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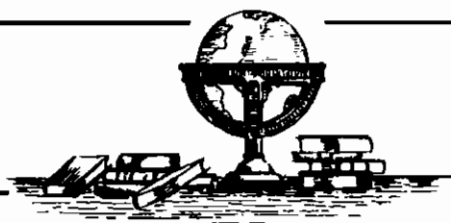
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RESEARCH IN THE MAHAN LIBRARY

JOURNALS OF THE AMERICAN PRIVATEER *YANKEE*, 1812-1813 by Dr. Thaddeus V. Tuleja

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Various papers of Adm. William Veazie Pratt, USN, whose distinguished naval career extended over 47 years, were recently acquired by the Naval War College, through the Naval War College Foundation, from the admiral's son, William Veazie Pratt, Jr. A preliminary review of the more than 20 cartons of material reveals a large assortment of papers of the Pratt and Edward Johnson families that cover the period 1805 to 1967. Buffs of the War of 1812 will be particularly interested to learn that included in the material are two original journals of the *Yankee*, covering the first and second wartime voyages of the illustrious American privateer.

During the early stages of the war, the large British Navy was tied down by events in Europe, and the small American Fleet of 16 ships, aided by a growing armada of privateersmen, enjoyed great mobility and success at sea. The *Constitution's* stunning defeat of the British *Guerriere* set in motion a series of victories in single-ship actions which lasted until Napoleon's power ebbed and the British Navy was able to commit more warships to patrol and blockade duties along the American coast.

No less impressive, although unheralded, were the wartime exploits of the privateers. Operating under letters

of marque bestowed upon them by the U.S. Government, the privateers went to sea to plunder the enemy's farflung oceanic commerce for personal profit and national purpose, more or less in that order. During the War of 1812 there were more than 500 privateers sailing under the U.S. flag. In the course of the conflict, these maritime mercenaries captured more than 1,300 British vessels. Of course, the undertaking seemed adventurous with images of a fairytale glory dancing in the brains of coast-bred lads. Fortunes were to be made quickly, perhaps even in a few months. The challenge was singing in the sea wind, and the devil could take the hindmost!

But the privateer's life was not all that heroic or remunerative. Nor was it without its frustrations and tragedies. More than half the privateersmen returned no richer than when they had departed with high hopes, and there were those who never got back at all, having fallen prey to their quarry. Yet a few—a very few—did achieve superior success. The *Yankee* was one of them.

The journal of the *Yankee's* first cruise, originating out of Rhode Island on 15 July 1812 under the command of young Oliver Wilson, opens in the literary style that belonged to the 19th century: "At 8 a.m. get under weigh

and beat out of the harbour, the wind S.W. and the tide at flood. As we passed Fort Wolcott fired a salute of three guns, which was answered by raising the American standard." Written in a clear hand and a clipped pedestrian style, the log goes on to record all those lovely details that fire the imagination of the sea historian, but which add little to the broad picture of the war. On the second day out, for example, the ship's clerk, Noah Jones (alias "The Wanderer"), notes that at 6 p.m. they "exercised all hands at the musket, and at sundown regulated the several messes on board." On that same day Gunner's Mate Samuel Slocum (who got a "nota bene" in the log) was severely reprimanded by the *Yankee's* skipper for "mulinous conduct" and was finally sent ashore.

The *Yankee* took departure from Rhode Island Light and set an easterly course that brushed south of Sable Island, that notorious graveyard of ships, and then northward for nearly 2 weeks to the waters off Newfoundland, where she engaged the *Royal Bounty*. Thence she proceeded on a southerly course away from the Grand Banks and was battered by a sail-ripping storm some 600 nautical miles east-southeast of Cape Race. She then pointed her cutwater toward Rhode Island and arrived at Bristol on the last day of August. During her month and a half at sea she crossed the paths of a number of ships, brigs, and schooners, sailing by some, plundering others, and sending a few substantial prizes into port.

