

Department of Defense Bloggers Roundtable With Michael Crawford, Senior Historian, Naval History and Heritage Command Subject: The U.S. Navy's Contributions in the War of 1812 Time: 1:03 p.m. EST Date: Tuesday, February 7, 2012

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BRADLEY CANTOR (Office of the Secretary of Defense Public Affairs): All right, we're going to get the program started.

Hello. I'd like to welcome you all to the Department of Defense Bloggers Roundtable for Tuesday, February 7th, 2012. My name is Brad Cantor, with the Office of the Secretary of Defense Public Affairs. I will be moderating today's call.

Today we're honored to have as our guest Dr. Michael Crawford, a senior historian at the Naval History and Heritage Command. Dr. Crawford will discuss how the U.S. Navy contributed to some of the most significant outcomes of the War of 1812.

Before we begin the program, a note to our bloggers on the -- on the line today: Please remember to clearly state your name and blog or organization in advance of your question. Respect the doctor's time and keep your questions succinct and to the point. And finally please mute your phones unless you are asking questions. This will keep unnecessary noise from interrupting the roundtable.

And with that, I turn the discussion over to Dr. Crawford.

Doctor?

MICHAEL CRAWFORD: Good afternoon.

When the United States declared war against the United Kingdom, it had certain objectives: It wanted to end impressments of its citizens into the Royal Navy; it wanted to obtain recognition of the maritime rights of its merchantmen against illegal blockades, searches and seizures; and it wanted to stop British support of hostile American Indians -- Native Americans against the United States. Madison, the president, sent his war message to Congress on June 18th, 1812, because he had come to the conclusion that attempts at economic coercion had

failed to win concessions from the British and thus war was the only means the United States had left to assert its rights and to defend the national honor.

Now, how did he, Madison, expect to win this war? Well, the British were engaged at that time with most of their forces against Napoleon, and so despite the -- their overwhelming navy and army, they weren't available to fight America. So Madison's plan was to win quickly by invading and occupying British-owned Canada. The United States far outnumbered Canada in population and thought it would be a snap.

But, by the time the war ended, two and a half years later, early in 1815, all of several of American attempts to invade and occupy Canada had failed.

The United States had ended up on the defensive, repulsing major invasions at Plattsburgh, New York; and in New Orleans, Louisiana; and suffering the ravaging of the shores of the Chesapeake Bay, a major agricultural region; as well as the capture and burning of its capital. Furthermore, a tight British blockade of the American coast had brought the U.S. government to the brink of financial collapse.

In the Treaty of Ghent, the British acceded to none of the United States' war demands. After 1815, impressments of U.S. citizens and seizures of American merchantmen did stop, but only because the United Kingdom and its allies had defeated Napoleonic France, and Europe was at peace. The British no longer had need of thousands of sailors to man their warships or a reason to intercept trade with Europe.

Historians debate who won the War of 1812. Some, particularly American historians, say that no side won the war but that it was a draw. These historians point to the fact that the peace treaty provided for a return to the status quo ante bellum, the condition before the war, with no loss or gain of territory.

Other historians, mostly British and Canadian, claim victory for the British. They base their argument on the facts that the British thwarted American strategy of seizing control of Canada and successfully resisted the concessions the United States government sought. Britain fought a defensive war, and since the United States did not win, Britain had the victory.

Still others assert that the United States actually won the war because it attained its major objective -- the nation successfully defended its honor. Depending much on how one chooses to define winning, the debate over who won the war, however interesting it may be, will never be decided definitively.

The one thing that all sides agree on is that the Native Americans were the real losers. More productive and meaningful than the question who won the war is the question of what precisely was gained and what was lost as a result of the war? What were the war's outcomes?

Among the War of 1812's most significant outcomes for the United States was a new defense policy. As historian George Daughan put -- puts it, the Navy found a permanent place in America's strategic thinking. Before the war, members of the Federalist Party had supported a strong Navy. But the Republicans, the party in power, sought to keep the Navy small and designed mainly for harbor defense. They feared that an ocean-going Navy would draw the United States into war unnecessarily and require high taxes that would corrupt the political system, benefit mainly financiers, and hurt the common folk. The most vocal opponent of a larger Navy was Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin.

