

# THE CONFEDERATE NAVAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Issue Number Nine -- February 1992

## C.S.S. ALABAMA ARTIFACTS EXHIBIT AT U.S. NAVAL MUSEUM OPENS WITH ALL- STAR FRANCO-AMERICAN RECEPTION

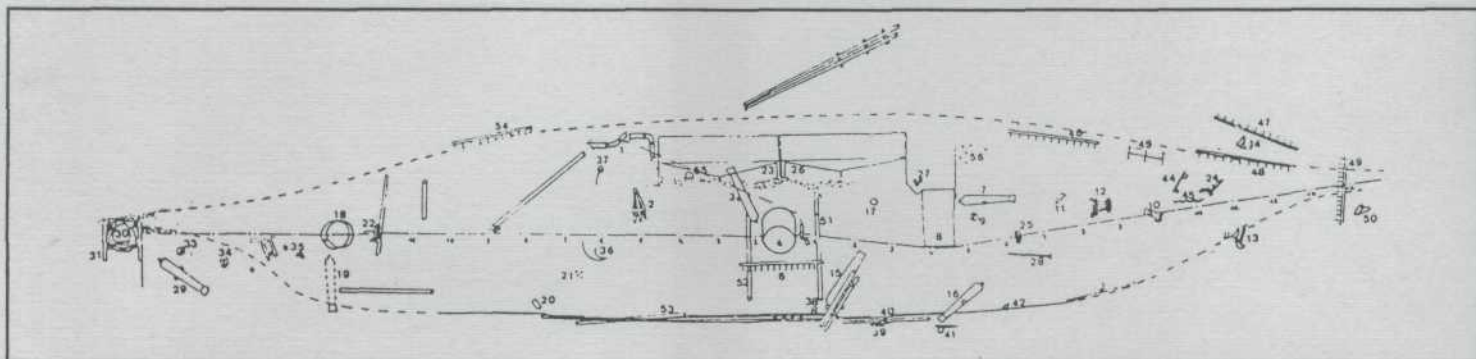


Diagram of *C.S.S. Alabama* as she now lies beneath 178 feet of water off Cherbourg harbor, France

By John Townley

On January 13th, the U.S. Naval Museum in the Washington Navy Yard opened its long-awaited exhibit of artifacts from the *C.S.S. Alabama* with a gala reception. Among the several hundred attending was a wide assortment of admirals, ambassadors, attaches, business magnates, museum brass, underwater archaeologists, and historians of both American and French persuasion, as well as dozens of descendants of Capt. Raphael Semmes and Capt. John Winslow and various CNHS Board members.

The twenty artifacts on display were supplemented by a number of other *Alabama*-related pieces to round out the exhibit, including the recently-seized bell alleged to be from the *Alabama* (for more on the bell, see sidebar, p. 2). Of the actual artifacts from the ship, Semmes's toilet bowl is probably the most spectacular, being entirely lined with a bucolic country

scene done in blue on white porcelain. Next most exciting is the brass rim of the ship's wheel, inscribed with the CSN motto "Aide Toi, Et Dieu T'Aidera," (Help yourself and God will help you) which enabled divers to positively identify the wreck. Standing beside it is a large copper galley chimney, the biggest of the pieces taken up from the bottom. With the exception of one cannon ball, the rest of the ar-



Project head Capt. Max Guerout (r.) (Continued on page two...)

tifacts consist of various English-made crockery, mostly blue and white Davenport ceramics with anchor motifs.

Beefing up the exhibit are the *Kearsarge's* stern post with one of *Alabama's* unexploded shells still lodged in it, the Laird *Alabama* builder's model, the well-known Xanthus Smith painting of the battle, Semmes's commission for the ship, models of the *Alabama* and the *Kearsarge*, several award certificates for members of the *Kearsarge's* crew, and the now notorious bell with *C.S.S. Alabama* crudely carved onto it which may very likely be entirely bogus.

All in all, the exhibition, though small, is quite satisfying and very attractively put together by the museum's Assistant Director Claudia Pennington.

After brief speeches from various parties including French diving project head Capt. Max Guerout, we were all treated to a film about the ship's history and the sto-

## Editorial:

# A Hard Job -- A Fine Conclusion

It was more than a pleasure this month to be witness to the arrival of the artifacts of the *C.S.S. Alabama*, the first time ever any part of the actual ship herself has ever seen American soil. Built in England, she lived and died on the high seas, and the closest she ever got to the country which she served was a few miles off Galveston where she sank the *U.S.S. Hatteras*. As the years progress, it is hoped we will be seeing more and more of her on this side of the Western Ocean.

Perhaps equally as amazing as the artifacts in the exhibit itself was the friendly, congratulative camaraderie of French and American, Navy, State Department, and various museum and government types with wine and canape in hand. It was both amazing and enheartening, because it was not always so.

The *Alabama* was a source of great international contention when she was on the seas destroying ships of a nation with which Britain, her builder, was not at war. The controversy continued into the early 1870's, well after she had gone to her grave, with the *Alabama* Claims settlement against Britain. Finally, after the discovery of her wreck in the mid-1980's, she once more became a bone of contention, this time between the U.S. and France over the subject of her ownership.

It is too long and tangled a story to tell here, but it is a tale of close calls, watchfulness, delusion, greed, mistrust, and miscommunication that would make for a good novel. A lot of good diplomacy, patience, and a lot of hard work and personal expense were involved as well, which is why things came out so well in the end.

There might never have been an ownership dispute to begin with, as when first queried by France,

the U.S. Navy was quite content to simply give the ship away without a second thought. The letter committing this bureaucratic *faux pas* was luckily spotted by someone knowledgeable of the ship as it made its way through channels and the hue and cry was raised to strongly reconsider the move.

From a dangerous state of malign neglect, the *Alabama* soon became the object of desire for various entrepreneurs on both sides of the ocean, including at least one filmmaker, a handful of academics, four government departments, and a number of members of Congress. As always when too many fingers are in the pie, a mess ensued and a lot of accusations, both true and false, flew. In the end, however, cooler heads prevailed and after much long and tiring negotiations, the current satisfactory arrangements were settled upon. There are lots of people to thank for this, many of them familiar to readers of these pages. Some are not so familiar, so they deserve special mention. One is Peter Bernhardt, the U.S. State Department attorney who spent many long and patient months negotiating the Franco-American agreement. Without his patience, tact, and wise and experienced diplomacy, things could have come apart a dozen different times.

Also less well-known and particularly to thank are Michael Higgins and Roger DeMik, who alerted the world to the *Alabama's* situation at the earliest stages and spent many months and thousands of their own personal funds making Congress aware of what was happening and getting a slow-moving bureaucracy to wake up and take action. As founding Directors of the CNHS, they also left a continuing legacy that will protect Confederate naval vessels into the next century. -- John Townley



French *Alabama* Association  
President Mme. Ulane Bonnel

(...continued from page one)

ry of its rediscovery and recent diving expeditions funded by Electricité de France (the national power company who also did the artifact conservation in its labs). The film begins and ends with the famous sea shanty "Roll, *Alabama*, Roll," (which, surprisingly, was a recording this author had made of it back in 1973), and there is some excellent footage of the fine archaeological work the French have done under enormously difficult circumstances.

The ship lies in 178 feet of water, at the limit of natural-air SCUBA diving, in a four-knot (continued next page...)

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current except for slack tide. Divers were accompanied by a small submarine which used computer guidance to very precisely map the wreck. So far, only the few loose objects now on display have been recovered to protect them from possible looting. No actual excavation has been done on the wreck so far, only preparatory mapping and observation.

The ship lies tilted on her side with most of the upper decks long since dissolved away, with boilers and stacks prominent, as well as various cannon strewn about here and there. It is uncertain at the moment just how much may be recovered from the wreck, as diving conditions are difficult and the project could run through many millions of dollars before it is completed.

Suitable diving conditions are only found in two months of the year (one in spring, the other in fall), and unaided divers can only remain at the site for ten minutes twice a day at slack tide, though the submarine can work longer when it is available. All the diving is being done by volunteer French Navy personnel and funding and conservation facilities are being provided by the French power company.



Semmes's ornate porcelain commode features bucolic landscape



Semmes descendant Luke Finley cuts ribbon to open exhibit

As a result of the signing of the Franco-American accord recognizing U.S. ownership of the *Alabama* and French control of the diving, the project will be supervised by the joint U.S.-French *C.S.S. Alabama* Scientific Committee which includes CNHS directors William Dudley and Paul Johnston, who are also senior historian at the U.S. Naval Historical Center and Maritime Curator for the Smithsonian Institution respectively.

As with most historical exhibits, the cases and labels tend to distance you a bit from the reality of their genuineness. But then suddenly you realize, looking at a plate, that Semmes, or Kell, or Sinclair, or Fullam, or Dr. Galt, or Stribling, or Dr. Llewellyn *actually ate off it*. Not to mention the commode...one wonders what Captain Raphael T. Semmes would have thought if he had known his toilet would end up behind glass in a museum! But nevertheless, in the truest sense of the word, it is a measure of greatness indeed.

The *C.S.S. Alabama* exhibit, entitled "*Alabama Lost And Found*," will be at the U.S. Navy Museum through June, then will travel to Mobile, Alabama and finally back to Paris.

## The Battle Of The Bell: Is It The Real Thing?

In issue seven we briefly touched on the possibility that the ship's bell purported to come from the *Alabama* might not be the real thing. Since then it has been inspected by scientists at a laboratory at the Smithsonian Institution who basically gave a non-committal opinion. They found no evidence that it had ever been underwater but admit that it might have been.

Certainly there is the strong possibility that it is a fake, as indeed one person has already come forward and claimed to have forged it. In addition to its pristine condition, it is seriously too small for a ship of *Alabama's* size and its crudely engraved lettering is inconsistent with the carefully-wrought nature of the other artifacts from the ship.

The bell was seized late last year from New Jersey relic dealer Richard Steinmetz who is appealing the Federal decision based on his allegation that the *Alabama* was in fact a pirate ship and not subject to any sort of legal protection. The appeal goes to court in March.



Bell on display with newspaper clippings about controversy

## Profile:

# John McIntosh Kell, "Luff" Of The *C.S.S. Alabama*

By Norman C. Delaney

For two weeks in the summer of 1849 a court-martial board at the Pensacola Navy Yard deliberated the fate of four young passed midshipmen. The issue involved seemed hardly earth-shaking. The four, while assigned to the sloop-of-war *Albany* cruising Caribbean waters, had refused an order to light the candle of the lieutenant who relieved them at the end of night watch. One after the other, each had been suspended from duty and confined until the *Albany's* return to Pensacola. The four officers were convinced that the order was not only degrading to their new rating as passed midshipman, but also illegal. The issue, as well as the future of the four passed midshipmen, would be decided by six senior officers. Agreeing to serve as counsel for the four was Lieutenant Raphael Semmes, lawyer and veteran officer of 23 years service. He too believed that the disputed order had been both degrading and illegal. Despite Semmes's assistance, however, the four passed midshipmen were found guilty of "willful disobedience of a lawful order" and dismissed from the service. A year later, the decision was reversed and they were reinstated without prejudice.

For 26-year-old John McIntosh Kell, one of the four passed midshipmen, dismissal from the navy was traumatic. But his conscience was clear. Although he had disobeyed an order he considered illegal, his overall record remained exemplary.

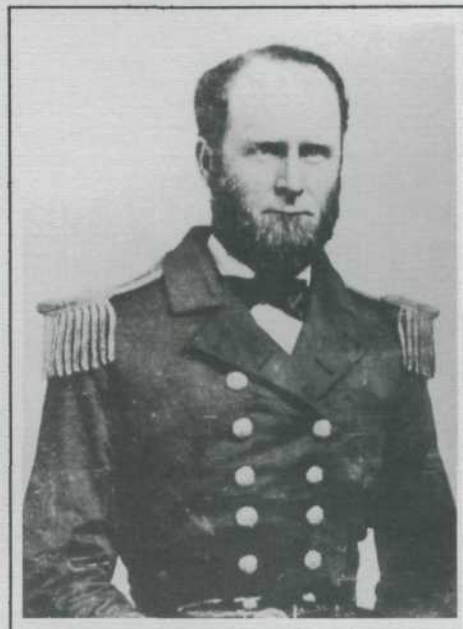
Twelve years later, on January 18, 1861, Kell resigned his commission as lieutenant in the United States Navy. Less than an hour earlier his home state of Georgia had adopted an ordinance for secession. To Kell, resignation was not a rash decision but, rather, a "sacred and

honorable duty." Offering his services to his state, he was commissioned a commander in Georgia's fledgling navy. For several weeks he patrolled the coast, commanding the paddle wheel steamer *Savannah*, a converted passenger liner. But his assignment was changed abruptly by a telegram from Confederate Navy Secretary Stephen R. Mallory in Richmond:

"Proceed to New Orleans and report to Commander Raphael Semmes, C.S. Navy, for duty."