Her greatest trial and finest achievement as an American privateer was the battle with the *Royal Bounty*, encountered off Cape Race on 1 August 1812. Captain Wilson opened fire upon the British ship, four times the size of the *Yankee*, then bore away, crossing the enemy's bow, and fired another broadside. Captain Gambles of the *Royal Bounty* returned a steady fire, but the "Wanderer" reports: "... we soon completely destroyed her standing and

running rigging and sails, killed the helmsman and kept up so warm a fire of round, langrage, cannister grape, musket balls, buskshot and pistol bullets, that the enemy's ship became unmanageable..." After the *Royal Bounty's* surrender, the logkeeper recorded in detail the extent of battle damage sustained by the British vessel, noting with evident pride that "even her colours were penetrated with six musket shots."

But it was not all a voyage of battle and plunder, for on fair days, with no hostile sail on the horizon, some brand of seagoing tomfoolery used up the idle hours. The log notes that on Sunday, 16 August, the *Yankee's* officers and men amused themselves with dancing and singing and that the "surgeon in particular displayed great activity in his rig-gadoons, saches and pigeon-wings and excited infinite merriment by his somersaults and feats of tumbling."

Curiously, in his logkeeping, Noah Jones doubled a day in his reckoning, for his 36th day out is recorded as "Wednesday 19th, August 1812," and his 37th day as "Wednesday 20th, August 1812." Thus, the *Yankee* found her way back home on Sunday, 31 August 1812. Or was it Monday?

The fact is, it was Monday, for his second entry of a Wednesday for 20 August actually put him behind by 24 hours, and his arrival at Bristol on 31 August was not on the Sabbath, as he noted, but one day later. Poor Noah Jones must have been confused, for after 20 August he logged only the numerical date of each entry and left out the day's name, save for the final Sunday of arrival which proves to be wrong.

The Rhode Island Historical Society retains the formal journal of the *Yankee's* second wartime cruise, and it is written in the same clear hand and style of the first. But another journal of the second cruise, which is part of the Pratt papers, is really not a log at all in the conventional sense. It begins on 17

October 1812, and Noah Jones, again serving as the *Yankee's* clerk, carries on the tale of the voyage with appropriate data; but his text now becomes analytic and descriptive, philosophic and erudite, and leaves one with the strong persuasion that he was a man of keen perception, mature sensibilities, and perhaps a classical education.

The journal begins with the lines: "Art thou a Wanderer?" the opening of two poetic stanzas attributed to Montgomery, probably James Montgomery, a Scottish poet who died in 1854. This is followed by lines from Goldsmith and a Latin phrase from Virgil. Few ships' logs of the time began with such literary allusions.

Noah Jones' unofficial journal of the second voyage includes a descriptive evaluation of the ship's officers, and each commentary is summarized in a few lines of Jonesian verse. He must have thought well of his 26-year old captain, Oliver Wilson, for of him he says:

O'er our gay vessel and her
daring band,
Experienc'd Wilson holds the
chief command;
Tho' train'd in boisterous element,
he's mind
To yet by soft humanity refin'd
Abroad confest, the father
of his crew!
Brave, liberal, just.

The poetic Muses touched his hand even when he penned his chronicled prose. Without question, he was a man who loved the sea and the life of a privateersman, and he could write with a Victorian flourish: "Farewell, ye tranquil pleasure of social life! I sacrifice ye all at the imperious calls of Fate and Fortune."

Talented he was, and well read! No important detail escaped his eye, and he rarely let a chance pass to become a sort of moral philosopher about the vagaries of mankind. But one cannot but wonder if he was not a bit of a prude, too,

especially since he sailed in rugged 19th century sailing vessels by choice and should have been inured to the life they offered. What quartermaster today, jotting down required entries in his notebook, would think to write, as Noah Jones did on the 25th day out: "Nothing on board the *Yankee* is so highly disgusting to me as the extreme indecency of language made use of by the cabin officers." In his private literary world, Jones even took his captain to task for vulgarity, but he exonerated him in the same paragraph by noting that Wilson, once ashore, "threw aside entirely this worst part of a seaman's character . . ." But in spite of Jones' severe moral assessment of his shipmates, a modern sailor can feel a kinship with those old salts of the War of 1812 who knew so well the *lingua franca* of the sea.

