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**The Confederate Navy.**  
**[From the Richmond, Va., Times, April 15 and 22, 1894.]**  
**What It Accomplished During the War.**

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A Very Interesting and Valuable Paper Read Before R E. Lee Camp by Mr. Virginius  
Newton.

This valuable resumé is from a corrected copy kindly furnished by Mr. Newton, a "live"  
citizen of Richmond,

whose agency is felt, if not proclaimed.

His modesty would fain keep in the shade his merit.

His heart holds all of the memorable past, as the readers of the Papers, as well as the local  
press, warmly know--ED.

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**SOUTHERN HISTORICAL SOCIETY PAPERS**

Several weeks ago Mr. Virginius Newton, of this city, was requested by the members of Lee Camp to read before that body a paper relating to some of the numerous episodes during the late war. Mr. Newton responded with the promptness of a gallant soldier, and selected as his subject the Confederate Navy and its noble deeds.

He succeeded in giving in the most condensed form a statement of the many noble deeds executed by men who offered their lives to the cause of the Confederacy, and selected the navy as their field of operation.

The following is a copy of the paper read by Mr. Newton:

In greeting you to-night, the mind, by that law which induces contrast, leaps the gap of thirty years, and bodies forth in memory that gallant host which lived in days that tried men's souls, and linked heart to heart "with hoops of steel."

Men of a boundless devotion, uncalculating sacrifice, magnificent heroism, unequalled endurance, whose names, whose deeds, deeply etched upon the scroll of fame, shall live upon the lips of men, shall be lisped by the tongues of the babes of your land, so long as the English speech shall be voiced upon this planet. As comrades, as survivors of this host that laid down life itself in defence of your sacred soil, in defence of the cause of civil liberty, you I salute with

"Honor and reverence, and the good repute,  
That follows faithful service as its fruit."

I address you this evening upon a branch of your military service, the more conspicuous, perhaps, in its absence from your councils, handicapped from beginning to end of your struggle by a lack of the material development of your section, and overshadowed by your ever memorable prowess in the field,

### **"The Navy of the Confederate States."**

That a navy is--that it may be made an important factor--an efficient coadjutor to the success of an army in the field, let the service of the United States Navy in the late war fully attest.

McClellan, in the hour of his defeat, before Richmond, made Harrison's Landing the goal of his flight, to place his shattered and demoralized forces under the guns of the navy on the James.

The United States navy convoyed the Federal army to its attack upon Fort Henry, in February, 1862--rendered service so effective that capitulation was made to it before the army was in position--and a few days later was its left wing at Fort Donelson, contributing material aid in its reduction.

The Mississippi (with its vast supplies so essential to your armies) was in your control, from Cairo to the Gulf, until Foote, from the North, and Farragut from the South, broke its barriers, and began that system of segregation which so pitilessly sapped your vital forces.

The presence of the navy at Savannah and the seaboard, gave birth, in the brain of Sherman, to that relentless "March to The Sea," which shook, for a time, even the morale of the army of Northern Virginia.

Grant, in his Wilderness Campaign, foiled at every point, in his direct road to Richmond, sat down before Petersburg, his right wing in touch with the navy on the James, and that he be not shorn of this assistance, obstructed the river against the descent of your gunboats.

The brief career of the Merrimac in Hampton Roads, delayed the advance of McClellan on the Peninsula--gave you the much needed time to put the defences of Richmond in order--evoked the memorable telegram to Fox, assistant secretary of navy: "Can I rely upon the Monitor to keep the Merrimac in check, so that I can make Fort Monroe a base of operations," and as late as the 12th of March, 1862, the lamentation of General Barnard, his chief of engineers: "The possibility of the Merrimac appearing again, paralyzes the movement of this army by whatsoever route is adopted."

### **IMPORTANCE OF BLOCKADES**

The rigid blockade of your ports from the Chesapeake Bay to the Rio Grande, cut off the Confederacy from the markets of the world; deprived you of clothing, shoes, tools, ammunition and munitions of war--threw you back upon the undeveloped resources of an agricultural people; added ten-fold to the hardships of your troops in the field; restricted

your captures upon the high seas; and contributed in material, if not in equal portion, to your final overthrow on land.

The navy of your common country, which, at the beginning of hostilities, numbered some ninety war ships, of various classes, fell into the hands of the Federals, and by December, 1861, was augmented, by superior facilities, to 264 vessels, mounting 2,557 guns, with 22,000 seamen.

