisting on an "abject surrender," in accordance with Fijian custom. He received the abject surrender as the surviving Fijians crawled on their hands and knees, beseeching him for mercy, up the hill to where Wilkes sat.

On 9 August 1840, Wilkes' expedition left Fiji. *Vincennes* and *Peacock* went to the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii) while *Porpoise* and *Flying Fish* surveyed other South Pacific islands before heading to Honolulu as well. While in Hawaii, Wilkes learned that natives on Samoa had killed an America sailor, in violation of the agreement he had made with Samoan leaders. Wilkes dispatched *Peacock* and *Flying Fish* to return to Samoa.

By 24 February, *Peacock* and *Flying Fish* had arrived off Upolu Samoa, reported site of the killing. Chief Malietoa refused Lieutenant Hudson's demands to turn over the perpetrator(s). Hudson sent a party ashore of 70-men, including 20 Marines. He then bombarded the village of Saulafata with grape shot and cannon balls. The grape fell short, but the cannon balls did considerable damage. After 18 shots the *Peacock* ceased fire. The shore party broke into three groups, one remained at the beach guarding the boats, while the other two, including the Marines entered the 50-hut village and torched it. The Samoan warriors did not attempt to resist, and the women and children had fled. As the shore party returned to the ship, Hudson was not satisfied and

ordered the party back ashore to destroy the villages of Fusi and Sallesesi. Another 100 huts in the two villages were burned with no resistance. Before returning to the ships, the shore party destroyed all the Samoan canoes they could find.

Having dealt with the affront to the U.S. flag by the Samoans, *Peacock* and *Flying Fish* surveyed more remote islands in the South Pacific, arriving in the Gilbert Islands in March 1841. Then known as the Kingsmill Islands, the two ships surveyed most of the islands, including Tarawa and Makin (of WWII battles).

Having been drawn to Drummond's Island by reports of a surviving white woman and child from a shipwreck, Lieutenant Hudson went ashore on 6 April with a couple officers, a Marine detachment, as well as *Peacock's* Scientific Corps. At first the natives were not hostile as they gathered in the large maneaba. Negotiations were difficult as the natives had no chief. None showed any knowledge of the shipwreck or survivors, although parts of the ship were found in huts that were searched by the Americans. Hudson went ashore the next day with a somewhat larger force for a more thorough search. Upon returning to the boats, it was discovered that Seaman John Anderson was missing. A search was made, but there was no sign of Anderson, but it was noticed the natives were arming themselves for battle. As the search teams returned to the boats, native warriors arrived on the beach, throwing rocks, waving weapons and attempting to surround the boats as they shoved off. The boats received some damage from rocks but there were no casualties and the boats got away.

Lieutenant Hudson decided to wait to see if the missing Sailor would appear, and on 9 April, *Flying Fish* arrived with additional reinforcement. *Peacock* took position to bombard the largest village, Utiroa, while *Flying Fish* took position to provide covering fire for seven armed boats that would make a landing. The landing party included 20 Marines and 62 armed Sailors under the

command of Marine Lieutenant William M. Walker.

As the boats drew near shore, 600-700 native warriors were observed "dancing" in the jungle just beyond the beach, presumably preparing for a fight. Lieutenant Walker yelled a demand for the return of the missing Sailor, which was ignored. At this point, the warriors charged into the water to attack the boats, forcing the boats to back away. After pulling out of the shallows, Walker turned the boats back toward the beach and fired a "rocket" into the mass of warriors. Walker then ordered his force to open volley fire with muskets from the boats. At least 12 warriors were killed and many wounded, and they retreated from the beach.

Walker's forces then went ashore. Although there was some minor skirmishing, Walker's force burned the village of Utiroa and then destroyed another nearby village for good measure. Walker made one last attempt to gain information about the missing Sailor or shipwreck survivors. Not surprisingly, the natives were in no mood to talk, as the largest maneoa in the Gilbert Islands went up in flames. The U.S. force then withdrew and departed, finding no sign of Seaman Anderson of shipwreck survivors. There were no U.S. casualties, although all of the boats required some degree of repair. The Battle of Drummond's Island was over.

Peacock and *Flying Fish* then rejoined the rest of Wilkes' expedition in Hawaii, before proceeding to the Pacific Northwest for survey work along what is now the Oregon and Washington coasts. On 17 July 1841, *Peacock* ran aground on the bar at the entrance to the Columbia River. The surf smashed the largest boat, but other boats were able to get all the crew and the great majority of scientific objects and papers safely off the ship, before *Peacock* was pounded into lumber by the surf on 19 July (hitting whales is bad luck!).

After surveying the coast of northern California, Wilkes' surviving ships, *Vincennes*, *Porpoise* and *Flying Fish* commenced a return to the U.S. East Coast by way of Hawaii, Wake Island, Philippines, Borneo and the Cape of Good Hope arriving at New York on 10 June 1842. Much of the "take" of the expedition would later form the core of the original collection of the Smithsonian Institution. Wilkes' expedition covered 87,000 miles and surveyed 280 islands, collecting over 60,000 plant and bird specimens. Two ships and 28 men were lost on the voyage.

Upon his return, Lieutenant Wilkes was court-martialed for the loss of *Peacock*, regular mistreatment of subordinate officers and excessive punishment of his Sailors (ordering more than the authorized 12-lashes for Sailors convicted of theft). The charges were brought by subordinate officers. Wilkes was acquitted of all except illegally punishing his men. (Some accounts indicate charges included the massacre of natives at Fiji, but I cannot find proof of that, and if he was, he was acquitted.) Sentenced to a public reprimand, Wilkes was nevertheless promoted to commander in 1843.

By the time of the Civil War, Wilkes was a captain in command of the screw-frigate *San Jacinto*. He subsequently assumed command of a small squadron consisting of steam sloop *Wachusett* (flagship), *San Jacinto* and two gunboats, patrolling the approaches to the British colony of Bermuda. On 8 November 1861, on Wilkes' orders, *San Jacinto* stopped and boarded the British Royal Mail Service (RMS) paddle-steamer *Trent*, in violation of British neutrality, and arrested two Confederate commissioners en route Britain and France, in what became known as the Trent Affair. Initially hailed in the North, President Lincoln quickly disavowed Wilkes' action, as it appeared it might lead to war with Great Britain.

Wilkes would be court-martialed again in 1864 after writing a scathing letter to Secretary of the

Navy Gideon Welles, in response to complaints by other nations of neutrality violations from Wilkes' squadron. He was found guilty of the charges, but President Lincoln reduced the sentence and the other charges were then dropped. Wilkes was promoted to rear admiral on the retired list in July 1866.

Four U.S. Navy ships have been named for Wilkes; the first being Torpedo Boat No. 35 (commissioned in 1902 with Lieutenant (j.g.) Dudley Knox in command. Decommissioned in 1913 and sunk as a target in 1914). The second was Destroyer No. 67 (in service 1916-1934). Third was DD-441, a *Gleaves*-class destroyer, commissioned in April 1941, with ten battle stars in World War II, before being decommissioned in 1946 and scrapped in 1972. The fourth was oceanographic survey vessel T-AGS-33, commissioned in 1971, decommissioned in 1979 and transferred to Tunisia in 1995.

Lieutenant William L. Hudson went on to command of the screw frigate *Niagara*, which attempted to lay the first transatlantic cable in April 1857, along a route previously surveyed by Mathew Fontaine Maury. The first attempt was unsuccessful. The second attempt was made in August 1857 in concert with British "battleship" HMS *Agamemnon* (the first British ship-of-the-line designed from the keel up for steam power). The two ships spliced the cable together in mid-Atlantic and then reeled out the cable in opposite directions. On 16 August, Queen Victoria sent the first transatlantic cable message to President James Buchanan. The cable went dead three weeks later. The next attempt (successful) was in 1866.

(Some sources state three U.S. Navy ships were named after Hudson, but there actually appears to be only one; Fletcher-class destroyer DD- 475, in service from April 1943 to May 1946 (scrapped in 1973) with nine battle stars and credited with sinking two submarines and heroic action

alongside escort carrier *Sangamon* (CVE-26) when the carrier was hit by a kamikaze on 4 May 1945.)

Vincennes was subsequently commanded by Commander Franklin Buchanan, who would found the "Naval School" in 1845 (which became the U.S. Naval Academy) and would end up during the Civil War as the senior admiral in the Confederate Navy. In July 1846, *Vincennes* accompanied the 90-gun ship-of-the-line *Columbus* to Uraga, Japan, on Commodore James Biddle's attempt to open Japan to U.S. trade. Although the *Columbus* was the most impressive ship in the U.S. Navy at the time, the Japanese were unimpressed and surrounded the two ships with hundreds of small craft, politely but adamantly refusing to let anyone off the U.S. ships or to negotiate. This mission was a failure and the opening of Japan had to wait until Commodore Mathew Perry's expedition in 1853-1854. *Vincennes* served on blockade duty during the Civil War.

Of the other two Wilkes' Expedition ships, *Porpoise* disappeared without a trace off Formosa in September 1854 (see H-Gram 060/H-060-2). *Flying Fish* was found unfit for further service at the end of the expedition and sold off.

Sources include: Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition During Years 1838, 1839, 1840, 1842, by Charles Wilkes: *Lea and Blanchard, Philadelphia, 1845*; One Hundred Eighty Landings of the United States Marines 1800-1934, by H. A. Ellsworth: *U.S. Marines History and Museums Division, 1934*; *Sea of Glory: America's Voyage of Discovery—The U.S. Exploring Expedition, 1838-1842*, by N. Philbrick: *Viking, New York, 2003*; "The United States Exploring Expedition in Fiji," by Roberta Sprague, *scholarspece.manoa.hawaii.edu.*)

The Battle of Ty-ho Bay, China, 1855

By the 1830s, piracy had been effectively suppressed in the Atlantic and Caribbean, but

continued to flourish throughout the Far East. Between 1850 and 1864, China was in the throes of the massive Taiping rebellion against the Qing dynasty (20-30 million dead) which made the First Opium War (1839-42) and second Opium War (1856-60) between Britain and China a side-show to the carnage in China itself. The result of the chaos in China was widespread lawlessness, and piracy along the coast. Conflict between Western ships and Chinese pirates was common, as the pirates operated from hundreds of hide sites.

In the summer of 1855, Chinese pirates brazenly captured four merchant vessels that were being escorted by the British paddlewheel steam vessel, HMS *Eaglet*. *Eaglet* was a commercial vessel chartered by the British Navy in 1855 to tow vessels through shallow water. *Eaglet's* armament is unknown, but apparently was insufficient to fend off the pirates. Upon receiving word of the attack, the Royal Navy screw sloop HMS *Rattler* pursued the pirates, but found them in a bay too shallow for *Rattler* to enter.

Of note, HMS *Rattler* was the first screw warship (i.e., a steam powered warship with a propeller rather than paddlewheels), launched in 1843 and commissioned in 1845. The comparable USS *Princeton* was launched after *Rattler*, but commissioned sooner in 1844. The incorporation of steam engines aboard what were still primarily sailing vessels drove a revolution in shipboard armament. The steam engines and paddlewheels reduced the space available for gun decks. With less space for guns, ships began to mount fewer, but heavier and longer-range guns. *Rattler* was technically a 9-gun ship, but one was an 8-inch pivot "shell gun" along with, eight 32-pounder broadside guns, which made her powerful for her size. *Rattler* had a crew of about 180 men. The early steam warships were propelled by paddlewheels, which were considered to be very vulnerable to enemy fire, and the screw propeller design of *Rattler* represented a much better and less vulnerable propulsion source, that also returned space for guns.

The conceptually similar USS *Princeton* was commissioned on 9 September 1843. Designed by John Ericsson (who later built the ironclad USS *Monitor*), *Princeton* carried two 12-inch smoothbore guns (although she was only designed for one) and twelve 42-pounder carronades. *Princeton* suffered a major setback on 28 February 1844 during a demonstration cruise on the Potomac, with President John Tyler, former First Lady Dolly Madison, and numerous dignitaries embarked. During the last demonstration firing of the day, the 12-inch gun "Peacemaker" burst, killing six people including Secretary of State Abel P. Upshur, Secretary of the Navy Thomas W. Gilmer (making him the shortest serving Secretary of the Navy - only 10 days), and President Tyler's slave valet, Armistead. President Tyler was unharmed as he was below deck courting the daughter of one of the dignitaries who was killed (whom he subsequently married).

Meanwhile, back in China, *Rattler* met up with the U.S. paddle-wheel frigate *Powhatan*. British Commodore William A. Fellowes and U.S. Commodore William J. McCluney (Commander of the U.S. East Indies Squadron) conferred and agreed to make a joint attack on the pirate base (with no need to wait for any guidance from Washington or London). The cooperation is noteworthy in that within five days of McCluney becoming a midshipman on the 18-gun sloop-of-war USS *Wasp* (the third *Wasp*), *Wasp* engaged the 22-gun British brig HMS *Frolic* on 18 October 1812. In the bloody close-quarters battle that followed, considered by many historians as the most intense ship-to-ship action of the entire war, *Wasp* finally got the better of *Frolic*. All the British officers on *Frolic* were dead or wounded, so a U.S. officer struck *Frolic's* colors on their behalf. However, after the battle, neither ship was able to sail. Two days later, the 74-gun ship-of-the-line HMS *Poitiers* arrived on the scene, and Midshipman McCluney became a prisoner of war, although he was subsequently paroled by the British. (*Wasp* was repaired and placed in British service as HMS *Loup Cervier* and then

HMS *Peacock* when she was lost without a trace off Virginia Capes in July 1814. The fourth USS *Wasp* was lost without a trace in the Atlantic in October 1814.)

After the War of 1812, McCluney rose through the ranks. At the outbreak of the Mexican-American War he was in command of the 30-gun frigate USS *John Adams* (see also Battle of Muckie above). On 18 May 1846, *John Adams* and 50-gun frigate USS *Raritan* combined to make a successful 500-man amphibious assault on the Mexican military depot at Point Isabel (now in Texas). He subsequently led 120 men ashore from *John Adams* against Tuxpan, Mexico, and then led 1,400 Sailors 80 miles up the Tobasco River to take the provincial capital of Villahermosa Mexico.

