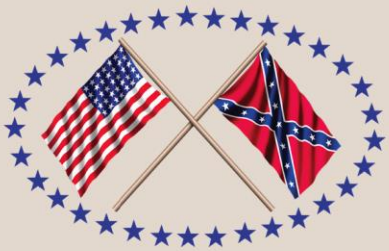
Sumter to Appomattox



American Civil War Round Table of Australia (New South Wales Chapter)
www.americancivilwar.asn.au Patron: Prof the Hon Bob Carr

Number 109 Nov. – Dec. 2021

President's Message

Dear Friends,

We are actually having a face-to-face meeting at the Roseville Club on 29 November 2021 for our end of year get together and Annual General Meeting. Relieved! However, we will not have Bob Carr speaking until next year.

Thank you, Peter Headley, for another interesting presentation on a topic that morphed from a focus on soldiers to a focus on sailors and the navies of the day. It is described elsewhere in this newsletter. Thank you also to Brian Skinner for stepping forward to fill the slot at the end of year meeting.

The end of year meeting is an opportunity to introduce friends who might be interested in our activities. Don't be put off by the AGM with which we will start. It will be short and business like! I promise! I have a reputation to protect.

The end of year meeting is also a good opportunity to pay your subscription if you have not already done so. I would appreciate you taking this opportunity so that I do not have to deal with a twitchy and out of sorts Treasurer.

We now have members in regional NSW, Canberra and Tasmania. I promised at the last meeting that we would find ways to enable them to remain involved even when we are meeting in person. We therefore are going to set up a link that will enable them to participate, albeit by means of a camera and screens. Whilst we will give this trial our best shot, please do not despair if it is not entirely successful the first time. We will persist until we have solved any problems we may encounter. It is an Engineer thing.

Please stay safe and well,

Ian McIntyre

Our Next Meeting

Christmas Function/AGM

Monday, 29th November from 6.15pm.

AGM starts at 6.45pm.

Topic of the talk:

Minnesota in the Civil War

Member Brian Skinner will present a topic which is of great personal interest to him.

Please come along and celebrate. We will be providing a subsidised 3-course meal with wine.

Email Treasurer Wayne Morrison at **treasurer@americancivilwar.asn.au** if you are attending and make a payment of $45 to our ACWRTA Westpac account (BSB 082 445 account no. 413569756) **by Wednesday 24th November.**

NOTE: You must bring your PROOF OF VACCINATION (required by the Roseville Club and ACWRTA).

On our **Website** you will always find the date of our next meeting. Our Facebook page is also easily accessed from our website www.americancivilwar.asn.au

Our Last Meeting

Life in the Union Navy and Service aboard a Monitor

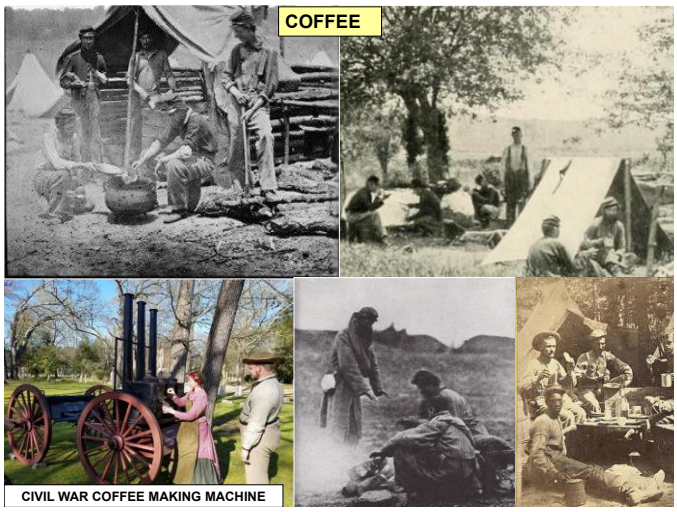
Peter Headley

In his short welcome, Dan Howard introduced Peter and referred to the fact that one of Peter's Connecticut ancestors had come to Australia in 1853 to the gold rush. He also mentioned that Peter was connected to an Australian WW1 military commander, Major General Pompey Elliott, who was his Great Uncle.