Of the ten navy yards, the property of your common country, eight were located in the Northern States, and but two, Norfolk and Pensacola, were in the South. The Pensacola yard was one merely for shelter and repair. From that at Norfolk came the guns and ammunition that did service in the whole South, afloat and ashore, the first years of the war.

The number of officers in the navy of the nation was 1,563, of these, 671 were credited to the South, but were not by that fact, necessarily, Southern born; of these latter, 321 resigned, and cast their lives and fortunes with that of your country.

To the future historian of this tragic epoch, "who shall naught extenuate, naught set down in malice," a perplexing chapter of his book will be the one in which he shall endeavor to give an account of the ways and means by which your people, void of manufacturing industries, void of skilled and efficient artisans, void of material for construction, equipped and maintained in the field for four long years, the most effective military service known in modern times.

### **DISADVANTAGES OF THE SOUTH**

Professor Soley, of the United States Navy, in his book, "The Blockade and The Cruisers," says:

"Great as was the task before the United States Government in preparing for a naval war, it was as nothing to that of the Confederacy. The latter had at its disposal a small number of trained officers, imbued with the same ideas, and brought up in the same school as their opponents. Some of these, like Buchanan, Semmes, Brown, Maffitt, and Brooke, were men of extraordinary professional qualities; but, except in its officers, the Confederate Government had nothing in the shape of a navy. It had not a single ship of war. It had no abundant fleet of merchant vessels in its ports from which to draw resources. It had no seamen, for its people were not given to seafaring pursuits. Its only ship-yards were Norfolk and Pensacola. Norfolk, with its immense supplies of ordnance and equipments, was indeed invaluable; but, though the 300 new Dahlgren guns captured in the yard were a permanent acquisition, the yard itself was lost when the war was one-fourth over.

"The South was without any large force of skilled mechanics; and such as it had were early summoned to the army. There were only three rolling mills in the country, two of which were in Tennessee; (and the third, at Atlanta, was unfitted for heavy work). There were hardly any machine shops that were prepared to supply the best kind of

workmanship; and in the beginning, the only foundry capable of casting heavy guns, was the Tredegar Iron Works, at Richmond, which, under the direction of Commander Brooke, was employed to its fullest capacity.

"Worst of all, there were no raw materials, except the timber that was standing in the forests. The cost of iron was enormous, and, toward the end of the war, it was hardly to be had at any price. Under these circumstances, no general plan of naval policy, on a large scale, could be carried out; and the conflict on the Southern side became a species of partisan, desultory warfare."

### **SCARCITY OF SUPPLIES**

The iron required was in the bowels of the earth. Hemp must be sown, grown, reaped, and there were no rope walks. You had never produced a sufficiency of iron in times of peace, and now, with the advent of war to increase its uses, the price rose from \$25 to \$1,300 per ton.

No powder was stored in any of the Southern States, except in small quantities. That captured at Norfolk, and in some arsenals, amounted, it is said, to sixty thousand pounds. The stock of percussion caps was less than 500,000, and not a machine for making them could be found in the South.

Colonel Gorgas says: "We began in April, 1861, without an arsenal, laboratory or powder mill of any capacity, and with no foundry or rolling mill, except at Richmond. During the harassments of war, holding our own in the field defiantly and successfully, against a powerful enemy; crippled by a depreciated currency, throttled by a blockade, which prevented our getting material or workmen; obliged to send almost every able-bodied man into the field; unable to use slave labor, except in the most unskilled departments; hampered by want of transportation, even of the commonest supplies of food; with no stock on hand, even of such articles as steel, copper, iron, or leather, with which to build up our establishments; against all these obstacles, and in spite of all these deficiencies, we created, before the close of 1863, literally out of the ground, foundries and rolling mills at Richmond, Selma, Atlanta and Macon, smelting works at Petersburg, chemical works at Charlotte, a powder mill far superior to any in the United States, unsurpassed by any across the ocean, a chain of arsenals, armories and laboratories from Virginia to Alabama."

### **STILL OTHER DIFFICULTIES**

You had further difficulties still. At the organization of the Confederate government, its treasury was not only empty, but the legislation and fiscal agency for taxation and collection of revenue had to be adopted and applied.

Under the most favorable auspices, time and experience were necessary to adjust a scheme of taxation to the condition of your people, and to put in running order the machinery for collection of revenue. Expenses had already begun, and demands for large sums of money, for immediate use, were urgent.

The treasury of the common country was in possession of your enemies; save the paltry sum of \$500,000 in the mint at New Orleans; paltry to a nation in pressing need of millions.