During the Mexican War, McCluney's aggressive operations came to the attention of Commodore Mathew Perry, who was equally inclined to bold action. Often considered the "Father of the American Steam Navy," Perry selected McCluney to refit and repair the paddlewheel steam frigate USS *Mississippi* to serve as Perry's flagship for his planned expedition to open Japan to trade. Perry envisioned that steam powered ships would serve to awe the Japanese in a way USS *Columbus* had failed in 1846 (See Battle of Drummond's Island, above).

Mississippi was one of the first two U.S. Navy steam frigates, completed in 1841. *Mississippi's* sister ship, USS *Missouri* was commissioned in 1842, but caught fire, exploded and sank at Gibraltar on 26-27 August 1843 while on a mission to take the first U.S. ambassador to China. The British ship-of-the-line HMS *Malabar* rescued 200 of *Missouri's* crew, and the British Governor of Gibraltar provided care for the crew, which resulted in a resolution of appreciation by the U.S. Congress. None of *Missouri's* crew was lost. The captain of *Missouri* was court-martialed for negligence, but President Tyler remitted the sentence. It turned out that catching fire was a

frequent occurrence on steam frigates, as the wooden hulls were not adequately insulated from the boilers, fortunately with less severe consequences than *Missouri*.

Commodore Perry, embarked on *Mississippi*, with McCluney in command, was supposed to sail for Japan from Annapolis in company with the ill-starred screw sloop *Princeton*, which then ran aground in Chesapeake Bay and broke down twice before even reaching Norfolk. The paddle-wheel steam frigate *Powhatan* was recalled from the Home Squadron to substitute for *Princeton*. On 24 November 1852, Perry ordered McCluney to take command of *Powhatan*, prepare her for overseas operations, and follow after *Mississippi* as soon as possible. McCluney had *Powhatan* underway by 13 February 1853. *Powhatan* caught fire twice on her outbound voyage toward Cape of Good Hope, but stopped in the Madeira Islands and made innovative fixes to keep the exhaust stacks from overheating fixtures around them.

Powhatan was the fourth side-wheel steam frigate built by the U.S. Navy. *Powhatan* and her sister USS *Susquehanna* were completed about ten years after *Mississippi* and the lost *Missouri* and were the first steam frigates with the new Dahlgren smoothbore guns; *Powhatan* carried one 11-inch pivoting Dahlgren gun and ten 9-inch Dahlgren guns. The Dahlgren guns fired explosive shells, and were safer and more powerful than previous shipboard gun designs. The size and power of these guns made them exceptionally deadly to wooden ships, which could not be adequately countered until the advent of iron hulls. *Powhatan* cost about twice as much to build as the USS *Constitution*; cutting edge technology has always come with a high price tag.

During this period, Lieutenant John Dahlgren also designed a series of 12-pounder and 24-pounder boat howitzers (that also could be mounted on field carriages for use ashore), which were

adopted as standard in 1850. The “medium” 12-pounder Dahlgren boat howitzer was the most successful and probably equipped the small boats on *Powhatan*. The boat howitzer would be mounted in the bow of ships’ boats and had a range of about 1,000 yards. It had a firing rate of about five rounds per minute aboard boat and 8 rounds per minute ashore. It was crewed by 8 to 10 men, who each carried two rounds in addition to two ammunition boxes lashed to the carriage for a standard load of 72 rounds of shell or shrapnel.

Before *Powhatan* departed, President Millard Fillmore empowered Captain McCluney to finalize the ratification of the “Convention of Peace, Friendship, and Good Understanding between the United States and His Highness the Sultan of Borneo (now the Sultan of Brunei). The treaty was signed in the Sultan’s palace on 11 July 1853 and is still in effect today, one of the longest-lasting treaties in U.S. history.

When *Powhatan* finally rejoined with Perry, the U.S. East India Squadron included ten ships and 1,600 crewmen. Perry had already made his first visit to Japan in July 1853, with four “Black Ships,” in an extremely heavy-handed approach, demanding that Japan open itself to U.S. trade. Perry left Japan to give the Japanese time to think it over. Perry transferred his flag to *Powhatan* and returned to Tokyo Bay in February 1854 with eight warships. Three of the ships were steam-powered (*Mississippi*, *Susquehanna* and *Powhatan*). All of the warships had been upgraded with the more destructive “shell guns.” Under the very overt threat of the use of force, this time the Japanese gave in and on 31 March 1854, the Japanese signed the “Convention of Kanagawa” on the deck of *Powhatan*. (I will cover Commodore Mathew Perry’s expedition to Japan in greater detail in a future H-gram, as it is one of the ultimate examples of “gunboat diplomacy.”)

Having successfully accomplished his mission, Perry and most of his squadron returned to the

U.S., leaving *Powhatan* behind and McCluney in command of the U.S. East Indies Squadron to look after U.S. interests in the chaos of China.

