



Morris in 1826 by Sarah E. Smith after Ary Scheffer (1795-1858), U.S. Naval Academy Museum; to the right, a daguerreotype of Morris, circa 1850, by Albert Sands Southworth (1811-1894), Metropolitan Museum of Art.

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF COMMODORE CHARLES MORRIS, USN.

For anyone with a penchant for early United States history, particularly that aspect which pertains to the Navy, the autobiography of Commodore Charles Morris (1784–1856), a Connecticut native, cannot fail to be of engrossing interest. Only three of the prominent American naval commanders of the War of 1812 wrote memoirs: Morris, David Porter, and Thomas MacDonough. Porter’s *Journal of a Cruise*, etc. (1815), while one of the foremost, and in parts enthralling, naval stories of all time is concerned exclusively with the voyage of the frigate *Essex* in 1812-1814. MacDonough’s, though broader in coverage and indubitably of value, spans a mere 12 pages. (It can be found, by the way, in *The Life of Commodore Thomas MacDonough, U.S. Navy* (1909) by Rodney MacDonough, pp. 20-32.¹) Morris’ autobiography on the other hand, like MacDonough’s, commences with the start of his career as Midshipman in 1799 and extends up to the early 1840’s; when Morris was, by then, one of the Navy’s most distinguished senior officers. It runs 130 plus pages; only, again like MacDonough, it’s a pity it isn’t longer in length than it is.

The work was ostensibly intended alone for his family. But in late 1879 or early 1880, two of Morris’ daughters turned a copy over to the United State Naval Institute who then first published it in their *Proceedings* issue of April 1880, vol. VI, no. 12. It has since been re-printed in 2002 by the Institute, and is now readily available as a hard-bound book.

The Autobiography of Commodore Charles Morris, USN abounds in unusual trivia and anecdotes, a few action filled episodes, and wise reflections on both life and the navy. Leaving aside the matter contained in the excerpts we’ve selected for this article, the following are some of these worth noting in our preface. When some of Commodore Edward Preble’s midshipmen went visiting the towns and locales in Sicily in the Spring of 1805; accompanying them was the young Washington Irving; at the time taking a tour of western Europe. Morris on several occasions points out and gives examples of British naval officers treating the American navy with scorn and contempt prior to the War of 1812; yet not all British naval officers were so, and some were, as he himself records, actually helpful and accommodating. As Isaac Hull’s First Lieutenant on the *Constitution*, it was Morris who recommended warping or kedging to escape the overwhelming British squadron that pursued her. Subsequent to the action with the *Guerriere*, and in which he was grievously wounded, Morris was promoted to Captain’s rank; much to the ire of those his senior on the list waiting for the same honor; bypassing that of Master Commandant. Morris notes that the reason Madison’s Secretary of War John Armstrong did not fortify Washington, D.C. was that it “offered no sufficient motive for such an enterprise” (i.e., a serious attempt to take the city.)² Other topics and events

¹ See: <http://archive.org/details/lifeofcommodoret00macd>

² Henry Adams, in chapter 10 of volume 6 of his *The History of the United States of America during the Administrations of James Madison: 1809-1817*, observes that it was the engineering skills of West Point graduates that made the defenses at New York, Norfolk, Fort Erie, Fort Meigs, and Plattsburg impregnable or near impregnable. And had the same skills utilized and measures been taken at Washington, D.C., the nation’s capital could easily have been saved.

addressed or covered at length, and again these are but *some* of them, are the final war with the Barbary pirates in 1815; various ship building projects in the navy; the Stephen Decatur and James Barron duel; war and political turmoil among Toussaint L’ouverture’s successors on the island of Haiti; the South American war for Independence; and the preliminaries that culminated in the Charles Wilkes’ world (including the Antarctic) exploring expedition of 1838-1842. *Not* mentioned is that Morris was one of the officers called upon to discipline the wild Philip Spencer, of *Somers* “mutiny” fame (Nov.-Dec. 1842); when Morris commanded the U.S. Naval Station at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in May 1842.³

In choosing what extracts to include here, I decided to leave out his accounts of the chase for the *Constitution*: Fenimore Cooper’s version (in his history of the navy) is much more tension filled and exhilarating; the fight between *Constitution* versus *Guerriere*, well enough covered elsewhere, and the defense and loss of the sloop *Adams* on the Penobscot. This last I omitted as too lengthy. Otherwise I would have added it as well. The burning of the *Philadelphia* might have been elided also as too familiar and well known, but that Morris’ account of the same is singularly detailed *and* colorful.

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...So short a time had then elapsed since the commencement of our Navy, that almost all the commissioned officers [i.e., in 1799-1800] had been appointed from the merchant service. Chronometers were unknown in the Navy; sextants were very rare, and their use still more so. The navigators who could ascertain the longitude by lunar observations were few in number, and the process of the calculations a mystery beyond ordinary attainments. It may be easily conceived that in such a school, even under the most favorable circumstances, little theoretical knowledge could be acquired by the midshipmen when embarked. That any should have been sought could hardly be expected, where no aid was given, and where the want of that knowledge was considered as no cause for reproach...<sup>4</sup>

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...For the greater part of this cruise I was stationed in the maintop, with Henry Wadsworth, from the other watch, as my associate. The duties which were then required of midshipmen were calculated to make them sooner and better acquainted with the details of a seaman’s duty than the more relaxed system of later days.*⁵ Besides being obliged to take an active personal share in the ordinary duties, they were frequently exercised collectively in managing the sails and yards of the mizzenmast. By this training I learned something of practical duties, and by application, when leisure offered, I was able to keep up an ordinary journal, construct a chart, and mark upon it the ship’s track.

