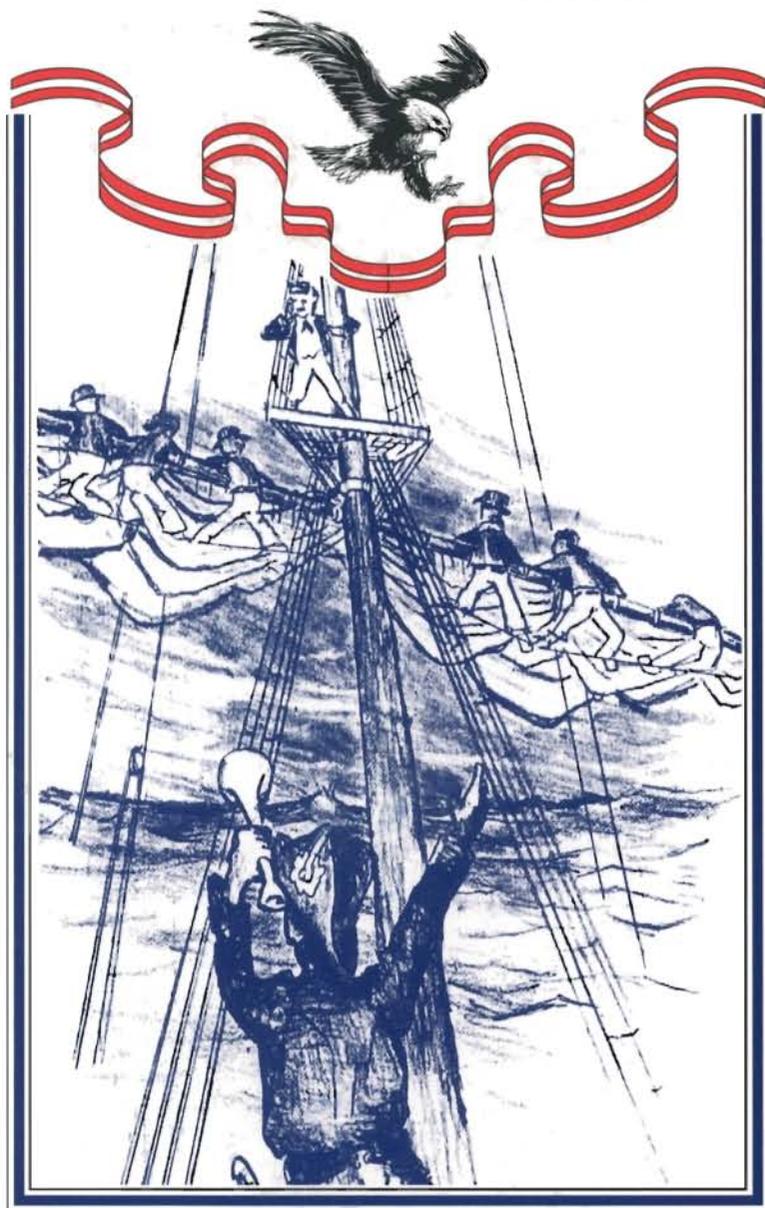


# WITH CAPTAIN DAVID PORTER

or

**"How We Got Our Name"**

**VALPARAISO & PORTER COUNTY INDIANA**



**Ten-year old Midshipman David Glasgow Farragut's  
adventures on the USS ESSEX and  
the Battle of Valparaiso.**

**by John D. Wolf**

## MIDSHIPMAN DAVID GLASGOW FARRAGUT'S ADVENTURES ON THE USS ESSEX FROM 1811-1814. FARRAGUT LATER BECAME THE FIRST ADMIRAL IN THE UNITED STATES NAVY.

In 1810, a 10-year old boy joined the United States Navy as a commissioned officer. In the pre-Annapolis navy, this is how American trained its naval officers: start them young.

James Glasgow Farragut was aptly described as "three pounds of uniform surrounded by seventy pounds of fight." Before he retired, he was to become the Navy's first Admiral. In the years between, his name was indelibly associated with that of Captain David Porter, who adopted the lad and gave him his name.

In 1810, the United States Navy was in its infancy, but soon to be baptized by fire in the War of 1812. This war was really a continuation of America's struggle for independence. It was a fight for freedom of the seas.

