

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

BY

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BLOCKADE RUNNING AND NEUROSURGERY

THE TIMES

There is an historical tie to this meeting of British and American neurosurgeons in Bermuda that I would like to develop. One hundred and ten years ago, British and Americans -- who, I will try to show, would have been neurosurgeons -- along with their charming wives and daughters met here with Bermudans and their charming young ladies. There were parties, fancy balls and banquets such as this tonight. Bermuda was gay and collecting great wealth, but it was a sad time in America. It was at the time of the War between the States. Unlike tonight, those that met here were not neurosurgeons. They were diplomats, military and commercial agents of the Confederacy -- British and Bermudan officials and merchants establishing a lifeline of trade with the Agricultural Confederacy who were in sore need of munitions and manufactured material.

Early in the war, the Union Government of Washington wisely ordered a blockade of Southern ports. They had only 15 to 20 naval vessels powered largely by sail, in the early days of the war, which permitted even large slow vessels coming directly from England to have little trouble getting through. However, they were able to capture a number of slow deep draft merchant vessels and these in turn were quickly outfitted with arms and crew and pressed into service in the blockade, gradually increasing it and making it more effective. To overcome this problem, the large vessels then ran directly to Bermuda or Nassau and trans-shipped

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their cargoes into smaller, faster vessels of light draft provided by the merchants of Bermuda and Britain to run the blockade. These cargoes were rich. This trade brought with it wealth to everyone in Bermuda. Life here was gay. "Rose Hill," home of the Bournes, commercial agent for the Confederate Government, a beautiful place overlooking St. Georges Harbor, was always open to Southern supporters as was the home of Norman Walker, Confederate agent. Young girls of the island entertained Confederate officers with all sorts of dances and activities so that St. George's became not only a harbor of refuge but a pleasant resting place after the excitement of an outward voyage through the blockade. It was a boom town. The warehouses here were stuffed with commissary stores for the Confederate Government and with cotton, for the hungry mills of Britain, run out in payment for the munitions, etc. This affluence filtered through to common sailors and attracted ladies of light virtue from Atlantic Coast ports, and "Shinbone Alley" had some hot dives.

Britain, officially neutral, had some sympathy with the South but even though incidents like the Trent Affair made relations with the United States a bit strained, she honored the blockade because, since her Navy controlled the seas, she wanted her blockades honored also. The sympathies of Bermudans were strongly pro-Southern -- so much so, Mr. McCue, that the American Consul was attacked in his office and another time knocked down on the street.

THE BOATS

Every Tarheel, (North Carolinians), many Southerners and a few other Americans -- and probably Martin Nichols -- are familiar with these blockade runners of the Confederacy. I would like to describe some of these vessels to you because they mark a great development in the history of transportation.

Inspiration is born of desperation, and necessity is the mother of invention. However, there is no stimulus like the chance for a big profit in private enterprise to get new things on the drawing board, so often times from the tragedies of war come some of our greatest scientific developments. At the start of the war, most of the vessels -- blockade runners as well as men of war -- were largely propelled by sail. The only advantage to the runner was the silence. A sailboat at night can still be quite sneaky, but steam was coming in. The Admiral of the U. S. Navy complained to the Secretary of the Navy: "How much the difficulty of maintaining a close blockade has been increased by the introduction of steam." The wooden sailing warships became ironclad with auxiliary steam engines. The blockade runners, however, found the

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profits of a successful trip so great that at most two trips, and sometimes one, through the blockade would pay for a vessel. In fact, one runner loaded with cotton and tobacco brought such a profit on that one run that she paid for herself and a sister ship that was lost. In order to participate in these profits, there developed the most rapid changes in design and propulsion of surface vessels of any comparable period in history. It was this blockade and the rich rewards that inspired the British to build the first all steel boat, and to improve steam power and design for speed. The successful formula for penetrating the Union blockade was: "Speed, low visibility, darkness and courage." These little steamers were turned out in great numbers in Britain. Many built on the Clyde -- at first in wood, later in metal -- they had long narrow graceful lines, low profile and painted gray to be less visible, they were of light draft to get over the sandbars and with raked stacks that could be lowered, at first sidewheelers and later propeller driven. The latter were quieter, no faster and built to go through -- not over -- a heavy sea. These vessels, of course, were not armed. At the end of the war, some of these vessels being built were steel, twin screw steamers that could do over 20 knots -- the forerunners of the modern torpedo boat destroyers. To show the degree British shipowners were involved, only 5% flew the Confederate flag. About half of the runners ever got caught. The USN captured 295 steamers, 44 ships and 683 schooners. That is 1033 vessels, not counting those that were run aground or scuttled to avoid capture. These vessels plus the bravery and ability of their captains kept the lifeline of the Confederacy open between Bermuda and Charleston, South Carolina and particularly Wilmington, North Carolina long after other ports closed. This was due to the effectiveness of Fort Fisher which successfully guarded the entrance to Cape Fear River until the fort fell in January, 1865 under attack from overwhelming odds from land and sea.