Peter began his lecture with a description of soldiers and their relationship with coffee, tobacco and hardtack.

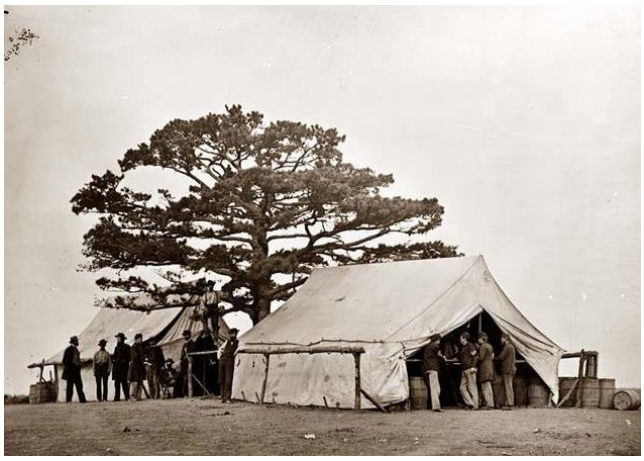
Soldiers carried a combination coffee mug and billycan for boiling coffee. Coffee beans needed to be ground up before use, usually done with a rifle butt and a hard stone. Coffee was usually mixed with sugar and condensed milk.

There was an expression, "coffee boilers", used in the Union Army which referred to malingerers and others who dropped out of the line of march or at the first chance fell back to the rear, notably when fighting began. They were usually found having coffee that they had brewed up.

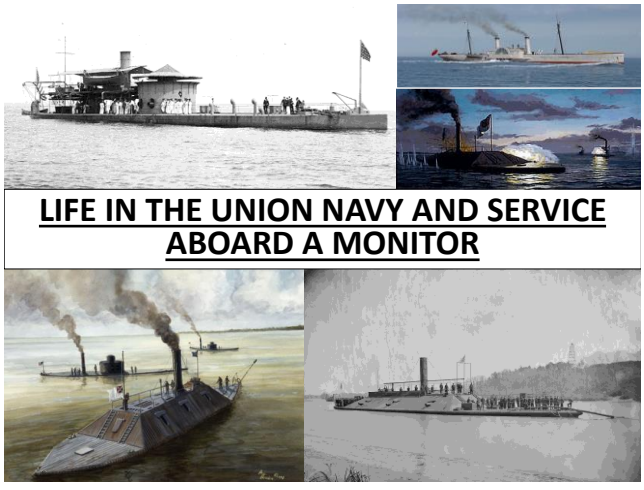


There are, in fact, photos showing that this class of no hopers did get their payback at times. On the 3rd day at Gettysburg, Confederate artillery opened up to reduce Union defences on Cemetery Hill before Pickett's Charge was to commence. As they were firing uphill much of the shot went over Cemetery Ridge and into many "Coffee Boilers" on the ground beyond, who naturally got badly shot up, much to the amusement and pleasure of the Union troops holding the front line on Cemetery Hill.

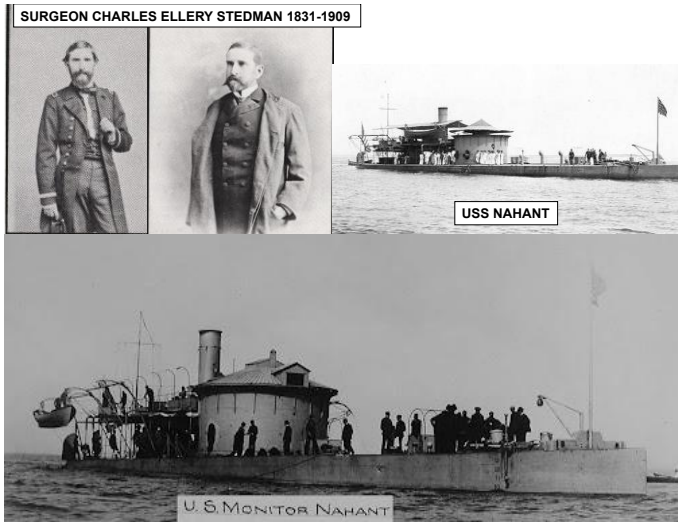
Soldiers also liked to carry a twist of tobacco and they smoked pipes rather than cigars which tended to break up in a soldier's knapsack. Union troops traded their coffee for tobacco from Confederate soldiers, usually between the lines when things were quiet. Hardtack, as its name implies, was a baked rock-hard biscuit which needed to be grated, soaked, broken up or fried up to be edible. Soldiers carried 3-4 days' rations when on the march, together with salt beef or pork, usually referred to as "salt horse". Fresh vegetables and fruit were usually only available when in permanent camp. Sutlers stores (*see below*) had food items available but they tended to be too expensive for the average soldier.