The young boy Farragut, now called David after the man he idolized, was to become one of the midshipmen survivors of the great battle in the harbor of Valparaiso, Chile, the battle that gave Valparaiso, Indiana, its name. Our county is named for David Porter, captain of the ESSEX, and Farragut's commanding officer.

It is interesting to see the early navy and the battle of Valparaiso through the eyes of a boy who faced British warships, icy gales, pirate raiders, and rebellious prisoners with courage and heroism.

Farragut's father was a Spaniard who adopted America and fought in the Revolutionary war. His mother was Irish. David was born in Tennessee on July 5, 1801. Who would guess that he would become the first Admiral of the United States Navy, the hero of the battles of New Orleans and Mobile Bay, and one of the world's greatest naval leaders?

David Glasgow's father and David Porter's father were friends from the Revolution. Both died in New Orleans while David Porter was in command of the city's naval station. Since Elizabeth Farragut had cared for David Porter's father, he agreed to adopt one of the five children, nine-year old David Glasgow.

Porter introduced Farragut to Navy Secretary Paul Hamilton in Washington D.C. and the boy received a midshipman's commission.

In August of 1811, Midshipman Farragut and his new benefactor, David Porter, journeyed to Norfolk, Virginia, to their new home, the United States Frigate ESSEX. Each day, the 10-year-old midshipman was put in command of a ship-to-shore boat called a "wherry," manned by six burly sailors.

On these trips, Midshipman Farragut wore his undress or working uniform. This consisted of a short navy-blue coat of wool with a standing collar decorated by a button and a slip of lace on each side of the high neck. He also wore a vest, knee breeches, stockings of white cotton, low-cut black shoes, and a cocked hat.

For more formal wear, such as ceremonies when he was received on board or dined with the captain, he wore a full-dress uniform. This consisted of a blue tailcoat with short lapels and standing collar decorated with gold lace on each side of the neck. There were six gold buttons down the front and buttons on the cuff. A white vest and white breeches and a short, curved navy sword made up the rest of the dress uniform.

The ESSEX was home to 300 sailors, 10 officers, and 12 midshipmen. The ESSEX was a ship built for speed and mounted thirty-two guns—she was a vital part of the young navy.

In those days, shipping was essential to the growth of the new nation. But neither

barbary pirates in North Africa nor the "ruler of the seas," Great Britain, respected the stars and stripes. Therefore, in 1794, the United States Congress had authorized the building of six frigates. Best known was the CONSTITUTION, called "Old Ironsides" because she was built with Georgia oak that caused cannonballs to bounce off her sides. This ship can be visited in Boston harbor today.

The ESSEX was a fine ship, built by public subscription by the citizens of Essex County, Massachusetts, at a cost of \$75,000. The government paid an additional amount to outfit the ship. The ship was 140 feet long, 37 feet wide at the beam, and displaced 850 tons. The ESSEX was designed to be an all-purpose fighting ship, fast and maneuverable.

## LIFE ABOARD THE ESSEX

A warship in those days had limited space for its 322 human occupants. Captain Porter's cabin was in the stern of the gun deck. Officers had tiny staterooms on the berth deck, three decks down. The First Lieutenant, the Marine Officer, the Surgeon and his two assistants, the Chaplain, and the Purser were quartered here.

Midshipman Farragut and his eleven seniors were forward from the officers in the steerage section. Like all sailors of that day, they slung their hammocks at night, stored them away during the day, and kept all personal belongings in a sea chest.

They took their meals, or "mess," as it was called, separate from the crew and officers. The Captain ate alone, as he does in today's navy.

And what was the "mess" that David and his shipmates ate while at sea for long periods of time? Fresh provisions were rare, but prized whenever they could be obtained in a port. Sometimes pens in the forward section of the ship would contain chickens, pigs, or even sheep or goats. Barrels of flour and apples helped sustain the men while hard biscuits, beans, coffee, and "jerked" (or dried) meat made up the main diet.

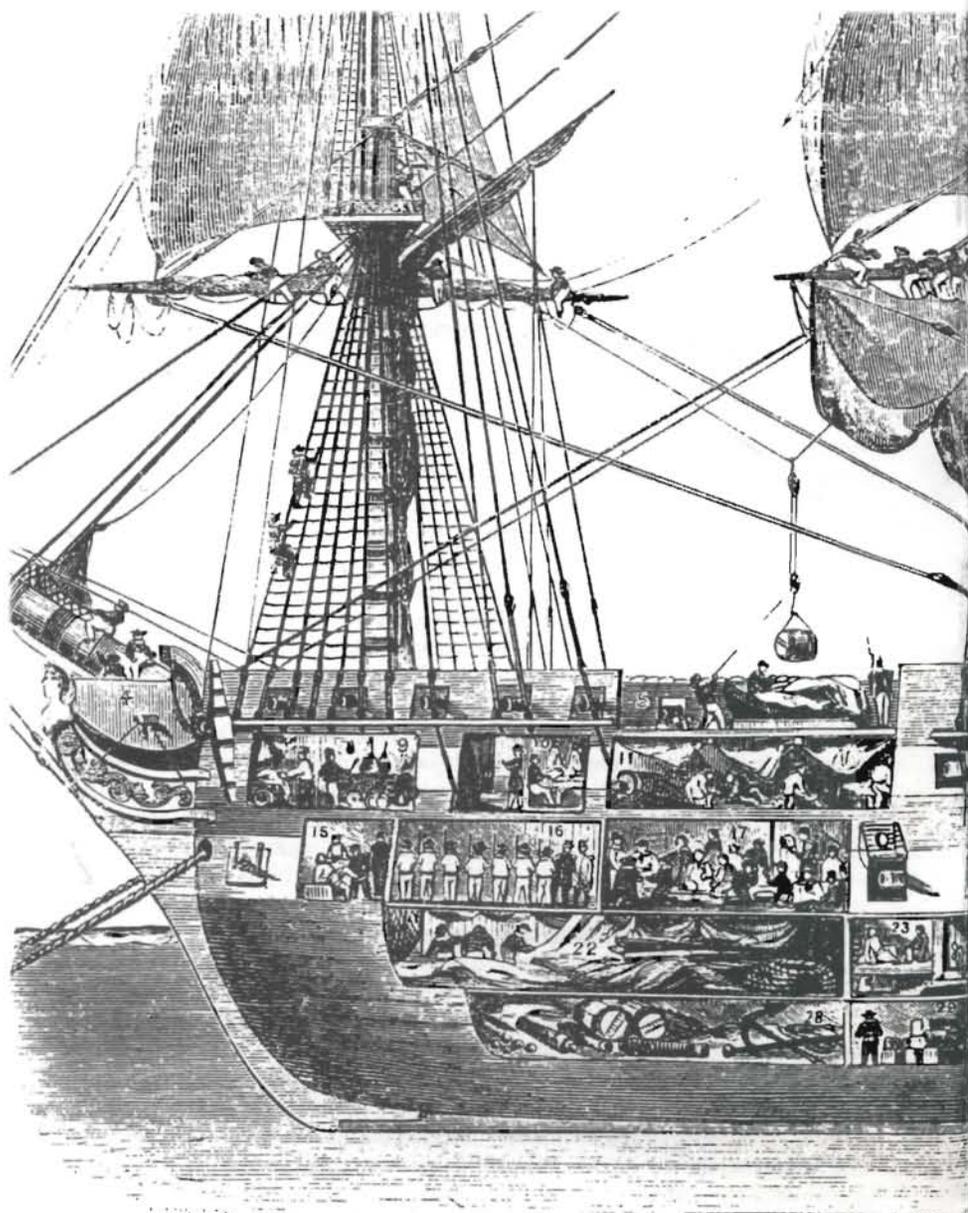
In later travels among the South Pacific islands, the men learned to capture giant sea turtles several feet wide. These unfortunate creatures were thrown into the hold and required little food or water to live. The crew had a supply of fresh meat.

Water was always a problem for the crew. Barrels of the precious fluid were rationed out. Occasionally the barrels were refilled from catching rain water or sending a boat ashore to an island. Bathing was done by lowering a bucket into the sea for salt water.

In frigid waters, the men had no way to keep warm except to add layers of clothing. However, they learned to heat a cannonball on the blacksmith's forge, plunge it into a bucket of sand, then stand around it for warmth.