When Semmes learned he would command the *Sumter*, the South's first commerce raider, he requested that Kell be appointed first lieutenant and executive officer. This association of Semmes and Kell was the beginning of three years of service at sea, a time which Kell marked by a conspicuous change in his appearance. In addition to his standing six feet tall, Kell's most imposing feature was his carefully brushed red beard. At the time the *Sumter* left New Orleans, Kell vowed he would not cut it until he was reunited with his wife Blanche. Within the year he received new orders to serve under Semmes on a new ship, the *C.S.S. Alabama*. More than three years passed before he was able to return to Blanche and their only surviving child. During his long absence his two other young children had died of diphtheria. But letters to and from Blanche were received infrequently, since the *Alabama* -- figuratively a "ghost ship" -- seldom made port. As a result, Kell did not learn of the deaths of his children until after the *Alabama's* arrival at Cherbourg.

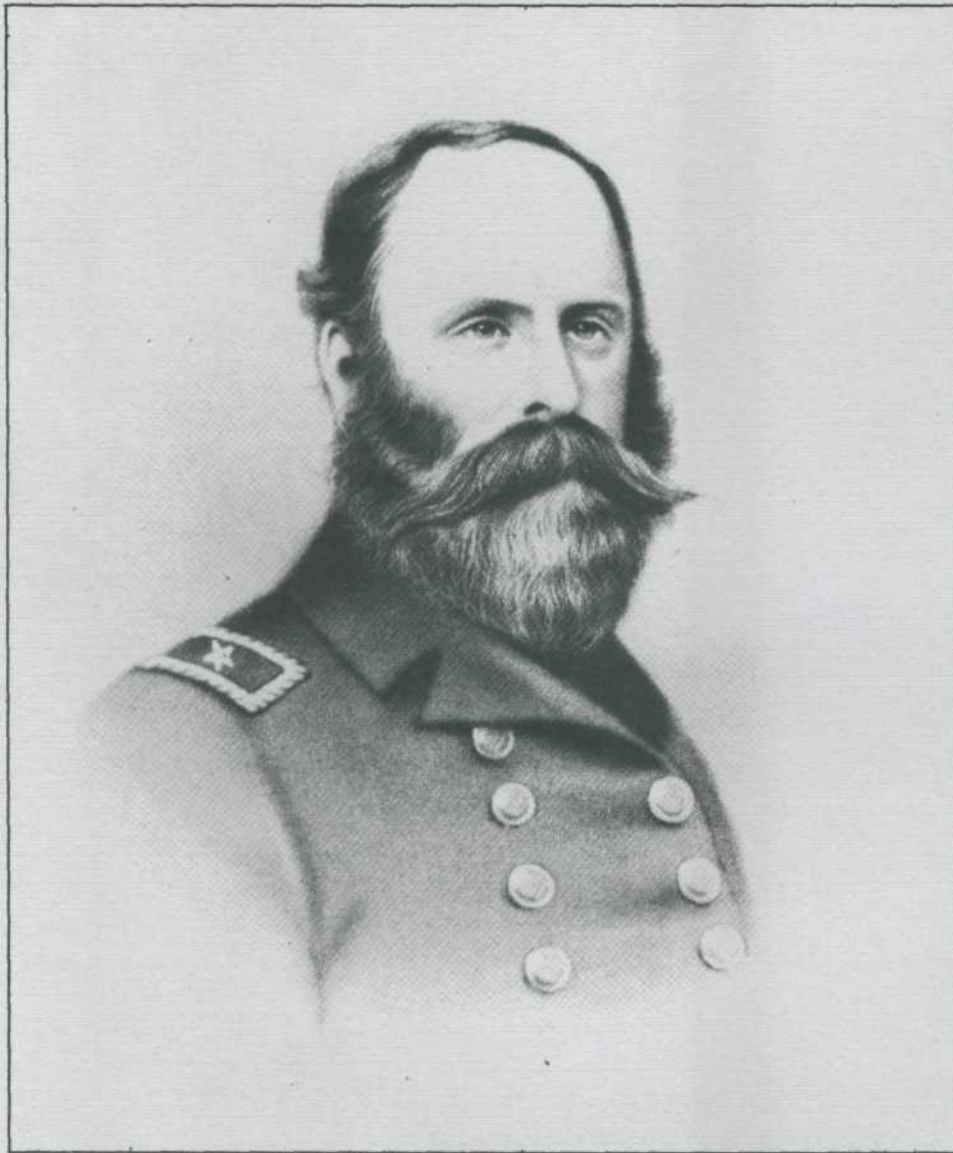
During his three years commanding the *Sumter* and *Alabama*, Semmes found Kell to be the able and loyal first officer he needed. So dedicated to duty was Kell that during the 22 months of the *Alabama's* cruise he was off the ship a total of only 22 hours. Semmes spent most



Kell at New Orleans before the *C.S.S. Sumter* ran the blockade

of his time (quite appropriately, as ship's captain) either in his quarters or on the quarter-deck. Because the other officers were less experienced, many duties -- operating the ship, overhauling Northern merchant ships, and drilling and disciplining the crew -- were Kell's responsibilities.

