

The Genesis Of The Confederate Navy

AS the different States seceded from the Union, each sovereignty made efforts to provide for a navy, and conferred rank upon its officers. A few revenue cutters and merchant steamers were seized and converted into men-of-war. Thus, at the beginning, each State had its own navy. At Charleston several naval officers assisted in the capture of Fort Sumter; notably, Capt. H. J. Hartstene, in command of a picket boat, and Lieut. J. R. Hamilton, in command of a floating battery. General Beauregard mentioned the assistance rendered by these officers; also the services of Dr. A. C. Lynch, late of the United States navy. Mention is also made of Lieut. W. G. Dozier, and the armed steamers Gordon, Lady Davis and General Clinch. The keels of two fine ironclads, the Palmetto State and the Chicora, were laid, and Commodore Duncan N. Ingraham was put in command of the naval forces.

Upon the secession of Virginia, April 17, 1861, a convention was entered into between that State and the Confederate States of America, after which the seat of the Confederate government was removed to Richmond, and the Congress assembled there July 20th; from which time properly commences the history of the Confederate navy. The navy department was organized with Stephen R. Mallory, secretary of the navy: Commodore Samuel Barron, chief of the bureau of orders and detail; Commander George Minor, chief of ordnance and hydrography; Paymaster John DeBree, chief of provisions and clothing; Surg. W. A. W. Spottswood, bureau of medicine and surgery; Edward M. Tidball, chief clerk. The Confederate government conferred commissions and warrants upon officers in accordance with their relative rank in the United States navy, and a more regular and satisfactory course of administration was entered upon.

By act of Congress, April 21, 1862, the navy was to consist of 4 admirals, 10 captains, 31 commanders, 100 first lieutenants, 25 second lieutenants, 20 masters in line of promotion, 12 paymasters, 40 assistant paymasters, 22 surgeons, 15 passed assistant surgeons, 30 assistant surgeons, 1 engineer-in-chief, and 12 engineers. But the Confederate navy register attached (see Appendix) gives the personnel of the navy on January 1, 1864.

Commodore Lawrence Rousseau was put in command of the naval forces at New Orleans; Commodore Josiah Tattnall, at Savannah; Commodore French Forrest, at Norfolk; Commodore Duncan N.

Ingraham, at Charleston, and Capt. Victor Randolph, at Mobile. Commodores Rousseau, Forrest and Tattnall were veterans of the war of 1812, and the last two had served with much distinction in the war with Mexico. The name of Tattnall is a household word among all English-speaking people on account of his chivalry in Eastern waters while commanding the East India squadron. Commodore Forrest, who had in 1856-58 commanded the Brazil squadron, threw up his commission when his native State (Virginia), seceded, and joined the South with the enthusiasm of a boy. His reward was small.

The secretary of the navy, Mr. Mallory, immediately turned his attention to the building of a navy. He entered into innumerable contracts, and gunboats were built on the Pamunkey, York, Tombigbee, Pedee and other rivers; but as these boats were mostly burned before completion, it is not necessary to enumerate them. The want of proper boilers and engines would have rendered them very inefficient at best.

The amount of work done was marvelous. "Before the war but seven steam war vessels had been built in the States forming the Confederacy, and the engines of only two of these had been contracted for in these States. All the labor or materials requisite to complete and equip a war vessel could not be commanded at any one point of the Confederacy." This was the report of a committee appointed by Congress, August 27, 1862. This committee further found that the navy department "had erected a powder-mill which supplies all the powder required by our navy; two engine, boiler and machine shops, and five ordnance workshops. It has established eighteen yards for building war vessels, and a rope-walk, making all cordage from a rope-yarn to a 9-inch cable, and capable of turning out 8,000 yards per month Of vessels not ironclad and converted to war vessels, there were 44. The department has built and completed as war vessels, 12; partially constructed and destroyed to save from the enemy, 10; now under construction, 9; ironclad vessels now in commission, 12; completed and destroyed or lost by capture, 4; in progress of construction and in various stages of forwardness, 23." It had also one ironclad floating battery, presented to the Confederate States by the ladies of Georgia, and one ironclad ram turned over by the State of Alabama.

The navy had afloat in November, 1861, the Sumter, the McRae, the Patrick Henry, the Jamestown, the Resolute, the Calhoun, the Ivy, the Lady Davis, the Jackson, the Tuscarora, the Virginia, the Manassas, and some twenty privateers. There were still others, of which a correct list

cannot be given on account of the loss of official documents. It will be remembered that on the sounds of North Carolina alone, we had the Seabird, the Curlew, the Ellis, the Beaufort, the Appomattox, the Raleigh, the Fanny and the Forrest. At Savannah were the Savannah, the Sampson, the Lady Davis and the Huntress; at New Orleans, the Bienville and others.