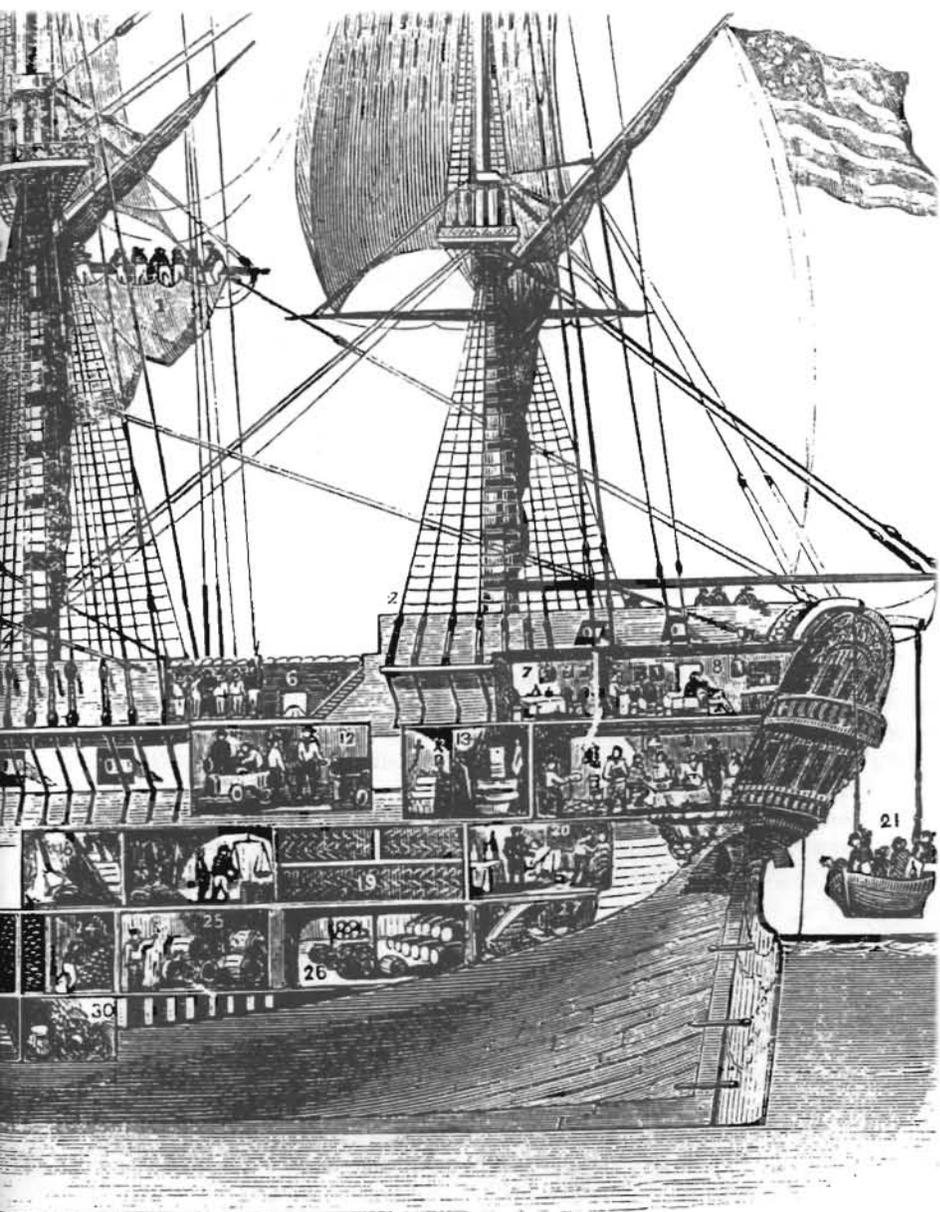
It was necessary for David and other midshipmen on the ESSEX to learn navy protocol, or proper shipboard behavior. The quarter-deck was respected at all times with formalities appropriate to a man-of-war. No one ever sat down or lounged on the quarter-deck. Salutes were required on entering or leaving this section of the ship.

Punishments were meted out for breaking the rules of rigid behavior. Sometimes an unruly "middie" was sent aloft for several hours to perch on the masthead. David actually got to like this particular discipline, and in later years, after he became a captain, he was known to sometimes climb the rigging to a point high enough to view the action better. Seamen were sometimes known to get a dozen lashes from the cat-o-nine-tails.



THE HULL OF AN AMERICAN MAN-OF-WAR CUT OPEN AMIDSHIPS, FROM STEM TO STERN.

