

**AN ENGLISHMAN'S VIEW OF THE BATTLE
BETWEEN THE ALABAMA AND THE
KEARSARGE; THE CAREER OF
THE ALABAMA NO. 290, FROM JULY 29,
1862, TO JUNE 19, 1864; ABOARD A
SEMMES PRIZE; PP. 69-139**

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FREDERICK MILNES EDGE & H. S. CANFIELD

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OF THE
BATTLE
BETWEEN THE
ALABAMA AND THE *KEARSARGE*

AN ACCOUNT OF THE NAVAL ENGAGEMENT IN THE BRITISH CHANNEL ON
SUNDAY, JUNE 19TH, 1864. FROM INFORMATION PERSONALLY OB-
TAINED IN THE TOWN OF CHERBOURG, AS WELL AS FROM
THE OFFICERS AND CREW OF THE UNITED
STATES SLOOP OF WAR *KEARSARGE*, AND
THE WOUNDED AND PRISONERS
OF THE CONFEDERATE
PRIVATEER.

BY
FREDERICK MILNES EDGE

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1864

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1906

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M 29

1872



The writer of this pamphlet is an English gentleman of intelligence, now residing in London, who has spent some time in this country, and is known and esteemed by many of our best citizens. He visited Cherbourg for the express purpose of making the inquiry and investigation, the results of which are embodied in the following pages, and generously devotes the pecuniary results of his copyright to the funds of the SANITARY COMMISSION.

TO VISIT
AMSTERDAM

THIS RECORD
OF
A MOST GLORIOUS VICTORY
GAINED IN THE CAUSE OF
JUSTICE AND HUMANITY
IS
DEDICATED TO
THAT NOBLE OFFSPRING OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE,
THE SANITARY COMMISSION OF THE UNITED STATES,
BY
THEIR OBEDIENT SERVANT,
THE AUTHOR.

London, July 14, 1864.

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PREFACE

LETTER OF CAPTAIN WINSLOW.

U. S. S. "KEARSARGE," OFF DOVER,

July 18, 1864.

FRED'K M. EDGE, ESQ.,

LONDON,

My Dear Sir:

I have read the proof sheets of your pamphlet entitled "*The Alabama and the Kearsarge—An Account of the Naval Engagement in the British Channel on Sunday, June 19, 1864.*" I can fully endorse the pamphlet as giving a fair, unvarnished statement of all the facts, both prior and subsequent to the engagement.

With my best wishes, I remain, with feelings of obligation,

Very truly yours,

JOHN A. WINSLOW.

THE KEARSARGE

THE importance of the engagement between the United States sloop-of-war *Kearsarge* and the Confederate privateer *Alabama* cannot be estimated by the size of the two vessels. The conflict off Cherbourg on Sunday, the 19th of June, was the first decisive engagement between shipping propelled by steam, and the first test of the merits of modern naval artillery. It was, moreover, a contest for superiority between the ordnance of Europe and America, whilst the result furnishes us with *data* wherefrom to estimate the relative advantage of rifled and smooth-bore cannon at short range.

Perhaps no greater or more numerous misrepresentations were ever made in regard to an engagement than in reference to the one in question. The first news of the conflict came to us enveloped in a mass of statements, the greater part of which, not to use an unparliamentary expression, was diametrically opposed to the truth; and although several weeks have now elapsed since the *Alabama* followed her many defenceless victims to their watery grave, these misrepresentations attain as much credence as ever. The victory of the *Kearsarge* was accounted for, and the defeat of the *Alabama* excused or palliated upon the following principal reasons:

1. The superior size and speed of the *Kearsarge*.
2. The superiority of her armament.
3. The "chain-plating" at her sides.
4. The greater number of her crew.
5. The unpreparedness of the *Alabama*.
6. The assumed necessity of Captain Semmes' accepting the challenge sent him (as represented) by the commander of the *Kearsarge*.

Besides these misstatements, there have been others put forth, either in ignorance of the real facts of the case, or with a purposed intention of diminishing the merit of the victory by casting odium upon the Federals on the score of inhumanity. In the former category must be placed the remarks of *The Times* (June 21st); but it is just to state that the observations in question were made on receipt of the first news, and from information furnished probably by parties unconnected with the paper and desirous of palliating the *Alabama's* defeat by any means in their power. We are informed in the article above referred to that the guns of the latter vessel "had been pointed* for 2,000 yards, and the second shot went right through the *Kearsarge*," whereas no shot whatever went through as stated. Again, "the *Kearsarge* fired about 100 (shot) chiefly eleven-inch shell," the fact being that not one-third of her projectiles were of that calibre. Further on we find—"The men (of the *Alabama*) were all true to the last; they only ceased firing when the water came to the muzzles of their guns." Such a declaration as this is laughable in the extreme; the *Alabama's* guns were all on the spar-deck, like those of the *Kearsarge*; and to achieve what the *Times* represents, her men must have fought on until the hull of their vessel was two feet under water. The truth is—if the evidence of the prisoners saved by the *Kearsarge* may be taken—Captain Semmes hauled down his flag immediately after being informed by his chief engineer that the water was putting out the fires; and within a few minutes the water gained so rapidly on the vessel that her bow rose slowly in the air, and half her guns obtained a greater elevation than they had ever known previously. It is unfortunate to find such cheap-novel style of writing in a paper which at some future period may be referred to as an authoritative chronicler of events now transpiring.

It would be too long a task to notice all the numerous misstatements of private individuals, and of the English and French press, in reference to this action: the best mode is to give the facts as they occurred, leaving the public to judge by internal evidence on which side the truth exists.

* Sighted (Ed.).

Within a few days of the fight, the writer of these pages crossed from London to Cherbourg for the purpose of obtaining by personal examination, full and precise information in reference to the engagement. It would seem as though misrepresentation, if not positive falsehood, were inseparable from everything connected with the *Alabama*—for on reaching the French naval station he was positively assured by the people on shore that nobody was permitted to board the *Kearsarge*. Preferring, however, to substantiate the truth of these allegations from the officers of the vessel themselves, he hired a boat and sailed out to the sloop, receiving on his arrival an immediate and polite reception from Captain Winslow and his gallant subordinates. During the six days he remained at Cherbourg, he found the *Kearsarge* open to the inspection, above and below, of any and everybody who chose to visit her; and he frequently heard surprise expressed, by English and French visitors alike, that representations on shore were so inconsonant with the truth of the case.

I found the *Kearsarge* lying under the guns of the French ship-of-the-line *Napoleon*, two cables' length from that vessel and about a mile and a half from the harbor; she had not moved from that anchorage since entering the port of Cherbourg, and no repairs whatever had been effected in her hull since the fight. I had thus full opportunity to examine the extent of her damage, and she certainly did not look at all like a vessel which had just been engaged in one of the hottest conflicts of modern times.

SIZE OF THE TWO VESSELS.

The *Kearsarge*, in size, is by no means the terrible craft represented by those who, for some reason or other, seek to detract from the honor of her victory; she appeared to me a mere yacht in comparison with the shipping around her, and disappointed many of the visitors who came to see her. The relative proportions of the two antagonists were as follows: