



*By Charles Priestley*

**B**y June, 1864, after nearly two years at sea and some 75,000 miles, the CSS *Alabama* was a tired ship. Her bottom was fouled, the copper sheathing peeling off her hull, her decks were leaking and there were holes in the tubing of her wheezing boilers. Officers and men were “*pretty well fagged out*”, as her captain put it<sup>1</sup>, and he himself had a bad cold which turned into a fever. “*Our bottom is in such a state that everything passes us,*” he had written in his journal on May 21. “*We are like a crippled hunter limping home from a long chase.*”<sup>2</sup>

The night of June 10 found the ship in the Channel in thick fog, but she was boarded by a Channel pilot off the Lizard and the following morning, Saturday, June 11, 1864, she arrived safely off the long breakwater marking the entrance to the great harbour at Cherbourg. At about 12.30, she came through the West Pass and anchored just inside the harbour.<sup>3</sup>

On duty in Cherbourg Harbour that day was the pride of the French Navy, the ironclad *Couronne*, under the command of a Breton officer called Jérôme Penhoat. Penhoat now sent off a boat to find out who the stranger was and what she wanted. The boat came back with an officer in a grey uniform who explained that the vessel was the CSS *Alabama* and that she wanted permission to land some 40 prisoners from the last two prizes she had captured. Penhoat replied that he was not authorised to give

<sup>1</sup> *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion* (Washington, DC, 1894-1927), Series I, Volume 3 (hereafter cited as ORN I:3), p.652: Semmes to Barron, June 14, 1864.

<sup>2</sup> ORN I:3, p.674: Extracts from the journal of Captain Semmes, C.S. Navy, commanding the C.S.S. Alabama, April 1 to June 16, 1864 (hereafter cited as Semmes Journal), May 21, 1864.

<sup>3</sup> ORN I:3, p.676: Semmes Journal, June 11, 1864.

permission, but would have to pass the request up to the Préfet Maritime. Meanwhile, however, the *Alabama* could come in and anchor in the inner part of the harbour, which she did.<sup>4</sup>

The title of Préfet Maritime is usually translated, by Semmes and others, as “Port Admiral”. In reality, however, it is very much more than that. The Préfet Maritime is responsible not merely for the port but for the whole of that particular part of the coast and everything that happens there.

The Préfet Maritime at this time was Vice-Admiral Augustin Dupouy, a career naval officer of 56 who, as captain of the *Napoléon*, had taken part, with the Royal Navy, in the bombardment of Sebastopol during the Crimean War. He was very much a technical man; he had invented a new naval gun carriage<sup>5</sup>, for example, and when he was finally able to visit the *Kearsarge* after the battle of June 19 and to talk to her captain, John Ancrum Winslow, he was clearly disappointed that Winslow was unable to answer his questions about the precise method of casting used on the *Kearsarge*'s 11-inch guns.<sup>6</sup>

Dupouy had been appointed only three weeks earlier, and he was just beginning to get the measure of his new responsibilities when the arrival of the *Alabama* presented him with his first problem. He was, after all, a sailor, not a diplomat, and he had absolutely no idea what to do in a case like this; his previous career had not prepared him for it. The chain of command went from Penhoat to Dupouy to the Minister of the Navy, Count Prosper Chasseloup-Laubat, and from Chasseloup-Laubat direct to the Emperor, Napoleon III, who was conveniently on holiday in Biarritz at the time. At 2 o'clock, then, Dupouy sent off a hasty telegram to the Minister, asking for instructions.<sup>7</sup> While Dupouy was still waiting for an answer, Semmes compounded the problem by sending ashore his Executive Officer, John McIntosh Kell, with a letter for the Admiral asking permission for the *Alabama* to enter the dock in order to carry out extensive but essential repairs. In desperation, Dupouy sent off a second telegram to the Minister, asking what he should do now.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, shortly after 7 o'clock that evening, an answer came to the first telegram: the prisoners must be released immediately! There was no response as yet, however, to the question of repairs.<sup>9</sup>

Semmes, delighted to be rid of his reluctant guests, loaded them into two of the *Alabama*'s boats and landed them at the Vigie de l'Onglet<sup>10</sup>, a former battery near the quay which was now a signal station and acted as a kind of airport control tower, as it were, regulating traffic in the harbour. Here they were discharged into the care of the U.S. Consul, Édouard Liais, a naval provisioning merchant from a prominent local family.<sup>11</sup>

The night before arriving in Cherbourg, Semmes had written in his journal these curiously final and prophetic words: “*And thus, thanks to an all-wise Providence, we*

<sup>4</sup> Paul Ingouf-Knocker, *Coulez l'Alabama!* (St.-Lô 1976, revised 2002), p.25.

<sup>5</sup> Ingouf-Knocker, *op.cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>6</sup> Service Historique de la Défense, Cherbourg: Le Vice-Amiral Préfet Maritime du 1<sup>er</sup> Arrondissement, Augustin Dupouy, à Son Excellence Monsieur le Ministre de la Marine et des Colonies, à Paris (hereafter cited as SHD, Dupouy to Minister), June 25, 1864.

<sup>7</sup> Ingouf-Knocker, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>8</sup> Admiral Raphael Semmes, *Memoirs of Service Afloat During the War Between the States* (Baltimore, 1869), p. 751; Ingouf-Knocker, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>9</sup> Ingouf-Knocker, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>10</sup> This little building still survives at the end of the rue de l'Onglet. It now houses the offices of a centre for water sports.

<sup>11</sup> *ORN I:3*, p. 676; Semmes Journal, June 11, 1864; Ingouf-Knocker, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

have brought our cruise of the 'Alabama' to a successful termination."<sup>12</sup> He expected the repairs to take a couple of months. His plan, as we know from a letter which he wrote two days later to the senior Confederate Navy officer in Europe, Flag-Officer Samuel Barron, was to pay off his officers and crew and give them an extended run on shore, as he put it, and for himself to ask to be relieved of his command.<sup>13</sup> As we know, however, it was not to be.

The next day was Sunday and a quiet day aboard the *Alabama*, with only a few curious visitors. Semmes reported in his journal that the weather continued cloudy and cool and that he was still suffering from his cold and fever. Nevertheless, he mustered and inspected the crew. There was still no answer from Paris, but at least officers and men could enjoy fresh food for the first time since they had left the Cape. It was the start of the strawberry season, and Semmes wrote appreciatively in his journal of the "very large and fine" berries, as well as of the good beef and mutton and the excellent Normandy milk and butter.<sup>14</sup>

Back on shore, meanwhile, the Admiral received a telegram from Paris. Was he certain that the mysterious vessel was indeed the *Alabama*? Might she not be the *Florida*, which had been in Brest for repairs from August, 1863 until January, 1864, when she evaded the *Kearsarge* and made for the open sea? After questioning the *Alabama*'s newly released prisoners and the pilot who had brought her in, Dupouy sent off a telegram to Paris confirming that the vessel was indeed the *Alabama*, and then a further one confirming that Semmes was her captain, following both telegrams with a letter the next day.<sup>15</sup>

The next day was Monday, June 13, and Semmes went ashore in the morning to see the Admiral and to explain what exactly he needed. He met Dupouy in his office in the Préfecture Maritime, a few minutes' walk from the landing-stage. The Admiral gave him a courteous welcome and was very friendly – until it came to the question of the repairs. What a pity, he said, that Semmes had not gone to a commercial port like Le Havre or Bordeaux, where he could easily have been accommodated. The problem was that Cherbourg was a naval base and the docks were naval docks. However, he had of course referred Semmes's request to Paris, and was waiting for a response. How unfortunate that the Emperor was away at the moment!

A rather frustrated Semmes took his leave, writing later to Barron about the need for patience "as all the Latin races are proverbially slow in their movements."<sup>16</sup>

It seems probable that he also took the opportunity that morning to visit the Confederate consular agent, Adolphe Bonfils,<sup>17</sup> another naval provisioning merchant

<sup>12</sup> ORN I:3, p. 676: Semmes Journal, June 10, 1864.

<sup>13</sup> ORN I:3, p. 651: Semmes to Barron, June 13, 1864.

<sup>14</sup> ORN I:3, p. 676: Semmes Journal, June 12, 1864.

<sup>15</sup> Ingouf-Knocker, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-28.

<sup>16</sup> ORN I:3, p. 652: Semmes to Barron, June 14, 1864.

