

On Sunday morning, June 19, 1864, at Cherbourg, France, two Southerners and former shipmates prepared to engage their ships in one of the most famous naval battles of the Civil War. Captain John Winslow, a North Carolinian of the *U.S.S. Kearsarge* had moved to Massachusetts while in his teens. Captain Raphael Semmes of the *C.S.S. Alabama* was born in Maryland but moved to Alabama in 1841. For 21 months Semmes' powerful *Alabama*, built at the Laird Shipyard at Birkenhead, England, had prowled the high seas terrorizing Union vessels. Semmes himself had supervised its conversion to a warship. The *Alabama's* voyage of 75,000 miles resulted in the capture or destruction of sixty-four Union merchant ships, totaling over \$5 million in damages. During its time at sea, the *Alabama* never entered a Confederate port to replenish supplies or refuel. Instead Semmes captained it to such diverse ports as Bahia, Brazil, Capetown, Singapore, and Cherbourg. The ship and its noted commander were considered by the United States as the scourge of high seas.

Now on this late spring day, Semmes prepared to do battle. After months of being labeled a "pirate" by the Northern press, Semmes was spoiling for a fight with a Union warship. Only a few days before the battle he told his second in command, John MacIntosh Kell, "I am tired of running from that flaunting rag." Disregarding Kell's list of reasons why he should not fight the *Kearsarge*, Semmes sent a challenge to Captain Winslow. Winslow had spent many months searching for the *Alabama*, and he now had the elusive raider trapped in Cherbourg.

The battle between the two vessels lasted approximately one hour. On paper it appeared as if both ships were evenly matched in size, propulsion and armament, but the *Kearsarge* was faster with stronger guns and ammunition. Furthermore, the *Alabama's* fuses were defective, and its gunpowder had been damaged by many months at sea. The two vessels fought in slowly narrowing circles. During the eighth circle at approximately 400 yards apart, the *Kearsarge* unleashed its last deadly charge, causing the *Alabama* to sink. The *Kearsarge* also had luck on its side when an enemy shell lodged in the rudder post and failed to explode. Nineteen sailors from the *Alabama* were killed or drowned; sixty-three others were taken prisoner. Semmes, along with 14 officers and 24 crewmen were rescued by an English yacht, *Deerhound*. The battle would become the last one-on-one battle between wooden warships at sea. Semmes would live to fight another day. He was promoted to Rear Admiral, and later Jefferson Davis commissioned him as a Brigadier General. Semmes died in Mobile, Alabama on August 30, 1877, at age 67. His antagonist, John Winslow, lived until September 29, 1873, dying in Boston, Massachusetts at age 61.

This month's speaker, Larry Hathcock of the MRRT, will present "The *C.S.S. Alabama*." Born in Alabama, Larry's interest in the Civil War developed when hearing of the exploits of his maternal great-grandfather, William Torrence of the Fifth Georgia Infantry. Larry earned degrees from Oakland University and Wayne State. He spent six years in the Naval Reserve with half of those on active duty with the U.S. Navy. As a re-enactor he participated in the filming of Pickett's Charge in the movie, "Gettysburg." Larry taught in the Holly school district for 30 years, and in 1999 was selected as a "Teacher of the Year" by the American Legion.

You'll definitely want to be in attendance for this one, so mark your calendars now—**MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 30TH**.

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The MRRT extends its thanks to last month's speaker, Tom Nanzig, for his fine program, "The Road to Appomattox." Tom enhanced his talk with many slides depicting the final week of the war and Lee's ultimate surrender to Grant. If you weren't there, you missed a good one.

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FALL FIELD TRIP:

All the plans have been finalized for the weekend trip to Shiloh on Saturday and Sunday, October 19-20. ALL UNPAID MONIES FOR THE BUS, SPEAKER, TWO LUNCHES, AND A SATURDAY NIGHT DINNER MUST BE PAID AT THIS MONTH'S MEETING. Nearly 50 people have signed up for what promises to be a great time.

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QUIZ: All questions pertain to the Navies.....

1. Which noted U.S. diplomat was called out of retirement to help settle the “*Alabama Claims*”? And how much money was Great Britain ordered to pay to the United States?
2. Which U.S. ironclad sank in 12 minutes without the loss of life after striking 2 torpedoes on December 12, 1862? And on which river did this episode occur? [Hint: it’s on display at Vicksburg National Battlefield Park]
3. According to U.S. law, how much alcohol [grog] was officially allowed in a seaman’s daily diet? And, when Congress rescinded this law in the summer of 1862, what was given to each sailor each day as a substitute?
4. What were “tinclads”? And, what was another name for this type of vessel?
5. Which Federal naval captain had two sons who served the Confederacy, was scalded by escaping steam aboard his vessel at Fort Henry, and died of heart disease during the war on May 1, 1864? And, on April 17, 1861, Jefferson Davis allowed civilian-owned vessels to prey upon Federal commerce ships. What were these civilian ships called?
6. What was the unique location of the Confederate Naval Academy established in April of 1862? And, where was the U.S. Naval Academy relocated from Annapolis, Maryland for security purposes?
7. Which Swede invented the *Monitor*, and which steam-powered warship that he designed exploded in 1844 during a demonstration, killing the U.S. Secretary of State Abel P. Upshur, Secretary of the Navy Thomas W. Gilmer, and several others?
8. Which Confederate graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy helped convert the *U.S.S. Merrimack* to the *C.S.S. Virginia* as an ironclad, invented a heavy artillery piece that was named for him, and later headed the Bureau of Ordnance and Hydrography? And, what invention had he created prior to the war?
9. What is the significance of *Ile a Vache* and the *Ocean Ranger*?
10. Name the Federal ironclad that battled alongside the *Monitor* against a powerful Confederate battery at Drewry’s Bluff on May 15, 1862. And, who commanded this vessel which suffered the deaths of 13 and 11 wounded?