- |                           |                             |                          |                              |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Sailors furling Sails. | 5. Sailors lowering a Cask. | 9. Cook's Galley.        | 13. Officers' Cabins.        |
| 2. Poop or Quarter-Deck.  | 6. Surgical inspection.     | 10. Midshipmen's Cabin.  | 14. Dining-Room of Officers. |
| 3. Bob Stays.             | 7. Captain's Cabin.         | 11. Sailors' Berth.      | 15. Dressing a Wound.        |
| 4. Figure Head.           | 8. Dining-Room.             | 12. Exercising the Guns. | 16. Musket exercise.         |



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|---------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| 17. Sailors' Mess-Room.   | 21. Lowering a Boat.       | 25. Spirit-Room.          | 28. General Store Room. |
| 18. Mending Sails.        | 22. Sail and Cordage Room. | 26. Powder Magazine.      | 29. Casks and Tanks.    |
| 19. Provision Room.       | 23. The Prison.            | 27. Blocks, Pulleys, etc. | 30. Dunnage.            |
| 20. Sick Bay or Hospital. | 24. Shot Magazine.         |                           |                         |

## TRAINING FOR BATTLE

Daily routine at sea went something like this: After the anchor was brought up, crewmen and midshipmen scampered up the ratlines into the lower and upper rigging to loose the sails. Once the ship was underway and the water was gliding past its bow, the actual training of the crew began.

The crew of the ESSEX knew that fighting would come soon. Captain Porter and his officers had to train farmers, clerks, and landsmen to be ready. It was serious business.

At dawn, the ship's drums rolled and the bugler blew reveille. The boatswain piped shrilly and shouted, "Ahoy, all hands, hammocks up." The major work began with holystoning of the decks and general clean-up.

At eight bells, the men were piped to breakfast. At nine o'clock, the drums rolled, the flag was raised, and the guard changed. David and his fellow midshipmen then reported to the chaplain for two hours of schooling, in mathematics, grammar, and scripture.

At 11:30, the midshipmen practiced seamanship, "shooting the sun" with their sextants to determine the noontime position of the ship on the navigation charts. A midshipman informed the captain when it was noon (there being no clocks in those days), the bell was rung, and the men not on watch went to their noonday meal.

Work continued until four o'clock. Then the evening meal was eaten, after which the crew had time for relaxing, spinning yarns, dancing, singing, and playing musical instruments.

At sunset, the drums rolled, the guard brought the colors down and the band played. By eight o'clock, the long roll of drums announced the day's end, hammocks were brought out, fires were extinguished, and night routine settled in. By ten o'clock, the only sounds were the rush of water under the bow, the whispers of wind in the sails, and the tread of sentries, who rang the ship's bell each half hour and sang out "All's well."