<sup>17</sup> There has been much confusion over Bonfils's Christian name, probably partly because all the men in the Bonfils family appear to have had the same two first names, Joseph Marie, and were therefore known by their third name. Ingouf-Knocker (*op. cit.*, p. 24) refers to "M. Joseph Bonfils, vice-consul du Brésil" and says that his eldest son, Amédée, "est depuis peu investi de la charge d'Agent consulaire des Etats Confédérés" ("had recently been appointed Confederate consular agent"). Slidell, Confederate Commissioner to France, refers (ORN I:3, p. 661) to "Mr. Auguste Bonfils". Semmes, however, writes (ORN I:3, p. 648) to "Ad. Bonfils, Esq." and Bonfils signs himself "Ad. Bonfils" in a letter to Slidell (ORN I:3, p. 662). The full name of the Brazilian Consul at Cherbourg was Joseph Marie *Adolphe* Bonfils and he was generally known as Adolphe. There seems little doubt, then, that the same man was also the Confederate consular agent. He was born in 1800 and was thus 64 in 1864. His eldest son Joseph Marie *Gustave* Adolphe (born 1821), known as Gustave, signed the death certificates of the three Confederate dead after the

and a neighbour of Liais. Bonfils was also the consul of Brazil, but it is clear both from his actions and from the evidence of John Slidell, the Confederate Commissioner to France, that he and his sons took their responsibility to the Confederacy extremely seriously.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, Bonfils had written of his own volition to Slidell, on the very day that the *Alabama* arrived, asking him to apply direct to the Government for permission for her to go into dock.<sup>19</sup>

If Semmes did visit Bonfils that morning, though, it would have been of necessity a fairly short meeting, since the Imperial Brazilian Navy training-ship *Bahiana* was arriving that day on a courtesy visit, and Bonfils would have had to be on hand to welcome her.<sup>20</sup>

That afternoon, rumours began to circulate in Cherbourg that the USS *Kearsarge* was on her way from Flushing, so Semmes continued to keep the crew on board.<sup>21</sup>

The following day, Tuesday, June 14, these rumours turned out to be true. At about 12.30, the dark shape of the *Kearsarge* appeared off the breakwater. She made no attempt to enter the harbour, but anchored just outside the East Pass<sup>22</sup>. A boat then came out to the *Couronne* carrying her surgeon, Dr John M. Browne, who asked permission for her to enter the harbour. Penhoat, having signalled the Admiral, gave permission, but the *Kearsarge* made no move to come in. Instead, her captain, John Ancrum Winslow, came ashore at about 3.30 to speak to the U.S. Consul, Bonfils's neighbour Édouard Liais. Liais then informed the Admiral that the *Kearsarge* had come to pick up the *Alabama*'s former prisoners, whereupon the Admiral sent another telegram to the Minister, asking for instructions.<sup>23</sup>

At this point Dupouy's worst fears were realised, as Semmes decided to fight the *Kearsarge*.

It seems that he had come to this decision virtually as soon as he saw the *Kearsarge*. He called Kell into his cabin and discussed the situation with him, but his opening words were: "*Kell, I am going out to fight the 'Kearsarge'. What do you think of it?*" The meeting was thus similar to a certain type of business meeting, called simply to approve a decision already made. Kell could never have dissuaded Semmes, even if he had wanted to. He could, and did, point out the *Alabama*'s weak points, but, as he said, "*I stated these facts simply for myself.*"<sup>24</sup>

Later that day, Semmes wrote to Samuel Barron in Paris. "*As we are about equally matched,*" he said, "*I shall go out to engage her.*"<sup>25</sup>

Why did Semmes fight? In reality, he had very little choice. The *Alabama* was far too slow now to make a run for it, and his only real alternative was thus to sit bottled up in Cherbourg until the end of the war. Since this was not Raphael Semmes's style, he decided to fight. In any case, as he said to Kell, "*I am tired of running from that*

battle of June 19, describing himself as "*Agent des Etats du Sud de l'Amérique*" ("agent of the Southern States of America").

<sup>18</sup> ORN I:3, p. 661: Slidell to Benjamin, June 30, 1864.

<sup>19</sup> ORN I:3, p. 647: Slidell to Semmes, June 12, 1864.

<sup>20</sup> Ingouf-Knocker, *op.cit.*, p. 24.

<sup>21</sup> ORN I:3, p. 677: Semmes Journal, June 13, 1864.

<sup>22</sup> See Penhoat's official report on the battle in *The American Historical Review*, Vol. XXIII (1917-1918), pp. 119-123: "*Le Kerseage se présente devant la passe de l'Est sans entrer*" (p. 121).

<sup>23</sup> SHD, Dupouy to Minister, June 15, 1864; Ingouf-Knocker, *op.cit.*, p. 50.

<sup>24</sup> John McIntosh Kell, *Recollections of a Naval Life, including the cruises of the Confederate States Steamers "Sumter" and "Alabama"* (Washington, D.C., 1900), p. 245.

<sup>25</sup> ORN I:3, p. 651: Semmes to Barron, June 14, 1864.

*flaunting rag!*”<sup>26</sup>

“As we are about equally matched.” On the face of it, that was true. The two ships were of similar size. The *Kearsarge*’s crew was slightly larger than the *Alabama*’s, but the *Alabama* had one more gun. The *Kearsarge* had seven guns - four 32-pounders, a 28-pounder rifle and two huge Dahlgren 11-inch guns on pivots amidships. The *Alabama* carried eight - six 32-pounders, an 8-inch smoothbore pivot aft and a 7-inch, 110 lb English Blakely rifle as a forward pivot.<sup>27</sup>

Kell reminded his commander, though, of the *Alabama*’s disadvantages. It was not merely the state of her hull and her boilers. In the course of her long cruise, both fuses and powder had deteriorated. When Semmes had used one of his last two prizes, the *Rockingham*, for target practice in April, only a third of the shells had exploded.<sup>28</sup> Trying a few shots in open sea three weeks later, Semmes found that not one of them burst. “Bad fuses”, he scribbled in the margin of his journal.<sup>29</sup> The powder, too, was affected by damp, probably because the magazine was located next door to the freshwater condenser. Some of it had had to be thrown overboard.<sup>30</sup>

The *Kearsarge* had one advantage, however, which was not mentioned. Some months before, Winslow had had 1.7-inch iron chains slung along her sides to protect her vulnerable machinery. The chains were then boxed over with deal boards, which were painted black.

Historians have argued ever since over whether Semmes knew about these chains. Semmes himself, and Kell, always denied that he could have done. Three of his officers, however, said much later that he did. Lieutenant Arthur Sinclair first said so in “*Two Years on the Alabama*”, published more than 30 years after the event. The *Alabama*’s surgeon and paymaster, Dr. Galt, said so in 1900 in a letter to Mrs. Kell, and Semmes’s clerk, W. Breedlove Smith, apparently repeated the claim in an interview with the *New Orleans Daily Picayune* in 1912 - 48 years after the battle.<sup>31</sup>

If Semmes did know about the chains, though, how did he find out? Sinclair says that Dupouy told him.<sup>32</sup> Dupouy’s reports to the Minister, however, make no mention of the chains until June 21, by which time he had had a chance to go on board the *Kearsarge* and examine her. In any case, one consistent element in the story of the *Alabama*’s last days is that Dupouy was desperate throughout to be seen as absolutely impartial; he would hardly have compromised his position by tipping Semmes off. It is also claimed that everyone in Cherbourg knew about the chains; the local fishermen had apparently seen them. On May 20, however, less than a month before, when the *Kearsarge* was at Calais, five officers from the CSS *Rappahannock* had put on civilian clothes and rowed around her; they reported only that she was “*very dirty*”, making no mention of any

<sup>26</sup> Stephen Fox, *Wolf of the Deep* (New York, 2007), p. 213, quoting from Norman C. Delaney, *John McIntosh Kell of the Raider “Alabama”* (University, Alabama, 1973), p. 159. Delaney was in turn quoting from an interview given by Kell in 1883 with “Wood Holt” (Alfred Iverson Branham) of the *Atlanta Constitution*, but Fox points out that, in an interview of ca. 1885 with Wood Holt, Kell had recalled Semmes’s phrase as “that dirty rag”, which Fox feels is more probable.

<sup>27</sup> Kell, *op.cit.*, p. 245.

<sup>28</sup> Kell, *op.cit.*, p. 245.

<sup>29</sup> *ORN* I:3, p. 673: Semmes Journal, May 12, 1864; William Marvel, *The Alabama and the Kearsarge: the Sailor’s Civil War* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1996), p. 229.

<sup>30</sup> *ORN* I:3, p. 664: Semmes to Barron, July 5, 1864; John M. Taylor, *Confederate Raider: Raphael Semmes of the “Alabama”* (Washington, D.C., 1994), p. 199.

