

HMS Trincomalee at Sunderland



From Harper's Weekly, January 1862

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At the end of her second commission, in 1857, HMS Trincomalee was placed "in ordinary" at Chatham. On Tuesday 15th September 1857, Lieutenant Commander John B. Field, who had been on the ship during the commission, took the paddleship, "Cuckoo", from Chatham to Plymouth with marines and seamen, late of the Trincomalee.

The ship remained "in ordinary" for just over 2½ years, until April 1860, when the Lords of the Admiralty ordered "the Trincomalee, 24" (guns), "to be brought up from reserve in ordinary at Chatham, and taken into dock, in order to be fitted out as a training ship for the Naval Coast Volunteers at Newcastle and Sunderland." As soon as she was completed she was to be "sent round to the Tyne, where she will be stationed."

The "Hampshire Advertiser" of 19th May 1860 reported that :

"The Trincomalee, 24, sailing frigate, which is fitting at Chatham as a training ship for the Naval Coast Volunteers, is to be supplied with the following armament, viz. :- Main deck, 10 32-pounders, each of 50 cwt.; and 6 8 inch guns, each of 52 cwt."

By 22nd December 1860 the Admiralty had resolved "to station H.M.S. Frigate Trincomalee, in the South Dock, Sunderland, as training ship for the seamen of that port who have joined the

Royal Naval Reserve.” The fitting out of the ship at Chatham was delayed due to poor weather conditions. However by 14th February 1861 the frigate had been moored at the southern part of the Extension Dock at Sunderland, and was open to the public being daily “visited by numbers. On Sunday and Sunday week, about 5,000 persons were on board of her.”

The ship and her crew became a regular source of news for the local “North & South Shields Gazette”, in the issue of Thursday 21st February 1861 the paper reported:

“TRIAL OF LIFE-PRESERVING APPARATUS, - At Sunderland, yesterday afternoon, Captain Heard and his officers and men of the Trincomalee, and naval reserve, got out the rockets and life lines, and had a practice at the sea outlet of the South Dock. The weather was very boisterous, and there was a heavy fall of rain all the time. The practice made was very good.”

The Gazette of Thursday 18th April of the same year refers to religious services being held on the ship, by this time from 50 to 60 seamen were daily training for the Naval Reserve, on board the Trincomalee:

“WEAR CHURCH MISSION. - Divine service is now held every Sunday afternoon on board the Trincomalee, in the South Dock, Sunderland. The service is at present held on the maindeck, but in summer it will be conducted on the upper deck, and the ship's awning will be spread. This is the commencement of a movement for a Church of England Mission amongst the seamen of the port. In the course of two or three weeks a clergyman will be appointed to take charge of the mission, who will perform the Sunday afternoon service on board the Trincomalee, and also attend to the spiritual wants of the seamen of the dock and port.”

Not unexpectedly there was rivalry between Sunderland and Newcastle as to which port was doing the most for the Naval Reserve, as this article of 13th June 1861 shows:

“THE ROYAL NAVAL RESERVE. - THE WEAR v. THE TYNE. - The assertion made last week by the Sunderland Herald, that “Sunderland stands at the head of all the ports on the North-East coast, as respects the number of men enrolled in the Royal Naval Reserve,” has been refuted by Mr Greenhow, shipping master, North Shields, who states authoritatively “that the Tyne has entered more men by some hundreds than those in the Wear amount to – the Shipping Office at North Shields alone having entered 680, and which, with the other offices added, will make the numbers of this port alone quite 1,000.” He also states that since the early part of December of last year, the Shipping Office, North Shields, has entered more than double the number entered at the Sunderland Shipping Office; also the number of men drilled on board the Castor”, training ship on the Tyne, “has been three to one drilled on board the Trincomalee. It may therefore, he declares, safely be asserted that the Tyne, not the Wear, stands at the head of all the ports on the North-East coast as respects the number of men enrolled.”