The main part of Peter's talk, with very informative illustrations, described life on board a monitor and other US Navy blockade vessels.



Information was based on a large number of letters and drawings from a surgeon, which were only found in the 1970s. This surgeon, Dr Charles Ellery Stedman, served on the ironclad monitor *Nahant* and other vessels. While in service, he created many detailed drawings of battles and life aboard ship as well as details of military events such as blockades.

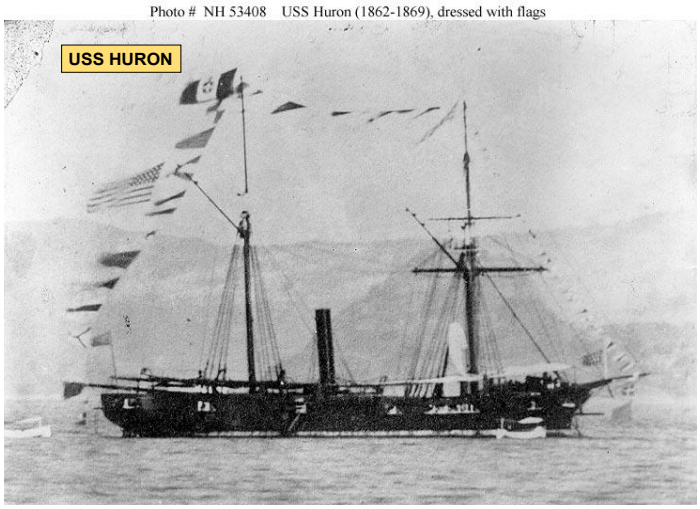


Born in Boston in 1831, he was from a medical background, with both of his grandfathers and his father being connected with the Navy and respected Boston doctors.

At the time of his medical training at Harvard, trainee doctors such as Charles Stedman, were expected to be apprenticed to a physician for three years to gain experience while studying. As well, Charles joined a variety of University clubs. In his final exam, Charles delivered his treatise in Latin and also passed the oral exam, which involved being grilled by nine Professors for ten minutes each. Later, in 1855, he travelled to Europe as ship's surgeon.

In Sept 1861 he volunteered in the Union Navy and, in January 1862, was posted to the *USS Huron*, which was assigned to blockade duties, as Volunteer Assistant Surgeon at $70 per month (a sailor got $16/mth).

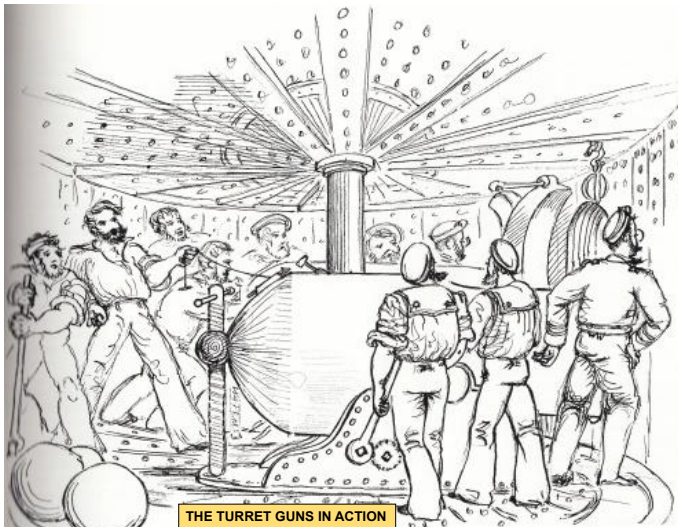
Blockade runners were generally very fast passenger service ships (reaching 14-15 knots), often manned by English Crews and Captain, which were painted to merge with ocean colours. If spotted, rockets were fired in the direction of travel of the blockade runner and to alert other blockade vessels that a blockade runner was about. They, in turn, would fire their rockets in a different direction to cause confusion. The blockade runners did not carry guns, and crews of captured ships were either released or, if Confederates, sent to prison.