The ship returned to Boston in March, 1801. Peace having been restored between the United States and France, the ships were recalled home, and preparations commenced for discharging their crews, placing them in ordinary, and reducing the officers to the numbers which had been designated for a peace establishment. While the ship was waiting for orders, leave was granted to me for an absence of a fortnight, of which I availed myself to visit my mother. I was recalled at the end of a week, as the ship had been ordered to Washington and would sail soon.

The ship was delayed by head-winds so that we did not reach Washington till late in May. We passed the frigate *United States* in the lower part of the Potomac. About 10 o’clock in the morning of a beautifully serene day, we passed Mount Vernon. Every one was on deck to look upon the dwelling where

³ See “Some Reminiscences of Philip Spencer and the Brig ‘Somers,’” *The United Service: A Monthly Review of Military and Naval Affairs*, vol. IV, July 1890, pp. 23-36, by Robert C. Rogers; quote: “In the quality of personal activity he [Morris] was indomitable, an unclouded, superior brain, frugal in regimen; so reverent a Christian that, like Milton, he removed his hat when the awful name of God was mentioned; equal and just in his administration of his important duties; abundant in esprit de corps, without which professional excellence is impossible, and it was only occasion he lacked to be a Nelson militantly as he was a Collingwood morally. Not singular the influence of such an example upon the whole squadron, -- reformatory to a great extent, not from fear, but that respect which every gentleman feels for one better than himself. At no period in the history of the navy has there been a more efficient and a more creditably-representative squadron than that under Charles Morris at the period we speak of.”

⁴ *The Autobiography of Commodore Charles Morris, USN* (2002, U.S. Naval Institute Press edition), p. 8.

⁵ [Footnote in the Naval Institute 1880 *Proceedings* version (and also found in the 2002 U.S. Naval Institute Press edition.)] * It must be remembered that this was written about 1840.

Washington had made his home. Mrs. Washington and others of the family could be distinguished in the portico which fronts the river. When opposite to the house, by order of Captain [James] Sever, the sails were lowered, the colors displayed half-masted, and a mourning salute of thirteen guns was fired as a mark of respect to the memory of Washington, whose life had so recently been closed, and whose tomb was in our view. The general silence on board the ship and around us, except when broken by the cannon's sound, the echo and re-echo of that sound from the near and distant hills, as it died away in the distance, the whole ship's company uncovered and motionless, and the associations connected with the ceremony, seemed to make a deep impression upon all, as they certainly did upon me. When the salute was finished the sails were again set, the colors hoisted, and we proceeded up the river. The frigate New York had preceded us, without saluting, but we found her grounded on the bar at the entrance of the eastern branch of the Potomac, and the *Congress*, passing her, was the first ship of war that reached what has since become the Navy yard at Washington. The frigates New York and United States joined us a few days afterwards.

After a visit to the ships by President Jefferson and the members of his cabinet, the crews were paid off and the ships dismantled. There was only one house at that time standing in the quarter of the city near the Navy yard. Tents were pitched and shanties erected among the bushes which covered the slope of the hill, by persons from Baltimore who came to supply the wants of the sailors. The "Six" and the "Seven" buildings, the shell of what was intended for a hotel, where the General Post-Office now stands, a low tavern on Pennsylvania Avenue, the President's House and its yard, enclosed with a rail fence, and the south wing of the Capitol, surrounded by building rubbish, were then the principal if not the only buildings in the city of Washington.⁶

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My father was retained till the following November, during which time he was employed in settling his accounts with the officers of the Treasury. Hitherto I had received the benefit of his supervision since I had joined the Navy. I was now to be separated from him and left to my own guidance. With a tolerable wardrobe and one hundred and fifty dollars, I was given to understand that I must thenceforward depend on my pay for support, unless misfortunes not occasioned by my own misconduct should render further assistance necessary. The full pay of a midshipman was then about two hundred and thirty dollars a year, and the furlough pay half that amount. Under the most favorable circumstances, rigid economy and abstinence from all pleasures which depended on expense were indispensable; and when on furlough, as I then was, the difficulties of preserving a decent appearance were of course greatly increased. Freedom from debt and the feeling of pecuniary independence consequent on such freedom, was a very early and a very strong desire with me, and has continued through life; and it has always been difficult for me to imagine a sufficient motive for any one to sacrifice that independence for any personal gratification not indispensable or health. This feeling naturally deprived me of many amusements in which my associates frequently indulged. I do not think, however, that my non-participation operated to my injury, even in their opinions, whilst in a manner it compelled me to seek other amusements attended with little or no expense. These I found in reading, for which I had retained my fondness, or when opportunity offered, in the society of families with whom I had formed an acquaintance, and thus slightly increased my too small store of knowledge, and acquired a little familiarity with the usages of society. Subsequent observation tended to confirm me in these courses. It was sufficiently apparent that those who wasted their time and money in the grosser gratifications of sense, or the idle display of vanity, neither acquired the confidence of their superiors, nor the respect of the generality of their acquaintances. Those, on the contrary, who sought to improve their minds, and to increase their professional and general knowledge; who showed a preference for respectable and intelligent, and especially for domestic society, -- hardly failed to inspire esteem, and to gain an interest with the worthy, which was not only a source of great present gratification, but at the same time strengthened all their better feelings and principles, and gave new and strong securities for their future good conduct. When I recur to the sad fate of many young men whom I have known to enter the Navy with bright hopes, fine talents, and without any marked vices, but who have been insensibly and gradually led by the example and persuasions of others into habits of expense, idle amusements, sensual indulgence, and