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More stories from the great Battle of Shiloh.....

It was somewhere behind the Union line, shortly after noon, that the Forty-first Illinois of Brigadier General Stephen Hurlbut’s First Brigade, which had been badly shot up, was moving toward the rear. It passed another regiment advancing to the front. Colonel Isaac C. Pugh of the Forty-first, a white-haired man who had seen service in the Mexican War, called out to his new troops: “Fill your canteens boys! Some of you will be in hell before night and you’ll need water!”

Major Charles H. Levanway, coming into Savannah, Tennessee the previous day with the Thirty-fourth Illinois had a strong premonition of death, a premonition that was realized within hours. Sometime before noon on Monday, as he sat astride his mount to the rear of his regimental line, he was struck fatally by a canister shot that destroyed the bone in his neck. An observer described him falling to the ground on his stomach yet with his face grotesquely turned upward.

One soldier of the Sixth Ohio Volunteer Infantry who witnessed the carnage of the battle remembered: “A considerable number of wounded had crawled or been carried to one of the ravines, out of range of the fire which swept the slopes above. Many had died there, and others were in the last agonies as we passed. Their groans and cries were heart-rending. One poor fellow begged piteously to be put out of his misery and another kept repeating, ‘Oh God, have mercy! O God, O God!’ until we passed out of hearing. The gory corpses lying all about us, in every imaginable attitude, and slain by an inconceivable variety of wounds, were shocking to behold, but they made no sign and claimed no recognition; their sufferings were over.”

The battered Confederate army finally struggled back to Corinth in the pouring rain. Upon reaching the small northeast Mississippi town, the army set up makeshift hospitals at every likely location—schools, churches, hotels, and homes. Still there was not enough room for all the wounded. Numbering more than 8000, they were in some cases simply stretched out in the halls or on porches and sidewalks. A nurse later wrote that the foul air from the mass of human beings made her so sick initially that she felt she could not go on with her duties. She told of trying to cheer a young man she had been attending for several days who had learned that his arm was to be amputated. He said he knew that he would die, and he would not be comforted. A few hours after the amputation he was dead. She shuddered, she added, as she inadvertently passed the amputating area later and saw the man’s lifeless arm resting in a bloody tub with its hand hanging over the edge.

Numerous burial trenches, some with more than a hundred bodies, were scattered about the battlefield. Occasionally, little more than a few shovelfuls of dirt were tossed over the remains. In one spot an inert arm, with rigor mortis setting in, extended from the fresh earth toward the sky, the hand with stiff open fingers as if groping for something. One soldier passing by stared in disbelief, walked over and placed a piece of hardtack in the empty hand. “That fellow,” he declared, “is not going off hungry if I can help it.”

QUIZ ANSWERS:

1. Charles Francis Adams and \$15.5 million in gold
2. *U.S.S. Cairo* and the Yazoo River
3. One gill (4 ounces) and five cents
4. 4th class gunboats designed for use on shallow rivers (they were neither “tin” nor classified as ironclads) and “Light Draft”
5. William D. Porter and Privateers
6. Aboard the *C.S.S. Patrick Henry* and Newport, Rhode Island
7. John Ericsson and *U.S.S. Princeton* (President John Tyler and his future wife, Julia Gardiner, were below decks and barely escaped death. Others killed included David Gardiner, father of the President’s future wife, an American diplomat, a naval officer, and the President’s black valet.)
8. John Mercer Brooke and a deep-sea sounding apparatus for mapping the ocean floor
9. The *Ocean Ranger* was a ship carrying 468 freed blacks to Ile a Vache, Haiti in Abraham Lincoln’s failed colonization experiment
10. *U.S.S. Galena* and John Rodgers

A reminder that our meeting this month is **MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 30TH**. Guest speaker, Larry Hathcock, will present a fine tale of “The *C.S.S. Alabama*.” You’ll want to be in attendance for this and all the other fun. The meeting starts at 7:30 P.M. at the Farmington Public Library at Grand River and Farmington Road. See you there!

And don’t forget to check out our website: <http://www.farmlib.org/mrrt/>.