



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.

To be continued ...

¹ *The Times*, Monday, June 21, 1886.