By the end of the war, people of all political stripes, including Albert Gallatin, believed the country needed a powerful Navy, one at least large enough to be a factor in the thinking of any European country, particularly Britain. The country realized that having a weak Navy, rather than keeping us out of war, made it difficult to avoid war. Before the war, Britain, seeing how weak the United States was militarily, did not take our threats of war seriously. As historian George Daughan observes, the notion that a disarmed country could protect itself against imperialist Europe by using peaceful coercion and diplomacy was forever rejected.

By the end of the war, many Republicans and all Federalists were committed to a strong Navy, an adequate professional Army, and the financial reforms necessary to support them.

After the war, Congress, although dominated more than ever by republicans, approved an ambitious naval expansion program and a regular Army of 10,000 men. They raised taxes to pay for these, and they created the Second National Bank as a tool for government financing.

So how do we explain this turnabout in strategic thinking? What had happened during the war?

First of all, at the beginning of -- even before the war, the war planners in the United States had left the Navy out of the calculation. The Navy was very small. We only had, like, 15 ships that were capable of doing sea duty, and then we had several dozen gunboats that could act for harbor defense but couldn't go to sea. So they expected and planned for a quick war and a rapid conquest and occupation of Canada by land troops.

Disaster -- (chuckles) -- occurred on the Canadian border. Early in the war, we lost an army. And so the people in Washington, the war planners, quickly came to understand that the conquest of Canada depended on control of the waterways, especially Lake Ontario. And so they ordered a buildup of Navy vessels on the Great Lakes. By the end of the war, almost all of our Navy was on the Great Lakes. The -- and late in 1814 we had 400 men on ships at sea, 10,000 men on ships on the Great Lakes.

But despite this, the buildup came too late. The British were able to keep up in the shipbuilding race on Lake Ontario and we had stalemate. There is no great battle of Lake Ontario.

Another thing that happened was naval victory on Lake Champlain, that occurred late in the war, when the British had an army of 10,000 invading upstate New York, but American naval victory in Lake Champlain threw that army back into Canada, because without control of Lake Champlain, their supply lines -- the British supply lines were vulnerable.

At the same time, you have the British wreaking destruction all up and down the Chesapeake Bay because there was no United States Navy available in the Chesapeake Bay to stop them. So these two events -- victory at Lake Champlain and disaster in the Chesapeake -- demonstrate the two sides of naval power: the value of having it and the danger of not having it.

Throughout the war, on the high seas, especially earlier in the war, naval victories -- single-ship victories like Constitution versus Java, Constitution versus Guerriere, other ships, United States versus Macedonia -- these were among the few pieces of good news for the American people. And those battles, those victories at sea, helped maintain national morale.

So all of these events convinced the nation's leaders as well as the nation's people that we needed both an adequate navy and an adequate army if we wanted to be an adequate nation.

Now, there was another outcome of the war that's closely related to this new commitment to a strong national defense, and that's greater receptiveness to a larger role for the central government. The failures resulting from a weak central government during the war led to these changes in popular attitudes that accepted government activism in the economic and foreign policy realms.

So in the economic realm, you end up with Henry Clay's American System, a conglomeration of policies designed to build up the American economy: protective tariffs that were designed to promote American manufacturing, a national bank that would facilitate a national currency, transfers of federal funds between regions, a place to deposit federal revenues and a place -- an institution to sell government bonds. During the War of 1812 we didn't have such an institution, and it made it very difficult for the United States to move money from where it was to where it was needed. And also part of the American System of Henry Clay was a national program of transportation improvements, which they called in those days "internal improvements."

In foreign policy, Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, under James Monroe -- the presidency of James Monroe pursued an ambitious program. He pushed the Monroe Doctrine, which had to do with telling European empires that they were not to build any more empires in the Western Hemisphere; the acquisition of Florida from Spain and the settlement with Britain regarding the Oregon Territory.

But we ended up -- we had disputed who owned Oregon. And the United States and Great Britain agreed to have a condominium for a

certain number of years. And that was actually favorable to the United States, because the United States populated the area, whereas Britain didn't. And so when the period came to an end, it was obviously who was going to end up with Oregon.

Also related to this change in attitude towards the central government was the greater political unity that the war produced. Within the Republican Party, there emerged a group of National Republicans who adopted much of the Federalist platform: a strong army and navy, coastal fortifications, high taxes, booming cities, finance capitalism.

During these same post-war years, the Federalist Party and its elitist ethos rapidly disappeared, leading to a short period of political unity known as the "era of good feelings."

On the international scene, one of the most important outcomes of the war was a transformation of the United Kingdom's policy toward the United States. Before the war, the U.K. considered the United States to be a commercial rival and potential enemy, to be thwarted through confrontation wherever possible. As one historian puts it, after the war, the United Kingdom sought accommodation with the United States, no longer treating America with intimidating and condescending language, but considering the friendship of the United States as something to be curried as an asset. Or, as another historian states, for Britain, the unwanted fact and unsuccessful character of the War of 1812 encouraged a new relationship between the two states: one of post-war conciliation of the United States by the United Kingdom, and settlement of disputes by arbitration.

So instances of this accommodating spirit after the war appear in the rapid abandonment of British-held positions in the United States; establishment of reciprocity of tariffs in a commercial convention in 1815; demilitarization of the Great Lakes; cooperation on the Monroe Doctrine; and partial settlement of frontier disputes.

Now, this change in British policy was brought about by British recognition of the United States' newfound political unity, strong Army and Navy and sound fiscal underpinnings. And the role of the United States Navy in bringing about Britain's newfound respect for the United States was critical. After 1812, as historian Jon Latimer observed, the British took the United States seriously as a naval power, an honor accorded to few others.

Still another outcome of the War of 1812 that had a profound effect on the future course of American history was the defeat of the Native Americans. The war destroyed the southeastern and the northwestern Indian concentrations and broke the Native Americans' link with the British. Withdrawal of the British from the interior of much of North America left only Spain and later its successor Mexico to play the role abandoned by the British of supporting the Indians against U.S. ambitions.

Neither Spain nor Mexico would prove strong enough, allowing the United States to push aside the Native Americans while settling the West.

The U.S. Navy's victory in the Battle of Lake Erie was of pivotal importance here.

The United States Navy played a central role in what did not happen as a result of the War of 1812, as well as what did happen. The United States did not succeed in its original strategy of invading Canada, because, as I've said earlier, planners had not considered the Navy devising their strategy, and then the British matched the U.S. Navy's buildup on the lakes.

The British and the Native American allies did not establish an Indian buffer state in the old northwest because of the U.S. Navy victory on Lake Erie, which made possible the U.S. Army victory at the Battle of the Thames. And finally, the British did not succeed in invading New York and in separating New England, largely disaffected with the nation because of the war -- they didn't succeed in separating New England from the union, owing to U.S. naval victory on Lake Champlain.

I hope that this survey has illuminated why the War of 1812 really does matter in the United States -- the history of the United States, shaping its future in powerful ways, and that it has shown as well the crucial contributions the Navy made in producing those important outcomes.

So that's my -- that's my statement.

MR. CANTOR: Well, thank you, Dr. Crawford.

We're now going to open the round table to questions from our bloggers. Bloggers, remember to please state your name and organization before you ask your question. We are going to start with Thomas Goering from Navy Cyberspace.

Q: Thank you, sir. Very informative brief. My name is Tom Goering from Navy Cyberspace, navycs.com. Matter of fact, I get a little extra credit. I'm taking American History to 1877 currently in college, and I really appreciate the brief here. But -- (chuckles) -- my question is -- comes to the -- you were talking about the British -- or navy stopped doing impressment of American citizens after the War of 1812. But leading up to it, how difficult was it to man our Navy, knowing that that threat existed? And what is a good resource of (books or ?) that I could probably pull out and find even more information about this subject? Thank you.

MR. CRAWFORD: Well, there's a very old book -- "old" meaning, like, 70 years old or something -- by an -- I think the author's name is Zimmerman -- that examines the issue of impressment in detail.

But the question of manning our Navy -- now of course the British Navy was not all-volunteer, whereas the U.S. Navy was volunteer, all-volunteer. And before the War of 1812 actually we had no trouble -- well, not much trouble -- manning our ships, because we needed so few men because we had so few ships. Before the war was declared, the total personnel in the U.S. Navy was about a thousand.

And impressment actually -- it was safer to be, if you were a seaman, on a U.S. Navy ship than to be on a merchant ship, because the British did not claim the right -- no one claimed the right to stop a national vessel and examine it for citizens of its country to seize, whereas any nation had the right in international law to stop and examine a merchant ship to see that it was, you know, within the rules and so forth.