We mentioned the times and the boats. Now -- THE MEN:

Perhaps we have wondered what the type of person who goes into neurosurgery today would have done a few generations ago. Here we are interested in the scientific, willing to face the challenges, and take the responsibility for meticulous and often dangerous procedures and possessing the confidence to do it. For the most part, aggressive, dominant (at least domineering) cocky neurosurgeons -- an insufferable lot. They didn't have neurosurgeons in those days so it is easy to maintain that the venturesome turned to the sea (although somewhat prejudiced by my avocation), and we have some evidence to back it. Many of the would-have-been neurosurgeons of yesteryear became sea captains and ran the clipper ships and became naval officers. They too require

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an interest and a knowledge in science to navigate. They were willing to face challenges and take responsibility for lives, not only of their crew but of their own -- perhaps a different courage than ours. One wonders if our lives depended upon it as well as those of our patients if we would undertake some of the procedures we do. These men probably had an insufferable ego as well.

The Confederate Navy was small but mobile, manned by capable men, some of whom had been at the U. S. Naval Academy before the war. The Confederacy also owned and operated several blockade runners, so skillfully operated by Confederate captains as a patriotic duty, that they ran the blockade almost on a schedule, one making over 50 runs without a loss. The bravery of these men fighting for their country is understandable, but it is amazing how brave some of the British runners were, fighting for a handsome profit!

Now it is interesting to learn who some of these enterprising and courageous Britishers, Americans and Bermudans were who participated in the blockade running and in the blockade itself. It is difficult to record the names of many of the British captains because many were officers of H.M. Navy who wrangled leaves from the Admiralty and sailed under assumed names so that in case of capture it would not reflect on Her Majesty's neutrality. However, to tie these venturesome blockade runners in with our societies meeting here tonight, I would like to mention some names of those sailors common to those of members of our two societies (and there are many more names I have come across common to other neurosurgeons in our countries, not members of our societies, that will be too numerous to list). Some deserve special mention.

First and foremost of these naval heroes was Captain, later Admiral, Raphael Semmes, grandfather of our own beloved honorary member, Dr. Raphael Eustace Semmes. Admiral Semmes was almost a one-man Confederate Navy. With his two commands, the SUMPTER and the ALABAMA, he officially sank, captured or destroyed 57 Union vessels. Finally, toward the end of the war, the ALABAMA was shot out from under him in the English Channel. He was rescued and taken to Britain where he was honored. He returned to the Confederate States where he worked toward the end of the war for both the Confederate Navy and Army. After the war, he was imprisoned for a few months for "war crimes" until cooler heads released him.

Tom Taylor, an Englishman, was a conscientious and famous agent for a British shipping company. He started with one blockade

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runner out of Bermuda, turned in great profits, and finally had several runners. Personally, he made 28 round trips through the blockade and kept a record of these exciting, hair-raising episodes. Although always unarmed, he was a clever operator. Once when captured, he was able to get his captors inebriated and saved his ship and cargo and turned his captors into captives of the Confederacy. He probably has some descendants or relatives practicing neurosurgery in Derby, Belfast or Dundee.

A most colorful British naval officer turned blockade runner was Captain Roberts (Augustus Charles Hobart-Hampden, a son of the 6th Earl of Buckinghamshire, (onetime Captain of Queen Victoria's yacht, won the Victoria Cross in the Crimean War, captured a Russian warship, etc.). He established a record in blockade running and was never caught. (One night he ran up against a blockading vessel, was told to stop or be blasted out of the water. He said: "Aye, aye, sir" and stopped. In the dark, he could hear the boarding party coming to take her over; and, just as they touched his boat, he whispered down the tube: "Full speed ahead" and shot out of sight and finally made it in. Finally, in the Turkish and Russian War, he assumed a Turkish name and became Chief Admiral of the Turkish Navy). He is included here because his assumed name was Roberts and who can tell whom he might have met on American soil between voyages. We have several Dr. Roberts in the U.S.A. who are neurosurgeons.

Another Englishman, an engineer who played the game with skill, ingenuity, and courage, said of blockade running: "On the whole, a rather enjoyable occupation, with something of the zest of yacht racing -- a kind of exciting sport of the highest order."