After many months service, Stedman's health began to fail, a common problem related to being in inland malarial waters. After recovering, in 1863, he was sent to the 1875-ton monitor, *USS Nahant* which, along with monitor USS *Montauk* and other vessels, was blockading Charleston Harbour.

Life aboard a monitor was difficult and unhealthy. Conditions were described by one officer as "a fighting machine unfit for human habitation". Temperatures below deck ranged between 40 and 80 degrees F in summer, reaching 98F (37.5C) with high humidity.

Another issue was that hits from enemy weapons to the gun turret caused popped bolts and nuts and iron splinters to fly around inside the turret, wounding the gun crew. At Charleston Harbour, the Confederates managed to hit the monitors with 2,209 shots whereas the nine monitors only fired 139 shots in 1.5 hours. This was due to the fact that shells on the monitors weighed 175kg - 205kg and were handled manually, so firing and reloading was slow.



THE TURRET GUNS IN ACTION

POWDER DIVISION ON THE BERTH DECK OF THE NAHANT IN ACTION

When blockading Charleston Harbour, the monitors were disadvantaged.

Blockade of Charleston Harbour.

This was because Confederate crews were able to see the turrets turning back on target after reloading. This meant that the monitors were about to open fire and so the Confederate gun crews could take evasive action. All nine monitors sustained damage and, with a falling tide, withdrew from Charleston Harbour. At one point, *Montauk* was hit by a mine but was able to reach Port Royal for repairs.

Stedman was present when the *USS Nahant* and the *USS Weehawken* met the ironclad *CSS Atlanta* at Wassaw Sound, Georgia, on 17th June 1863. Both Union monitors elected not to fire until they were at point blank range because the reloading process was so slow. While the *Weehawken* was able to shoot five rounds, the *Nahant* was not able to do so before the *Atlanta* ran aground and hoisted the white flag.

Both Stedman and Confederate doctors saw to the wounded from both sides, and this experience gave Stedman a high regard for rebel doctors.

SETTING A DISLOCATED SHOULDER IN A GALE

Stedman remained on the *Nahant* for 8 months, one of only three of the original crew of 75 who did so. He again became ill during this period and needed to recuperate at home.

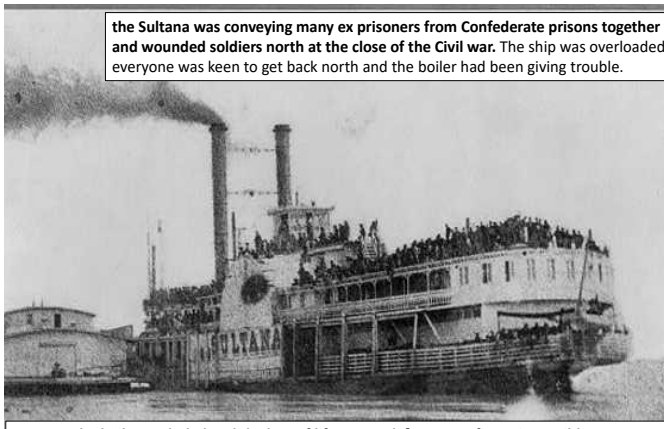
RECUPERATING AT HOME WITH HIS MOTHER ON HIS RIGHT WIFE AND FATHER IN LAW ON HIS LEFT

Once recovered, he was assigned to the *USS Circassian*, a supply ship to the Union blockade ships. Voyages were of two weeks duration so there are few of his letters and drawings from this period.

USS CIRCASSIAN SUPPLY STEAMER TO THE BLOCKADING SQUADRONS

Stedman resigned his commission in September 1865 and returned to private practice. In 1868, he joined the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) and died in 1909. His letters are in the hands of his brother's descendants.