<sup>31</sup> Fox, *op.cit.*, p. 228 and endnote, p. 297. Breedlove Smith’s first name is usually given as William, but according to Maurice Rigby it was actually Wightman.

<sup>32</sup> Arthur Sinclair, *Two Years on the Alabama* (London, 1896), p. 261.

chains.<sup>33</sup> On balance, then, it seems highly unlikely that Semmes knew about them.

At all events, Semmes decided to fight, and that evening he delivered an extraordinary challenge to Winslow. He wrote to the Confederate consular agent, Adolphe Bonfils, as follows: “*Sir: I hear that you were informed by the U.S. Consul that the Kearsarge was to come to this port solely for the prisoners landed by me, and that he was to depart in twenty-four hours. I desire to say to the U.S. Consul that my intention is to fight the Kearsarge as soon as I can make the necessary arrangements. I hope these will not detain me more than until to-morrow evening, or after the morrow morning at furthest. I beg she will not depart before I am ready to go out.*”<sup>34</sup> Bonfils then took this letter down the rue du Val de Saire to the house of his neighbour Liais, the U.S. Consul, and delivered it to him.<sup>35</sup>

Semmes and Dr. Galt, his Paymaster, then took ashore, according to Semmes, 4 ½ sacks of sovereigns, containing about 4,700 in all, the ship’s payroll and a package of ransom bonds, which they deposited with Bonfils.<sup>36</sup> It will be noticed that Semmes makes no mention of his collection of chronometers. One account says that he had hoped to sell them in Cherbourg but was forbidden to do so by the French authorities and had therefore had to deposit these, too, with Bonfils.<sup>37</sup> It is known that they were eventually brought to England on the British yacht *Hornet*, but they may possibly have been held by Bonfils in the meantime.

Meanwhile, the French authorities had noticed unusual activity aboard the *Alabama*. The Admiral sent his aide-de-camp, who came back with the news that Semmes had determined to go out and attack the *Kearsarge*. The Admiral replied that Semmes could not go out until 24 hours after the *Kearsarge* had left. Semmes, however, having practised law, was ready with his answer. The 24-hour rule *would* apply, he said, if the *Kearsarge* had come into the harbour and anchored, but she had not; she was cruising up and down outside the breakwater, so he was free to attack her when he wished. The Admiral retorted that in his opinion the 24-hour rule applied as long as the *Kearsarge* was in French waters, and that if necessary he would use force to stop Semmes going out. Semmes then changed tack and protested that allowing the *Kearsarge* to take his former prisoners on board would amount to giving her reinforcements. This does not appear to have occurred to the Admiral, but he decided to hold back the embarkation until he had received instructions from Paris.<sup>38</sup>

Early the next morning, June 15, Semmes temporarily withdrew his request to be allowed to go into dock and asked instead to be permitted to take on coal.<sup>39</sup> At about 10 o’clock, the Admiral received a visit from Winslow and Liais. Dupouy says that it was immediately clear to him that the *Kearsarge* had not come to Cherbourg simply to pick up the prisoners. Her aim was obviously to cruise up and down until the *Alabama* came out. He therefore asked Winslow either to come into port and anchor, as he had been authorised to do, or to go further out. Winslow agreed to wait for the *Alabama* in the

<sup>33</sup> Douglas French Forrest (ed. William N. Still, Jr.), *Odyssey in Gray: a Diary of Confederate Service, 1863-1865* (Richmond, Virginia, 1979), p. 179.

<sup>34</sup> Reproduced in *ORN* I:3, p. 648.

<sup>35</sup> Liais lived at 1, rue du Val de Saire and Bonfils at 40, rue du Val de Saire. Both buildings survive today (2013), the former as a savings bank.

<sup>36</sup> *ORN* I:3, p. 651: Semmes to Barron, June 14, 1864.

<sup>37</sup> Ingouf-Knocker, *op.cit.*, p. 67 (though he appears to think that the funds were deposited with Bonfils on June 18, the day before the battle).

<sup>38</sup> SHD, Dupouy to Minister, June 15, 1864.

<sup>39</sup> *ORN* I:3, p. 652: Semmes to Barron, June 16, 1864.

open sea.<sup>40</sup>

Shortly after noon, a telegram arrived from Paris finally giving a ruling on the two questions perplexing the Admiral: the *Alabama* could not be permitted to go into dock, but equally the *Kearsarge* could not be permitted to embark the prisoners.<sup>41</sup> As Semmes had by now withdrawn his request, though, Dupouy decided not to tell him about the telegram.<sup>42</sup> Coaling started that afternoon.

That day, however, Dupouy had something to take his mind briefly off his American problem, because June 15 saw the official inauguration of Cherbourg's new Casino des Bains de Mer. Sea-bathing had apparently been brought to France by Royalists émigrés who had been in exile in England during the Napoleonic Wars, and it had become very fashionable. Cherbourg had in fact had a sea-bathing establishment as long ago as 1829, but unfortunately it had gone bankrupt. Now a new company, with extensive capital, had been formed by Count Hippolyte de Tocqueville (brother of the writer Alexis de Tocqueville) and this week marked the opening of the new establishment. The plan, apparently, was to make Cherbourg into the French Brighton.

The new Casino des Bains de Mer was an enormous complex. Apart from sea-bathing, it offered hydrotherapy, gaming rooms, billiard rooms, lecture rooms, a restaurant, a ballroom, luxurious apartments with sea-views and a garden modelled on Versailles. The Administrator was the British Consul, Horace Hamond, and the Director was another Englishman called Alwood, who had done his best to make the opening a success by inviting to it a number of his richer friends and acquaintances from England, including a certain coal-mining magnate named John Lancaster. Invitations had also been sent, of course, to everyone of importance, whether military, religious or civilian, in Cherbourg and the surrounding area, including Normandy's most famous author, the novelist Octave Feuillet, and his beautiful wife. Finally, Alwood had made an arrangement with the Directors of France's Western Railway, who had agreed to lay on a special train leaving Paris at 8.20 on the Saturday night, arriving in Cherbourg early on the Sunday morning, June 19, and returning to Paris at 8.45 that evening – the only possible problem here being that Cherbourg time was 20 minutes behind Paris time.<sup>43</sup>

The day of the inauguration began early with a religious ceremony to bless the new enterprise. Dupouy was unable to attend, however, since he had received an overnight telegram from Paris asking for a full report on the situation, and he had been working on that when Winslow and Liais appeared in his office.

Finishing the draft of his report and leaving it to one of his staff to check, he hurried off to the Casino, arriving just in time for the banquet for the 70 most distinguished locals, at which he was one of the speakers. He was unable, though, to enjoy the food, the wine and the conversation, nor the music by the band of the 18<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the Line, for worrying about what was going on outside. Once the speeches and the loyal toast were over, he was able at last to return to his office, where he was updated by his staff. He then read through his report for the Minister, signed it and went off to change for the ball which was to close the day's festivities.<sup>44</sup>

Here the Admiral could finally forget his worries over the contending Americans. The evening started at 9.30 with a massive public display of fireworks from the terrace

<sup>40</sup> SHD, Dupouy to Minister, June 15, 1864.

<sup>41</sup> Reproduced (in translation) in *ORN* I:3, p. 58, enclosure in letter from W.L. Dayton to William H. Seward, June 17, 1864.

<sup>42</sup> SHD, Dupouy to Minister, June 15, 1864.

<sup>43</sup> Ingouf-Knocker, *op.cit.*, pp. 18-21.

<sup>44</sup> Ingouf-Knocker, *op.cit.*, pp. 56-60.

of the Casino. Then the whole of Cherbourg society gathered in the great hall of the Casino for the ball. Everyone was there – government officials, military and naval officers, political figures, the local business community, the Brazilian officer-cadets from the *Bahiana* and, inevitably, beautiful women. This was clearly the biggest event in the Cherbourg calendar for 1864, and the local press published ecstatic descriptions of the lights and flowers, the uniforms, evening dress and decorations, the bare shoulders and the jewels. The “sumptuous buffet”, too, received appreciative mentions. More column inches, however, were devoted to the beautiful Madame Feuillet, the star of the evening, who was generally described as “*éblouissante*”, “dazzling.” The Admiral seems to have been particularly taken with her, and was quick to promise her a pleasure-trip around the harbour in his launch,<sup>45</sup> as a result of which we have a description from her pen of both the *Alabama* and the battle.