Having agreed to work together to deal with the Chinese pirates, *Powhatan*, *Rattler* and *Eaglet* sailed to the north side of Lantau Island, now part of Hong Kong, to where *Rattler* had previously located the pirate anchorage. The water in the anchorage was too shallow for either *Powhatan* or *Rattler* to enter, so the plan was to have the shallow-draft HMS *Eaglet* tow six boats, each armed with a boat howitzer, with a total of about 200 men from the two ships, into the anchorage to attack the pirate junks and recover any captured merchant ships. The assault group from *Powhatan* included 26 Marines, led by First Lieutenant James H. Jones, along with eight Navy officers and 66 Sailors. Lieutenant Robert B. Pegram was in overall command of the Americans. The British contingent was about the same size.

Powhatan and *Rattler* initially remained out of sight. When a Chinese junk sailed out of the anchorage, *Powhatan*’s cutter and *Rattler*’s pinnace were sent to intercept. At that time, *Eaglet* and her towed boats came in view of the pirate anchorage and observed 14 large pirate junks and 22 smaller ones, along with seven captured merchant ships (most Chinese) in the bay. The larger pirate junks had small canons. As the *Powhatan* and *Rattler* came in view, about half the pirate junks opted to try to escape, while the other half, including the larger junks, prepared for a fight.

Undeterred by the size of the pirate fleet, *Eaglet* pressed on with her tows. Canon-fire from the Chinese junks was heavy, but almost all of it went long, over the heads of *Eaglet* and the boats. *Eaglet* fired five Congreve Rockets (as in ‘the rockets’ red glare’) at the junks. Once in range, the boat howitzer crews opened fire with great effect, quickly sinking six pirate junks and probably demoralizing many of the remainder. As

the range decreased to close quarters, *Eaglet* detached the boats to grapple with the pirate junks. The pirates reportedly put up fierce resistance as boarding parties from the boats climbed aboard the pirate junks, but casualties were very one-sided. Lieutenant Henry Rolando of *Powhatan* was the first to raise a U.S. flag on a captured junk. As CDR Fellowes of *Rattler* boarded another junk, Lieutenant Rolando came to assist with his boat. As the two climbed aboard, the junk blew up and the boat was capsized and Fellowes, Rolando and a number of American Sailors were thrown in the water; most were rescued and continued the engagement.

About 500 pirates were killed in action, drowned or were wounded, while 1,000 surrendered. (Accounts are vague as to whatever happened to the pirates who were captured.) Pirate junks that had not been sunk by howitzer fire were burned. Fourteen large junks and six smaller ones were destroyed, while 16 smaller junks escaped. The seven merchant ships were recovered, but two were so badly damaged they burned too.

The U.S. casualties were five dead (crewmen John Pepper, James A. Halsey, Isaac Cole, and Landsmen S. Mullard and B.F. Addamson) and six wounded. The British lost one officer and three Sailors killed and "several" wounded.

Powhatan and McCluney departed the Far East not long after the battle of Ty-ho Bay, arriving in Norfolk on 14 February 1856, after three years deployed. As a strong proponent of steam power and iron hulls (actively resisted by much of the "traditional" Navy), McCluney was assigned to the "Stevens' Battery" Project in Hoboken, New Jersey in 1857 to develop the first iron-clad steam-powered warship. The project languished due to inadequate funding, but the design had many features in common with the later *Monitor* (so many, that some claim Ericsson copied the Stevens' design).

In 1859, McCluney assumed command of the Home and West Indies Squadron, embarked in the large screw frigate *Roanoke*. In the meantime, *Powhatan* returned to Japan and the formal U.S.-Japan Treaty of Amity and Commerce was signed aboard on 29 July 1858. On 13 February 1860, *Powhatan* departed Yokohama in company with the first Japanese screw-corvette, *Kanin Maru*, (which the Japanese had ordered from the Netherlands while negotiating with Commodore Perry). *Kanin Maru* carried the first Japanese Embassy to the U.S. The plan was for *Powhatan* to sail with *Kanin Maru* to San Francisco and then to Panama, where the Japanese delegation would cross by train, to be picked up by *Roanoke* for transport to Washington DC. Due to delay, McCluney and *Roanoke* waited off the east coast of Panama for over a year, as many of the crew became sick of various tropical diseases. McCluney's health deteriorated, and although he successfully completed his mission of getting the 72-person Japanese delegation to Hampton Roads (*Roanoke's* draft was too deep for the Potomac), his health never recovered; he retired in 1861 and died in 1864. To my surprise, no U.S. Navy ship was ever named after Commodore William J. McCluney.

Sources include: Far China Station: The U.S. Navy in Asian Waters, 1800-98, by Robert Erwin Johnson: Naval Institute Press, 2013; The Long War Against Piracy: Historical Trends, by A. James Wombwell: Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2010; Treading Softly: U.S. Marines in China, 1819-1949, by George B. Clark: Greenwood Publishing, 2001; NHHHC's Dictionary of American Fighting Ships (DANFS).