Peter than described the commercial steamboat *Sultana* tragedy, which occurred on April 27, 1865. The vessel had left Memphis and was conveying Union ex-prisoners and wounded soldiers north when the boiler blew up, destroying the ship. An estimated 1800 were killed. This is still the 2nd record for the greatest loss of life in a single ship accident.



the Sultana was conveying many ex prisoners from Confederate prisons together and wounded soldiers north at the close of the Civil war. The ship was overloaded everyone was keen to get back north and the boiler had been giving trouble.

En route the boiler exploded and the loss of life was such [no exact figure is possible as many pe on the steamer were unrecorded] that today the Sultana disaster is still has the 2nd record for th greatest loss of life for any single ship disaster. Few people have heard of it and at the time its los news was overtaken by the news of the end of the Civil War and Lincoln's assassination

This disaster came just after the Civil War's end and Lincoln's assassination, which meant it was overlooked. As a result, few people have ever heard of it.

A number of popular songs of the period were also discussed, including "Lorena" (1857), "The girl I left behind me" (1848), "Old Folks at home" ("Swannee River") (Stephen Foster, 1851) and "Home Sweet Home" (from 1792).

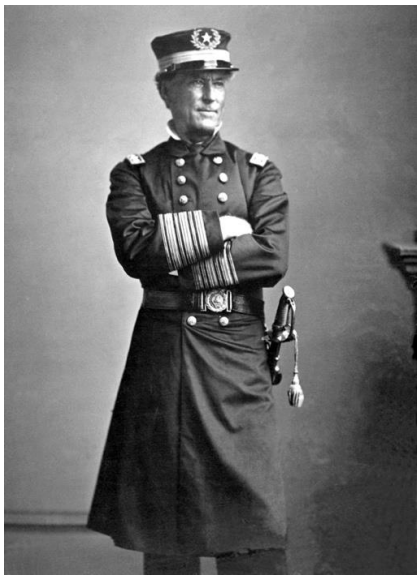
This was an interesting and informative presentation from Peter Headley, with excellent slides of Stedman's drawings and old photos.

This publication is the official newsletter of the American Civil War Round Table of Australia (NSW Chapter). All inquiries regarding the newsletter should be addressed to the Secretary of the Chapter
by phone on 0411 745 704 or e-mail:
secretary@americancivilwar.asn.au

Civil War Profile

Thanks to Dan Howard

Admiral David Glasgow Farragut (1801 – 1870)



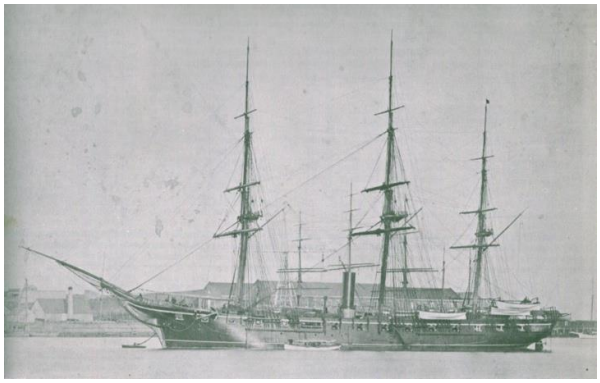
James (later 'David') Glasgow Farragut was born on a farm near Knoxville, Tennessee, in 1801. His father had been born in Minorca and took to the sea as a young sailor on merchant ships in the Mediterranean. Subsequently as captain of a merchant ship, he heard of the pending revolt in the American colonies, and sailed to Haiti, from where he exchanged his cargo of goods for muskets, cannon and ammunition, which he provided to the grateful American colonists in Charleston, South Carolina. He remained in America, and eventually became sailing master of a gunboat patrolling the Mississippi. During his career, he befriended another sailing master, David Porter Sr., whose son, David Porter Jr., was a Commander in the American navy. The Porters and the Farraguts became close. When James' mother died when he was only 8 years old, Commander Porter offered to take the boy into his household at nearby New Orleans and train him in due course as a naval officer. Porter introduced young James to Secretary of the Navy Paul Hamilton, to whom the precocious James expressed his desire to become a midshipman. His wish was granted when he was commissioned as a midshipman in December 1810.

