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A SHORT ACCOUNT OF THE CONFEDERATE RAIDER ALABAMA

By Rear Admiral Francis D. Boyle, U.S.N. Ret.

ed. note: We asked Admiral Boyle to write this article for the Noticias. As a valued volunteer Watchstander at the Maritime Museum he has brought to light the stories behind the valued items on display in the Museum.

When the Confederate States of America were formed in 1861 and a State of war existed between the North and South, the Southern leaders were determined to inflict damage on the industrial North by seeking out and destroying ships and cargos of any nation before they could reach their destination in a Union port. Thus Secretary of the Navy Mallory sent Commander James Dunwoody Bulloch of the Confederate Navy to England to find, purchase, and arm for the Confederacy ships that could act as sea raiders to destroy Union shipping and Union related cargoes. One of the first endeavors of Commander Bulloch was to negotiate the contract for building the Confederate Ship ALABAMA.

The Laird Bros. of Birkenhead, across the Mersey river from Liverpool, modeled a man-o-war of the type that Commander Bulloch needed. After a review of the model and a discussion of costs and other contractual matters, the deal was made. For payment of 47,500 pounds sterling the Confederate States of America were to receive a raider-type cruiser without installed ordnance. She was to be bark rigged and to have, as an auxiliary for main propulsion in emergencies, a 300 horse-power Steam engine. This was in August of 1861, delivery to be within a year.

By June 1862, Hull No. 290, as the ALABAMA was officially known in the building yard, had underway trials, and building mistakes found. Correction of the deficiencies got underway when the ship returned to port. Completion was near but getting the "290" to sea was not to be a simple job.

The Union ambassador in London was a descendant of a long line of patriots whose forbears went back to the time before the days of '76. He was Charles Francis Adams of the Adams family — famous in those days when the early colonists were beginning to formulate their thoughts on a document to become known as the "Declaration of Independence." Ambassador Adams, from information provided him by his Liverpool Consul, Mr. Dudley, knew that there was good reason to question the neutrality of Great Britain, and that reason was the "290" in the Birkenhead shipyards.

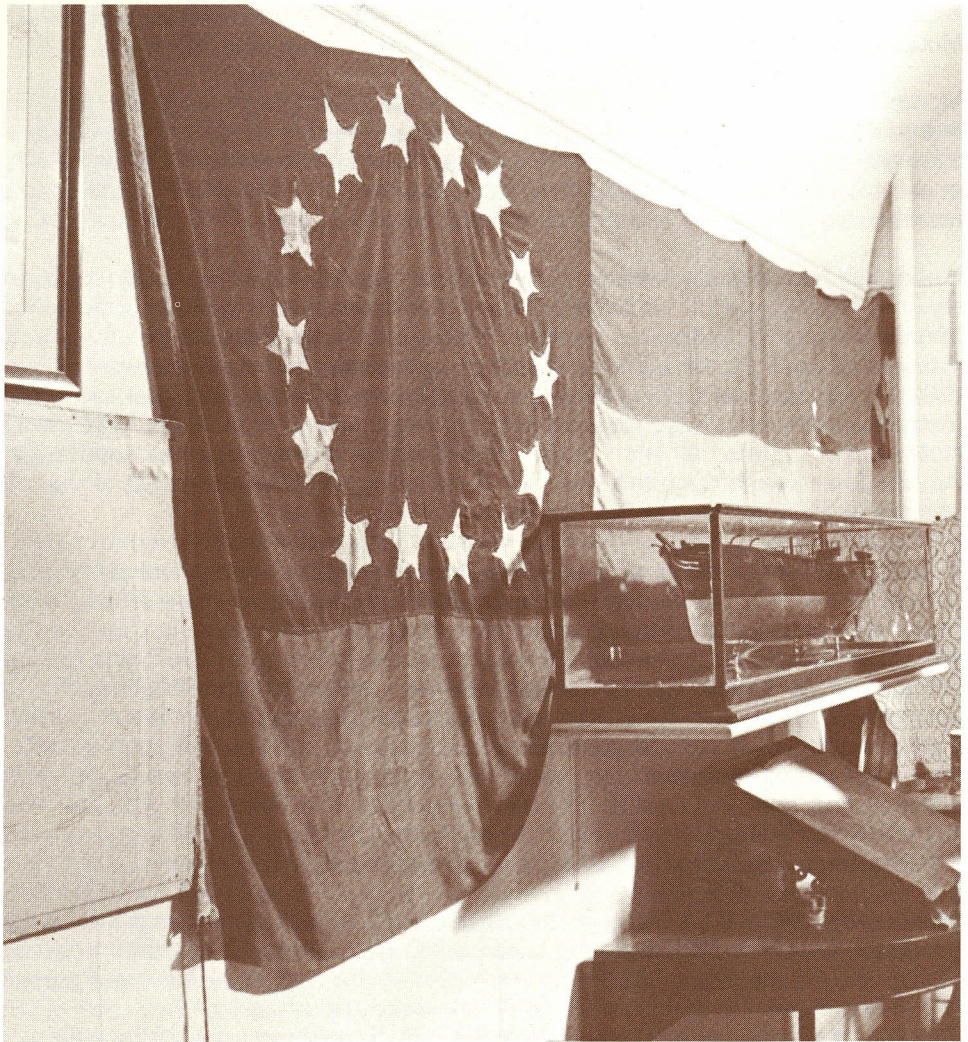
Lord Russell, Minister of Foreign Affairs, listened to Ambassador Adams' complaint about the ship being readied at Birkenhead. His aide advised him that the ship was being called ENRICA, a Spanish name, and was destined for Spain. Adams became enraged, threatened to close the Union Embassy and return to the States. Lord Russell pointed out to Adams that he was presenting hear-say information, and not facts.