Since he was responsible for discipline aboard the *Alabama*, it is hardly surprising that Kell was resented. For, as Semmes later boasted in *Service Afloat*, discipline aboard the *Alabama* was "never relaxed." While "the willing and obedient were treated with humanity and kindness, the turbulent were jerked down, with a strong hand, and made submissive to discipline." The "strong hand" was, of course, Kell's. Semmes, noting his "luff's" affability and kindness when in the company of his fellow officers, added, "You will scarcely recognize him again on deck, arraigning some culprit 'at the mast' for a breach of discipline." One of the "culprits" later described Kell as "a low lived bully...a man without any principle." But a fairer evaluation is that



Kell as "luff" (first officer) on board the *C.S.S. Alabama*.

of an officer, Richard F. Armstrong. As the *Alabama*'s second lieutenant, Armstrong hid his youthful resentment of Kell. "How I used to hate him," he admitted years later to Blanche. But the mature Armstrong had come to appreciate his former senior officer, for he acknowledged, "Captain Semmes may well give him the credit of the discipline and much of the success of the ship."

Indeed, the success of the *Alabama* -- for which Kell does deserve considerable credit -- was remarkable. This one vessel inflicted losses of more than 4.5 million dollars in destroyed ships and cargoes.

Her record of 65 prizes, either burned or bonded, surpassed all other Confederate cruisers. In addition, she fought and defeated a Union warship - the *Hatteras* -- in less than fifteen minutes. Little wonder that Southerners who served aboard the *Alabama* believed they were contributing much toward ultimate Confederate victory. And most of the sailors seem to have appreciated their no-nonsense "luff." According to the captain of the English yacht *Deerhound*, which rescued Semmes and Kell from the sinking *Alabama*, "Semmes seemed to be greatly revered by the crew, but I think Kell had their deepest regard. Ac-

ording to their idea, Kell was Semmes's mainstay and chief counsellor, and the commander owed much of his success and reputation to his first officer's sagacity and promptness of resource."

Only family letters written by Blanche Kell after the war provide a hint of criticism of Semmes. According to Blanche, her husband had had strong misgivings about engaging the *Kearsarge* with her more powerful guns. Prior to Semmes's written challenge to Captain John Winslow, Kell had reminded him that because of bad powder and fuses only one of every three shells fired at the prize Rockingham in target practice had exploded. But Semmes, who apparently had already made up his mind to fight, had replied, "I'll take the chance of 1 in 3."

Nevertheless, Kell was totally loyal to Semmes. (After the war he named a son Semmes.) He was, therefore, understandably bitter toward former *Alabama* lieutenant Arthur Sinclair for writing that Semmes had learned about the *Kearsarge*'s planked-over chain protection -- from a French officer -- prior to the engagement. Semmes had always denied knowing about the chains, contending that Winslow as guilty of deception by having protective chains slung over the sides of his ship, then covered over. Not even Kell's angry disclaimer, written on behalf of Semmes's family, could convince Sinclair that Semmes had been unaware of the chains.

After the loss of the *Alabama*, Semmes and Kell returned to the Confederacy and were assigned to the pitifully small "fleet" on the James River. Kell, who had been promoted while the *Alabama* was at sea, commanded the ironclad *Richmond*, and Semmes -- now an admiral -- commanded the squadron. However, sickness compelled Kell to return to Georgia shortly before Semmes arrived to assume command. Only weeks later, Rich-

mond was evacuated and the iron-clads blown up to prevent capture.

After the war Semmes spent three months in a Northern prison before being released without trial. He later practiced law in Mobile, while Kell turned to farming at Sunnydale, Georgia. The former "luff" was content to let Semmes's *Service Afloat*, published in 1869 tell the story of their exploits aboard the *Sumter* and *Alabama*. Following Semmes's death in 1877, however, Kell became the logical spokesman on behalf of his deceased captain. His well-written "Cruises and Combats of the 'Alabama'," originally published in Century magazine, was included in the *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* series; in 1900 Kell's autobiography, *Recollections of a Naval Life*, appeared.