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 11-13.

eventual intemperance, to public disgrace and a miserable death, I cannot feel sufficiently grateful to that kind Providence which preserved me through the temptations of youth.<sup>7</sup>

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On our passage from Gibraltar toward Malta, we met a British frigate, from which we learned the loss of the frigate *Philadelphia*, and the capture of her officers and crew by the Tripolines. This was a severe blow. The really efficient force of the squadron for all offensive operations against the city was diminished nearly one half, and the capture of so many of our people strengthened the means of the enemy to insist on terms of peace that would be more in his favor than he could otherwise have expected. When we arrived off Malta letters were sent out to the commodore [Edward Preble] from Captain [William] Bainbridge, which gave all the particulars of this sad disaster.\*<sup>8</sup> The ship proceeded to Syracuse, accompanied by the *Enterprise*, Lieutenant [Stephen] Decatur, which we had met near that place.

Arrangements were made for landing spare stores and provisions at this place, as the port of rendezvous for the squadron. Another midshipman and myself were placed in charge of these stores, and resided on shore. This employment was very agreeable, but not very advantageous. With no knowledge of the language or of the people, the pleasure as well as the improvement to be gained from social intercourse was very limited, whilst my separation from the ship diminished my opportunities for professional improvement. I endeavored to learn the language, but I was soon after recalled on board, under circumstances that again seemed to destroy my hopes of favor from the commodore. In the attendance to our shore duties, my companion and myself had agreed to take alternate days, during the absence of the squadron, which had proceeded off Tripoli. The commodore returned on a day when my companion should have been on the lookout; but he happened to neglect an early visit to the harbor, and the morning was well advanced when I accidentally discovered the arrival of the ship, and proceeded to receive orders. It so happened that the receipt of articles had been delayed in consequence of our neglect, and having first presented myself, the commodore neither asked nor waited for any excuses, but publicly ordered me to rejoin the ship immediately, as a punishment for my negligence. As my companion escaped all censure and was continued in his duties, I thought myself treated with injustice, and my feelings strongly prompted me to ask permission to leave the squadron; and if it could not be otherwise obtained, to leave the service. The better judgment of my uncle [shipboard secretary to Preble] and his persuasions induced me, however, to continue, and to hope for more favorable consideration; and I resumed my ordinary duties. Subsequent events proved the wisdom of this decision, and showed that the circumstances which, at the time, seemed most adverse to my interest were to contribute most essentially to my advantage...

A ketch which had been recently captured from the enemy, when on her way to Constantinople with a present of slaves and other articles for the Grand Vizier, was fitted to receive the persons who were specially selected for the enterprise. She was about sixty tons burden and was manned by sixty-four persons, of whom Lieutenant Stephen Decatur "had the command."<sup>9</sup> The brig *Siren*, Lieutenant [Charles] Stewart, was to accompany us, to assist with her boats and to receive the crew of the ketch (which had been named the *Intrepid*), in case of her destruction, which was considered probable. The officers were told to take only a single change of linen, and no time was allowed to prepare stores, as we embarked within an hour after receiving notice, and sailed immediately, on the evening of the 3rd of February, 1804. Combustibles had been previously prepared and placed in the vessel, with ship's provisions for two or three weeks' supply. A Maltese had also been obtained to accompany us as a pilot into the harbor, with which he was well acquainted. We arrived in sight of Tripoli about the 10th, but the wind was fresh from the westward, with strong indications of an approaching gale. After some consultation between the commanders, the vessels anchored under cover of the night near the entrance, and a boat was sent with the

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 14-15.

<sup>8</sup> [Footnote in the Naval Institute 1880 *Proceedings* version] \* The *Philadelphia* was maintaining alone the blockade of Tripoli, and on the 31st of October, while chasing a blockade-runner, she grounded on a shoal. In this situation she was attacked by a division of Tripolitan gunboats, and surrendered, being unable to offer any resistance.

<sup>9</sup> [Footnote in the Naval Institute 1880 *Proceedings* version] \* The officers of the *Intrepid* were Lieutenant Decatur, commanding; Lieutenants Lawrence, Joseph Bainbridge, and Thorn; Midshipmen McDonough, Izard, G. Morris, Laws, Davis, and Rowe; and Surgeon Heerman. The Maltese pilot, Salvadore Catalano, afterwards became a sailing-master in the Navy.

pilot to determine by observation if the entrance was practicable and safe, of which he had expressed strong doubts. To my surprise I was ordered to go with him. We went quite close to the entrance, where we found the surf breaking entirely across it; and my own opinion concurred with that of the pilot that no attempt ought to be made. It was, however, a severe trial to make such a report. I had heard many of the officers treat the doubts of the pilot as the offspring of apprehension, and the weather was not yet so decidedly boisterous as to render it certain that an attempt might not be made, notwithstanding our report. Should such be the case and should it succeed, the imputations upon the pilot might be repeated upon me, and, unknown as I was, might be the cause of my ruin in the estimation of my brother officers. My sense of duty and propriety, however, prevailed over these apprehensions, and my report was decidedly against any attempt to enter the harbor at that time, and sustained all the ejections of the pilot. These opinions were evidently received with much dissatisfaction by a majority, and with some murmurs, but the attempt was abandoned for the time, and the vessels weighed again to get beyond the view from the town before daylight. This was not done without some difficulty, as the gale increased rapidly. It continued for four or five days with great violence, and drove us considerably to the eastward, and at one time nearer the coast than was agreeable.