Only one group was absent. To the disappointment of the revellers, there were no officers, as they had been hoping, from the *Alabama*. Retiring to his room with a glass of champagne in order to write up his copy, one of the journalists wrote poetically of the dark shape of the Confederate vessel sitting silent out there in the darkness across the water, a single lantern burning in her rigging.<sup>46</sup>

The dancing went on until dawn, but the Admiral was back in his office as usual the next morning, Thursday, June 16, in time to send off another of his anxious telegrams to Paris, following it up with a letter. The *Kearsarge* was continuing to cruise up and down outside the harbour, further out than before, although still in view of the port. The Admiral felt that this was acceptable. Did the Minister agree? Meanwhile, the *Alabama* had finished taking on coal and was probably preparing to go out, though he did not know when. He would do his best to make sure that the fight took place outside French territorial waters. Finally, he begged the Minister once more to let him know if he was not happy with how Dupouy was handling the situation.<sup>47</sup>

Friday, June 17, started off peacefully enough for the Admiral, with the *Alabama* still at anchor and the *Kearsarge* still cruising around outside the breakwater. At 10.30, however, Liais, the U.S. Consul, suddenly appeared in his office. He had learned that reinforcements were on their way for the *Alabama*; what did Dupouy propose to do about it? Dupouy thought this highly unlikely, but just in case he sent off a telegram to the Ministry asking for instructions. A reply came back four hours later saying that in no circumstances could the *Alabama* be allowed to take on any reinforcements. By this time, however, the Admiral was out in the harbour on the promised boat-trip with Madame Feuillet.<sup>48</sup> He had done some advance planning for this, sending an aristocratic young officer who spoke good English to the *Alabama* to ask permission to visit the ship. Given his official position, Dupouy felt that he could not go on board himself, so he sent Madame Feuillet and her husband in the care of the young officer. In her memoirs, she describes Semmes as “*a lean little man, slightly stooped, having something of the bearing of the first Emperor.*”<sup>49</sup> He offered them Cape wine and cakes, and she reports seeing him “*surrounded by his collection of chronometers.*” If correct, this means that Semmes still had his chronometers on board two days before the battle.

Madame Feuillet was not the only visitor that day, however. The last entry in

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ingouf-Knocker, *op.cit.*, p. 60, quoting Gaston Maillard of “La Gazette des Étrangers”.

<sup>47</sup> SHD, Dupouy to Minister, June 16, 1864.

<sup>48</sup> Ingouf-Knocker, *op.cit.*, p. 63.

<sup>49</sup> Mme. Octave Feuillet, *Quelques Années de Ma Vie* (seventh edition, Paris, 1899), p. 274 (“*un petit homme sec et légèrement voûté, ayant un peu de la tournure du premier Empereur*”).

Semmes's shipboard journal is dated June 16, for on June 17 he also received a visit from Warren Adams, an enterprising publisher from the house of Saunders, Otley, which had published a number of pro-Confederate works. Adams had hurried over from England to see if Semmes would allow him to take back the two volumes for publication. Semmes was delighted to do so, and the manuscript was handed over for editing to the novelist and poet George Meredith, who supplemented his income by moonlighting as a publisher's reader and who, like many of what today might be called the liberal intelligentsia, was a fervent Confederate.<sup>50</sup>

June 17 was also the day on which John Lancaster's yacht *Deerhound* arrived, anchoring near another English yacht called the *Hornet*.<sup>51</sup>

At about 8 o'clock the next morning, Saturday, June 18, the people of Cherbourg were startled by a tremendous cannonade. Naturally assuming that the long-awaited battle had begun, they rushed down to the port, where they were amazed to see the *Alabama* still peacefully at anchor, although there was a thick pall of grey smoke on the horizon. A naval officer on the quay reassured them. It was the Brazilian training-ship *Bahiana*, he explained, firing a salute at the end of her courtesy visit, and being saluted in turn by the guns on the Fort de Chavagnac<sup>52</sup> at the West Pass of the harbour.<sup>53</sup>

By now, police and gendarmes had been posted at the railway station and the harbour to prevent any potential reinforcements reaching either ship. William Lewis Dayton Junior, Second Secretary at the U.S. Legation and son of the U.S. Minister to France, had arrived at the Admiral's office late the night before but had been told to come back in the morning. He had come down from Paris with a dispatch from his father for Winslow. He now returned at 7.30 a.m., and was told that he could go out to the *Kearsarge*, but he must make his own arrangements to get there and must give his word to return as soon as he had delivered the dispatch. As he was waiting at the Vigie de l'Onglet while the gendarmes examined his pass, he noticed two young men who had been stopped by the police while attempting to go out to the *Alabama*.<sup>54</sup> These were in fact the two Prussian Master's Mates, Maximilian Mulnier and Julius Schrader<sup>55</sup>, and they were finally allowed to go because they had been a part of *Alabama*'s crew when she arrived at Cherbourg. They had been on their way home on leave and had just reached Paris when they heard the news and came rushing back. Several other Confederate naval officers who had hoped to be allowed to join the *Alabama* were disappointed, even Midshipman William Sinclair, who had been on the ship from the start before transferring to the *Tuscaloosa*.<sup>56</sup>

On board the *Alabama* there was much to be done, and civilian visitors were probably not welcome at this late stage. Exceptions could always be made, however, one of them for Alicia Maria Hamond, the daughter of the British Consul. She was invited to go out to visit the *Alabama* by the owner of an English yacht, an old friend of the family. She tells us firmly, incidentally, that this yacht was not the *Deerhound*. She

<sup>50</sup> Fox, *op.cit.*, pp. 215, 229; "The Times", June 21, 1864; Frank J. Merli (edited David M. Fahey), *The Alabama, British Neutrality and the American Civil War* (Bloomington, Indiana, 2004), p. 144.

<sup>51</sup> Marvel, *op.cit.*, p.247. See also Captain Evan Parry Jones's statement in Sinclair, *op.cit.*, p. 287.

<sup>52</sup> This circular fort still stands in the sea at the west end of the harbour, just below Querqueville.

<sup>53</sup> Ingouf-Knocker, *op.cit.*, p. 66.

<sup>54</sup> William Lewis Dayton, Junior, to William L. Dayton, Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of the United States at Paris, France, June 22, 1864, in Box 3, Folder 2, William L. Dayton Papers, Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library (hereafter cited as Dayton).

<sup>55</sup> Their names are usually given as Maximilian von Meulnier and Julius Schroeder, but Maurice Rigby has established conclusively that they were in fact Mulnier and Schrader.

<sup>56</sup> Marvel, *op.cit.*, p. 248; Semmes, *op.cit.*, p. 755; Kell, *op.cit.*, p.246.

describes Semmes as “a very quiet, silent man, with a face full of determination ... He talked with a strong American accent, and seemed to be incessantly receiving reports from his officers.” “They say I am afraid to fight the ‘Kearsarge’”, he said. “Do I look afraid?”<sup>57</sup>

That afternoon, Semmes went ashore to take his leave of the Admiral and to deliver a letter telling him that he planned to go out the following morning between 9.00 and 10.00.<sup>58</sup> The news soon became known. While the Admiral himself had to be seen to be studiously neutral, his officers clearly did not feel any such restrictions, and Semmes received many expressions of support from them. Indeed, Cherbourg in general seems to have been strongly on the side of the *Alabama*; when the victorious *Kearsarge* arrived in the harbour the following evening, she was met with absolute silence from the crowds on the quay.<sup>59</sup>

In the evening, Alicia Hamond and her father were among the crowd of people promenading in the Place Napoléon, listening to the military band. Her father was talking to the Admiral when Semmes suddenly passed them and, recognising her from the morning’s visit, came and sat by her. They walked up and down together. “Have you heard that all is settled?” he said. “Tomorrow we fight.” He was, she said, very quiet and very grave. She was a typically romantic Victorian girl, and the morning’s visit to the *Alabama* had reinforced her view of Semmes as a knightly hero. Now she was thinking of the next day’s battle. “Little girl,” he said (though she was nearly 25 years old), “little girl, you are crying”, and she was.<sup>60</sup>

They parted, and Semmes went off to see Adolphe Bonfils, the Confederate agent, and to thank him for all his efforts on the *Alabama*’s behalf.<sup>61</sup> In a final, extraordinary display of loyalty earlier that day, Bonfils, without telling Semmes, had written to Slidell, the Confederate Commissioner, begging him to stop the fight, but Slidell had refused.<sup>62</sup> Semmes now went for a final prayer to Bonfils’s parish church, St-Clément, some two hundred yards up the street from the agent’s house. As the next day was Sunday, Semmes begged his friend to attend mass in his place and to offer prayers for the officers and men of the *Alabama*. The two men said goodbye for the last time, and Semmes was rowed back to his ship.<sup>63</sup>

That night the Admiral gave a party in his quarters for some of the more important visitors – among them, inevitably, the beautiful Madame Feuillet. Perhaps Madame might care to come out the next day and view the projected battle from the breakwater, the Admiral suggested. If so, his launch would be beneath her windows at 5 o’clock.<sup>64</sup>

Meanwhile, in another part of town, a number of the *Alabama*’s officers attended a banquet given by local sympathisers. After a series of toasts they parted, promising to meet again the next evening to celebrate their victory.<sup>65</sup>

The weather had been unseasonably cold and drizzly more or less since the

<sup>57</sup> “A.M.F.” [Alicia Maria Falls, née Hamond], *Foreign Courts and Foreign Homes* (London, 1898), pp. 281-282.