In his later years Kell was gratified to receive recognition from admirers of the now legendary *Alabama*. In 1886 Governor John Gordon appointed him Georgia's adjutant general, a position Kell held at the time of his death in 1900. Although the state legislature eventually gave him the honorary title "General," Kell preferred being "Captain" Kell. He was "Captain Kell, 'Luff' of the *Alabama*."

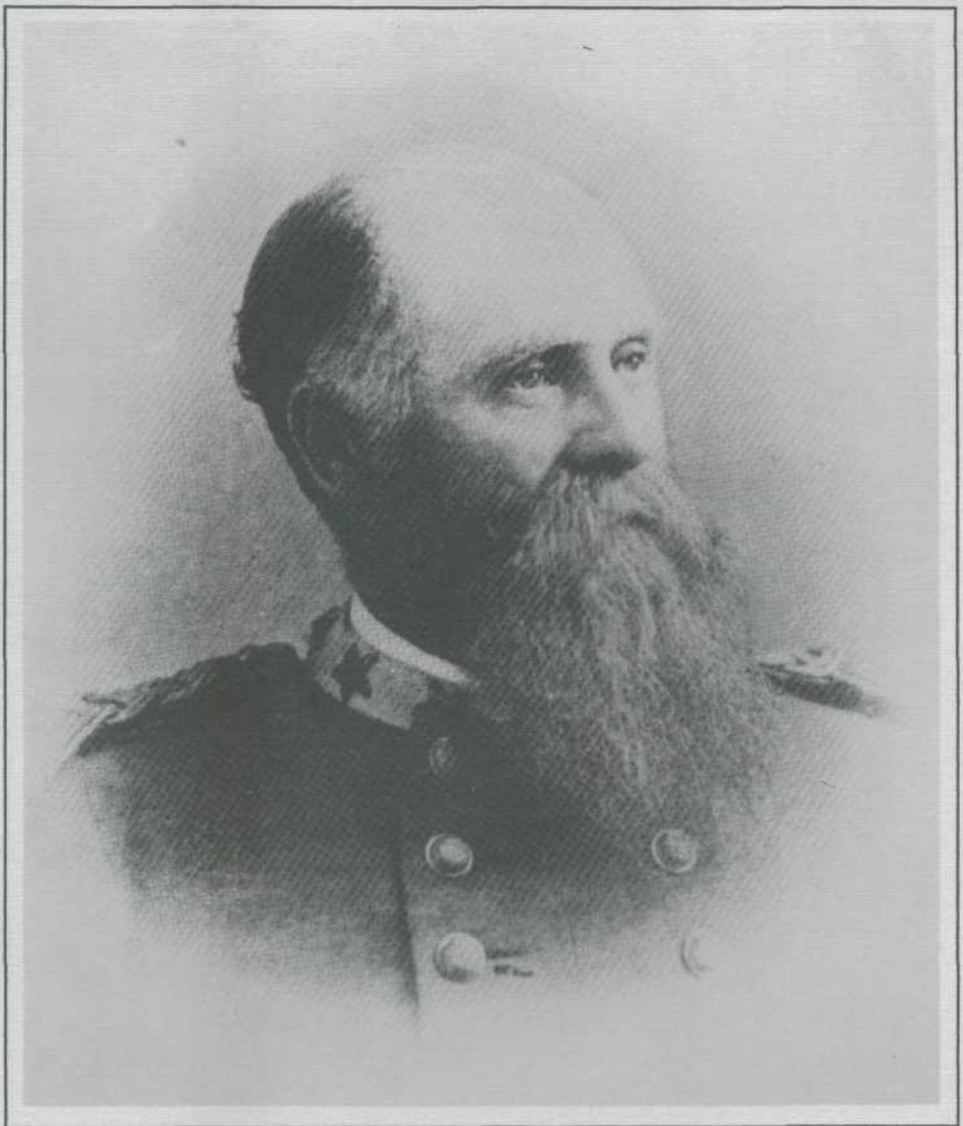
*Norman C. Delaney is Professor Of History at Del Mar College, author of John McIntosh Kell of the Raider Alabama, and a member of the CNHS Board of Advisors.*

### Review:

## Admiral Of The Amazon

*Admiral Of The Amazon, John Randolph Tucker, His Confederate Colleagues, and Peru* by David P. Werlich, Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 1990. This biography of Virginian John Randolph Tucker describes the life of the prominent American naval officer outlined on the facing page.