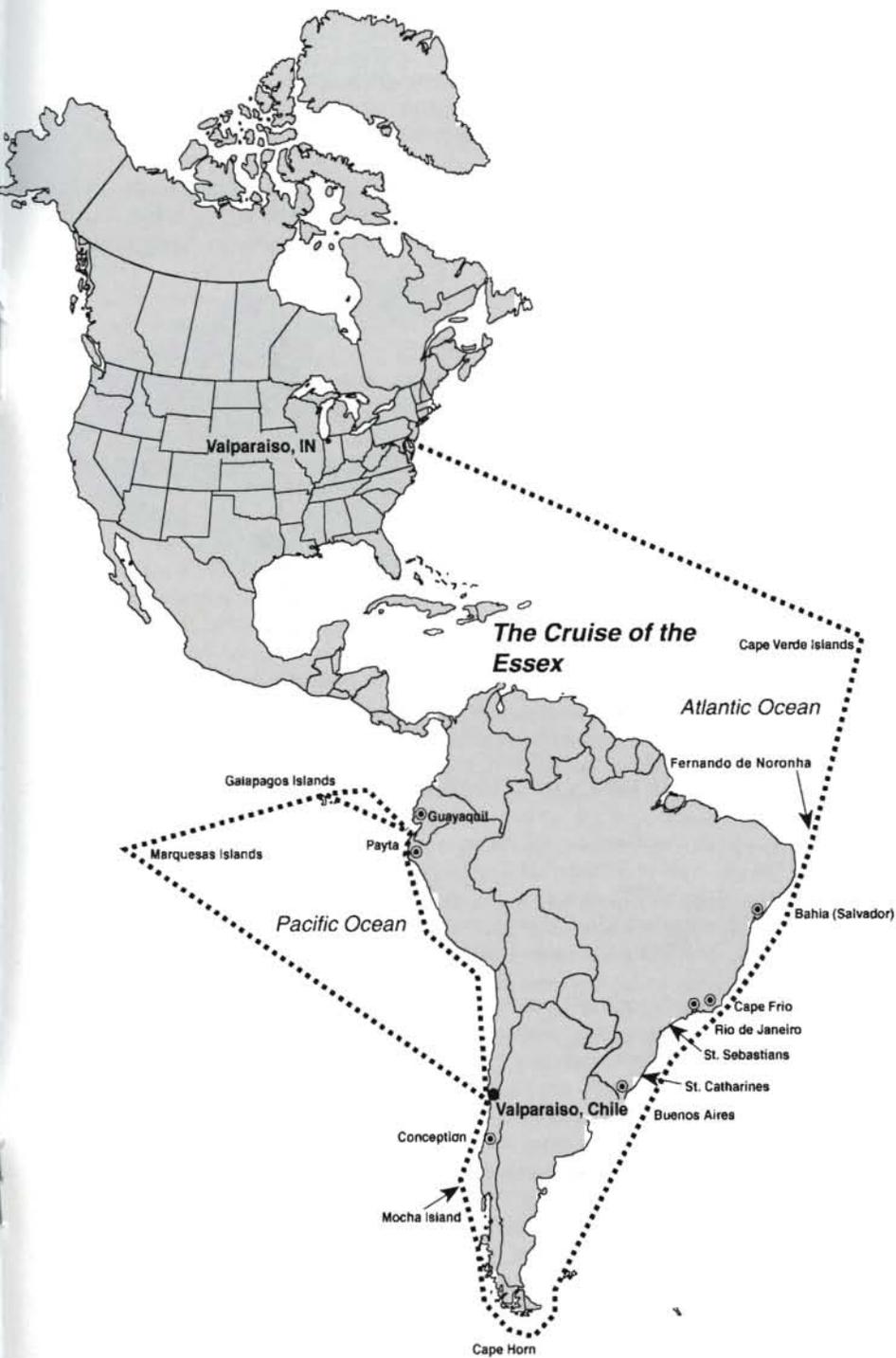
Once at sea, the crew of the ESSEX immediately began intensive gunnery practice. "Mr. Farragut," as David was called, was assigned to one of six "divisions," each one commanded by an officer. They were put to the deadly serious business of handling the guns.

Since the ESSEX carried 32 guns, a division had 7 or 8 guns, with 10 men to handle each one. On a call to battle, the bugle sounded, the drums rolled, Midshipman Farragut would grab a cutlass from the rack and run to his station.

David had a distinct advantage on the gun deck, being small, because the overhead space was so low that most men had to bend over to service the guns. When the gun captain gave an order the midshipman repeated the order, to insure that it was heard above the noise.

The call to general quarters came twice a day. Picture a ten-year-old boy, grabbing his cutlass from the rack and waving it as he runs to his gun station! Ports were opened. The guns' black spouts were run out after being loaded with powder and ball. The guns were aimed with wedges.

Powder boys carried black powder from the magazine in leather buckets with tight lids to prevent spillage. After firing, the guns were run back in by block and tackle, sponged, and reloaded.



## THE WAR OF 1812

By the time the ESSEX was called to join the squadron, she was ready, and declared the "smartest" ship in the squadron. On June 18, 1812, Congress declared war on Great Britain. Just two days short of his eleventh birthday, Mr. Midshipman Farragut was off to war.

Within three weeks the ESSEX had captured six British ships. Captain Porter was a master of tricks. He often made his ship look like a merchantman or he flew British colors so that the enemy would come closer. By such ruses, Captain Porter captured the British man-of-war ALERT, a first in the War of 1812.

With the capture of these British ships, or more particularly with the capture of their crews, space aboard the ESSEX was strained. It was impossible to watch all the prisoners. Trouble was bound to happen.

Midshipman Farragut awoke suddenly one night to make out an enemy sailor prowling the deck, pistol in hand. The attempt at an uprising failed, however, when David sprang from his hammock and crept to Captain Porter's cabin to spread the alarm.

The Captain awoke and cried "Fire! Fire!" as he ran toward the berth deck. The men instantly were alert and rushed to their stations. The danger was over. The prisoner mutiny ended.