Thus it was that an Irishman named Matthew Maguire was hired by the Union Consul in Liverpool as a spy to find out the real ownership of "290" and to provide to Ambassador Adams the information with which to confront Lord Russell. The week of 23 July 1862 Mr. Maguire completed his assignment and presented solid information, backed by documents, that allowed Ambassador Adams to confront Lord Russell with the "facts." The meeting was held on Friday afternoon, July the 25th.

Lord Russell, after reading the papers assembled, acknowledged that there was sufficient information to cause the ship to be detained and to prevent her from sailing. The situation was legally within the "Foreign Enlistment Act of 1819" which forbade a neutral nation from building and equipping a man-o-war; this prohibition did not extend to private individuals and firms under certain conditions. Thus the Laird Bros. had a legal crutch. Nevertheless, Lord Russell told Ambassador Adams that he would take it up with the other government agencies involved on Monday, July 28th.

Commander Bulloch was not without informants, and had the story of the preceding day's decision regarding the "290" on Saturday, the 26th. He immediately prepared a plan to move his ship without arousing suspicion: his plan called for "river trials" on the Mersey on Monday. He invited leading management personnel from the shipyard and their wives to join him in a brief Monday cruise on the river. In celebration of the event he decked the ship out in bunting and brought on board a delectable assortment of food and drink for the luncheon. Getting the ship ready was another matter.

Equipment and supplies were not on board as moving the ship on such short notice had not been planned. With the help of yard personnel working over the weekend and other people interested in his success, Commander Bulloch managed to put enough material on board to permit the ship to get underway with a minimum of trouble. He advertised for his crew, who were already hired but not alert to the sailing plans. About fifty of the ninety crewman responded in time to get the ship underway. The skipper, a Cunard Line Captain, and the principal Ship's officers, all British



The original model of the ALABAMA made in 1861. Also the Confederate National Ensign which was flown as a battle flag on the ALABAMA during her engagement off Cherbourg, France. When the ALABAMA was sinking the colors were lowered and a crewman, J. Bulloch, wrapped the flag around himself before he abandoned ship. When he was put ashore from the yacht DEERHOUND he gave the flag to his brother Captain Bulloch who had made the original contract for the construction of the ALABAMA.

subjects, were easily available and on board when the "river trials" commenced on Monday morning.

Monday afternoon at about 3:00 P.M. a lighter was placed alongside the "290" in mid-stream and the guests were asked to leave. They were told night trials were planned, and it would be inconvenient for them to remain on board. After the last guest had left the ship and the lighter was cleared of the side, "290" headed to a remote uninhabited anchorage sixty miles away.