The receipts of the Confederate Government from February, 1861, to August, 1862--eighteen months--were \$302,500,000, its expenditures, \$347,300,000, and of this vast sum, but fourteen and a half millions were appropriated to the building and equipment of a navy.

You had officers sufficient, many of them already of national fame, of large experience and great abilities, but no ships, no seamen. Can you create an army without men and without muskets? The task of the Israelites in Egypt pales in the contrast; the labors of Sisyphus were not more hopeless.

What could these men do? What did they do? Taking as their guide the wisdom of Scripture, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might," they sought service in all available lines, and did a noble work, though history has failed to embalm in living record a tribute to their labors. Their reward has been found, not in the recognition of a grateful country, but in the conscious strength which sustains those whose labor is not in vain.

### **WHAT THEY DID**

Some sought service in your army and rose to high rank. Others built your seashore and river batteries, mounted your heavy guns, drilled and instructed your men in their use; in the service of ammunition, shot and shell; developed a torpedo and sub-marine service, and protected the rivers and harbors of your land against invasion.

Others, still, set to work to manufacture your ordnance--ordnance stores and supplies. The ordnance works at Richmond, under Commander Brooke, Lieutenants Minor and Wright, supplied the equipment of your vessels in the James, and at Wilmington, carriages for heavy guns in shore-batteries, and between May, '61 and '62, shipped to New Orleans, 220 heavy guns, many of them the efficient banded rifle gun, the invention of Commander John M. Brooke.

The ordnance works at Charlotte, N. C., under Ramsay, chief engineer, C. S. N. (who had seen service in the Merrimac), supplied heavy forgings, shafting for steamers, wrought-iron projectiles, gun carriages, blocks, ordnance equipment of every kind, and an ordnance laboratory.

Commander Catesby Ap. R. Jones, (late executive officer of the Merrimac), at Selma, Ala., superintended the various branches of a foundry, and the manufacture of heavy guns, forty-seven of which were used in the defences of Mobile and Charleston. At Atlanta, Ga., Lieutenant D. P. McCorkle was in charge of ordnance works for the making of shot, shell, and gun carriages.

Lieutenant Kennon (and, subsequently, Lieutenant Eggleston), at New Orleans, was engaged in the manufacture of fuses, primers, fireworks, cannon, gun carriages, projectiles, and ordnance of all kinds.

At Petersburg the navy established a rope walk, substituting cotton for hemp, and supplied the navy, the army, coal mines, railroads, and canals.

### NECESSITY FOR SUCH INDUSTRIES

Such industries had to be established, for your necessities were great and urgent. Their proper conduct required skill and intelligence, and these officers gave them the direction of greatest efficiency. Perhaps it was well you had so few ships to give these men; perhaps they rendered a better service in these lines.

Nevertheless, like the bird that beats its wings against its cage, they fretted against this durance vile, and longed for

"A wet sheet, and a flowing sea,  
A wind that follows fast,  
And fills the white and rustling sail,  
And bends the gallant mast."

With Herculean labor you built some vessels for harbor defence; fitted out two or three for service at sea; mounted one, sometimes two, guns upon such river steamers and tug boats as you could lay hands upon, and called them gunboats.

A gunboat is a vessel of war, and a chief essential of a war vessel is that its engines and boilers should be below the water line, for protection against the damage of shot or shell. In your gunboats, boilers and engines were on deck, and at all times exposed to the ravage and complete destruction of a single shot.

In this fashion you equipped yourselves, and girded your loins to grapple with a naval power, armed with the accumulations and experience of sixty years, supplemented with

additions from a wide field and vast resources.

Gregg, in his history of the war, says that on land you were outnumbered at times from two to ten for one; but in the navy from 100 to 1,000 to one. We make no computation of the ratio, but rest solely upon the abiding sense that you and we will always feel, of a great disproportion.

With green timber, after plans devised to meet the lack of skill in your labor, for you had no force of ship carpenters, you built ironclads at Norfolk, Richmond, Wilmington, Charleston, Savannah, Mobile, New Orleans, and on the Mississippi.

Wherever they were completed and afloat, before the advance of the enemy made their construction abortive, they were handled with skill, and did good service. That they did no more, that they achieved no lasting success, was due to causes beyond your and our control.