And so the British regularly stopped American ships, even out -- just outside of American territory -- which at that time was the distance one could fire a cannon from shore and hit a ship, so we didn't have the 20-mile rule back then -- and would muster the crews, and anyone they thought might be a British citizen, especially Irishmen, they would seize and impress into their -- into their Navy. And so -- the British did not recognize naturalization.

So I mean, somebody from Wales going to America in 1805 and, you know, serving in a merchant ship there and taking out U.S. citizenship, he was still subject to being told he has to serve the -- serve the king. And so it was -- it was -- it was something like and somewhere between 8(,000) and 10,000 Americans impressed into the British Navy between the 1790s and the War of 1812.

But there's only one case -- well, actually two cases -- in which the British stopped a(n) American Navy vessel and seized men from it and made them serve in their navy. One occurred during the -- what's known as a Quasi-War with France and, as a result of -- the American officer cooperated with the British and, as a result, he was cashiered, and the United States has ever since had an order saying that no commander of a U.S. Navy ship will allow someone else to muster his men. (Chuckles.)

And then the other case is the famous Chesapeake and Leopard Affair in 1807 in which the British stopped the USS Chesapeake just outside of Chesapeake Bay and seized the men that they claimed -- and with half justification -- claimed were deserters from the British Navy.

Does that answer your question?

Q: Yes, sir. Thank you very much.

MR. CANTOR: OK. Up next we have Chuck Simmins.

Q: Chuck Simmins from America's North Shore Journal. Thank you for speaking with us today, Doctor.

I spent some time after the last roundtable looking at the history of the war with respect to my area, upstate New York. Am I correct in getting the impression that much of the war in -- along both shores, the north and south shore of Lake Ontario, was tit-for-tat raiding, and that gradually the violence and things like burning the towns escalated as the fighting became more intense?

MR. CRAWFORD: Absolutely. You've got it right. That's what happened.

Of course, this had little to do with the Navy, although -- it was mainly the militia and the Army. And it was a very fluid border, and you had a lot of questions about loyalties, because a lot of the settlers of Canada had come from the United States, and the question is, are they truly now British? Are their sympathies still American? And so there was a lot of crossing back and forth, not just for raiding but also -- I mean, British deserters would go over to America; Americans would drive their cattle over to Canada to sell it to the British; a lot of, you know, cross-border.

But the tit-for-tat raiding did get worse.

It was -- and the violence was more and more directed against civilians and not military targets. It was, as one historian calls it, a civil war.

Q: Or an uncivil war. (Chuckles.)

MR. CRAWFORD: Uncivil, yeah.

Q: Thank you, Doctor.

MR. CRAWFORD: You're welcome.

MR. CANTOR: OK. Up next we have Maggie. (Pause.)

Maggie, are you there?

All right, one more time. Maggie?

Q: (Inaudible.) Sorry, I was muted and typing.

MR. CANTOR: Yeah. No problem.

Q: No, no, I'm going to pass on to the next one, OK?

MR. CANTOR: OK. Well, that actually -- I -- unless somebody joined after we -- after the call started, I believe that's all the bloggers for today. Is there anybody else there that has any more questions?

Q: Well, again, I'd like to follow up one last question about manpower.

MR. CANTOR: OK, sure.

Q: Sir --

MR. CANTOR: Can you --

Q: -- Tom Goering again from Navy CyberSpace. How were our sailors compensated in the early 1800s?

MR. CRAWFORD: Well, there was a -- all right, the common sailor -- I mean, the officers had a salary. That was set by Congress. Common sailors' salary or wages were set by the secretary of the Navy and set -- I mean, that's -- the Congress voted a certain amount of money to the Navy, so the secretary of the Navy had to operate within bounds of the appropriation, but he could set the wages. And sailors basically -- if they did -- petty officers down to common seamen signed up for a cruise, so -- and a cruise could last, you know, a year or so.

And they were paid monthly, and the purser was the one who kept charge, kept the record of payments, and against this record, the sailors would be deducted for things they bought from the purser's store, like clothing and tobacco. And the wages were just about equal or a little less than the wages they could earn on a merchant vessel, but the advantage was that the labor -- the work was more regular. So the sailor had to weigh, you know, whether he wanted to go serve in a merchant ship or sign up for a cruise in a Navy vessel.

Q: Well, thank you, sir. I found the book "At Sea Under Impressment: Accounts of Involuntary Service Aboard Navy and Pirate Vessels." I assume that's one of the books. And then you got the Zimmerman one that you mentioned. I'm going to read both of those.