Meanwhile back at the Laird Bros. Shipyard, every effort was being made to get the equipment and supplies left behind onto a lighter to be towed to the anchorage for transfer to the ship. There was also the problem of the rest of the crew — they were to be put on the lighter. Early Tuesday morning the lighter was under tow enroute to "290." By 6:00 in the evening the tug and its tow reached the ship, and transfer of men and gear was commenced. By midnight the tug, towing an empty lighter, was clear; an hour and a half later "290" had her anchor aweigh and was headed out into the Irish Sea through the North Channel along the Northern coast of Ireland enroute to a rendezvous in the Azores.

Tuesday the official order was issued to seize the ship and to prevent her from leaving Birkenhead. It was too late. Union ships, in addition to those of the British Navy, were soon scouring the approaches to Liverpool to intercept the Confederate Navy's new pride and joy. Meanwhile, in good sailing weather "290" reached the Island of Terceira to find Captain Steven McQueen and his bark AGRIPPINA waiting with coal, supplies, and the all important ordnance to be placed on board — the 6 thirty-two pounders, a hundred-pounder rifle cannon, and an eight-inch smooth-bore shell gun. It took five days to transfer and install the guns and to stow the supplies and fuel. During this time the passenger ship BAHAMA with the new Commanding Officer, Captain Raphael Semmes, and the ship's officers from the Confederate Navy, arrived; and also twenty Confederate seamen.

When all transfer of equipment had been completed, Captain Semmes gathered the combined British and Confederate crews aft to read to them his orders from the Confederate Secretary of the Navy which named the ship ALABAMA and placed him in command. He then offered the British sailors twice the pay they received in the British Navy to sail with him. Sixty of the British crewmen agreed. Thus he had eighty men with which to start his career as a sea-raider.

The first two weeks in the life of the ALABAMA were spent in getting everything aboard in ship-shape condition and conducting a training program to prepare the ship for its planned aggressive forays. Then, as if by signal, ALABAMA started her career that was to make her feared over the next twenty-two months.

Each year American whalers spent September whaling in the vicinity of the Azores. September of 1862 might have been a good month except for the new Confederate Raider — ALABAMA. She captured whaling ships and destroyed them. In three weeks of October Captain Semmes and his daring command stopped sixteen merchant ships, and set them on fire after their crews and passengers were

removed. In very little time the name ALABAMA spread around the world, and it struck fear in the hearts of Union sailormen who ventured out to sea.

Operating for short periods in areas where the "pickings" were lucrative, Semmes would move his command to keep ahead of the searching Union warships. He sailed from the Atlantic Coast to the Carribean, from the Carribean to the Windward Islands, then to the coast of Brazil, the Cape of Good Hope, the Indian Ocean, the South China Sea, through Malacca Strait to India and then back to the Atlantic.

Twenty months of ship operations began to take their toll of ship's equipment; particularly the boilers and the steam engine, as well as the copper plating on the ship's bottom needed repair. ALABAMA needed an overhaul. To return to Birkenhead would mean the loss of his ship. There was a chance that the French would give him the assistance he needed so Semmes headed for Cherbourg and, he hoped, the extension of a friendly helping hand to get the much needed repairs for his ship.

June 11th the ship came to anchor in the harbour of Cherbourg, France. Behind her long track over the sea were the remains of sixty-nine Union ships that had never reached their destination — all victims of this intrepid raider.

In the month of June 1864 the French government was acutely aware that the Southern cause was losing and that it would be judicious to refrain from an act against the United States that might be inferred as taking sides. Semmes' request for ship overhaul was refused and he was advised that the ALABAMA would be required to leave France as soon as she was ready for sea.

Meanwhile, in Holland, the U.S.S. KEARSARGE, Captain John A. Winslow in Command, hearing of the presence of the ALABAMA in Cherbourg, immediately got underway for the English Channel. By June 14th Captain Winslow had his ship positioned about seven miles off the harbor entrance to await developments. On Sunday, June 19th, at nine o'clock in the morning, ALABAMA stood out to sea and to her last encounter.