With your remarkable development in many lines of industry, born of an urgent necessity, you were no nearer the building of adequate marine engines at the close, than in the beginning of the war. In this lay the weakness and inefficiency of all the vessels you built. When New Orleans was captured, April 24, 1862, you had under construction two ironclads, the Louisiana and the Mississippi, either of which, in the opinion of Admiral Porter, of the United States navy, equipped with adequate engines (especially the Mississippi), would have swept, not only the gulf, but your entire seaboard clear of the Federal navy.

The Louisiana was hastened night and day, and dropped below the city, opposite the forts, with carpenters still at work and guns unmounted, to meet the advance of the Federal navy. When put into the stream, it was found that her engines, assisted by two tugboats lashed to her sides, were incapable of stemming the current in the river, and her utility became that simply of a battery located on the river front.

When Farragut had passed Forts Jackson and St. Philip, his fleet of twenty-four vessels of war, mounting 227 guns, engaged the Confederate fleet of four river steamers, the so-called ironclad Manassas, and the Louisiana moored to the river bank; in all five vessels, mounting twenty-eight guns.

### **BROKE THE BLOCKADE**

January 31, 1863, your ironclads, Palmetto State and Chicora, broke the blockade at Charleston, S. C., dispersed the Federal fleet, and secured the surrender of two ships, the Mercedita and Keystone State, but the victory was shorn of its triumphs by the ability of these vessels, subsequently, to elude the pursuit of our slow steaming ships.

August 5th, 1864, when Farragut had passed Forts Morgan and Gaines, guarding the entrance to Mobile Bay, his fleet of four monitors and fourteen ships, mounting 159 guns,

engaged the Confederate armament, composed of the ironclad Tennessee and three river steamers, mounting twenty-one guns. The latter were quickly placed hors de combat, leaving, the Tennessee alone, to meet the whole force of the enemy.

Attacked on all sides by the three monitors and fourteen ships, rammed time and again, run into abeam, at full speed, hammered with steel shot of 440 pounds weight thrown from the heavy guns of the monitors at 200 yards distant, in vain endeavoring to ram her adversaries, but each time frustrated by their superior speed, the Tennessee waged this unequal contest until her rudder chains were shot away, and thus unmanageable, crippled and leaking, she was surrendered to the enemy.

Her casemates (at an angle of 4.5 degrees, covered with two feet of solid wood and five inches of iron), had been pierced by the heavy shot fired by the Monitor. The turrets of these vessels were impenetrable to the shot of the Tennessee, and after four hours of fruitless contest the issue had become that of further disaster and further fearful carnage.

### **GREAT DISPARITY OF FORCES**

In presenting to your consideration this great disparity of the opposing forces at New Orleans and Mobile Bay, we do not seek to pluck one leaf from the crown of the victor. His conspicuous gallantry on both occasions places him in the front rank of the great naval commanders, of whom history speaks, and makes his victories the more meritorious and unique, in that they were wrested from forts and fleets combined. The officers of your navy were as fine a body of men as ever sought service. There was no lack of skill, no lack of initiative, no want of gallantry in those so fortunate as to secure commands.

**Tatnall, though near seventy years of age, at Port Royal, Savannah, and Hampton Roads, showed that the fiery courage,** which had carried him, in 1859, to the assistance of the English and French at Peiho, in China, with the exclamation, "Blood is thicker than water," still animated his breast.

The services of Buchanan in the Merrimac in Hampton Roads, March 8 and 9, 1862, and August 5, 1864, in Mobile Bay, need no recital here.

Ingram, who had won national fame in 1853, in protecting American citizenship in Smyrna, in the Kostza case, at Charleston, 1863, and elsewhere, showed no decline of zeal in the maintenance of his cause.

Cooke, at Roanoke Island and Elizabeth City, in February, 1862, though breasting a forlorn hope, showed the same spirit that won him deserved promotion, in the successful



career of the Albemarle, in the engagements of April 19, and May 5, 1864, in Albemarle Sound.

### **ACTION OF THE ARKANSAS**

Brown (in the ill equipped Arkansas), on the Mississippi River, July 15, 1862, ran the gauntlet of the Federal fleet of four ironclads, eight rams, four gunboats, and two ships of war; inflicted much damage to the enemy, put two of their vessels ashore in crippled condition, and by his presence at Vicksburg, brought suspense and confusion to the movements of the enemy in that quarter.

A suspense so effective that when a month later, you abandoned and blew her up, in consequence of defective engines, Farragut telegraphed the Navy Department: "It is the happiest moment of my life that I am able to inform the Department of the destruction of the ram Arkansas."

Glassell, in his daring attempt to torpedo the new Ironsides off the port of Charleston, the night of October 5, 1864.