<sup>58</sup> SHD, Dupouy to Minister, June 19 and June 22, 1864; Semmes, *op.cit.*, p. 755.

<sup>59</sup> Ingouf-Knocker, *op.cit.*, pp. 68, 85; Frank J. Merli (ed.), “Letters on the Alabama, June 1864” in *The Mariner’s Mirror* 58:2, (1972), pp. 217-218; George T. Sinclair to Barron, June 19 [misdated as 20] and June 21, 1864. See also Captain T. Saumarez, R.N., quoted in the “British Press and Jersey Times”, July 8, 1864: “A very strong feeling existed against the Northerners at Cherbourg.”

<sup>60</sup> “A.M.F.”, *op.cit.*, pp. 283-285.

<sup>61</sup> Ingouf-Knocker, *op.cit.*, p. 73.

<sup>62</sup> ORN I:3, pp. 661-662; Bonfils to Slidell, June 18, 1864, Slidell to Bonfils, June 19, 1864.

<sup>63</sup> Taylor, *op.cit.*, p. 201; Marvel, *op.cit.*, p. 248.

<sup>64</sup> Feuillet, *op.cit.*, p. 275.

<sup>65</sup> Taylor, *op.cit.*, p. 201.

*Alabama*'s arrival, but at 3.30 a.m. on Sunday, June 19, the officer of the watch noted in the log of the *Couronne*: "Weather fine, slight north-westerly breeze."<sup>66</sup> Shortly after 6.00, the *Alabama* lit her fires, although Semmes gave most of the crew a bit of a rest, not turning them to till about 9.00. At around 6.15, a boat came out to the *Alabama* from the *Couronne*. Semmes was still in his cot at this time, so the officer on board the boat explained the procedure to Kell: the French warship would escort the *Alabama* out to the limits of French territorial waters, after which she would turn back.<sup>67</sup>

At about 8 o'clock, Commander George Terry Sinclair, CSN, Arthur Sinclair's uncle, was inexplicably allowed to go on board the *Alabama*. He had come down the day before with his son William, the former midshipman on the *Alabama*, who had been prevented by the French authorities from joining his old ship. Now, for some unknown reason, the father was permitted to visit her and to view her preparations. He offered his services to Semmes, but Semmes declared himself honour bound not to accept them, so Sinclair had to content himself with advising Semmes to keep Winslow at a distance so as not to let him have the advantage of his powerful 11-inch guns. Semmes's response was: "I shall feel him first, and it will all depend on that." Sinclair stayed on board until the *Alabama* was under way, and then took a boat back to the town to view the battle – giving us, as a result, one of the very few contemporary eyewitness accounts of the fight by someone not directly involved.<sup>68</sup>

By now the sun had broken through a light early fog and it was a beautiful day; as Dupouy put it in his report, it was "superb weather, with scarcely a ripple,"<sup>69</sup> ideal for a naval battle. From early that morning, people had been staking out their vantage points all along the coast, from Cap Lévi on the East to Querqueville on the West. In Cherbourg itself, they crowded on to the roofs of houses and church towers, while in the harbour the sailors climbed the rigging.<sup>70</sup> The town's photographer, François Rondin, positioned himself with his camera in the tower of Ste-Trinité, just round the corner from his studio.<sup>71</sup> Numbers of people took the steep path up to the fort at the top of the Montagne du Roule, which dominates both town and harbour.<sup>72</sup> Young William Dayton hired a carriage with Liais and positioned himself with a powerful telescope in front of the 10<sup>th</sup>-century Chapel of St.-Germain at Querqueville, some 5 miles to the West.<sup>73</sup> He was responsible for another of the few contemporary eyewitness accounts. Almost certainly there, too, was a young American art student studying in Paris, Alfred Howland, who painted the scene.<sup>74</sup>

Spectators were forbidden to go out to the breakwater, for fear that they might signal to one or other of the contestants, but watching from there that morning were both Madame Feuillet and Alicia Hamond. Madame Feuillet, of course, was with the Admiral in his boat. Alicia Hamond had a friend who was married to a French naval

<sup>66</sup> Ingouf-Knocker, *op.cit.*, p. 74.

<sup>67</sup> Semmes, *op.cit.*, p.755.

<sup>68</sup> Merli, "Letters on the Alabama", *op.cit.*, p. 217.

<sup>69</sup> SHD, Dupouy to Minister, June 22, 1864 ("un temps superbe et une mer sans ondulations sensibles").

<sup>70</sup> Marvel, *op.cit.* p. 249; Fox, *op.cit.*, p. 218; Semmes, *op.cit.*, p.755.

<sup>71</sup> Frederick Milnes Edge, *An Englishman's View of the Battle between the Alabama and the Kearsarge* (New York, 1864), p.22. According to Edge, Rondin succeeded in taking a photograph of the battle. Edge "was only able to see the negative, but that was quite sufficient to show that the artist had obtained a very fine view indeed of the exciting contest." No print of this, however, has ever surfaced. See also Marvel, *op.cit.*, pp. 261 and 313, note 4. Rondin's studio was at 20, place d'Armes (now place de la République); the current building appears original.

<sup>72</sup> Ingouf-Knocker, *op.cit.*, p. 76.

<sup>73</sup> Dayton, *op.cit.*

<sup>74</sup> The painting is in the U.S. Naval Academy Museum, Annapolis.

officer, so she, too, saw the battle from the breakwater. Both women left highly-coloured accounts written some 30 years later.<sup>75</sup>

In all, about 15,000 people are thought to have witnessed the fight. Adolphe Bonfils, though, was not one of them. As he had promised, when the *Alabama* went out to fight he was in his seat in the church of St-Clément, listening to the prayers for the *Alabama* and her crew.<sup>76</sup>

Soon after 9.00, the *Alabama* was ready. Her decks had been sanded, tubs of water placed at intervals. The officers were in their best uniforms, the crew in their white ducks. At about 9.30, her boilers wheezed into life and she began to move slowly out towards the West Pass, followed by the *Couronne* and, at a distance, by John Lancaster's *Deerhound*, which was coming out to view the battle apparently as the result of a family vote. On her way through the harbour, the *Alabama* passed Dupouy's old ship, the *Napoléon*. Her crew manned the rigging and cheered the *Alabama* as she went by, while her band played what Arthur Sinclair described as "a Confederate national air" – presumably *Dixie*.<sup>77</sup>

At 10 o'clock, the *Alabama* reached the West Pass of Cherbourg Harbour, the *Couronne* still following.<sup>78</sup> Back in the town, the great bell of Ste.-Trinité was just striking the hour when the *Alabama* went out to her doom.<sup>79</sup>

According to the prophet Isaiah, "every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood."<sup>80</sup> Although now dismissed by many as an inaccurate translation of the original Hebrew, this would serve as a good description of most battles, including this one. Both Dupouy and Sinclair separately interviewed the survivors after the battle, and both reported that they had had great difficulty in obtaining any sort of clear and coherent account of what had happened. As Dupouy put it, "all the facts are so distorted and interpreted so differently by the only people who could enlighten me, that it is extremely difficult to establish the truth with any degree of certainty."<sup>81</sup>

Nevertheless, the basic facts of the battle are clear. When the *Alabama* came out of the West Pass, she could see the *Kearsarge* out to the North-East. Winslow initially moved further out, presumably to avoid any difficulty with the French, and stopped when about 7 miles from the shore.<sup>82</sup> It took the *Alabama* about 45 minutes to come up with him, and Semmes took the opportunity to address his men. Standing on a gun-carriage, he reminded them of all that they had achieved so far, of their victory over the USS *Hatteras*, of the countless prizes taken, the cargoes burned. Now they were in the Channel, "the theatre," as he put it, "of so much of the naval glory of our race." Would they allow the name of their ship to be tarnished by defeat? There was a shout of "Never!", and Semmes ordered the men to their quarters.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Feuillet, *op.cit.*, pp. 275-278; "A.M.F.", *op.cit.*, pp. 287-297.

<sup>76</sup> Marvel, *op.cit.*, p. 250. The church still stands in the rue du Val de Saire.