***The Water Witch* Affair, Paraguay, 1855**

USS *Water Witch* was a sidewheel steam gunboat built at the Washington Navy Yard and commissioned in 1853 under the command of Lieutenant Thomas Jefferson Page. With a crew of about 64 officers and enlisted, she was initially armed with one 32-pounder howitzer, but had

two more fitted later. She had an experimental propulsion system ("Morgan eccentric feathering paddle wheels" in with the paddles rotated so as to always be perpendicular to the water surface, which increased efficiency). *Water Witch* departed Norfolk on 8 February 1853, for an extended deployment conducting surveys along the coasts and rivers of Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay, for which her shallow 7'10" draft was ideally suited. In 1852, the dictator of Argentina had been overthrown and his successor opened the rivers of Argentina to commerce by all nations. The U.S. Navy decided that would be a good opportunity to conduct the first detailed hydrologic surveys of the Rio de la Plata and tributaries, including the Parana and Paraguay rivers.

Lieutenant Page was politically connected (grandfather signed Declaration of Independence), with a generally arrogant and foul disposition, utterly lacking intact. He had worked under Mathew Fontaine Maury at the U.S. Naval Observatory before he held command of the brig USS *Dolphin* in the Far East in 1849-1850, which included fights with Japanese pirates at the mouth of the Yangtze River, at the request of the Qing Dynasty government of China.

Water Witch arrived at Asuncion, the capital of Paraguay, in October 1853, and was initially welcomed by the President (dictator) of Paraguay, Carlos Antonio Lopez. Lieutenant Page sought to continue the survey of the Paraguay River into the Mato Grosso area of Brazil. Because relations between Paraguay and Brazil were poor, Lopez granted permission for Page to go up the Paraguay River only to a certain point. However, Page subsequently ignored Lopez' order, and pressed on deep into Brazil to Corumba (1,870 miles inland from Buenos Aires, Argentina and the ocean).

Water Witch survey opened up the Mato Grosso to steam navigation, which didn't make Lopez happy, as that would result in Brazilian traffic

transiting the Paraguay River through the capital. In the meantime, the U.S. Consul in Paraguay, Edward Hopkins (with a reputation for highhanded arrogance) had a falling out with President Lopez. (Hopkins had been court-martialled three times while he was in the U.S. Navy before being dismissed.) Without going through all the diplomatic machinations, at one point *Water Witch* trained her guns on the Presidential Palace, and then spirited Hopkins out of the country with sensitive papers that Lopez wanted. The result was that Lopez was so angered that he banned all foreign warships from Paraguay waters, and refused to ratify the U.S.-Paraguay treaty of friendship.

In January 1855, *Water Witch* was in Argentine waters, and Lieutenant Page led a small expedition up an Argentine River, leaving *Water Witch* under the command of his Executive Officer, Lieutenant William Nicholson Jeffers, with orders to explore the upper Parana River (which is the boundary between Argentina and Paraguay). Near the junction of the Parana and Paraguay Rivers, the Parana is split by an island, with the main southern channel (several miles wide) open to international traffic, and a smaller northern channel (Canal Privado) considered territorial waters by Paraguay. The western (downstream) entrance to Canal Privado was guarded by Paraguayan Fort Itapiru. The fort was small, but had six large cannons, whose gunners were well-drilled.

On 1 February 1855, the *Water Witch* approached Fort Itapiru and the entrance to Canal Privado. Lieutenant Jeffers knew that foreign warships were banned from Paraguay waters, and he anticipated trouble, moving the starboard gun to the port side and ordering ammunition (regular shells, shrapnel shells, and grape shot) readied for use. At 1320, the fort sent a canoe out to *Water Witch* and offered to provide a copy of Lopez' decree. Because the decree was in Spanish, Jeffers refused to accept it, even though *Water Witch* had crewmen aboard who could speak

Spanish, including an Argentine river pilot. The fort hailed *Water Witch* when the distance closed to 300 yards, but Jeffers claimed not to understand. Then the fort fired two blank shots, but *Water Witch* pressed forward. The fort fired a third time, this time with a live round that hit and killed the helmsman, Samuel Chaney. *Water Witch* returned fire with three howitzers and reversed course. The fort continued firing, hitting *Water Witch* in the hull ten times, destroying two boats and damaging a paddle wheel. *Water Witch* made it back to an Argentine port.

When Lieutenant Page learned of the action, he went down river to Buenos Aires intending to convince the commander of the U.S. South American Squadron, Commodore William D. Salter, to give him permission to attack the fort. Salter declined and referred the matter to Washington. *Water Witch* returned to the Washington Navy Yard in May 1856. Back in the United States, Page claimed that the fort fired on *Water Witch* without provocation while she was in international waters. However, the U.S. Secretary of State concluded that Page and Jeffers were responsible for the incident. Even the press in the United States for the most part ignored the incident.