Nevertheless the “Newcastle Daily Journal of 12th August 1861 did deem it fit to make the following report:

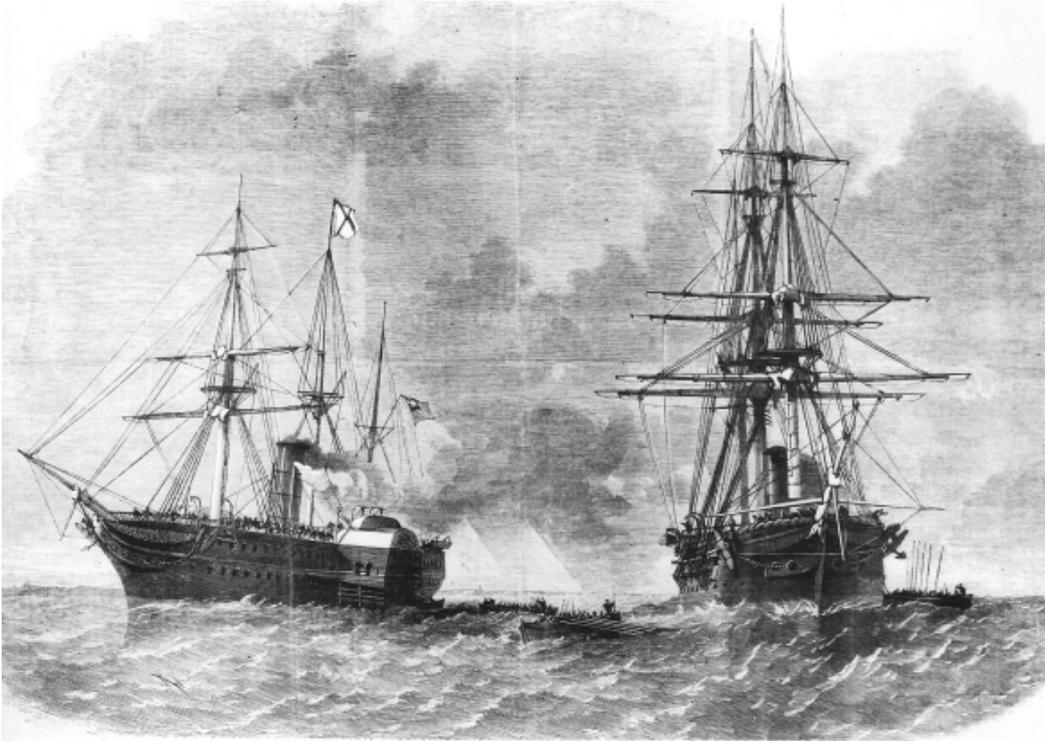
“ The Mayor of Sunderland and Mrs. Mayoress visited H.M.S. Trincomalee, in Sunderland Dock, the other day, while the men of the Royal Naval Reserve were at drill, and were so pleased with what they saw that his Worship left with Captain Heard five pounds, for the entertainment of the seamen.”

The ship and crew did receive visits from two prominent politicians whilst at Sunderland, and the crew made a public statement concerning an incident during the American Civil War which was taking place.

Escaping American Confederates and a commodious crinoline -

On 8th November 1861 two Southern American Commissioners were making their escape to England aboard the English mail steamer, Trent, when off Bermuda they were seized from the steamer by Lieutenant Fairfax of the United States frigate, San Jacinto.

The following newspaper article from the "Durham County Advertiser" of Friday 6th December 1861 gives more details:



The mail steamer Trent encounters the frigate San Jacinto

“THE AMERICAN ACCOUNT OF THE SEIZURE

The account, as furnished from the San Jacinto, agrees, in the main, with the version given by the commander of the Trent. It is, however, represented that all the despatches of Messrs Mason and Slidell were likewise seized. The first account published by the New York papers was given in the following despatch :-