<sup>77</sup> *ORN* I:3, p. 649: Semmes to Barron, June 21, 1864; *ORN* I:3, p. 667: John Lancaster to the Editor of *The Daily News*, June 27, 1864; Kell, *op.cit.* p. 246; SHD, Dupouy to Minister, June 22, 1864; Sinclair, *op.cit.*, pp. 265-266.

<sup>78</sup> SHD, Dupouy to Minister, June 21, 1864.

<sup>79</sup> Ingouf-Knocker, *op.cit.*, p. 76; Marvel, *op.cit.*, pp. 250 and 311, note 12.

<sup>80</sup> Isaiah 9, verse 5 (Authorised Version).

<sup>81</sup> SHD, Dupouy to Minister, June 22, 1864 ("tous les faits sont tellement dénaturés et interprétés si différemment par ceux qui peuvent seuls m'éclairer, qu'il y a une difficulté extrême à faire constater la vérité avec quelque certitude"); SHD, Sinclair to Dupouy, June 21, 1864, enclosed in Dupouy to Minister, June 25, 1864; Merli, "Letters on the *Alabama*", *op.cit.*, p. 218.

<sup>82</sup> *ORN* I:3, p. 79: Winslow to Welles, July 30, 1864, and p. 649: Semmes to Barron, June 21, 1864.

<sup>83</sup> Semmes, *op.cit.*, p. 756.

When within range, about 1200 yards away, probably just after 11 o'clock, Semmes opened fire. He had decided to fight the *Kearsarge* with his starboard battery, and had therefore transferred one of his 32-pounders from port to starboard. This had the effect of making the *Alabama* lower in the water on that side, and thus presenting slightly less of a target. As the range closed, the *Kearsarge* presented her starboard battery and opened fire herself, and the battle became general. In order to maintain their respective positions, the two ships were then forced to steam in a series of seven concentric circles,<sup>84</sup> reminding one Yankee sailor of two flies crawling around the rim of a saucer.<sup>85</sup>

It seems to have been generally believed in the North that the "British pirate" was crewed entirely by trained gunners from HMS *Excellent*. This, it need hardly be said, is untrue. The *Alabama* fired probably three shots to every two from the *Kearsarge*. "Her fire", Dupouy said in his report to the Minister, "was extremely rapid, perhaps too much so."<sup>86</sup> Certainly that was one of her problems, since she actually had very few trained gunners. Powder and ammunition were far too valuable to waste, and her crew had in fact had very little practice. Their shooting, initially at least, was very inaccurate, much of it simply too high, although Winslow said in his report that it became better later.<sup>87</sup>

That, however, was not the only problem. Eyewitnesses reported that while there was a sharp crack, a flash and a fine blue vapour from the *Kearsarge's* guns, the *Alabama's* produced a dull, muffled sound, and a mass of heavy grey smoke.<sup>88</sup> Clearly, the ship's powder had seriously deteriorated.

Seeing that his shots were having little effect, Semmes switched from solid shot to shell and back again, with no better result. Early in the battle, a shell from the *Alabama's* Blakely rifle hit the *Kearsarge's* sternpost. Had it exploded, of course, it might well have changed the course of the battle, but it did not. The only real damage was caused by a shell from her aft pivot, which exploded near the *Kearsarge's* aft pivot, wounding three men, the *Kearsarge's* only casualties, one of whom later died.

Meanwhile, the *Kearsarge's* heavy 11-inch Dahlgrens were causing terrible execution. A single shell killed or wounded the entire crew of the *Alabama's* aft pivot, and the brawny Irishman Michael Mars had to sweep the mangled remains overboard so that men from one of the 32-pounder crews could take over.<sup>89</sup> David Llewellyn, the ship's British Assistant Surgeon, was operating on a wounded man below decks when a shot from the *Kearsarge* swept his patient from the table.<sup>90</sup> Finally, about 45 minutes into the fight, another shell holed the *Alabama's* hull near the waterline; water poured in, extinguishing the fires. Setting sail, Semmes turned his ship's head to shore in a last desperate attempt to reach the safety of French waters, but the *Kearsarge* cut him off.

<sup>84</sup> ORN I:3, p. 64: Abstract Log of U.S.S. *Kearsarge*, Captain John A. Winslow, June 19, 1864; p 79: Winslow to Welles, July 30, 1864; p. 649-650: Semmes to Barron, June 21, 1864; SHD, Dupouy to Minister, June 22, 1864; Dayton, *op.cit.*

<sup>85</sup> Fox, *op.cit.*, p.220 and p. 297, quoting from *Boston Evening Transcript*, June 21, 1922.

<sup>86</sup> SHD, Dupouy to Minister, June 22, 1864.

<sup>87</sup> ORN I:3, p. 79: Winslow to Welles, July 30, 1864.

<sup>88</sup> James D. Bulloch, *The Secret Service of the Confederate States in Europe: or, How the Confederate Cruisers Were Equipped* (London, 1883, reprinted 1959 ), Vol. I, p. 286.

<sup>89</sup> Sinclair, *op.cit.*, p. 284; John McIntosh Kell, "Cruise and Combats of the *Alabama*", in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* (New York, 1887, reprinted 1956), Vol. IV, p. 609. Mars's real name was Maher; I am grateful to Maurice Rigby for this information. See Norman C. Delaney, "The *Alabama's* 'Bold and Determined Man'", in *Naval History Magazine*, August 2011, Vol. 25, No. 4. It was not unusual to sign on under a false name at this time, but it is also possible that the name was simply taken down incorrectly when Mars originally signed on.

<sup>90</sup> Kell, "Cruise and Combats", *op.cit.*, p. 610.

At this point he gave the order to cease firing, shorten sail and haul down the colours.

He then had one of the *Alabama*'s two undamaged boats launched and hastily sent Master's Mate George Townley Fullam, another Englishman, off in it to tell the *Kearsarge* to stop firing. Fullam shouted up that the *Alabama* had surrendered, asked Winslow to lower his boats and then received permission to go back himself in order to help rescue the crew. The *Alabama* was now settling by the stern, and Semmes had given the order to abandon ship. The wounded and some of the non-swimmers were placed in the other undamaged boat with Dr Galt and Lieutenant Joseph Wilson and sent off to the *Kearsarge*, while the majority, including Semmes, who had been wounded in the hand, and Kell, jumped into the water.

The *Deerhound* now steamed up, and Winslow shouted out to her: "*For God's sake, do what you can to save them!*"<sup>91</sup> He seemed unaccountably slow, though, to lower his own boats. The *Deerhound*, however, went briskly to work, pulling 41 officers and men, including Semmes and Kell, from the water and then, at Semmes's request, steaming off in the direction of England. Meanwhile, as the *Alabama*'s stern continued to fill with water, her shattered mainmast crashed into the sea, her prow gradually pointed to the sky, and somewhere around 12.30 or 12.45 she slid stern first below the waters of the Channel, some 5 miles off the French coast.<sup>92</sup> Her losses were 9 killed, 21 wounded and 18 drowned<sup>93</sup>, including Bartelli, Semmes's steward, and little David White, the former slave from Delaware emancipated by Semmes.<sup>94</sup> Drowned, too, was David Llewellyn, who had told no one that he could not swim. He had refused to leave the ship in one of the boats, but had tied two empty wooden shell-boxes around himself in a vain attempt to keep afloat.<sup>95</sup>

The *Deerhound* had saved a total of 41.<sup>96</sup> The *Kearsarge* had now finally launched her two undamaged boats and these started pulling in more of the survivors, though they seemed in no great hurry to do so. Three French pilot boats were rather more active. Antoine Mauger in the *Deux Soeurs* rescued 10, including Lieutenant Richard Armstrong, wounded in the side, and the irrepressible Michael Mars, who, picked up by one of the *Kearsarge*'s boats, leapt over the side and swam out to the Frenchman.<sup>97</sup> Constant Gosselin in the *Lutin* saved one or two more, and Auguste Doucet of the *Alphonsine Marie* picked up two men whom he was forced to hand over to one of the *Kearsarge*'s boats; once back on shore, he protested against this "act of piracy" in his official report.<sup>98</sup>

There is no real disagreement, then, over the main facts of the battle.<sup>99</sup> There are,

<sup>91</sup> ORN I:3, p. 665: John Lancaster to the Editor of *The Daily News*, June 27, 1864; p. 65: Abstract Log of U.S.S. *Kearsarge*, June 19, 1864.

<sup>92</sup> At 12.50, according to the log of the *Deerhound* (*The Times*, June 20, 1864); at 12.24, according to the log of the *Kearsarge* (ORN I:3, p. 65).