Author David Werlich is a scholar of Latin American history at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. He has



An aging Kell as Adjutant General of the State of Georgia, appointed by Governor John Gordon in 1886.

done a masterful job in pulling together widely scattered material from North and South American repositories and weaving it into a very readable narrative. This is the most thorough biography of a CSN officer and his service following the War to appear to date. There are very few works which describe the careers of Confederate naval officers following the War.

Among the others are Frances Leigh Williams's *Matthew Fontaine Maury, Scientist of the Sea* which includes his sojourn in Mexico, James Morgan's biography which tells of soldiering in Egypt, and *Joseph Fry, The Cuban Martyr* who ran guns into Cuba and got caught.

The only omissions detected in the book may be forgiven a Latin American

specialist; several minor coincidents and connections between Tucker's service in the Confederate and "American Union" fleets were missed, notably that the steamer *Arizona*, which carried Tucker and his confederates to Peru, was the former blockade runner *Robert E. Lee*, which served as *Concepcion* under his Peruvian command.

The descriptions of river survey in a hostile wilderness are fascinating, as are the parallels between North and South American river navigation. Tucker and his confederates had real influence on the development of early steam navigation on the Amazon and professor Werlich does them justice for their service both before and after the War. -- Kevin Foster

**Profile:**

# Commodore John Randolph Tucker, CSN

By Kevin Foster

John Randolph Tucker was a senior Commander in the United States Navy, known to his shipmates as "handsome Jack," in charge of ordnance at the Norfolk Navy Yard when Virginia seceded. He resigned his commission on April 18, 1861. Four days later the governor placed him in command of Virginia forces defending the James River. After a higher ranked officer took over most of the James River defenses, Tucker armed the steamer Yorktown and commissioned her the CSS Patrick Henry. He commanded the James River Squadron in support of the Virginia in the famous fight against the Union fleet at Hampton Roads and at the first defense of Drewry's Bluff.

Tucker next commissioned and commanded the ironclad *Chicora* at Charleston, where he took part in the famous raid with the Palmetto State that forced two Union ships to surrender and briefly raised the blockade. Following that engagement Tucker was promoted to Captain and given command of the Charleston Squadron. Tucker commanded the naval force that assisted in defeating Admiral Dupont's ironclad fleet attack. He promoted innovation such as mine warfare, torpedo boats and the submarine *H.L. Hunley*. Commodore Tucker and the Charleston Squadron defended the city to the bitter end. When the city was clearly falling to attack from the land, Tucker ordered the ships scuttled and retreated with his men to Wilmington, North Carolina, and ultimately to Richmond.

At Richmond Captain Tucker was placed in command of naval

forces ashore under Rear Admiral Semmes and worked to improve the defenses along the James, returning to the area of his first Confederate command. As Richmond fell Tucker was once again forced to destroy his command and retreat from superior forces. The Confederate sailors fought gallantly at Saylor's Creek where they repelled multiple Union infantry attacks. Captain Tucker was forced to surrender the naval brigade after the C.S. Army units on either side capitulated. Tucker, and several other officers captured at the same time but not covered by surrender terms, were sent to Fort Warren in Boston harbor. As a naval officer who had resigned his commission to go south, Tucker was not included in President



Johnson's general amnesty proclamation of May 29, 1865.

Forbidden to work in his profession as a sailor on board United States ships, Captain Tucker briefly accepted work ashore, before beginning a career in yet another navy. Following repeated provocations, the countries of Peru, Chile, Bolivia, and Ecuador had formed an alliance called the "American Union" to war against Spain. Following several engagements and friction among the al-

lied officers they chose the "Southern Yankee" John Tucker to lead the combined fleet.

Tucker became a Rear Admiral in the Peruvian navy and took three former Confederates with him as staff officers. He assumed command late in 1865 and prepared the fleet for an ambitious cruise against Spanish holdings in the Philippines, the South Atlantic, and the Caribbean. Tucker survived a mutiny by junior Peruvian officers but not the fallout from an embarrassing incident known as the "War of the Salutes." In an escalating series of events during late 1866, United States Navy officers visiting Valparaiso, including Admiral Dahlgren, refused to salute the Peruvian squadron under Tucker, claiming that Tucker was disrespectful of them and of the United States flag. Tucker denied any disrespect but refused in turn to salute the U.S. vessels. The incident forced the "Southern Yankee's" resignation and removal to a less politically sensitive post.

After several months Almirante Tucker was named president of the hydrographic survey of the Peruvian portions of the upper Amazon. Such survey duties were important, though obscure, and consumed the next seven years of his life. When the survey was completed Tucker and his ex-Confederate compatriots returned to the United States to publish the maps for which they had so painstakingly gathered information. There, in 1877, the mapmaking Confederates were released from service due to political maneuverings in Peru. Tucker and the others were left unpaid for several years until a direct appeal to the United States government for assistance in pressing the claim led to its payment. The 65-year old admiral, however, was too proud and "could not bring himself to request intervention of the United States on his own behalf." Tucker retired in Petersburg, Virginia and died there on June 12, 1883.

## Research, Requests, & Comments...

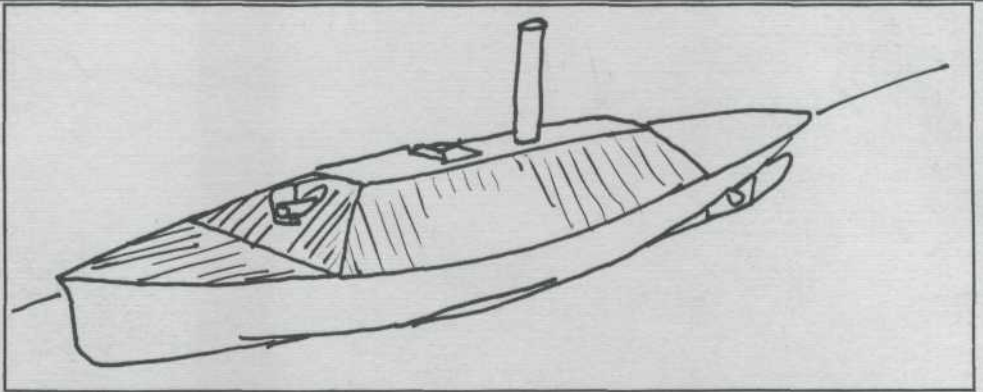
Dear CNHS,

I am a new member and I am researching Confederate ironclads, especially the obscure. I would like to contact anyone interested in this area and share data.

I have found an obscure little ironclad, built by a Mr. Williams Crary of Pensacola, Florida. It is referred to in *Naval Chronology* Vol. II, p. 62 and in Scharf p. 616. I have found his great granddaughter and she is searching through family records for more details.

What I know so far is that he sent a schooner to the Frederick G. Howard Yard at Milton, Florida. It was razed, then fitted with a low casemate covered in rail-yard iron. It was a rather odd vessel, with which Mr. Crary intended to attack Ft. Pickens, using a single gun of his own design, mounted in the bow.

I have researched this gentleman and discovered that he was not the crackpot I first imagined. Indeed, he was quite wealthy and a successful inventor with numerous patents who knew General Bragg and Secretary Mallory.



The gun was to be built at Red Mountain, Alabama at Rob's Foundry, where I believe Mr. Crary had half-interest. He designed a rather advanced shell using an inertial impact fuse -- a device not seen in naval guns for many decades.

The Crary ironclad was sent up the Escambia River upon the abandonment of Pensacola and burned at Bluff Springs, May 10, 1862.

As for the remains of the Crary ironclad, I see no evidence that the river was dredged or cleared and no survey has been made in the Bluff Springs area -- there's no reason why the vessel should not still be on the bottom of the river.

Attached is a crude drawing of what I imagine the Crary ironclad to have looked like, from the vague description I have of it. It was not

intended to attack Union vessels, so I'd guess the heaviest armor would be on the bow, less on the sides, and possibly none on the stern.

The gun designed by Mr. Crary was small -- maybe 3-4" -- to fire a high-velocity conical shell with an adjustable impact fuse. Typical schooners in the area were 150-175 tons, 120-130' long with 20-25' beam and 6-9' draft.

-- James B. Shuman, 1024 Triune Mill Rd., Thomaston, GA 30286, (404) 647-5548.

Special Note: Some readers trying to locate Thomas Moebs's CSN reference work have found he has moved to England. The book may still be had here: \$85 + \$4.75 postage, from Hamilton's Book Store, 784 Jamestown Rd., Williamsburg, VA 23185, (804)220-3000.

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