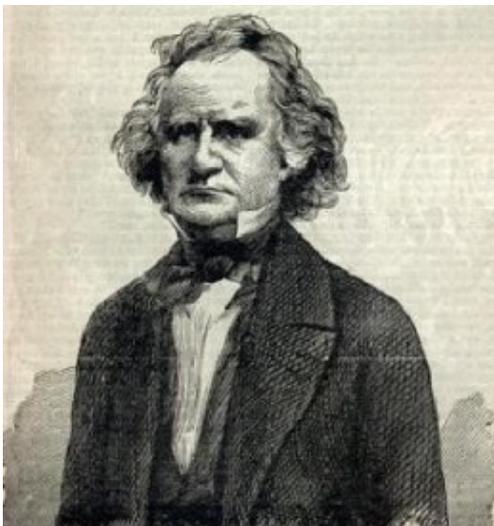
“FORTRESS MONROE, Nov. 15. - The United States' steam frigate San Jacinto, Captain Wilks, arrived in the roadstead at half past twelve p.m. having on board the rebel commissioners Slidell and Mason. They were taken from the English mail steamer, on the 8th instant, off Bermuda. Lieutenant Fairfax and 35 armed men went from the San Jacinto with five officers, who boarded the steamer and picked out the Commissioners. Messrs Slidell and Mason made feeble resistance, but were induced to leave with Lieutenant Fairfax. The captain of the steamer raved and swore, called the United States' officers 'piratical Yankees,' and other abusive names. One of the secretaries of the rebel Commissioners named Husted or Hurstace, also showed resistance; but himself and colleague accompanied their employers to confinement. Mr Slidell had his wife and four children on board, who were allowed to proceed to Europe. Commodore Wilks came ashore and had a lengthy conversation with General Wood. He expressed his opinion that he had done right, and said that, right or wrong, these men had to

be secured, and if he had done wrong he could be no more than cashiered for it.'

It appears to be generally admitted that Captain Wilks, of the San Jacinto, acted in the matter purely on his own responsibility. A Washington despatch on the point says :- "Captain Wilks was sent to the coast of Africa, especially to bring home the San Jacinto; and it was only when he arrived in the west Indies that he heard of the escape of Messrs Slidell and Mason. Therefore his arrest of them could not have been pursuant to orders."

"HOW THE DESPATCHES WERE SAVED

..Captain Wilks had just arrived at the Havannah from a foreign station when the Trent came in. There was a ball, at which Mr Slidell and his family were present, and also Lieutenant Fairfax of the San Jacinto. Miss Slidell, it is said, danced with the Lieutenant, and in her glee at the prospect before her, talked to him freely of the pleasant voyage they were anticipating to England. Lieutenant Fairfax went to his captain with the news, and it was, after that (in the opinion of those who tell this story), that Captain Wilks determined, of his own head, on the bold stroke of seizing the Southern Commissioners. The non-delivery of the despatches is explained by the prompt transfer of them from Mr to Mrs Slidell, after the San Jacinto had fired her guns. I hardly like to say what hiding-place Mrs Slidell is said to have chosen for her husband's papers, but it is fortunate that the right to search does not extend to crinoline. During this transfer of the papers, Miss Slidell gallantly kept watch and ward at the door of her father's cabin, and when her "quondam" partner at the Havannah ball, after trying to force his way in, and ungallantly receiving a slap on the face, which he ungallantly resented by an order to his marines to charge bayonets against the determined young lady, it might have gone hard for her, but for the British mail agent – Lieutenant Williams – who interposed between Miss Slidell and the bayonets' points."



Commissioner Mason



Commissioner Slidell

The response of the crew of HMS Trincomalee -

On Saturday 30th November 1861 the Naval Reserve at Sunderland met, as reported in the following Friday's "Newcastle Courant":