With the Anglo-American War of 1812 looming, young James was guaranteed to see and learn a great deal about naval warfare, and so it proved. As a midshipman aboard Porter's soon to become legendary 36-gun frigate *Essex*, James found himself in the thick of numerous dangerous hot engagements of the war, in which the *Essex* defeated and captured British ships, (including the 28-gun sloop *Alert*) and several merchantmen as prizes.

At the tender age of 12, Farragut became the youngest American to command a prize ship seized in war, when Porter gave him command of the re-captured whaling ship *Barclay*. He later re-joined the *Essex,* which plied the Atlantic and Pacific oceans and ultimately was defeated itself by the 40-gun British frigate *Phoebe* in the Battle of Valparaiso, resulting in Farragut and Porter (and the surviving crew) being taken prisoner. Soon paroled, James was now just 13 years old yet and, with an enormous amount of experience under his belt, was regarded by Porter as a most commendable officer. Farragut was so grateful to all that Porter had taught him that he changed his name from 'James' to 'David' in honour of his mentor.

David Farragut's subsequent service took him far abroad, and he became fluent in several languages. By the time of the Mexican War, he was commanding blockaders. From 1823, he had made his home in Norfolk, Virginia, but when the Civil War came, he felt his loyalty was to the Union and the American Navy that was his life. Perhaps having spent most of his life at sea and having fought so often for his country, this was not surprising.

Despite some official hesitancy because of his Southern background, the Navy appointed him Commander of the West Gulf Squadron in December 1861 and he was ordered to organise an expedition against New Orleans – a critical Confederate port whose capture was a key component of Winfield Scott's Anaconda Plan to strangle the Confederacy's access to maritime commerce and support. Farragut's flagship was the *USS Hartford*, a modern sloop of war steamer, launched in 1858 and armed with 20 nine-inch Dahlgren guns, two 20 pounder Parrott rifles and two 12 pounder guns. Although General George B. McClellan had insisted that the city could not be taken until its two defending forts – Jackson and St Philip – had been reduced, Farragut had other plans.



Farragut's flagship *USS Hartford*

Notwithstanding the Confederate forts guarding either side of the mouth of the Mississippi, and the Confederate gunships and rams positioned in line abreast formation across the river upstream of the forts, in the darkness of night at 3 am on the morning of 24th April, 1862, Farragut boldly ordered his squadron to run the gauntlet of the defending guns. He penetrated the substantial barrier of hulks and chains suspended across the river by the Confederates at the point where the forts and shore batteries could rake fire upon an invading fleet from both sides of the river. Due to the narrowness of the opening in the hulk and chain barrier, Farragut was forced to send his three divisions of ships into the passage in single file line astern - considerably riskier than the preferred formation of two parallel lines.

The cannon fire from the forts on both sides was colossal and at one point a Confederate fire-raft ran into the *Hartford*, setting her side ablaze, but a quick-thinking officer rolled some exploding balls of shot over the side of *Hartford* onto the fire-raft, which exploded and sank, whereupon the *Hartford's* crew was able to extinguish the flames.

The Union fleet ultimately prevailed and pressed up the river to the city, which surrendered without further fighting on April 21, 1862.

The story of Farragut's trademark meticulous preparation, and the ordering of his ships' movements that led to his stunning victory at New Orleans has filled many pages of history books; the victory led Abraham Lincoln to recommend Farragut's promotion to Admiral – the first ever in the American Navy. But here, for reasons of space, we must move on to Farragut's even more famous victory at Mobile Bay, Alabama.

Mobile was the last great port available to the Confederacy and had replaced New Orleans as the Confederacy's centre of maritime commerce and supply. Mobile had also developed substantial industrial capacity (including building ironclads) and had a key rail connection all the way to Columbus, Kentucky – the longest railway line in the South. But unlike the forts that had protected New Orleans, Forts Morgan and Gaines were capable of being resupplied and reinforced by land, and could remain a threat to the resupply of any flotilla that managed to get past them; thus a joint operation was required with the army, with a simultaneous attack on Fort Gaines and Fort Morgan by units detached from Grant's army commencing as Farragut led his fleet, at dawn on 5th August, 1864, into the jaws of the entrance to the bay and into the field of fire of the forts. Fortunately, Fort Gaines was quickly incapacitated by the Federal's land-based artillery.