In 1857, James Buchanan became the 15th President of the U.S., replacing Franklin Pierce. Historians are not clear exactly why, but Buchanan decided to send a punitive naval expedition to Paraguay over the *Water Witch* affair, although the consensus was the Buchanan needed a distraction from the fact that the United States was coming apart and heading toward civil war. Buchanan made his intentions known in his first annual message to Congress in December 1858. Buchanan claimed that Paraguay had seized and appropriated the property of American citizens in Paraguay, had refused to ratify the treaty of friendship on "frivolous and even insulting pretexts," and had "fired upon the United States Steamer *Water Witch*...and killed the sailor at the helm, while she was peacefully employed in

surveying the Parana River." Buchanan stated he would demand redress in a conciliatory manner, but would use force if necessary. On 2 June 1858, a joint resolution of Congress authorized Buchanan to use force if necessary.

Commodore William B. Shubrick was given command of the Paraguay Expedition. Shubrick had first entered the U.S. Navy in 1807 aboard USS *Wasp*. He served aboard *Hornet* and *Constellation* during the War of 1812, and was awarded a Congressional Medal for actions aboard *Constitution* when she defeated and captured HMS *Cyane* and HMS *Levant* in 1814. He subsequently served in senior command positions in operations on the west coast of Mexico during the Mexican-American War (1846-1848). Along with Shubrick was Judge James Butler Bowlin, appointed by President Buchanan, and the closest thing to a genuine professional diplomat the U.S. had (the U.S. Foreign Service was not created until 1924, so pretty much all diplomatic posts were filled as un-paid political patronage jobs, where the "diplomat" funded his operations through foreign business ventures; in most cases a diplomatic post was an opportunity for a political hack to get rich). Bowlin was an exception, who knew what he was doing.

In the event that Bowlin was unable to extract an apology from Paraguay for the attack on *Water Witch*, as well as other assorted restitutions (including payment to the family of the dead helmsman), Shubrick's orders were to blockade the Paraguay River to prevent commerce, attack and destroy the Paraguayan Fortress of Humaita (known as the "Gibraltar of South America"), and proceed to the capital Asuncion and capture it by force if necessary. Shubrick's force was the largest U.S. Naval force to be deployed anywhere prior to the Civil War, accounting for 25% of the Navy's personnel and operational vessels. The force initially included 12 ships, 200 guns and 2,500 men. Even so, it was woefully inadequate for the assigned mission.

Shubrick's force began arriving off Montevideo, Uruguay in December 1858, almost three years after the *Water Witch* incident. The force included two sail frigates (USS *Sabine* and USS *St. Lawrence*), two sail sloops-of-war (USS *Falmouth* and USS *Preble*) and three sail brigs (USS *Dolphin*, USS *Bainbridge*, and USS *Perry*), and the armed sidewheel steamer USS *Fulton*, the *Water Witch* and the steam-powered revenue cutter *Harriet Lane* (named after President Buchanan's niece). Two armed store ships (USS *Supply* and USS *Release*) rounded out the force.

The first problem was that with the exception of *Fulton* and *Water Witch*, none of these ships had a shallow-enough draft to get up the Parana River as far as Paraguay, and the sailing ships were ill-suited to riverine operations anyway. However, Shubrick had authority and funding to charter commercial steamers and adapt them as naval vessels. The charters gave the United States the option to buy the ships, which Shubrick did, purchasing seven steamers (which would be renamed *Mystic*, *Sumpter*, *Mohawk*, *Crusader*, *Wyandotte*, *Anacostia* and *Pulaski* during the Civil War).

Once the steamers were armed with guns transferred from the other ships (mostly 32-pounder howitzers), they proceeded up the Rio de la Plata and Parana River. Every one of them ran aground at some point and had to be pulled off sand bars by *Harriet Lane*. The Parana River passes through Argentina to land-locked Paraguay, and at that time Argentina was engaged in a civil war, as Buenos Aires had seceded from the rest of Argentina (and successfully bribed the Argentinian Navy to defect). The Argentinian faction wanted the U.S. mission to reach a peaceful settlement with Paraguay, while the Buenos Aires faction would have been perfectly happy if a war broken out.

Nevertheless, the U.S. force proceeded up the Parana River as far as Corrientes, Argentina, near the border with Paraguay. At this point, the

steamship *Fulton* proceeded up the river with Judge Bowlin and Commodore Shubrick embarked in an attempt to reach a diplomatic settlement. At the junction of the Parana and Paraguay Rivers, *Fulton* proceeded up the Paraguay toward Asuncion, first passing the fortress of Humaita. At that point, the horseshoe bend channel was only 200 yards wide, with a chain boom across the river. The fortress had 120 guns and an 18,000-man garrison. No wooden ship ever forced its way past the fortress. (In 1867-1868, it took 8,000 Brazilian and Argentinian soldiers, supported by iron-clad warships, two years and 400 dead to starve out the fortress.) *Fulton* anchored, sent a boat to the shore of the fort and stated her diplomatic mission. *Fulton* was then allowed to pass, arriving at Asuncion (1,300 miles from the sea) on 24 January 1859.