Our situation on board was far from comfortable. The commander, three lieutenants, and the surgeon occupied the very small cabin. Six midshipmen and the pilot had a platform laid on the water casks, whose surface they covered when they lay down for sleep, and at so small a distance below the deck that their heads would reach it when seated on the platform. The marines had corresponding accommodations on the opposite side, and the sailors had only the surface of the casks in the hold. To these inconveniences were added the want of any room on the deck for exercise, and the attacks of innumerable vermin, which our predecessors the slaves had left behind them. The provisions proved to be decayed and offensive. Fortunately our confinement did not continue long enough to affect our health or vigor.

On the morning of the 16th we again obtained sight of Tripoli, with light winds, pleasant weather, and a smooth sea, and stood in for the town. By arrangement the *Siren* kept far without us during the day, and her appearance had been so changed as to lull all suspicion of her being a vessel of war. The lightness of the wind allowed us to keep up all appearance of an anxious desire to reach the harbor before night, without bringing us too near to require any other change than the use of drags, which could not be seen from the city. All the crew were also kept below, excepting six or eight persons at a time, that suspicion might not be awakened by unusual numbers; and such as were visible were dressed as Maltese.

As the evening advanced our drags were taken in, so that we were within two miles of the eastern entrance at dark, the *Siren* being some three miles without us. The concerted arrangements were for the ketch to wait for the boats of the *Siren* to join us after dark, that they might accompany us to the attack; but as the sun descended the wind grew fainter, and there was good reason to apprehend that any delay in waiting for the boats might render it very difficult for the ketch to reach the ship. Decatur, therefore, determined to proceed without waiting, and accompanied his decision with the remark, "The fewer the number the greater the honor." One boat from the *Siren*, with six men, had joined us a few days before, and was still with us.

The final arrangements were now made, and the respective duties of the several officers, which had been previously allotted, were again specified and explained. The presumed number of our enemy was stated, and the necessity for our utmost exertions enjoined upon us. The watchword "Philadelphia" was issued, to be used as a means of recognition; and as we advanced into the harbor strict silence was enjoined and observed. The injunction, however, appeared to be unnecessary. No one seemed disposed to enter into conversation, but to be absorbed by his own reflections. My own thoughts were busy, now reverting to friends at home, now to the perils we were about to meet. Should I be able to justify the expectations of the former by meeting properly the dangers of the latter? How was I prepared for the death which might possibly be my fate? These, with others of a somber character, mixed with calculations to secure a prominent position when boarding, passed rapidly through my mind; and the minds of others were no doubt employed on similar subjects. The officers and crew were directed to conceal themselves as much as possible, excepting some six or eight. Most of the officers could be distinguished by their dress, and they required concealment more than the sailors. Fortunately, owing to the loss of some articles, which had been replaced by loan from the crew, my own dress corresponded to theirs, which enabled me to keep near

Decatur, who I supposed would naturally be among the first to leave the ketch. The wind wafted us slowly into the harbor, the water was smooth, and the young moon gave light enough to distinguish prominent objects. One battery was passed, the *Philadelphia* was in view near several smaller vessels, and the white walls of the city and its batteries were before us. We steered directly for the frigate, and at last the anxious silence was broken by a hail from her, demanding our character and object. Then might be seen the eager movements of the heads of the officers and crew who were stretched on the deck, ready to leap forward at the word of their commander, but still resting in silence. A conversation was kept up between the frigate and the ketch through our pilot, acting under the dictation of Decatur. We alleged the loss of our anchors during the last gale, which was true, as a reason for wishing to make fast to the frigate till morning, and permission was obtained; but just as the ketch was about coming in contact with the frigate the wind shifted, blowing lightly directly from the frigate, and it left us at rest abeam and about twenty yards from her.

This was a moment of great anxiety. We were directly under her guns, motionless and powerless, except by exertions which might betray our character. The *Siren's* boat was, however, in tow, and was leisurely manned, and took a rope to make fast to the ship. She was met by a boat with another rope, when both were united, and each boat returned to its vessel. This rope was passed along the deck and hauled upon by the crew as they lay stretched upon it, and the vessels gradually brought nearer each other. When nearly in contact the suspicions of the enemy appeared to be aroused, and the cry of "Americanos!" resounded through the ship. In a moment we were near enough, and the order "Board!" was given; and with this cry our men were soon on the decks of the frigate. The surprise had been complete; there was no time for any preparation, and the enemy made scarcely a show of resistance. A few were killed, one was made prisoner, and the remainder leaped overboard and probably reached their cruisers which were anchored near the ship. In less than twenty minutes the ship had been carried, the combustibles distributed and set on fire, and all our party again on board the ketch.

