



In 1854, during the Crimean War, Hobart's squadron of mortar-boats bombards the Russian Bomarsund fortress on the Åland Islands

By Charles Priestley

Even the keenest student of the American Civil War may be forgiven for being unaware that one of the greatest of the blockade-runner captains in that conflict lies buried on a Turkish hillside overlooking the Bosphorus.

Augustus Charles Hobart, known to his Victorian contemporaries as Hobart Pasha, was born on 1 April 1822 at Walton-on-the-Wolds, Leicestershire, the third son of the Reverend Augustus Edward Hobart, Rector of St. Mary's Church and younger brother of the fifth Earl of Buckinghamshire. Some confusion has arisen over the family name of the future naval hero, which is usually given today as Hobart-Hampden. This is because his uncle, the fifth Earl, on inheriting the Buckinghamshire estates of the Hampden family in 1824, added their name to his own. However, although the Rector of St. Mary's succeeded to the title in 1849, he did not change his name until 1878. Augustus Charles, who died in 1886, was therefore a plain Hobart for all but the last eight years of his life.

The boy was sent to Dr. Mayo's famous school at Cheam, Surrey. He proved a most unpromising student, however, and in 1835, shortly before his thirteenth birthday, he abandoned his studies and joined HMS *Rover* at Devonport as a midshipman.

He spent the greater part of the next eight years on ships patrolling the coast of South America, as part of the Royal Navy's efforts in the suppression of the slave trade. In the course of this, while serving on HMS *Dolphin*, he managed to capture a Brazilian slaver and brought her in triumph into the harbour of Demerara as a prize. He also found time, while back in England between voyages, to pass his Navy examinations.

As a reward for gallant conduct, he was next appointed to the royal steam yacht *Victoria and Albert* then commanded by Captain Lord Adolphus Fitz Clarence. By September, 1845, however, he was on duty in the Mediterranean as a lieutenant on board HMS *Rattler*, later transferring to the *Bulldog*, whose captain found him “full of zeal.”

On the outbreak of the Crimean War in 1854, Hobart, now a first lieutenant, was still with the *Bulldog*, which formed part of the Baltic Squadron. For two weeks in August, he was in command of HMS *Driver*, taking part with her in the attacks on the Russian forts on the Finnish coast. For this he was mentioned in despatches, his “ability, zeal, and great exertion” being particularly commended. In 1855, he was serving on HMS *Duke of Wellington*, the flagship of Admiral R.S. Dundas and, with the French *Bretagne*, one of the most powerful warships at that time in the world. Commanding the mortar-boats in the unsuccessful attack on the great naval fortress of Sveaborg, outside Helsinki, he was again mentioned in despatches and promoted to commander.

After twenty years of almost continuous service at sea, Hobart spent the years 1855-1861 first as officer of the coastguard at Dingle, Co. Kerry, and then commanding the hulk HMS *Hibernia*, which served as Receiving Ship and Guard Ship for Malta. The latter part of 1861, however, found him back at sea again, commanding the gunboat HMS *Foxhound* in the Mediterranean. Promoted to captain in March, 1863, he was retired on half pay.

It is difficult, when examining the lives of some of the more colourful characters of the Victorian era, to separate fact from fiction, to decide what is history and what is legend. In the case of Augustus Charles Hobart, this is particularly challenging. His autobiography, *Sketches from my Life*, published posthumously in 1887, is full of good stories. The writer who reviewed it for *The Edinburgh Review*, however, having carefully examined all the relevant naval records, was able to show conclusively that Hobart, apart from confusing dates and places, had exaggerated some of his adventures, invented others and appropriated still others from brother-officers. (In justice to Hobart, it should be said that he wrote the book while suffering from the illness which eventually killed him, and that many of the events he was referring to had taken place forty or more years earlier).

Nevertheless, there is sufficient evidence to show beyond any doubt that Hobart was a born naval commander, fearless and resourceful. Reference has already been made to his two mentions in despatches during the Crimean War. In its obituary of him, *The Times* asserted that his exploits both while running the blockade and while serving with the Ottoman Navy showed that “*the English Navy can still produce men who may be named with Nelson’s captains*”¹, and he was described elsewhere as “*a bold buccaneer of the Elizabethan period, who by some strange perverseness of fate was born into the Victorian.*” Indeed, Hobart would probably have been far happier as one of Elizabeth I’s sea-dogs, given an independent command where he could best display his natural gifts, rather than having to follow the orders of others. Like Nathan Bedford Forrest, with whom he had a certain amount in common, he was not by nature a good subordinate, being impatient of what he saw as the unnecessarily cautious attitude of his superiors and unwilling to show respect to those who, in his opinion, had not earned it. At the same time, though, as his energetic restructuring of the Turkish fleet showed, he had organisational skills worthy of Braxton Bragg. It is interesting to note that he found

¹ *The Times*, Monday, June 21, 1886.

his greatest opportunity to display his talents first in the American Civil War and then in the Ottoman Navy.