Speaking of yacht racing, you may be interested to learn that the yacht, AMERICA, was a blockade runner. After winning the cup from the British in 1851, she was purchased by a wealthy British Army officer who won some more races with her. She then passed through other owners. Finally, an Englishman, Captain Decie, bought her and cruised the West Indies, did some blockade running and then sold her to the Confederate Government in 1861. She did more blockade running and finally was driven ashore in Florida and was scuttled to avoid capture. A few months later, Commander T. H. Stevens of the USS OTTAWA, undoubtedly related to designers of subsequent cup defenders, spotted her as the AMERICA. She was salvaged, underwent extensive repairs, and joined the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron. On two occasions, her fine sailing qualities enabled her to overhaul and capture two Confederate vessels. After the war, she passed through a

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few more hands, and finally the Eastern Yacht Club, Boston, Massachusetts, presented her to the Navy Department for a museum at Annapolis.

Now all the heroes weren't amongst the runners. There were those on the blockade, and strangely enough one of the most prominent officers was a Lieutenant William Cushing. He, I believe, was a cousin of Harvey Cushing's father, an indefatigable man who made many captures and had many hair-breadth escapes, one being a trip ashore one night on Cape Fear with a handful of men in a rowboat to capture a Confederate General, General Hebert. The General was away; but, not to be empty-handed, he returned with a Captain who was "protecting" the General's wife. Photographs of the Lieutenant do not show the handsome profile of another Cushing in uniform; but, looking at an earlier picture of the neurosurgeon, to put him at the same age, there is a similarity in appearance as there was in spirit.

Brigadier General Gallushar Pennybacker of the Union Army was responsible for the siege of Fort Fisher which led to its fall, hastening the end of the war. Although his photograph is not as smooth as that of our Joe, with a little hirsute escape on the latter's lip, the family resemblance is there.

Now we have mentioned Semmes, Taylor, Cushing and Pennybacker. Some other names have appeared among the blockade runners -- some British, some American -- that are the same as members of our Societies: Johnson, a common name belonging to people of all walks of life from President of the United States all the way up to a neurosurgeon. Other names involved with the blockade and its running are familiar to all neurosurgeons: Gage, Davies, Bennett, Clark, Morgan, Russell, Robert, Smith, Walker, Wilson, White and names of many other neurosurgeons not members of our societies. Finally, just to implicate another at this table, it should be noted that just one hundred and eleven years ago tonight at about this time the Confederate steamer and successful blockade runner, the ROBERT E. LEE, was captured off Wilmington, North Carolina by none other than Commander Patterson of the USS JAMES ADGER.

So tonight as you dignified neurosurgeons kick up your heels on the dance floor, just think back a few generations ago, some of your relatives -- before the days of neurosurgery -- were here in this same place at parties between runs, doing the Virginia Reel, the LaVolta, and waltzes.

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PRESENTATION OF GAVEL

Now, Professor Logue, your secretary, Mr. Hankinson, has told Dr. Patterson that the Society of British Neurological Surgeons -- one of the oldest and most prestigious and studiously the most informal neurosurgical society in the world -- has no emblem, no gavel, no shield, no logo at all. We were astounded and decided we must have some memorabilia for this occasion so we have this gavel which we hope, despite your informality, you will condescend to accept. This gavel may be significant for three reasons:

First, it is made of Bermuda cedar, in memory of this occasion.

Second, it was made by hand by a leading craftsman and neurosurgeon, Dr. Bronson Ray, and why Bronson Ray? -- He has won prizes with his handicraft with furniture he has built and -- he had some Bermuda cedar. Because of the presence of His Honor, the Consul General, we will not go into detail as to how this was procured. It might even jeopardize further running of the Bermuda race.

Third, its box is made in part of lignum vitae from a dead-eye of a blockade runner which was recovered by a scuba diver after one hundred years under water. The blockade runner was the HEBE, built in Glasgow in 1862; and, running from Bermuda to Wilmington, North Carolina on August 18, 1863, she was driven ashore nine miles north of Fort Fisher by none other than Lieutenant Cushing on the USS SHOHOKEN and destroyed by the Confederates before she could be floated by the Federal Navy. We have incorporated this in recognition of our British and American ancestors involved in this exciting activity who, given the opportunity, could otherwise have been neurosurgeons.

Many of these slides and the dead-eye from the HEBE were obtained from the Blockade Runner Museum in Carolina Beach, North Carolina through the kindness of Mr. Foard who operates this excellent institution.