[The<sup>10</sup> plan of attack prescribed by our commander was for united action to obtain possession of the ship, with the exception of a boat to intercept communication to the shore, and for the surgeon and a few men to secure the ketch to the ship. When possession was secured, each lieutenant, with a midshipman and specified men, was to receive a portion of the prepared combustibles, and distribute them in designated parts of the berth-deck and in the forward store-rooms, and a smaller party under a midshipman to do the same in the cockpit, and there await orders to set fire, that all might be done at the same time and give all a chance for safe retreat. The party for the cockpit was assigned to my charge. My object in keeping near Lieutenant Decatur, when we were approaching the ship, was that by watching his actions, I could be governed by these rather than by his orders when the boarding should take place. It was well that this course was taken, for Decatur had leaped to the main chain plates of the frigate, before the order to board was given. I had leaped with him, and, probably more favored by circumstances, was able to reach the deck by the time he had gained the rail. The enemy were already leaping over the opposite side and made no resistance; but Decatur, under the supposition that he was first on board, was about to strike me, when I accidentally turned and stayed his uplifted arm by the watchword and mutual recognition. On my way to my station, after examining the cabin, and when passing forward, we met again under similar circumstances. Passing through the wardroom, which I found deserted, I awaited in the cockpit the men who had gone for the combustibles. These were so delayed that we had none when the order was given to set fire; but, as they came a moment after, they were distributed, and fire communicated before we left our station. In the mean time the fire on the deck above us had communicated, so rapidly that it was with no small difficulty and danger that our party reached the spar-deck by the forward hatchways. All the others had already rejoined the ketch, except Decatur, who remained on the rail till all others were on board; and the bow of the ketch had already swung off from the ship when he joined us by leaping into the rigging of the ketch.]

By great exertions, the two vessels were separated before the fire, which was pouring from the ports of the ship, enveloped the ketch also. Up to this time the ships and batteries of the enemy had remained silent, but they were now prepared to act: and when the crew of the ketch gave three cheers in

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<sup>10</sup> [Editor note. This paragraph, in the original, actually follows the next one. I transpose it here from that location, however, for purposes, in my opinion, of improved continuity to the story; also adding brackets to bring attention to this change.]

exultation of their success, they received the return of a general discharge from the enemy. The confusion of the moment probably prevented much care in their direction, and, though under the fire of nearly a hundred pieces for half an hour, the only shot which struck the ketch was one through the topgallant sail. We were in greater danger from the ship, whose broadside commanded the passage by which we were retreating, and whose guns were loaded and were discharged as they became heated. We escaped these also, and while urging the ketch onwards with sweeps, the crew were commenting upon the beauty of the spray thrown up by the shot between us and the brilliant light of the ship, rather than calculating any danger that might be apprehended from the contact. The appearance of the ship was indeed magnificent. The flames in the interior illuminated her ports and, ascending her rigging and masts, formed columns of fire, which, meeting the tops, were reflected into beautiful capitals; whilst the occasional discharge of her guns gave an idea of some directing spirit within her. The walls of the city and its batteries, and the masts and rigging of cruisers at anchor, brilliantly illuminated, and animated by the discharge of artillery, formed worthy adjuncts and an appropriate background to the picture. Favored by a light breeze our exertions soon carried us beyond the range of their shot, and at the entrance of the harbor we met the boats of the Siren, which had been intended to cooperate with us, whose crews rejoiced at our success, whilst they grieved at not having been able to participate in it.<sup>11</sup>

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The winter of 1810-11 was passed with the *President* and *Congress* in the harbor of New London. Captain Hull was absent a considerable part of the time, which devolved some additional duties upon me, but as we had but little other employment than the usual gun exercises, I found time to make a tolerable survey and chart of the harbor with the imperfect instruments at my command. After a short cruise on the eastern part of the coast and a visit to Boston, the ship proceeded to Chesapeake bay, in May 1811, and anchored off Annapolis, ready to receive on board Mr. Barlow and convey him as our envoy and minister to France.*¹² August arrived before we were joined by Mr. Barlow and his family, composed of Mrs. Barlow and her sister, Mrs. Baldwin.

A pleasant passage enabled us to land them at Cherbourg in September. The ship soon proceeded off the Texel, where we landed specie as payment of part of the public debt due in Holland. On our return a few days were passed in the Downs, where the British naval officers were civil. After another short detention at Cherbourg the ship took [American ambassador] Mr. [Jonathan] Russell to England as Chargé d'affaires...¹³

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Paris at that period contained many of the masterpieces of art which had formerly been the pride of different nations, and which were soon to be restored by the same chances of war that had enabled Napoleon to collect them. The examination of these occupied many of the hours at my disposal. Mr. Barlow had many acquaintances among the distinguished residents of the city, besides those who visited him in consequence of his official situation. Through his kindness his house was always open to me, and I met many persons there who were no less interesting from their personal character than from the distinguished position they had formerly held in society. It was there that I first met La Fayette, who frequently passed a quiet evening at the house, referring with Mr. and Mrs. Barlow to scenes and persons connected with our own revolution and that of France, which excited deep interest in those who had the good fortune to be present. Here also, among many others, were assembled the “Belle et Bonne” of Voltaire, Madame Villette,\*<sup>14</sup> the Archbishop of Paris, Grégoire, Marbois, and General Kosciusko, the

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 23-30.

<sup>12</sup> [Footnote in the Naval Institute 1880 *Proceedings* version] \* Joel Barlow, the well-known author of the *Columbiad* and the *Vision of Columbus*. Barlow had served as a chaplain during the Revolution. From 1788 to 1805 he was in France and in England, occupied with various political and financial schemes, in the latter of which he made a large fortune. Part of the time he was Consul of the United States at Algiers and Tripoli. He was appointed Minister to France in 1811, and gained a reputation for considerable diplomatic ability. He died in December, 1812, in Poland, having been sent for by the Emperor, then on his Russian campaign.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* p. 46.