The War of 1812 became a cat-and-mouse game. In October, the ESSEX left Delaware Bay for the South Atlantic to raid British commerce. Missing a rendezvous with his squadron, Captain Porter determined to sail around Cape Horn and carry the war into the Pacific Ocean. Although the ship was low on provisions and the passage around the Horn was frightful, the ship finally reached the southern coast of South America and the nation of Chile.

### THE ESSEX IN VALPARAISO HARBOR

The first large harbor where supplies were available was at Valparaiso, Chile. "Valparaiso" means "vale of paradise" in Spanish, and so it seemed to David and all the officers and men of the ESSEX after five months at sea.

While the damage of a 5000 mile voyage was repaired and while the ship was being re-supplied, the officers and crew of the ESSEX were entertained royally by the Chileans.

One incident in the South Pacific demonstrates how Captain Porter trusted Midshipman Farragut. There was always a problem for the Captain concerning what to do with a British ship and crew once they were captured. By June 25th, the Captain had eight captured whalers in his fleet. He decided to send them to Valparaiso in the charge of Lieutenant Downes. On July 5th, David Farragut's twelfth birthday, the young man was made captain of a ship, prize master of the BARCLAY.

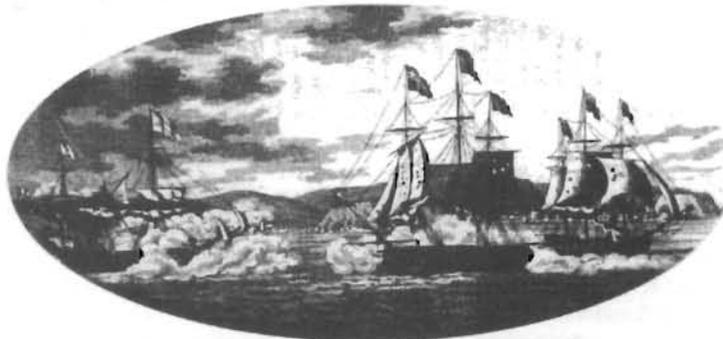
This arrangement did not sit well with the grizzled old master of the BARCLAY. He rebelled against Midshipman Farragut's authority and threatened Farragut. Farragut gave the order to "make sail" and get underway. Captain Randall declared that "he would shoot any man that touched a rope" and went below for his pistols.

Farragut called the boatswain's mate and told him his problem. The Bos'n shrilled his whistle and barked the order to the men to "fill sail." A message was sent below to the Captain that if he came on deck with pistols he would be thrown overboard. The

crew smiled and backed Farragut.

At anchor that evening, Midshipman Farragut took the rebellious captain to the flagship and explained the attempted overthrow of authority to Lieutenant Downes. The captain said it was "all a joke." Lieutenant Downes did not think well of a civilian captain trying to intimidate an officer of the United States Navy and thought the joke was most "unfunny."

Back to the BARCLAY went the boat, the captain's ears ringing with the words, "Acting Captain Farragut was in command. Captain Randall was simply an advisor in matters of navigation." The matter was settled, and the convoy proceeded to Valparaiso.



*Captain Porter's ship, the Essex, battled two British ships at Valparaiso in March 1814.*

### **THE BATTLE OF VALPARAISO: THE END OF THE ESSEX**

By now, the British whaling industry had endured losses of \$2.5 million due to the actions of the ESSEX. They were determined to eliminate this menace and sent Captain James Hillyar with frigates PHOEBE and CHERUB to find and destroy the ship. They finally located the ESSEX in Valparaiso harbor.

The Chilean harbor was neutral waters. The British ships entered the harbor and anchored nearby. Captain Hillyar and Captain Porter knew each other from the days of the Barbary pirates. They exchanged greetings.

A stand-off went on for weeks. The sailors from both ships had a truce ashore, but used words on pennants to communicate insults at each other. Songs were sung to such tunes as "Yankee Doodle" to brag of naval victories.

Captain Porter tried to provoke the British captain into a single ship combat. It was a game of "I dare you."

But the game of words was about to end. The cannons were to speak. Several times Porter tried to escape from the harbor into open sea. Not until March 28th did Porter discover the "siesta" time of the British sailors and made his move.

To gain the advantage with a faster but outgunned ship, Captain Porter decided to hoist sail quickly at the first strong wind and make a run for the open sea. The plan was good, but just as the ESSEX rounded a point of land, the wind shifted. The main mast was caught in a powerful cross wind and crashed to the deck, with a heavy spar dragging in the water. Several sailors were drowned.