A man of Hobart's character was never likely to be satisfied with a quiet life ashore on half pay, and the Civil War in America had thus come at a providential time for him. Together with two or three other post-captains, then, he applied for command of a blockade-runner, adopting the pseudonym "Captain Roberts". A desire for adventure was undoubtedly a key factor in this, and Hobart must also have been aware of the great profits to be made from blockade-running. On the other hand, it seems clear that his sympathies were with the South; he refers to himself and a colleague as "*staunch Southerners in our opinions*", while according to *The Times* the war "*provided him with the opportunity of showing his sympathy with the Confederate cause.*"

Seven of the thirty-one chapters of Hobart's autobiography deal with his blockade-running adventures. These were reprinted, virtually unchanged, from the account which he published, as "Captain Roberts", in 1867, entitled *Never Caught*. In contrast to the rest of his autobiographical writing, this was apparently judged by American authorities as "substantially accurate."

The summer of 1863 thus found him in command of the blockade-runner *Don*, in which he was to enjoy a number of successful runs into Wilmington. On 7 August that year, in a dispatch to the US Secretary of State, William H. Seward, the US Vice-Consul in Bermuda noted the arrival of "*steamer Don from London with merchandize for merchants here, and also for rebel agents.*"² According to Hobart, this included "*one thousand pairs of stays ... five hundred boxes of Cockle's pills, and a quantity of toothbrushes*" which he had brought out on his own account; the rest of the vessel's cargo consisted of "*blankets, shoes, Manchester goods of all sorts, and some mysterious cases marked 'hardware,' about which no one asked any questions, but which the military authorities took possession of.*" The following January, the US Consul, Charles Maxwell Allen, reported that "*Steamer Don, Capt. Roberts, from Wilmington with 561 bales cotton, came in on the 14th instant, screw boat 233 tons.*"³ According to his own account, Hobart made a total of six round trips in and out of Wilmington in the *Don*, before handing her over to his First Officer, Fred Cory, and returning to England; she was captured on 4 March, 1864, by the USS *Pequot* while attempting the run into Wilmington from Nassau.

In an interview in January, 1893, with *The New York Times*, Captain Grosvenor Porter, formerly of the Confederate blockade-runner *Phantom*, claimed to have met Hobart in London after the war and to have been told by him that he had temporarily retired from blockade-running at this stage because his identity had been discovered.⁴ This seems probable, since on 13 July, 1864, Allen, announcing to Seward the recent arrival at Bermuda of the *Falcon*, one of Alexander Collie's steamers, continued "*She is commanded by a person who was formerly master of the Don, who then went by the name of Roberts. He is said to be an English naval officer, son of some nobleman, is an intimate friend of Governor Ord. If captured will try to pass himself off as a deck hand.*"⁵

² Glen N. Wiche, ed., *Dispatches from Bermuda; the Civil War Letters of Charles Maxwell Allen, United States Consul at Bermuda, 1861-1888* (Kent, Ohio, 2008), p. 99.

³ Wiche, op.cit., p. 112.

⁴ *The New York Times*, January 8, 1893.

⁵ Wiche, op.cit., p. 143.

As Allen's intelligence was usually extremely accurate, this, incidentally, further disproves the theory, still often repeated as fact today, that Hobart commanded the blockade-runner *Condor*, which left the Clyde on 16 August, 1864. It was, in fact, under the command of another Royal Navy officer, Captain (later Vice-Admiral) W. N. W. Hewett, VC, whose *nom de guerre* was Samuel Ridge, that the *Condor*, having reached the safety of the guns of Fort Fisher on her first run from Halifax, ran aground on 1 October, 1864, apparently while trying to avoid the wreckage of the blockade-runner *Night Hawk*.⁶ In the shadowy world of the blockade-running captains, though, identities were frequently confused.