<sup>14</sup> [Footnote in the Naval Institute 1880 *Proceedings* version] \* Reine Philibert de Varicourt, Marquise de Villette, born 1757, died at Paris in 1822. She was the adopted daughter of Mme. Denis, and lived at Ferney, in Voltaire's household, until her marriage in 1777 to Charles, Marquis de Villette. Her husband was an active member of the Girondin party, and only his ill health saved him from

soldier and advocate of liberty in both hemispheres. Kosciusko, like La Fayette, was then residing in the country near Paris, in great retirement, out of favor with the government, if not under surveillance, and entered very little into society, where there were few who sympathized with him in their feelings and opinions, or where any expression of them could be made without danger. At Mr. Barlow's they found safety and sympathy, and other inducements which frequently brought them to his domestic circle. My introduction to Kosciusko was unexpected, and his manner made a strong impression on me. Mrs. Barlow and myself were sitting in the parlor on a dark, stormy day, when the servant announced a person whose name was not distinctly heard. He was followed into the room by a small man, in an old brown overcoat, who immediately rushed to Mrs. Barlow and gave her an embrace which was cordially returned. Both seemed to be greatly excited, and for some time I stood an unnoticed spectator. At last Mrs. Barlow presented me to the general, as an American officer, which gained me also an embrace, and the expression of his gratification at having once more met with one. Then laying both hands upon my head, he invoked the blessing of the Almighty upon me, with great fervor and solemnity, to my no small astonishment and confusion.

Although I had seen Napoleon tolerably near when he occasionally reviewed troops in the Carrousel, my desire was great to see him more nearly still. This desire was at last gratified under very favorable circumstances. The Emperor and the imperial family received all the foreign diplomatic corps and the great officers of the Empire, on the 1st of January, 1812. The foreign ministers had the privilege of presenting their countrymen on this occasion, and with several other Americans I accompanied Mr. Barlow. The diplomatic corps and their countrymen assembled about 11 A.M., in a large hall on the lower floor of the palace of the Tuileries, where coffee and other slight refreshments were served. About noon they were notified to proceed to the hall of the throne. Ascending the grand staircase between the line of the guards, every step having one at each end, we were conducted through a hall in which the city authorities were assembled, another containing the general officers of the Army and Navy and civil officers of corresponding ranks, and a third containing the Marshals and other superior dignitaries of the Empire and high officers of the household; this opened to the hall of the throne. The throne was at the farthest extremity. The Emperor stood near it, and at a short distance his grand chamberlain and one or two others. Our procession entered slowly and ranged itself rather on one side of the hall, the ambassador entitled to precedence near the head of the hall, and the others in succession, each having his suite near him, and a small space between each suite to keep them distinct. A few minutes after the arrangement was completed, the Emperor advanced to the ambassador highest in rank, Prince Schwartzberg from Austria, and addressed a few remarks to him, after which the strangers of that embassy were presented. The same course was pursued with each separate legation, and occupied from three to five minutes with each. When the Emperor had thus received all, he returned slowly along the line, returning the salutations of the different legations as he passed, but without conversing with any excepting with the Americans. When opposite to Mr. Barlow, he observed, "I perceive the English government has returned the seamen formerly taken from one of your ships of war," (news of which had been received a few days before); to which Mr. Barlow replied, "Yes, Sire, and in a manner honorable to our country." With a peculiar smile and a slight toss of the head, he rejoined, "So long as you do not injure the commerce or the revenue of England, you may do whatever besides that you may choose with her," and passed on. Having resumed his station near the throne, he bowed low to the assemblage, upon which they retired, keeping their faces towards him till they had reached the door of exit, when they returned to the hall where they had assembled...

...The great object of interest in this varied and brilliant scene was Napoleon himself; but it is difficult to describe his appearance and the expression of his countenance, or the impression which they made upon my mind. In height he was about five feet, eight inches. He had already exchanged the slight and slender figure of the conqueror of Italy for a ful[1]ness which verged closely upon corpulency. His movements were slow, but easy and dignified: the expression of his face generally grave and composed, the upper portion indicating deep thought, and the mouth and lower part, firmness and decision. His eyes were dark, clear, and penetrating, but without much brilliancy; and their motion was slow when passing from one object to another. His smile gave an agreeable and amiable expression to his face, which could hardly have

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proscription. He died in 1793. Madame Villette passed more than a year in prison, and after her liberation devoted the rest of her life to works of benevolence. [*Edit.* -- Remaining footnotes in this particular section pertaining to other persons enumerated on this list are here omitted.]



been expected from its generally cold and fixed character; but a smile seemed to be of rare occurrence, as it only appeared for the moment when he last addressed Mr. Barlow. On this occasion he was not, as usual, in uniform, but dressed in velvet coat and breeches, white satin vest, white silk stockings, shoes, and white cravat of lace, and carried a hat in his hand, with one side turned up, secured by a loop which supported a drooping white ostrich feather, and ornamented by a single diamond of great size and brilliancy.

The hilt of his small sword and the buttons of his coat, and the knee and shoe buckles were set with diamonds. The general character of his dress was in good taste, expensive but free from all gaudiness, and, compared with that of the officers of the court, appeared remarkable for its simplicity.<sup>15</sup>

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The remote cause [of the United States naval victories in the war of 1812], as it appeared to me, was to be found in the confidence of our enemy and in the [i.e., their perceived] distrust of ourselves to contend successfully against them: in the neglect of careful exercise, which resulted from the enemy's confidence, resting on former success; and, on our part, in the unwearied attention of our officers to devise and bring into daily exercise every improvement which might increase the chances of success against a Navy, to which we might soon be opposed as an enemy, and upon which there were so many injuries and insults to be avenged for the honor of our country. This expectation and feeling were of general, almost of universal, prevalence among our officers, and led them to a unity of purpose and action which could not fail of producing important results.