<sup>93</sup> Figure for killed and wounded in Semmes's report to Barron, June 21, 1864 (ORN I:3, p. 651; total drowned calculated by Marvel, *op.cit.*, p. 259).

<sup>94</sup> Sinclair, *op.cit.*, p. 263.

<sup>95</sup> Kell, *Recollections, op.cit.*, p. 250.

<sup>96</sup> ORN I:3, p. 656: Mason to Lancaster, June 21, 1864.

<sup>97</sup> ORN I:3, p. 653: Lieutenant R.F. Armstrong, C.S.N., to Barron, June 21, 1864. Mars had been entrusted with a part of the ship's papers, the other half being given to Frank Townsend, who was rescued by the *Deerhound*; both sets of papers safely reached Semmes in Southampton (Marvel, *op.cit.*, p. 256 and p. 312, note 21).

<sup>98</sup> Ingouf, *op.cit.*, p. 85.

<sup>99</sup> For the battle, see ORN I:3, pp. 64-65: log of the *Kearsarge*, June 19, 1864; pp. 79-81: Winslow's report to Welles, July 30, 1864; pp. 649-651: Semmes's report to Barron, June 21, 1864; Kell, "Cruise and Combats", *op.cit.*, pp. 607-614; Kell, *Recollections, op.cit.*, pp. 247-252; John M. Browne, "The Duel between the *Alabama* and the *Kearsarge*", in *Battles and Leaders*, Vol. IV, pp. 615-625; Sinclair, *op.cit.*, pp. 267-271; SHD, Dupouy to Minister, June 19, June

however, a number of areas of controversy which have been argued over for 150 years, the main ones being these:

- Did the *Kearsarge* deliberately continue firing after the *Alabama* had struck her colours?
- Did the *Alabama* deliberately continue firing after surrendering?
- Did Fullam break his word by not returning to the *Kearsarge* with the men whom he had rescued?
- Did the *Deerhound* break international law by not handing over to the *Kearsarge* the men whom she had saved?
- Did the *Deerhound* actually collude with the *Alabama*?
- Did Winslow deliberately delay launching his two undamaged boats?

First, it seems unlikely that anyone *deliberately* continued firing after the *Alabama* had surrendered. Certainly, it does appear that the *Kearsarge* fired into the *Alabama* (Semmes says five times) after she had struck her colours, but this was probably in the inevitable confusion of the battle. Winslow seems to have thought that the *Alabama*'s flag had been brought down by his fire, rather than struck, but he does also say that he was "*uncertain whether Captain Semmes was not using some ruse.*" He also says that the *Alabama* "*opened on us with the two guns on the port side.*" This seems improbable, but could possibly have happened in the confusion.<sup>100</sup>

As for Fullam, we know that he was permitted to go back and rescue men from the water, but there is no actual evidence that he gave his word to return with them to the *Kearsarge*. There is nothing in any of Winslow's reports, for example, which is surely significant. It is true that Frederick Milnes Edge, an Englishman who came over to Cherbourg immediately after the battle, interviewed many of the participants and wrote a useful but very one-sided account, claimed that Fullam had given his word.<sup>101</sup> Edge, however, was a fanatical Unionist, so might be expected to say so. Dr. John M. Browne, the *Kearsarge*'s surgeon, repeated the claim, in remarkably similar language, in his article for the editors of *The Century Magazine*,<sup>102</sup> but Browne was writing twenty years after the event. On balance, then, it seems reasonable to give Fullam the benefit of the doubt.

Next, there is the question of whether the *Deerhound* had any right to take the men whom she had rescued to England rather than surrendering them to the *Kearsarge*. Semmes, of course, mounts a long defence of her right to do so, complete with various historical examples.<sup>103</sup> In 1886, however, the editors of *The Century Magazine* sought a legal opinion from James Russell Soley, a professor at the U.S. Naval War College and later Assistant Secretary of the Navy. The Professor was absolutely clear on the issue. A neutral ship, he said, in general had no right to play any part in a battle, even to the extent of rescuing survivors from one of the contestants. In this case, however, Winslow had actually *requested* the *Deerhound* to rescue the men in the water. Once they were on board, then, not only was the *Deerhound* under no obligation to surrender them, but it would have been a gross breach of neutrality to do so.<sup>104</sup>

Perhaps the key question, though, is whether the *Deerhound* had made some kind of

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21, June 22, 1864. (Note that Winslow's full report was not written until over a month after the battle, and then only after a stern reminder dated July 7, 1864, from Welles; see *ORN* I:3, p. 73).

<sup>100</sup> *ORN* I:3, p. 60: Winslow to Welles, June 21, 1864; p. 80: Winslow to Welles, July 30, 1864.

<sup>101</sup> Edge, *op.cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>102</sup> Browne, "Duel", *op.cit.*, pp. 619-621.

<sup>103</sup> Semmes, *op.cit.*, pp. 766-776.

<sup>104</sup> The relevant part of the Professor's letter is given in a footnote to Browne, "Duel", *op.cit.*, p. 621.

arrangement with the *Alabama* before the battle, as was claimed afterwards by a number of Unionist partisans. If she had, that would imply that Semmes expected to lose, but that in itself does not necessarily rule out collusion. Semmes, of course, denied that there was any collusion. So does Kell, so does Arthur Sinclair and so does any other officer of the *Alabama* who pronounced on the subject; so do John Lancaster and his Captain, Evan Parry Jones; so does Alicia Hamond, who was not exactly unbiased but who, as the British Consul's daughter, had good local contacts. Admiral Dupouy, too, would most certainly have been very much on the alert for anything of that sort, yet his only mention of the *Deerhound* is in his long report to the Minister on June 22, where he simply says that "*an English steam yacht*" had rescued a part of the crew.<sup>105</sup>

The only evidence, in fact, if it can be called such, appears in affidavits sworn some time later by six members of the *Alabama*'s crew, four of them paroled prisoners from the *Kearsarge*, the other two among those rescued by the *Deerhound*.<sup>106</sup> It does not seem unreasonable to assume these to have been in response to some sort of financial inducement on the part of certain U.S. officials in England.

Nevertheless, it is possible that there was in fact collusion of a sort, albeit passive and not from the direction which one might expect. In this connection, the question of whether Winslow deliberately delayed sending his boats is relevant, because he may well have done, just as Semmes accused him of doing, but for a very different reason.

What, then, do we know of John Winslow? He was a competent enough officer, probably, although his record so far in the war had not been particularly impressive; he was perhaps a little stolid and unimaginative, but in general a decent, honest, straightforward man. Semmes, interestingly, remembered him from "the old service" as "*a humane and Christian gentleman*." "*What the war may have made of him*," he said, "*it is impossible to say*."<sup>107</sup> But what if Winslow behaved as he did precisely because he was still "*a humane and Christian gentleman*"? Winslow was well aware that there were some exceptionally bloodthirsty civilians back in the United States, particularly in Washington. When Lord John Russell protested that the men rescued by the *Deerhound* would otherwise have drowned, for example, Seward replied that "*it was the right of the Kearsarge that the pirates should drown*,"<sup>108</sup> and Gideon Welles if anything outdid him in vindictiveness. Hearing that Winslow had paroled all his prisoners and sent them ashore, Welles was furious. The "*foreign pirates*", he said, should have been "*held at every sacrifice*" and transported back to the United States.<sup>109</sup> It seems highly probable, then, that, had Semmes been captured, Seward and Welles would have wanted him hanged, together, very possibly, with his officers, while the men could have expected, at best, a long term in a Yankee prison camp.

It therefore seems at least possible that Winslow deliberately delayed launching his boats in order to give the *Deerhound* and the French pilot boats time to pick up as many people as she could. In this context, there is an interesting passage in Lieutenant Richard Armstrong's report to Barron of his rescue by Antoine Mauger's pilot boat. Armstrong had been wounded in the side, and was swimming with some difficulty

<sup>105</sup> SHD, Dupouy to Minister, June 22, 1864.

<sup>106</sup> These are, respectively, Nicholas Adams, James Higgs, Henry Middleton Kernot and John Wilson, and Brent Johnston and George Yeoman. The affidavits are in the Freeman Harlow Morse Papers, 1861-1888, Ms. 823. I am grateful to Maurice Rigby for this information.

<sup>107</sup> Semmes, *op.cit.*, p.760.

<sup>108</sup> In a despatch to Charles Francis Adams, U.S. Minister to Great Britain; quoted in, e.g., Semmes, *op.cit.*, p.762 and Bulloch, *op.cit.*, p. 291.