Hobart himself tells us that he "*could not rest long in England, ... got the command of a new and very fast paddle-wheel vessel, and went out again.*" This vessel, he says, was "*one of four built by R. and G., of Glasgow.*" This must refer to the *Falcon*, one of five, rather than four, vessels built on the Clyde for Alexander Collie by Randolph, Elder & Company.⁷ Hobart tells us that he "*made one successful round trip in the new vessel*", landing 1,140 bales of cotton at Bermuda, but that yellow fever broke out among the crew just as he was starting out again and he had to return to Halifax. Stricken with fever himself, he decided to give up blockade-running for good. In fact, the *Falcon* appears to have made two successful runs into Wilmington from Halifax and Nassau.⁸

Exactly how many times Hobart ran the blockade is unclear. The subtitle of *Never Caught* refers to "twelve successful trips", while others have claimed for him as many as eighteen. What is certain, however, is that he was both one of the most successful and one of the most daring of all the blockade-running captains. In the *New York Times* interview referred to above, Captain Porter is quoted as saying that "*Hobart's ship, the Don, took tremendous risks – greater, in fact, than was ever taken by any ship in the course of the war commanded by an Englishman,*" and that the *Don* "*would run into a whole fleet of war ships apparently for the mere fun of it, and, what was more, usually get through in safety.*"

With the war in America over, it was not long before Hobart was looking for fresh challenges. These he now found in the East rather than the West. In the course of a tour of the Continent in 1867 he found himself, according to his own account "*more by accident than design,*" in what was then still called Constantinople. Here he had an interview with Fuad Pasha, the Grand Vizier, to whom, apparently, he had letters of introduction. At this time Crete, still part of the Ottoman Empire, was in revolt, and Turkish efforts to bring the island into submission were frustrated by blockade-runners from Greece, operating with the active support of the Greek government. Hobart "accidentally hinted" to Fuad Pasha that he could see a way in which this blockade-running could be put a stop to and, as a result, was offered the post of Naval Adviser to the Sultan in succession to Sir Adolphus Slade, who had just retired. Given command of the fleet stationed off Crete, Hobart swiftly brought the island under Turkish control again by employing against the Greek blockade-runners precisely the same tactics which he himself had faced in America a few years earlier. Although Greek representations to the British government resulted in his being struck off the Navy List,

⁶ Among the passengers was the Southern spy Rose O'Neal Greenhow, who drowned, weighed down by the gold she was carrying, when the boat in which she was trying to reach the shore overturned.

⁷ Eric J. Graham, *Clyde Built: Blockade Runners, Cruisers and Armoured Rams of the American Civil War* (Edinburgh, 2006), p. 117.

⁸ Graham, *op.cit.*, p. 203.

the delighted Sultan raised him in 1869 to the rank of full admiral and granted him the title of Pasha.

It is not often realised that in the 1870s, Ottoman Turkey had the third biggest navy in the world, only the British and French navies being larger. Hobart was now appointed Inspector-General of the Turkish fleet, and at once embarked upon a thorough programme of reorganisation and improvement, establishing naval schools and training and gunnery ships and striving to maintain the efficiency of the new ironclads.

Hobart's name had been restored to the Navy List in 1874 through the influence of Lord Derby, only to be erased again when the Russo-Turkish War broke out in 1877 and he accepted command of the Turkish Black Sea fleet. In this capacity, however, he had little chance to show what he could do. Whether through timidity or through jealousy, the Turkish high command was reluctant to make the aggressive use of his squadron which he proposed, while Russia's loss of her own Black Sea fleet in 1856 by the Treaty of Paris meant that no great naval battle could take place. Nevertheless, in an echo of his blockade-running days, he successfully ran his ship, at the start of the war, from the Turkish headquarters at Rustchuk in Bulgaria down past the Russian batteries on the Lower Danube and out into the sea to rejoin the fleet. He also proved that he had discovered an effective solution to the problem of the dreaded Russian torpedo-boats, (for which he personally showed only contempt), protecting his ironclads, when at anchor, with a system of guard-boats linked by ropes.

Like many other Englishmen who have had anything more than merely superficial contact with the Turks, Hobart formed a great admiration and, indeed, affection for them (his opinion of the Greeks was very much less favourable). He was convinced that some sort of formal and lasting alliance between the British and Ottoman empires was vital to the interests and security of both, and visited London in 1885 on a mission to try to bring this about. He failed, but had the satisfaction at least of seeing himself once more restored to the Navy List, with the rank of vice-admiral.