Their number was so small that each knew almost every other, and there was scarcely a feeling of unworthy jealousy, though much of generous emulation, among those of corresponding ranks. To these advantages may be added the greater resources of our seamen than is usual with those of other nations. Many of our seamen have acquired trades before they begin their maritime pursuits, and, in case of necessity, carpenters, smiths, and others, are to be found in numbers among our crews, who can render most valuable aid in repairing damages; which could only be done in other services by the few who are usually specially provided for such purposes.

But the great source of our success was undoubtedly the superior management and direction of our guns; and that the English and other governments were satisfied of this is sufficiently evident by the careful attention they have since continued to give to this branch of the naval service.<sup>16</sup>

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Mr. S. L. Southard succeeded Mr. Thompson as Secretary of the Navy, in December, 1823. In the summer of 1824 the Secretary and the Board of Navy Commissioners made an official visit to Erie, Sackett's Harbor, and Whitehall, at which places the vessels on lakes Erie, Ontario, and Champlain had been collected and left, after the peace of 1815. The vessels were found to be much decayed, many of them sunk in shallow water, and the perishable articles of stores no longer of much value. The journey was extended down the St. Lawrence to Montreal and from Whitehall to Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and thence to Boston and New York and Philadelphia, on our return towards Washington.

The sale of all the vessels and perishable stores was recommended, excepting the ships-of-the-line, which had been begun and were still on the stocks, at and near Sackett's Harbor. This was soon after authorized and carried into effect and the ordnance sent to the Navy yard at New York. The further employment of officers on the lake stations was discontinued. Recommendations were made by the Board for an extension of the Navy yards at New York and Norfolk, and it was advised that plans for the future improvement of all the yards should be proposed and approved, after which no deviations from them should be permitted, without the executive sanction. Information was collected and reported to Congress, and published by their order, in order to disseminate [sic] knowledge in regard to water-rotting hemp and flax, in the hope of rendering ourselves independent of the foreign "articles. The form and arrangement of

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 49-52, 53.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 65-66.

the annual estimates were changed so as to show separately the expense of the shore establishments, and of the ships and active force of the Navy. This arrangement diminished the heads of appropriation and still exhibited the expenditures fully and clearly. By much exertion the Board succeeded in preventing any further advances to contractors, which had hitherto been clone, in a few cases, by the order of the Executive, from some of which danger of loss had occurred.

When it was determined to return La Fayette to France in a public ship the President [John Quincy Adams] thought proper to select me for the command. It was his desire that I should perform this duty without resigning my situation as a Navy Commissioner, to which, in his opinion, there was no legal objection. The designation for this duty, under the circumstances of the time, could not be otherwise than flattering to me, and was accepted with pleasure. I believed, however, that the exercise of the military duties of a captain, whilst holding a district commission of a civil character, would be exceedingly disagreeable to the feelings of the officers, even if legal. This belief was made known to the President and it was stated that I should feel bound to resign the commissionership, as soon as orders should be given to command the ship, to which he made no further objection.\*<sup>17</sup>

The *Brandywine* had been named, launched and equipped for this special service, the officers had been selected, so that there should be at least one from each state, and, when practicable, descendants of persons distinguished in the Revolution. The preparations were made by the first lieutenant and the officers of the yard, and I only took command on the first of September, two days before the general, his son, and his suite embarked at the mouth of the Potomac. He was accompanied by the Secretary of the Navy, and many other public officers from Washington, and met by a large party from Baltimore. A collation was prepared on board for our numerous guests, at which many speeches appropriate to the occasion were made, and the parting wishes of the general and guests were reciprocated. The next morning we stood down the bay, and to sea with a favorable wind. A few hours after the pilot had left us, it was found that the ship was leaking rapidly. This was not more unexpected than unpleasant. To take the general back to any of our ports after he had taken a formal leave of the country would place every one in an awkward position, but to expose him and others to any serious hazard by continuing our course was a serious responsibility. It was impossible at the moment to ascertain the precise cause of the leak, but from some experiments it was evidently effected by the greater or less velocity of the ship's motion. As it was under control by the pumps it was determined to proceed, especially as La Fayette was unwilling to return except from actual necessity. It soon became evident that the leak was caused by the oakum working out of the seams of the ship's sides. The weather and sea, for nearly the whole passage, caused the ship to roll so deep, that it was exceedingly difficult to apply any remedy, but as the planks gradually swelled from immersion, the leak gradually diminished.

Our passage was from these and other causes rendered very uncomfortable, and it was only on two clays that the general was able to join us at dinner, or to visit the deck. In the early part of the passage he suffered from sea-sickness, and the gout affected him considerably afterwards. This was much regretted, for, besides the discomforts, we were deprived of most of the pleasure which had been anticipated from the society of the general, and the hope of listening to his reminiscences of some of the interesting scenes and persons connected with his eventful life. My own health, which had never been perfectly restored since 1818, had become seriously impaired by a chronic affection of the liver, and consequent irritability of the stomach, which rendered me unable to do much towards the entertainment of our guest, or to become acquainted with the officers. We arrived off Havre in October, and, upon communicating with our consul, found that no objection existed to the landing of La Fayette. This had been supposed possible, as it was known that he was even more obnoxious to the Bourbon than to the Imperial government. The éclat of his reception and treatment in the United States, it was thought, might render the government unwilling to receive him again, lest his influence should excite movements dangerous to the monarchy. Should such

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<sup>17</sup> [Footnote in the Naval Institute 1880 *Proceedings* version] \* The following entry appears in the diary of President J. Q. Adams, under date of July 9, 1825; "Southard, S. N., again with Captain Morris, who is willing to command the frigate to take General La Fayette to France, and there give the ship to the next officer, to proceed with her to the Mediterranean, to be there commanded by Captain Patterson. But Morris thinks he ought to resign his seat at the Navy Board, and he wishes to have a term of six months allowed him to visit the naval establishments of France and England and to witness the latest improvements in naval architecture. I advised him at all events to go, and said we would consider further with regard to his resignation."

have been the case, and permission for him to land have been refused, I was authorized to use the ship to convey him to any other part of the world that he might select.