As the ship floundered a half-mile off shore, the PHOEBE and CHERUB closed in on the helpless ESSEX. The British took positions to rake the ESSEX from bow to stern. The ESSEX fought back, but the longer-ranged guns of the PHOEBE gave her the advantage.

Midshipman Farragut's recollection of the scene was written later: "I well remember the feelings of awe produced in me by the approach of the hostile ships. Even in my young mind I could see our case was hopeless. It was equally apparent that all were ready to die at their guns rather than surrender."

It seemed to make no difference to the British captain that the American ship was in neutral waters. The attack began at 3:54 in the afternoon and lasted for two-and-a-half hours. 700 cannonballs were fired at the ESSEX. Her few long guns could not inflict much damage on the British ships because the ESSEX could not turn. It was an uneven battle.

Of the ESSEX crew of 255 at the time, over 60 percent were killed, wounded, or missing. All but one line officer perished. Some gun crews had three changes of gunners stacked around them.

In later years, Farragut recalled the battle vividly: "I shall never forget the horrid impression made upon me by the sight of the first man I had ever seen killed. He was a boatswain's mate, and was fearfully mutilated. I remember well standing near the Captain when a shot came through the waterways and glanced upward, killing four men who were standing by the side of the gun, taking the last one in the head and scattering his brains over both of us."

At one point in the battle, a sailor by the name of Roach deserted his post and Captain Porter ordered Midshipman Farragut "to do his duty." Farragut took a pistol and pursued Roach, but found that he had already escaped to shore.

Midshipman Farragut was busy as the Captain's aide, quarter gunner, and powder boy. At one point he was sent to find more gun primers. As he was going below, the captain of the gun directly opposite was struck full in the face by an 18-pound shot and fell back on Farragut, knocking him down the ladder and smearing him with blood. The close call had only damaged his hat. Farragut was later standing next to the Quartermaster when a shot took off the Quartermaster's leg and a piece of Farragut's coattail.

The ship caught fire, but the fires were soon extinguished. Men whose clothing was afire jumped overboard to swim ashore. Captain Porter decided it would be useless to continue. He ordered the colors to be struck.

At this time, the ship was sinking and only 75 men and one officer were fit for duty. It was ten minutes after the colors were lowered that the British ceased fire.

## HEROES RETURN HOME

Thus ended the longest and bloodiest naval battle of the war. The wounded were attended to in Valparaiso homes. Porter, Farragut, and the survivors were paroled and allowed to return to the United States.

21 months after they had sailed away, they arrived back home. They were treated to immense receptions in New York and Philadelphia and received the gratitude of the nation.

Six weeks later, Captain Porter was given command of the COLUMBIA, still under construction in Washington. The ship was to be re-named the ESSEX, but the British landed and attacked Washington, burning both the White House and the COLUMBIA. The War of 1812 ended with the Treaty of Ghent shortly thereafter.

David Farragut was now 13 years old. On returning to his adopted home, he was to meet 15-month-old David Dixon Porter. During the Civil War, David Farragut

became the Navy's first Admiral and the hero of the Battles of New Orleans and Mobile Bay, where his famous words "Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!" became a part of Navy legend.

David Dixon Porter became the second Admiral of the United States Navy and the hero of Vicksburg.

Captain Porter was later called back to service in 1822 as Commodore of a squadron that was charged with eliminating the pirates from the Gulf of Mexico and the West Indies. In 1815 he published his Journal in two volumes, together with the line drawings he had made of his journeys and battles. A first edition of Porter's Journal is available in our library.

In 1831, Commodore Porter was appointed by President Andrew Jackson as ambassador to Turkey, where he served until he died in 1843. He was buried in Philadelphia.

In 1836, Porter County was separated from LaPorte County and was named for the naval hero, the only county so named in America. The name Valparaiso was chosen by the citizens in 1837.

That is how we got our name.

Heave the topmast from the board,  
And our ship for action clear,  
By the cannon and the sword,  
We will die or conquer here.  
The foe, of twice our force, nears us fast:  
To Your Posts, my faithful tars!  
Mind your rigging, guns, and spars,  
And defend your stripes and stars  
To the last.  
--"The Battle of Valparaiso"

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Printed by Home Mountain Publishing Co., Inc., Valparaiso, IN

First Printing - 1999  
Second Printing - 2000  
Third Printing - 2002

Booklet sponsored by



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