The original formal log of the *Yankee's* second cruise, now in the Rhode Island Historical Society, was edited in 1913 by Wilfred Harold Munro and published by the American Antiquarian Society. The formal log of the first cruise and the pensively poetic one of the second, both now reposing in the Naval Historical Collection of the Naval War College, were published in 1967 under the title: *Journals of Two Cruises Aboard the U.S. Privateer Yankee in the War of 1812—by a Wanderer*. The volume is enhanced by the scholarly introduction of Rear Adm. Ernest M. Eller, USN (Ret.), for many years Director of Naval History. There is also an Editor's Note of several pages which argues that Noah Jones, carried on the *Yankee's* manifest as "ship's clerk," may have been a Noah Johnson, distant relative of the Johnson-Pratt family. To support this contention, the editor argues that ". . . on the title page of the original journals, the name 'Noah Johnson' is written in a faint but legible hand . . ." In fact, there is no discernible signature on the title page of the second cruise log, although one

appears in the formal log of the first cruise. This signature is indeed "faint," but the name, inscribed with a graphite or lead marker, nonetheless can still be taken for "Noah Jones." This reviewer and several of his Naval War College associates, using strong magnifying glasses, were unable to make out the name "Johnson." If Noah Jones was indeed a Johnson and "something of a black sheep," as the editor surmises, the fact can hardly be proved by the evidence of these logs. Moreover, the formal log of the second cruise held by the Rhode Island Historical Society carries a much sharper signature in ink, and it is unmistakably "Noah Jones."

But the point is of minor importance, for the *Yankee's* romantic clerk sailed on only the privateer's first two cruises, and he then disappears from the

annals of the sea. The *Yankee*, under different commanders, made four more cruises against British shipping with other ships's clerks.

It is little wonder that Mr. Anthony Nicolosi, the professional guardian of the Naval Historical Collection, was delighted when he found two of the *Yankee's* logs in the valuable Pratt papers. The logs, almost venerable in their age, represent no routine record of uneventful cruises. They are accounts of a plucky privateer of the War of 1812 that captured some \$5 million of British maritime property, a tidy sum for those days. No other American privately armed vessel of war came out of the conflict with such laurels. A "Well Done" to Noah Jones, "the Wanderer," for his logkeeping and to the *Yankee* for her prowess.

GIFTS AND ACQUISITIONS

From Comdr. Jesse Boehret, USN (Ret.), has come a copy of "An Admiral For All Seasons: Life and Career of William Vezzie Pratt," an M.A. thesis submitted to the History Department of Syracuse University in 1971. Commander Boehret visited the college during the summer of 1970 and made extensive use of the Pratt papers in the Naval Historical Collection of the library. Lt. John B. Hattendorf, USN, currently assigned to the destroyer *Bradley Fiske*, presented a copy of "Technology and Strategy: A Study in the Professional Thought of the U.S. Navy, 1900-1916." The work was submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the M.A. degree in history at Brown University in 1971 (see the November 1971 issue of the *Review*). As evidenced by the footnote citations, Lieutenant Hattendorf relied very heavily on research materials in the Naval War College Archives.

Two important acquisitions to the college archives were the research files

of College Group Study Research Projects relating to the impact of reduced defense budgets on the national economy (see No. 293, *NWC, Journal of Abstracts, 1969-1970*) and the officer corps in an all-volunteer military force (see No. 218, *NWC, Journal of Abstracts, 1970-1971*). Included in the latter are completed questionnaires from members of college and university ROTC units and computer tapes prepared for a quantitative breakdown and analysis. Another significant addition to the archives was the records of the First through Sixth Conference of the Naval War Colleges of the Americas, 1962-1970. The idea of periodic meetings of the heads of naval schools and academies was fully conceived at the Second Inter-American Naval Conference held at Key West, Fla., in 1960. One result was the decision by one Chief of Naval Operations for a meeting of heads of Naval War Colleges, and invitations were sent to Latin American delegations for a get-together at New-

port, R.I. early in 1962. The First Conference met 9-11 April 1962. Subsequent meetings took place at Rio de Janeiro, 1963; Lima, Peru, 1964; Newport, 1966; and Buenos Aires, 1968 and

Newport, 1970. The U.S. Naval War College was designated the official depository for the records of the Conferences.

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. . . a circulating library in a town is an evergreen tree of diabolical knowledge! It blossoms through the year! And depend on it, . . . that they who are so fond of handling the leaves, will long for the fruit at last.

Richard B. Sheridan, The Rivals, I, ii