Upon the secession of Virginia, followed in May by Tennessee, Arkansas and North Carolina, officers who had resigned from the United States navy were reporting in large numbers at the navy department, but as there were no ships ready for them, they were sent to the different batteries on the York, James, Potomac and Rappahannock rivers in Virginia, and to many other batteries on the Mississippi and other rivers. As a rule, officers were at first detailed to do service in the States that claimed them. In Virginia we find, at Aquia creek, Commodore Lynch, Captain Thorburn, and Lieuts. John Wilkinson and Charles C. Simms; on the Rappahannock, Lieut. H. H. Lewis; on the Potomac, Commanders Frederick Chatard and Hartstene, and Lieuts. William L. Maury and C. W. Read; on the James, Commodore Hollins, Commanders Cocke and R. L. Page, and Lieutenants Pegram, Harrison and Catesby Jones; at Sewell's point and batteries near Norfolk, Capt. Arthur Sinclair, Commanders McIntosh and Pinkney, Lieuts. Robert Carter and Pembroke Jones; on the York, Commanders T. J. Page and W. C. Whittle, and Lieut. William Whittle. Lieut. Charles M. Fauntleroy was sent with two medium 32-pounders to Harper's Ferry. As the guns at these batteries were necessarily manned by soldiers, these officers occupied rather doubtful positions, and in many cases were mere drillmasters.

In reference to the relative rank of navy and army officers, General Lee addressed the following order to the officers at Gloucester Point for the regulation of all mixed commands:

As there are no sailors in the service, it is impossible to serve river batteries by them, and artillery companies must perform this duty. Naval officers from their experience and familiarity with the peculiar duties connected with naval batteries, their management, construction, etc., are eminently fitted for the command of such batteries, and are most appropriately placed in command of them. In a war such as this, unanimity and hearty cooperation should be the rule. Petty jealousies about slight shades of relative command and bickering about trivial

matters are entirely out of place and highly improper, and when carried so far as to interfere with the effectiveness of a command, become both criminal and contemptible. Within the ordinary limits of a letter it is impossible to provide for every contingency that may arise in a command which is not centered in a single individual. It is therefore hoped that mutual concessions will be made, and that the good of the service will be the only aim of all.

In some cases, army rank was conferred upon naval officers in command of batteries; but in this anomalous state of affairs, jealousies were constantly arising, and the navy men were only too glad to be assigned to duty afloat.

At the navy department the work of preparing for the manufacture of ordnance, powder and naval supplies was very heavy, and most diligently pursued. Lieut. Robert D. Minor was conspicuous in this duty, as was also Commander John M. Brooke, whose banded guns proved so efficient. Indeed, all the navy officers were most enthusiastic in turning their hands to any work to help the cause. Commodore M. F. Maury, who had been a member of the governor's advisory board, organized the naval submarine battery service. Upon his departure for England he turned it over to Lieut. Hunter Davidson, an energetic, gallant officer, who, by his skillful management of torpedoes in the James river, contributed largely to the defense of Richmond. Engineer Alphonse Jackson established a powder-mill; Commander John M. Brooke devised a machine for making percussion caps; Lieut. D. P. McCorkle manufactured at Atlanta gun carriages, etc.; later in the war, Commander Catesby Jones established a foundry for casting heavy guns, at Selma, Ala., and Chief Engineer H. A. Ramsay had charge of an establishment at Charlotte, N. C., for heavy forging and making gun carriages and naval equipments of all kinds.

On May 31 and June 1, 1861, several vessels belonging to the Potomac flotilla, under Commander Ward, U. S. N., cannonaded the battery at Aquia creek, under Commodore W. F. Lynch, but with no particular result. The object of the enemy, probably, was to develop the Confederate defenses. Commodore Lynch mentioned favorably Commanders R. D. Thorburn and J w. Cooke and Lieut. C. C. Simms. On June 27th, Commander Ward was killed on board his vessel, the Freeborn, off Mathias point on the Potomac river. Lieutenant Chaplin, U.S. N., landed with a handful of sailors and attempted to throw up a

breastwork. He was soon driven back, but he exhibited extraordinary courage in taking on his back one of his men who could not swim, and swimming to his boat. Batteries were at once constructed by the Confederates at Mathias point and Evansport, and put under the charge of Commander Frederick Chatard. As the river at Mathias point is but one mile and a half wide, the battery almost blockaded the Potomac river, and considerably annoyed, successively, the United States steamers Pocahontas, Seminole and Pensacola. Commander Chatard was assisted by Commander H. J. Hartstene and Lieut. C. W. Read, and others whose names are unobtainable. The batteries on the Potomac and Rappahannock rivers were evacuated when the army retired from Manassas; those on the York when the army fell back on Richmond, and those on the Elizabeth when the Confederates evacuated Norfolk.

The steamer St. Nicholas, plying between Baltimore and Washington, having been taken possession of by Commodore Hollins and Col. Richard Thomas, June 29, 1861, was taken to Coan river, and there boarded by Lieutenants Lewis, Simms and Minor, and fifteen sailors from the Confederate steamer Patrick Henry. Hollins went first in search of the U.S. S. Pawnee, hoping to take her by surprise. Foiled in this, he cruised in Chesapeake bay, and captured the schooner Margaret, the brig Monticello and the schooner Mary Pierce, which prizes he carried to Fredericksburg. Soon after this exploit Commodore Hollins was ordered to command the naval forces at New Orleans.

Source: "The Confederate Military History" Volume 12