Do you have any manpower books, as far as compensation, kind of the information you just put out, that I may be able to look up, sir?

MR. CRAWFORD: Oh. There's a good book for late 19th century, early 20th century.

Q: Well, I'll be glad to read that one, too.

MR. CRAWFORD: It's called "Manning the New Navy." And the author's name slips my mind at the moment.

Q: I'll find that, sir.

MR. CRAWFORD: But in terms of manpower studies, sir, the early period, there's no book that I know of that focuses on that.

If you ever want -- looking for a good book on the administration of the Navy, even though the title -- I mean, it isn't specifically about the administration. It's an excellent book.

It's a book called "A Gentlemanly and Honorable Profession." It's about the U.S. Navy officer corps before 1815. And the author's name is Christopher McKee, M-C-K-E-E.

MR. CANTOR: OK. Is that all the questions?

Q: I have one.

MR. CANTOR: OK, great.

Q: Chuck Simmins again, Doctor. In reading about the naval battles on Lake Ontario, one of the things that struck me was the remarkably slight amount of damage that was being done despite a lot of the shooting going on. And you know, if I read correctly, the battle off of where I live, Rochester, the British ships actually managed to row to safety during the battle. And can you talk a little bit about the mechanism of fighting and, you know, how the -- how the armaments worked or didn't work?

MR. CRAWFORD: OK. In the age of fighting sail, ships were armed in broadside, and that -- they would have cannons along the sides of the ship, plus, you know, a chaser -- a chase gun in the front and that -- at the bow and at the stern. But the main fighting was done broadside to broadside. And one of the reasons was, this is because of the way the ships were built. They were very strong on their sides, but very weak at the prow -- at the bow and the stern.

And there are two major types of armament aboard these ships.

There are the long guns, whose range is about a thousand yards, and then there are the carronades, whose range is more like 300 yards -- this is the effective range. And the carronades are called "smashers" because they carried very heavy balls.

A typical carronade was a 32-pounder. American frigates -- the superfrigates, like the Constitution and the United States, were armed with 24-pounder long guns as well as carronades, whereas British frigates were mainly armed with 18-pounders. And then, you know, you had the smaller guns on the smaller ships, the sloops and the brigs, and they would have been armed with mostly, I guess, from six to 12-pounders as well as the heavy carronades. The -- I say "heavy carronades" -- I mean, they fired a heavy ball, but they were light guns, and that's what's so -- is one of their advantages is you could put more of them onboard a ship than the long guns, which are very heavy.

So the object of the two fleets was -- I mean, mostly the two fleets would fight in line ahead, in the line of battle. And that's basically the kind of fighting you had on Lake Ontario.

But what happened on Lake Ontario is basically, the two sides were so afraid of losing that they never got very close to each other -- (chuckles) -- because they knew that if they lost, it basically meant they -- that, you know, that was -- that would determine the war.

Q: OK. That makes a lot of sense, then. And they're -- they didn't dare close -- and take the risk that they might be beaten.

MR. CRAWFORD: That's right.

Q: All right. Thank you.

MR. CRAWFORD: You're welcome.

MR. CANTOR: OK. Have any more questions? (Pause.)

All right. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you all.

CAPTAIN CHRISTOPHER (sp): This is --

MR. CANTOR: All right. Go ahead.

CAPT. CHRISTOPHER (sp): Excuse me. This is Captain Christopher (sp). I do want to point everybody on the line at our website, which is www.ourflagwasstillthere.org -- ourflagwasstillthere.org -- where Dr. -- some more of Dr. Crawford's writings can be found.

MR. CANTOR: Great. Well, thank you all. We've had some great questions today, and comments. As we wrap up today's call, I'd like to ask Dr. Crawford if he has any final comments.

MR. CRAWFORD: I appreciate having this opportunity to talk about the Navy and the War of 1812, and I thought the questions were very good ones and actually ones that I could sort of answer. (Chuckles.)

(Laughter.) So thank you.

MR. CANTOR: Great. Thank you, sir.

Today's program will be available online at dodlive.mil, where you'll be able to access story based on today's call, along with source documents, such as an audio file and a print transcript.

Again, thank you to Dr. Michael Crawford and our bloggers/participants. This concludes today's event. Feel free to disconnect at this time. Goodbye.

MR. CRAWFORD: Bye. CAPT. CHRISTOPHER (sp): Thank you.

END.