Meanwhile, however, the exertions of a very active and adventurous life had begun to tell on him at last, and his health had started to fail. Advised to go to the Riviera to recuperate, he died at Milan on 19 June, 1886, while on his way back to Turkey.

Hobart had always enjoyed the complete confidence of both the sultans whom he had served, and had given them in return his total loyalty. Abdul Hamid II had raised him to the rank of Mushir (Marshal) in 1881. Now he sent a gunboat to Genoa to bring Hobart's body back to Turkey for burial. The official Palace gazette, the *Osmanli*, describing Hobart's death as "an irreparable loss," commented: "*When the steamer Nedjid returns with the remains of the illustrious dead, there will certainly not be wanting Ottoman shoulders to carry the mournful burden to the heights of Scutari, where our departed friend may rest henceforth side by side with other heroes of his country, under the shadow of that column which Queen Victoria and her people raised there 30 years ago to the memory of those who fell in the sacred cause of their country and of the Sultan, their ally.*"⁹ Back in London, *The Daily Telegraph* opined that "*it was the good fortune of the distinguished maritime commander now deceased, to win golden opinions from all sorts of peoples, and his name and prowess will be as*

⁹ Quoted in *The Times*, Tuesday, June 29, 1886.

cordially remembered in his native land, and in the Southern States of America, as on the shores of the Bosphorus and the Golden Horn."¹⁰

Hobart still lies in the British Cemetery, but no longer in Scutari. Scutari (Üsküdar in Turkish), once used in reference to the whole area of settlement on the Asian side of the Bosphorus, now covers a narrower area, and the cemetery is today in the suburb of Haydarpaşa. Since it contains a number of British and Indian graves from the First World War, it is in the care of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, and two recent visits, in 2007 and 2009, found the grass mown and the graves, whether military or civilian, beautifully maintained.

Although there are ferries from the European side to Haydarpaşa, these do not run all day, and anyone wishing to visit the grave would therefore do better to take one of the regular and frequent ferries to Kadıköy, a journey of about fifteen minutes costing (in 2009) the equivalent of 60p. From there, it is a thirty-minute walk to the cemetery, going left along the shore, then up the hill, over the railway-line, past a large military hospital on the left and then left at the traffic lights at the top of the hill. The narrow cemetery gates are some thirty yards ahead, down a path by the side entrance to the military hospital.

On the upper level are the Crimean graves and the tall and impressive Crimean War monument of 1857. To find Hobart's simple grave, which is on the lower level, one walks straight on, past the neatly-arranged Commonwealth graves section on the left, towards a tall pink obelisk marking the grave of Charles Simpson Hanson (1874). Hobart's grave is the fourth one beyond this, next to the long, low, grey grave of Sir Philip Francis (1876).

The grave on the hillside, however, is not quite the only memorial to Hobart Pasha in Istanbul. In the collection of the Naval Museum in Beşiktaş is a portrait of him in full Turkish naval uniform. The painting is undated, but Hobart appears distinctly younger and slimmer than in the well-known photograph of him, and it therefore presumably dates from the earlier stages of his career in the Ottoman Navy. Although not normally on display, it fortunately formed part of the recent exhibition at the Pera Museum and the Research Institute, in the centre of Istanbul, of pieces from the Naval Museum, while the Naval Museum itself was undergoing a major reorganisation. It is to be hoped that, when this reorganisation is finally completed, the portrait will be on permanent display.

Finally, Hobart is not entirely forgotten in the village of his birth. Walton-on-the-Wolds is a pretty village just over four miles from Loughborough. St. Mary's Church, where Hobart's father was Rector, is on a slight hill just south of the centre of the village, with the rectory, Hobart's childhood home, next to it. Although the rectory is now a private house, the right-of-way from the centre of the village up to the church goes right through the former rectory garden and passes within a few yards of the house. The Church itself is normally locked, but an enquiry at the bar of the Anchor, the welcoming pub in the centre of the village, quickly produces a key. There is a large memorial to Hobart's mother, Mary, on the north wall of the chancel, while back in the Anchor a modest wooden frame near the bar contains a brief synopsis of the life of a British naval officer who found his greatest fame as the master of a blockade-runner and as an Ottoman admiral.

¹⁰ *The Daily Telegraph*, Monday, June 21, 1886.