Under-gunned; powder in the magazines deteriorated from long storage and tropical heat; only worn and deteriorated equipment available for use; all put ALABAMA in no condition to meet a sharp well-trained and highly-conditioned adversary such as KEARSARGE. In one hour and ten minutes of fighting the saga of the Grey Ghost of the Seven Seas was ended. With half her crew of 120 men casualties and a hull rent with bullet holes from the eleven inch Dahlgren guns of the Yankee ship, ALABAMA sank stern first in two hundred and seventy feet of water.

KEARSARGE, victor of the day, had only half a dozen men injured and only two killed; most of her damage had been to rigging shot away and ship's boats damaged.

Asking the nearby British yacht DEERHOUND to rescue those of the ALABAMA's crew remaining, Captain Winslow was trying to be humane. Unfortunately his

request for aid to the yacht eventually resulted in the landing of Captain Semmes and most of the remnants of his crew in the Port of Southampton, thereby depriving the Union Navy of prisoners.

Thus the man who was known as the terror of the seas for nearly two years escaped to return to the Confederacy, be made a Rear Admiral in Command of the James River defenses in Virginia until the end of the War, and to face groundless charges of war criminal after the War. After a short career in teaching and as an editor of a newspaper, Raphael Semmes practiced law in Mobile, Alabama until his death August 30, 1877.

ed. addenda: Visitors to the Maritime Museum can see the original model of the confederate steam ship ALABAMA which was made in 1861 at the time of the contract between Laird Bros. and the Confederate Navy's representative Captain James Dunwoody Bulloch. This model with other important items concerning the ALABAMA have been loaned to the Museum by Mrs. Robison Getsen formerly of Carmel but now residing on the French Riviera.

Also on display, above the model, is a lithograph donated by Colonel C.F. Liebrecht, which shows the final moments of the ALABAMA-KEARSARGE encounter. The picture shows no damage to the KEARSARGE, but in fact her ship's boats were badly shot up, and this necessitated Captain Winslow's request to the yacht DEERHOUND to assist in picking up survivors of the ALABAMA. The owner of the yacht, a British businessman, complied until he had more than forty persons on board. He asked Captain Semmes where he would like to go and the Captain replied that he preferred Southampton. Thus the Union Captain was left without the important prisoners.



Custom House: Oldest government building in West. Used as Custom House as late as 1867. Here, on July 7, 1846, the U.S. flag was officially raised to proclaim "Henceforth California will be a portion of the United States." Now owned by State of California.



First Theatre: Built in 1840s as saloon and boarding house. At end of Mexican War converted into theatre by men of regiment of New York volunteers. In 1937 Troupers of the Gold Coast revived old time melodramas and continue to perform. Owned by State.

COSAS DE INTERES PARA LOS SOCIOS

POSTCARD FOLDER: The association had printed this past spring a set of postcards that proves to be a good small gift to a friend, or to use individually. The paintings by the famous adobe painter — Evelyn McCormick — were borrowed from various owners to be copied, and printed in sepia. There are fifteen cards in the set, each of a different old adobe. They may be obtained from the association office in the Maritime Museum, Calle Principal, for \$1.50 a set.

IN MEMORIAM: Juliet Johnson Burkett, Crystal Mary Elizabeth Gold, Helen Green Halloran, Audrey Picard, Alfred D. Coons, Hester Schoeninger, John Ward, Margaret Eliassen.

GIFTS RECEIVED: Bokhara rug from Janice Durney; wooden stirrups, spurs, and flat leather carryall from Mr. and Mrs. Milton Stitt; six watercolors of native flower paintings done by Alice B. Chittenden from Mrs. Elizabeth Hay Bechtel; three fine silver trays, a copper tray, and silver compote from Mrs. Fulton Freeman; a gentleman's waistcoat of 18th century, wrought iron ceiling fixture, mahogany tray and antique Victorian easel from Nelle Currie; and for the library a roll top desk from Mrs. James W. Wells of Carmel.

EVENTS TO COME: This month will be the annual membership meeting — September 20th — the announcement is now being mailed. Other events to come are also being announced by the Special Events Committee.

Sunday, September 26, Casa Serrano, 8 P.M. Illustrated Lecture on the Music of California by Dr. Vahé Aslanian.

Sunday, October 24, Monterey Presbyterian Church, 8 P.M. Musical by Norma Jean Hodges. Please call the Association, 372-2608, for reservations.

A third program is being arranged for November — to be given by the Hartnell Chamber Singers.

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