<sup>109</sup> ORN I:3, p. 74, Welles to Winslow, July 8, 1864.

towards the French boat when one of the *Kearsarge*'s two boats passed quite close to him, but "*laid on its oars and made no particular exertion that I could see to save me.*" Armstrong had on his officer's cap, which he says would have been quite visible from the boat. He says that the officer in charge appeared to be looking for someone.<sup>110</sup> Is it not equally possible that, following his captain's lead, he was deliberately looking the other way in order to allow Armstrong to reach the safety of the French boat?

Certainly Winslow protested furiously afterwards about the "disgraceful act" of the *Deerhound* in steaming off with his "prisoners",<sup>111</sup> but then he could hardly have done otherwise. Welles's reaction to the news that Winslow had paroled his prisoners is indicative of what Winslow might have expected had there been any suspicion that he had condoned what had happened, let alone encouraged it.

That afternoon the *Kearsarge* came into port. The wounded men, three from the *Kearsarge* and twelve from the *Alabama*,<sup>112</sup> were taken ashore in a boat from the *Couronne*, in the charge of Dr. Galt and the chief French naval surgeon, Dr. G. T. Dufour, landed at the Vigie de l'Onglet and transported to the naval hospital.<sup>113</sup> The fine old Hôpital de la Marine just outside Cherbourg (now disused) had not yet been built,<sup>114</sup> so the provisional naval hospital of the time was split between a building in the former Abbaye du Voëu and a wing of the old barracks built in 1784 to house workers on the breakwater. Unfortunately, it is not known today to which site the fifteen wounded men were taken.<sup>115</sup> Since the Abbey is twice as far from the Vigie de l'Onglet as the barracks are, though, it is at least possible that it was to the barracks.

Three of the *Alabama*'s crew, however, never reached the hospital. George Appleby and James King had been carried on board the *Kearsarge* dead, and the ship's carpenter, William Robinson, had died shortly after of his wounds. Early on June 21, George Sinclair presided over a simple funeral ceremony in Cherbourg's old cemetery, high above the town. The dead men's comrades had made a Confederate flag for them the night before, and Sinclair reported that "*this morning every man was present & sober.*"<sup>116</sup>

Across the Channel, meanwhile, the *Deerhound* reached Southampton in the evening of June 19 and, coming up the estuary of the Itchen, landed her passengers on British soil.<sup>117</sup> The wounded were taken to the Sailors' Home in Canute Road,<sup>118</sup> while most of

<sup>110</sup> ORN I:3, p. 653, Armstrong to Barron, June 21, 1864.

<sup>111</sup> ORN I:3, p.61, Winslow to Welles, June 21, 1864.

<sup>112</sup> SHD, Docteur G.T. Dufour, "Relation Chirurgicale du Combat Naval entre le Kerseage [sic] et l'Alabama", in *Archives de Médecine Navale 1864*, Tome IIe ; this contains a full report of the injuries and treatment of the fifteen wounded.

<sup>113</sup> Ingouf, *op.cit.*, p. 86; SHD, Dupouy to Minister, June 19, 1864; ORN I:3, p. 70, Browne to Whelan, July 23, 1864.

<sup>114</sup> Construction started in 1869, and the building was finished in 1871.

<sup>115</sup> Correspondence with M. François Zoonekyndt, Service Historique de la Défense, Département de la Marine, Échelon de Cherbourg, January-February, 2011. The abbey was occupied by the Germans, and blown up by them in 1944. The building which housed the main part of the provisional naval hospital, however, although roofless, can still be seen behind the ruins of the abbey church. The well-preserved barracks (la Caserne de l'Abbaye) are now occupied by the Service Historique de la Défense.

<sup>116</sup> Merli, "Letters", *op.cit.*, p. 218. The Appleby and King graves are on a small terrace a short distance up from the lower entrance to the cemetery, but the whereabouts of Robinson's grave are unknown. Gustave Bonfils (see above, note 17) signed the three death certificates.

<sup>117</sup> She probably came in through the Outer Dock and landed her passengers in the Inner Dock; the Inner Dock was built over some time ago, but the Outer Dock survives as the Ocean Village Marina. Alternatively, she may have landed them at the Royal Pier, which was opened in 1833 but was badly damaged by fire in 1987 and 1992; its remains still stand in the water next to the Red Funnel Terminal. I am grateful to Geoff Watts, formerly of the Southampton Tourist Information Centre, for this information.

<sup>118</sup> *The Times*, June 21, 1864. The Sailors' Home was two buildings to the west of the Canute Castle Hotel, which is still standing. A modern building covers the site of the Home.

the officers and men scattered in search of lodging along the harbour.<sup>119</sup> Semmes and Kell, meanwhile, found refuge in Kelway's Hotel, in Queen's Terrace.<sup>120</sup> The next morning, they found themselves heroes. After being photographed in Samuel Wiseman's studio, together with the port surgeon, Dr. Wiblin, who was treating Semmes for the wound on his hand,<sup>121</sup> they went to buy new clothes at Samuel Emanuel's establishment in the High Street. The proprietor insisted that they come back to his house for a glass of wine, but then found that such a large and enthusiastic crowd had gathered outside in the hope of seeing them that he had to call the police to escort them back to their hotel.<sup>122</sup>

That afternoon, James Dunwoody Bulloch, the Rev. Francis Tremlett, the staunchly pro-Southern vicar of St. Peter's, Belsize Park, and James Murray Mason, the Confederate Commissioner, all arrived from London at the LSWR terminus to visit them.<sup>123</sup> In the following days, letters of support came in from far and wide, together with requests from dozens of young men eager to serve with Semmes on his next ship. Letters offering financial assistance, too, poured in, one of them from Gladstone's sister.<sup>124</sup> Admiral Talavera Vernon Anson and Captain Bedford Pim, RN, announced a fund to raise money to buy Semmes a sword to replace the one which had gone down with his ship. Lady de Hoghton, wife of the Confederate sympathiser Sir Henry de Hoghton, presented Semmes with a beautiful Second National flag which she had made herself.<sup>125</sup> In London, the writer George Meredith wrote to a friend "*The Alabama's sunk, and my heart's down with her.*"<sup>126</sup>

Nor was poor Llewellyn forgotten. Money was raised to install a memorial plaque and a stained glass window in his memory in Holy Trinity, Easton Royal, his childhood home, where his father was the vicar, and former students and colleagues at Charing Cross Hospital collected money to erect another monument there.<sup>127</sup>

The Confederacy, of course, survived the *Alabama* by barely 10 months, and at the end of it all, to adapt the late Frank Vandiver, the United States went on to world power, and the *Alabama*, like the Confederacy itself, went on to legend.<sup>128</sup>

Perhaps we should leave her final epitaph, though, to *The Times* of June 21, 1864: "*She was a good ship, well handled and well fought, and to a nation of sailors that means a great deal.*"

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<sup>119</sup> Sinclair, *op.cit.*, p. 286.

<sup>120</sup> *The Times*, June 21, 1864. The building is still standing, extending from 29 Queen's Terrace almost to the corner of Terminus Terrace.

<sup>121</sup> The photograph was recently in the collection of Gary Hendershott.

<sup>122</sup> Delaney, *John McIntosh Kell*, pp. 179-80, quoting from Kell interview with Wood Holt of the *Atlanta Constitution*, 1883. Wiseman's studio was at 9 Bernard Street and Emanuel's premises at 145 High Street, diagonally opposite the old Star Hotel (which still exists). Neither building survives today.

<sup>123</sup> *The Times*, June 21, 1864; Semmes, *op.cit.*, pp. 787-788. The terminus building is still standing, although it is now a casino.

<sup>124</sup> Semmes, *op.cit.*, pp. 787.

<sup>125</sup> Semmes, *op.cit.*, pp. 784-785; Edwin W. Besch, Michael Hammerson and Dave W. Morgan, "Raphael Semmes, the English "Confederate Parson," and his Maiden Sister Louisa: A Cased Presentation Revolver, a Magnificent Silver-mounted Sword, and a "Mammoth" Silk Confederate Second National Flag," in *Military Collector & Historian*, Vol. 53, No. 4, Winter 2001-2002.

<sup>126</sup> Meredith to Samuel Laurence, June 20, 1864, in Cline (ed.), *The Letters of George Meredith* (1970), Vol. I, p. 271.

<sup>127</sup> Holy Trinity, Easton Royal, can usually be found open, and the former vicarage still stands next to it. Charing Cross Hospital moved in 1973 to Fulham Palace Road, but the Llewellyn memorial moved with it and can be found just inside the Margravine Street entrance to the hospital.

<sup>128</sup> Frank E. Vandiver, *Blood Brothers: a Short History of the Civil War* (Texas, 1992), p. 177: "*The Confederacy went on to legend and the United States to world power.*"