Nevertheless, the Confederate batteries threw everything they had at the Federal fleet which Farragut had arrayed so that the faster monitor ironclad gunboats proceeded first, followed by his main ships to each of which he had ordered a supporting gunboat to be lashed to the port side for protection, as they attempted to thread the needle of the passage between the headland forts – a passage that had also been heavily mined with 'torpedoes' (mines). Speed was of the essence so that the fleet did not get trapped between the deadly raking cannon fire of the forts.

So thick was the smoke from cannon fire that Farragut decided to climb high into *Hartford's* rigging just short of the maintop in order to see and direct his ships, barking orders through a megaphone. The *Hartford's* commanding officer, Captain Drayton, was so concerned that the 63-year-old Farragut might fall from this precarious perch that he ordered a quartermaster aloft with a line to lash him to the rigging. The stirring image of the fearless Admiral aloft directing the battle was the stuff of legend and not only inspired his sailors but captured the public's imagination and remains an inspiration today.

As the fleet proceeded, one of the leading Union monitors, the *Tecumseh,* hit a mine causing a tremendous explosion – the ship sank in 30 seconds. Her skipper, Captain Craven, gallantly stepped aside from the escape ladder to allow the ship's pilot to scramble out ahead and, in doing so, sacrificed his own chance for escape - he would go down with his ship.

After *Tecumseh's* loss, other leading gunboats slowed for fear of hitting mines, and the fleet began to bunch up badly within in the killing zone of the Confederate guns. Farragut had to make a spilt-second decision whether to retreat or proceed…and then he called out *"I shall lead"* and moved the *Hartford* to the head of the attacking line of Union ships. He then shouted his immortal words to the hesitating captain of one of the stalled Union ships: *"Damn the torpedoes! Four Bells Captain Drayton!"* ordering full speed ahead. Led so heroically by their resolute Admiral, the fleet recovered its momentum and passed Fort Morgan's cannon fire swiftly. Farragut had gambled on his hunch that the remaining mines would have been rendered ineffective due to the length of time they had been submerged – a hunch that providentially proved correct. As his ships bumped against and passed over some of the 'torpedoes', they failed to detonate, and the fleet was now clear to attack and destroy the

remaining Confederate gunships and rams that had put up such stout resistance but were ultimately overwhelmed. The following map (credit: warfarehistorynetwork.com) assists to understand the battle and the tremendous obstacles Farragut overcame:

When the battle was won and the *Hartford's* dead were laid out on the deck of his ship, Farragut wept, his quartermaster reporting that *"It was the only time I ever saw the old gentleman cry, but the tears came in his eyes, like a little child."* By his actions, Farragut and his fleet deprived the Confederacy of its last main seaport and achieved a major strategic victory for the Union.

In his book *'On Seas of Glory'* by President Reagan's former Secretary of the Navy John Lehman, the author notes that Farragut was beloved by his sailors, and he had both tactical brilliance and uncommon strategic insight capable of changing the course of great events. Following Plutarch's biographical method, Lehman states that David Farragut's parallel life would surely be Horatio Nelson's.

Farragut died in 1870, survived by his second wife Virginia (his first wife Susan had died in 1840) and his son Loyall.

Admiral Farragut at Mobile Bay by Henry Ogden (in reality he was much higher aloft than shown here).

The Battle of Mobile Bay by Louis Prang (1884)

For further reading see:

J. Lehman *'On Seas of Glory'* (2002 Touchstone Books) J. P. Duffy '*Lincoln's Admiral' the Civil War Campaigns of David Farragut'* (1997, John Wiley & Sons Inc.)

Call for short talks

Our short ten-minute presentations on a particular battle or person have been a great success in revealing the depth of talent within our group.

Remember that we are a group of friends and a friendly audience. I know there are several amongst us who have not yet broken cover but who would be interesting and insightful presenters.

Please do not hesitate to volunteer to myself or John Morrison on a topic of your choice, be it short or long.

Ian McIntyre