“NAVAL RESERVE DEMONSTRATION AT SUNDERLAND

The seamen belonging to the Naval Reserve force of Sunderland held a meeting on Saturday afternoon, on board H.M.S. Trincomalee, for the purpose of expressing their disapprobation of the conduct of the Americans, in the late affair of the Trent mail-boat. It was quite a spontaneous act on the part of the men; and as their commander (Capt. Heard) was not present, Mr John Robertson” ... “was called upon to preside at the meeting, which was held between decks, and consisted of about 120 of the force. The Chairman, in strong terms, said their object in assembling was to show that they could feel as keenly an insult offered to their flag, which had braved a thousand years the battle and the breeze, as any American who defended the star and stripes; and they would show the world that British tars could yet as bravely defend it. - He was followed by other speakers, who, if they lacked polish, did not lack power, and who were not deficient in plain speaking. Ultimately the following resolution was adopted, amidst tremendous cheering :- “Seeing an account in the Shipping Gazette of the insult offered to the British flag by the Americans, we, the men of the Naval Reserve in Sunderland, do freely and spontaneously come forward and offer our services to resent such insult, and will shed the last drop of our blood in maintaining the dignity of our gracious Queen, and keeping untarnished the glory of our country's flag against any nation that dare insult them.” Captain Heard arrived on board just as the resolution was passed, and was received with loud cheers, as was also Mr Lambton, the shipping master, who accompanied him. Captain Heard thanked them, and, in a suitable address, reminded them of what their fathers did in upholding the standard of Old England, - how Crawford, a native of Sunderland, nailed the tattered flag of England to the mast at the battle of Camperdown. (Cheers.). He trusted that there were still Crawfords left in Sunderland who would not shrink from again nailing the colour to the mast if necessity required. (Cheers.) After Mr Lambton had thanked the force, in a patriotic speech, the meeting dispersed with three hearty cheers for the Queen. The whole of the men expressed their willingness at once to defend the flag under which they have enlisted. - On Monday, the force again assembled to the number of 150, on board the Trincomalee, and headed by the Monkwearmouth Colliery Band, they marched in team through the town, and were repeatedly cheered on the route, a great number of sailors and others following them.”

Mr. Disraeli addresses the men of HMS Trincomalee -



On the same day that the above newspaper report was issued, Mr. Disraeli was visiting Seaham. The “North & South Shields Gazette” of Thursday 12th December 1861 reported the visit thus:

“ MR DISRAELI'S ADDRESS TO THE SEAHAM NAVAL RESERVE. -

On Friday morning last, the Right Hon. B. Disraeli, who is at present the guest of Lady Londonderry, at Seaham Hall, visited Seaham Harbour, and minutely examined the works there. During the right hon. Gentleman's visit, Capt. Heard, R.N., of H.M. Training ship Trincomalee, with that readiness which so distinguishes him to show the Naval Reserve men

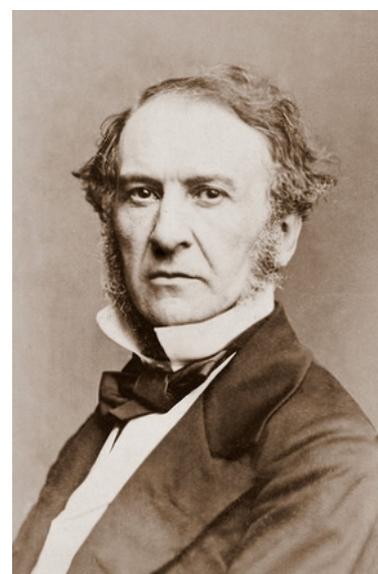
off, seized the opportunity of exercising the men of that force in the use of the rocket lines and apparatus for the saving of life, and explained their working to the distinguished visitor. At the termination of the exercise, the men in a body came forward, and in an address to Capt. Heard, desired that gentleman to convey to the authorities their offer of placing their services at the disposal of their Queen, to resent the late insult to the British flag. Capt. Heard made a brief and

sailor-like reply, and then introduced Mr Disraeli to the men. The right hon. gentleman said he felt he had no claim to address the men of the Naval Reserve, but having been a member of the Government that recommended its formation, he naturally felt some pride in observing the very great success which had attended it. He himself was a man of peace, and he hoped old England would long go in her glorious and peaceful career. He was proud to observe the feeling on the part of the Naval Reserve that day, and he was fully convinced that the same spirit animated every breast throughout the land, and should it be necessary to defend the honour and dignity of the country, he was sure that the spirit which animated its people could only end in one result. In conclusion, he said, he was pleased to witness the spirit of the population of this interesting little port in the county, of Durham. Three hearty cheers were given for the Queen, Mr Disraeli, and Lady Londonderry, and the proceedings terminated.”