President Lopez knew that a naval blockade could hurt Paraguay economically, but he also correctly assessed that it would not last long as the U.S. was headed toward civil war, so he was not impressed by the U.S. force (which would have to get past Humaita to reach the capital). However, Lopez also anticipated that war between Paraguay and Brazil was imminent and he did not need another enemy. Long story short, the negotiations worked out and everyone found language to save face. The U.S. said that *Water Witch* was not a warship, but a survey vessel (despite her being armed) and therefore had not violated Lopez' decree. Paraguay did not admit blame for the incident, saying the fort was only obeying standing orders and no insult to the American flag was intended, and Paraguay deplored that the incident happened because of the misinterpretation. Paraguay also quietly agreed to pay 10,000 pesos to the helmsman's family.

Fulton departed Asuncion on 13 February with the diplomatic settlement accomplished. However, the expedition revealed the sorry state of the U.S. Navy resulting from inadequate budgets and incompetent shore based administration. Shubrick's force was critically short

of all manner of munitions, with only enough to sustain a seven hour bombardment, and the largest weapon, an 11-inch Dahlgren gun, could not get anywhere near Paraguay. The steamers were constantly short of coal, and all of them were assessed as unfit as warships. The flagship *Sabine* nearly sank in a storm, when poorly constructed gun ports splintered, and the ship spent five hours on her beam-ends. In effect, the U.S. naval expedition was an expensive bluff (costing about 3 million dollars) and fortunately the Paraguayans didn't call it, otherwise this might have been one of the biggest embarrassments in U.S. naval history. As it was, President Buchanan claimed it was a big success and that Paraguay had given ample apologies (they had not actually done so). Congress was unimpressed, noting that Buchanan's naval expenditures were twice that of President Madison's during the War of 1812, with no glory to show for it.

When the U.S. Civil War broke out, Shubrick was the senior officer in the U.S. Navy from the south, but he opted to remain loyal to the Union. However, due to age he was placed on the retired list in 1862 and served out his days as chairman of the U.S. Lighthouse Board. Four ships were named after Shubrick; the first was a lighthouse steamer, the second was Torpedo Boat No. 31 (1901-1919), the third was *Clemson*-class destroyer DD-268 (1919-lend-lease to Britain in 1940, scrapped 1945). Gleaves-class destroyer DD-639 survived being hit by a German-bomb off Sicily and by a Japanese kamikaze off Okinawa, but was deemed not worth repairing at the end of World War II.

Lieutenant Page sided with the Confederacy during the Civil War, initially accepting a commission as a colonel of artillery in the Confederate Army engaged in the defense of Richmond. In 1863, he accepted a commission in the Confederate Navy as a captain after which he was sent to Europe to buy ships. At the end of the war, he was in command of the Confederate ironclad *CSS Stonewall* (more on her in the next H-

gram where she winds up in the Japanese Navy). After the war, Page went to Argentina as part of a Confederate community in exile, and had a hand in modernizing the Argentinian Navy. Lieutenant Jeffers, on the other hand, sided with the Union. He assumed command of the ironclad *USS Monitor* after Captain John Worden was wounded during the first ironclad engagement in history with *CSS Virginia* in the Battle of Hampton Roads in March 1862. *Gleaves*-class destroyer DD-621 named after Jeffers earned seven battle stars in World War II in the Mediterranean and Pacific, and the ship was present at the Japanese surrender. Not surprisingly, no ship was named after Page.

Water Witch saw extensive blockade duty during the Civil War. On the night of 3 June 1864, a Confederate Marine boat force boarded and captured *Water Witch* in Ossabow Sound, near Savannah Georgia. Two Union Sailors and six Confederates were killed (13 Union officers and 49 men were captured). The Confederates subsequently burned *Water Witch* in December 1864 to prevent her recapture by the Union.

As for Paraguay, President Lopez was correct in that he did not need an enemy of the United States. The War of the Triple Alliance broke out in 1864, with Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay ganging up on Paraguay, in what was the bloodiest war in Latin American history, with between 150,000 and 500,000 dead. Over 50,000 Brazilian soldiers, 18,000 Argentinian soldiers and 10,000 Uruguayan soldiers were casualties. Between a quarter and a half of Paraguay's population was killed, including President Lopez, who died in action against the Brazilians in the Battle of Cerro Cora in 1870.

Sources include: "The Paraguay Expedition," by Mark Corrison: Emporia State University, December 1983; "The Water Witch Incident," by Clare V. McKanna: The American Neptune, The Peabody Museum of Salem, Massachusetts, 1971;

*and NHC's Dictionary of American Fighting Ships
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