Read in his captures on the high seas. His daring intrusion into the harbor of Portland, Maine, with the schooner Archer, and capture of the United States Revenue vessel Cushing. His subsequent dash, April 23, 1865, in the river steamer Webb, through the Federal fleet at the mouth of the Red River; running the gauntlet of the Federal fleet at New Orleans the day after.

John Taylor Wood, in his many daring captures by boarding, culminating in the boarding and capture of the United States gunboat Underwriter, in the Neuse River, within pistol shot of two of the enemy's forts, the night of February 1, 1864.

The heroism of Huger, Kennon, Warley, Read, and others at the capture of New Orleans, fully attest the morale of the naval service, and the promise of its efficiency in a larger field, with better means of offensive action.

Semmes in the Sumter and Alabama, Maffitt in the Florida, with a bare handful of men, stricken with yellow fever, running the blockade of Mobile in the broad daylight, there refitting and passing again through the Federal fleet. Pegram in the Nashville, Maury in the Georgia, Wood in the Tallahassee, Wilkinson in the Chickamauga, Waddell in the Shenandoah, Read in the sailing ships Clarence, Tacony, and Archer, denied all rights in foreign ports, save those of belligerents, swept the seas bare of American commerce, and inflicted a damage the country has never recovered.

In 1860, two-thirds of the commerce of America was carried in American bottoms. In 1863, three-fourths had been transferred to English registers.

### THE ALABAMA CLAIMS

The injury thus inflicted took shape after the war in what is known as the Alabama Claims; were adjusted upon a principle formulated by this Government, accepted by the English Government, and placed at fifteen and a half millions by the Geneva Award, for losses inflicted by the Alabama, Florida, and Shenandoah, alone.

One hundred and eight other ships were destroyed, the loss of which may be placed at five millions, but for which no damage was recovered.

It is needless to say that the principle which governed the Alabama Claims, and the award made thereunder, though perhaps applicable to the United States and Great Britain in future wars, was not at the time, is not now, and never will be, a principle of International Law, and the rights of a belligerent to obtain ships, unarmed and without a crew, from a neutral nation, still exist.

We have endeavored, briefly, and with scant justice, to put before you the irremediable obstacles that forbade the creation of an effective navy for the Confederate States. We have sought to break the ground, rather than till it, for the future discussion of particular engagements.

Perhaps, with the king, in Alexander's feast, we have  
"Fought all our battles o'er again;  
And thrice we routed all our foes, and thrice we slew the slain."

Be this as it may, the past is a sealed book, and irreversible--its tragic memories live with us, and bid us hand to the youth of our land, the glorious history of our State, the gallant manhood of its men.

This old Commonwealth, whose history is briefly summed in the title, "Mother of States and Statesmen," by agreement of opinion, stands easily first in the roll of warriors and statesmen she has given to the nation. In the beginning of this Government, when the differences of interpretation in its organic law gave rise to the two parties, Federalist and Republican, she gave, as leaders to the one, a Washington, a Marshall, to the other, a Jefferson.

When, after sixty years of conflict of opinion, that stirred the nation to its depths--looking in vain for that justice in the Union, of right, our heritage, we submitted these questions to the arbitrament of the sword, she gave as leaders, to the North, a Farragut and a Thomas, to the South, a Lee and a Jackson. Though wasted with the ravages of war,

dismembered in her old age, and shorn of territory, of which she was ever prodigal, for the general good, the brilliant galaxy of her great men, her warriors and statesmen, encircle her brow with a halo of glory which time cannot dim, and proclaim to the nation that the glory of her house is not yet departed. Your organization seeks to perpetuate the incidents and memories of a fateful period in her history. Outside of the charities which you have built up and sustain, your labors seek to consecrate her soil, and place in enduring form the memory of her heroes. They teach the youth of a nation that a nation's worth is to be measured by the sacrifices it has made. That when it shall cease to love virtue, shall cease to cherish, to emulate, to perpetuate the glorious deeds, the glorious names of its men, it shall cease, and justly cease, to be numbered with the nations of the earth. On the 30th of May next, you will unite in dedicating a monument to the soldiers and sailors of the Confederacy. You complete the record of a glorious epoch in the history of your country; you crown the structure of imperishable fame with the cap-stone it has looked for; you hand to posterity a memorial in enduring bronze, of that gallant host, in remembrance of whose deeds of chivalry, of steadfast endurance, of immortal sacrifice, all hearts must throb with keenest emotion, all heads be bared in deepest reverence.