Mr. Gladstone addresses the ship's men -

The “Cork Daily Reporter” of Wednesday 22nd October 1862 tells us of Mr. Gladstone's encounter with the men of HMS Trincomalee:

“During the progress of the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the North, on reaching the Sunderland Docks, by the road leading underneath the railway at Hendon, the carriages were abandoned, and on proceeding round the north end of the Extension, Mr. Gladstone received a salute from the men of the Royal Naval Reserve, who, under the command of Captain Heard, of the Trincomalee, were under arms on the roadway opposite that vessel. Before taking leave of the men, Mr. Gladstone addressed them as follows :- “My friends of the Naval Reserve, and especially your gallant commander, I hope you won't think I use the words of idle compliment when I state that I have seen nothing in the whole course of my most deeply-interesting visit to the North of England with greater interest or satisfaction than your body on this occasion. I do not believe among all the measures that have been taken by the Government, or suggested for the purpose of national defence, a wiser suggestion has ever been made, or better measures adopted, than the incorporation of the Naval Reserve (Cheers).



It is a measure in its spirit essentially pacific, and at the same time it is a measure, as we know perfectly well from the experience of last winter, which has proved to be quite effective. I must not presume to make myself a judge of naval or military discipline, but I have spent some weeks on board a Queen's ship, and I never spent a portion of my life with greater satisfaction, and, if I may be allowed to say so, I see in you the indications not to be mistaken of the same spirit of self-denying discipline and resolution which have made the name of British sailors so famous throughout the world (cheers). Accept my best wishes for your health and prosperity, and of my certain confidence that you have rendered a great service to your country, as well as taken the wisest course for yourselves in becoming members of the Naval Reserve (loud cheers).”

HMS Trincomalee departs Sunderland for Hartlepool -

On the afternoon of Wednesday 11th June 1863, HM Paddle steamer Medusa left the Tyne for the Wear, from which she towed the training ship Trincomalee to Hartlepool. Captain Heard remained at Sunderland where our ship was replaced by HMS Active.

Captain Heard

For the two years and four months that HMS Trincomalee was at Sunderland, Captain Heard had been the commanding officer. He died suddenly of natural causes in Sunderland on 12th November 1866, the "Newcastle Guardian" of Saturday 17th November 1866 reported:

"Deceased was in his fifty-fifth or fifty-sixth year. He was the son of an old Peninsular officer, and was born near Kinsale, in Ireland. In 1826, at the age of 14 he entered the navy, and first saw active service on the coast of Spain, during the Spanish war of succession; he was at the siege of St. Jean D'Acre, and served as signal officer to Sir Charles Napier in that memorable siege, where he was recommended for promotion, and became lieutenant. Afterwards he served in the first Chinese war, and was in the expedition of Sir Edward Belcher against the Borneo pirates. He was subsequently promoted to the rank of commander, and came to Sunderland in 1851, as commander of the Coast Guard for Blyth and Hartlepool. After five years' service he was continued for three years longer on the application of all the public bodies in Sunderland. During the latter period Capt. Heard had to organize the Naval Reserve force in this district, and it was his popularity with the seamen of Sunderland, where the scheme was first taken up by the seamen, that gave it such an impetus. Up to the arrival of the Castor in the Tyne, Capt. Heard was in charge of the force for thirty miles along the sea coast. He was subsequently appointed to H.N. Naval Reserve training ship Trincomalee, sent to Sunderland, and transferred to the Active, which replaced the Trincomalee. After three years command of these vessels the town petitioned the Admiralty, and his command was extended for another year, he finally retiring from active service on half-pay at the close of 1864, when he was entertained at a public dinner, and announced his determination to spend the rest of his life in Sunderland. In all that related to the welfare of seamen he took the warmest interest. When in the Coast Guard and the reserve, he spent much time in organizing the coast guard and seamen in the use of the rocket apparatus and lines for the saving of shipwrecked seamen. The Lifeboat Service had in him a warm supporter, and he was the local secretary of the Royal National Lifeboat Association. It was to his constant applications to the Admiralty that the Channel Fleet was sent to Sunderland in 1863; and in 1864 he organized the gathering of French and English seamen on board H.M.S. Active, when 150 men of the French frigate La Danae sat down with an equal number of Reserve men – the first instance of this kind on record. In all that appertained to the port of Sunderland, he took the most lively interest, and never missed an opportunity of presenting the claims of that port in official quarters. His funeral is fixed for Friday, when all classes will join in paying their respects to one of the frankest sailors and genuine men Sunderland has had dwelling in her midst."

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