The morning after our arrival, the wife and children of George La Fayette, M. Lasteyrie, the son-in-law of La Fayette, and his children, came on board to meet the general and his son, and, after passing a few hours, they all returned together to the shore. Before leaving the ship the general was requested to ask for anything he might desire to take with him, when he requested the flag of the ship, under which he was received on board, and which he was about to leave. To this he subsequently added a few articles, that lie might give an American dinner to the inmates of La Grange. He left the ship under a major-general's salute, and three hearty cheers from the ship's company. As the object of my command was merely to see the general to France, the command was relinquished to the first lieutenant, and I accompanied La Fayette to the shore, and for a short time became his guest, as he had been mine. Captain Read, of the Navy, who was a passenger in the ship, was also of the party.

The party dined that day with a liberal deputy to the Chambers from the city, and on the following morning partook of a déjeuner, with a large party, at the residence of the United States consul, on the heights above the town. About noon the family of General La Fayette, Captain Read, and myself, left the city for Paris, and on passing the gates we found a large party, in carriages and on horseback, who had assembled to compliment La Fayette, by escorting him for some distance on his way. At the end of a league, the escort halted, and the gentlemen composing it dismounted, as did La Fayette and his suite. An address was made in behalf of the citizens, to which he responded in his usual felicitous manner, and the parties separated after the general's carriage had been nearly filled with bouquets of flowers and immortelles, by the ladies who had joined the cavalcade in carriages.

A late dinner was taken in a small village on the way to Rouen, at which the landlord contrived a compliment to La Fayette. The dessert plates had upon them representations of scenes in our revolutionary struggle, and he placed for the general that having for its subject the storming of the English redoubts at Yorktown. The next day was passed at Rouen, where another deputy of the liberal party assembled a number of the political friends of La Fayette to meet him. Though all proper precautions were taken to avoid producing any public excitement, the street near the house where we dined was thronged with people during the evening, who at last began to cheer La Fayette, as a call for his presence in the balcony. This was delayed for some time, but finally acceded to for the purpose of thanking them and recommending their immediate separation to prevent any excuse for the interference of the police. The effect, however, was unfavorable. The cheers increased, and the mounted police, who had been prepared, and stationed near, moved down the street in a body, and compelled all to retire before them. A few persons were injured, and much excitement created, but with no other consequences. The party separated immediately as all pleasure had been destroyed.

At Saint Germain we separated. George La Fayette went to Paris, with Captain Read and myself, and the general and his family proceeded directly to La Grange, at which place we joined him about a week later.

The residence of La Fayette was a part of the estates which formerly belonged to the family of Madame La Fayette, and contains about seven hundred acres. The dwelling is an ancient structure, forming three sides of a square, with a round tower at each corner, of which about one half projects beyond the sides of the building. Although one side is open, and the entrance to the dwelling is on the inner side of one of the wings, the passage to the entrance is through the side opposite to it, and would lead to the supposition that the building formerly had all its sides closed. The walls of the building were five or six feet thick, and its whole appearance and character plain and strong, without airy attempt at ornament.

The family and guests numbered about twenty-five while we were there. They assembled at breakfast at about ten, at which nearly an hour passed. They then separated, each making such arrangements as might be most agreeable till dinner, which was served at five. About an hour was passed at table, from which all went to the drawing-room, and passed the evening in conversation. At ten tea was served, after which the guests retired at pleasure, and by eleven the rooms were vacant. At the request of La

Fayette, I sat to [Ary] Scheffer for a portrait, of which a copy was also made by him, and sent by the general to my wife. The likeness was completed at a single sitting of about four hours.\*<sup>18</sup>

After a visit of three days, which was rendered very agreeable by the kindness of the family and the society of other interesting persons, we returned to Paris.

My instructions required me, after having seen La Fayette safely landed, to visit the dockyards of France and England, for the purpose of collecting any information that might be deemed useful, in forming plans for the permanent improvement of our Navy yards, or for any other branch of the naval establishment.

A few weeks were spent in Paris, visiting some of the many objects of interest which are collected there, and in forming acquaintances with, and obtaining information from, some of the officers connected with the central administration of the Navy...<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> [Footnote in the Naval Institute 1880 *Proceedings* version] \* The heliotype which appears as the frontispiece of this book is from the original portrait by Ary Scheffer, presented by La Fayette to Mrs. Morris. The following passage, which occurs in a letter of La Fayette, found among the Morris papers, may be of interest in this connection.

Lagrange, January 1, 1827.

"I hope, my dear friend, your portrait sent so long ago is at last arrived at its destination. The copy at La Grange has been in the hands of Scheffer to give it that share of color and counterpoint which you had brought from your coasting journey, so as to become similar to that in possession of Mrs. Morris. It faces the Brandywine flag.

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Let me hear from you, my dear Commodore, and believe me forever your affectionate obliged friend,

LA FAYETTE.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 106-111.