



# The Duty Roster

James Heath Editor

Texas Society War of 1812

Spring 2017

## PRESIDENT'S CORNER

I am coming up on my year as President of the Texas Society of the War of 1812. With the hard work of Secretary Wayne Courreges we have resolved our financial situation, cleaned up our roster, and worked to communicate with our members.

We will soon have our annual meeting at the SAR Convention in San Antonio on April 2. We will need to make some changes in our Officers at that time. I am willing to stand for another year and Wayne is willing to serve as Secretary-treasurer for another year.

We will have reports on our activities at the meeting and items to work on for the next year, notably getting all of our chapters running again

Annual 1812 Meeting and Breakfast

**Texas Society -  
Sons of the American Revolution**

**122nd Annual Convention  
March 31 - April 2, 2017  
El Tropicano Riverwalk Hotel  
110 Lexington Avenue  
San Antonio, TX 78205  
Phone: 210-223-9461**

## HOTEL RESERVATION NOTE

Make your room reservations directly with:

El Tropicano Riverwalk Hotel  
Call: 1-877-736-4311 or  
[reservations@eltropicanohotel.com](mailto:reservations@eltropicanohotel.com)

Mention Group Sons of the American Revolution for a room rate of only \$109.00 plus taxes. The room block is limited and the group rate expires on February 28th. Check-in time is 4:00pm, checkout time is noon. Complimentary in room wireless internet & onsite self-parking with in and out privileges.

If you will be attending the SAR State Convention go to the TEXAS Society SAR website for details on room, meals and other activities for March 31-April 2.



The ***Chesapeake-Leopard Affair*** was a naval engagement that occurred off the coast of Norfolk, Virginia, on 22 June 1807, between the British warship HMS *Leopard*

and the American frigate USS *Chesapeake*. The crew of *Leopard* pursued, attacked, and boarded the American frigate, looking for deserters from the Royal Navy.<sup>[1]</sup> *Chesapeake* was caught unprepared and after a short battle involving broadsides received from *Leopard*, the commander of *Chesapeake*, James Barron, surrendered his vessel to the British. The *Chesapeake* had fired only one shot.

Four crew were removed from the American vessel and were tried for desertion, one of whom One of the deserters, a Londoner named, Jenkin Ratford who had joined the crew of USS *Chesapeake*. Ratford had made himself conspicuous to British officers by shouting at them on the streets of Norfolk Virginia was subsequently hanged. *Chesapeake* was allowed to return home, where James Barron was court martialled and suspended from command.

The *Chesapeake–Leopard Affair* created an uproar among Americans. There were strident calls for war with Great Britain, but these quickly subsided. President Thomas Jefferson initially attempted to use this widespread bellicosity to diplomatically threaten the British government into settling the matter. The United States Congress backed away from armed conflict when British envoys showed no contrition for the *Chesapeake* affair, delivering proclamations reaffirming impressment. Jefferson's political failure to coerce Great Britain led him toward economic warfare, the Embargo of 1807.<sup>[2]</sup>

**Background** In the spring of 1807, during the Napoleonic Wars, several British naval vessels were on duty on the North American Station, blockading two French third-rate warships in Chesapeake Bay.<sup>[3]</sup> A number of Royal Navy seamen had deserted from their ships and local American authorities gave them sanctuary. Other deserters were reported to be at the Gosport Navy Yard, then commanded by Stephen Decatur. Decatur received a letter

from the British consul ordering him to turn over three men alleged to have deserted from HMS *Melampus*. The consul claimed the men had enlisted in the U.S. Navy, which was recruiting a crew for *Chesapeake*, then at the Washington Navy Yard outfitting for a voyage to the Mediterranean.<sup>[1][5]</sup>

Vice-Admiral Sir George Berkeley dispatched his flagship, the fourth-rate warship HMS *Leopard*, with written orders authorizing him to board and search the United States warship to recover any deserters.<sup>[4]</sup>

*Chesapeake* was off the coast of Norfolk, Virginia, commanded by Commodore James Barron, when *Leopard*, under Captain Salusbury Pryce Humphreys, encountered and hailed her. Barron was not alarmed, and received Lieutenant John Meade on board, who presented Barron with the search warrant. After an inconclusive discussion, Meade returned to *Leopard*. Captain Humphreys, using a hailing trumpet, ordered the American ship to submit. When *Chesapeake* did not, Humphreys fired a round across her bow. This was followed immediately by *Leopard* firing broadsides into the American ship.<sup>[7]</sup> Her guns unloaded and her decks cluttered with stores in preparation for a long cruise, *Chesapeake* managed to fire only a single gun in reply. The humiliated Barron struck his colors and surrendered. Three of *Chesapeake*'s crew had been killed and 18 wounded, including Barron, by the attack. However, Humphreys refused the surrender and sent a boarding party to *Chesapeake* to search for deserters.<sup>[8]</sup>



Barron surrenders the Chesapeake

Scores of British nationals had signed on as crewmen of *Chesapeake*,<sup>[7]</sup> but Humphreys seized only the four Royal Navy deserters: Daniel Martin, John Strachan and William Ware, all from HMS *Melampus*, and Jenkin Ratford, formerly on HMS *Halifax*. Only Ratford was British-born. The others were American citizens

The brig *Columbine* brought the first dispatches to Halifax in early July. *Leopard* followed with her prisoners for trial.<sup>[9]</sup> Jenkin Ratford, the sole British citizen, was sentenced to death and was hanged from the yardarm of *Halifax* on 31 August 1807.<sup>[10][11]</sup> The three Americans received sentences of 500 lashes each, but the sentences were later commuted.<sup>[11]</sup>

The bloody encounter caused a storm of protest from the United States government, and the British government eventually offered to return the three American citizens and to pay reparations for the damage to *Chesapeake*.<sup>[12]</sup> The schooner HMS *Bream* returned the last two British deserters to Boston, Massachusetts, one month after the outbreak of the War of 1812.

The incident outraged the American sense of honor.<sup>[13]</sup> Americans of every political stripe saw the need to uphold national honor, and to reject the treatment of the United States by Britain as a third class nonentity. Americans talked incessantly about the need for force in response.<sup>[14]</sup> President Thomas Jefferson noted: "Never

since the Battle of Lexington have I seen this country in such a state of exasperation as at present, and even that did not produce such unanimity."<sup>[15]</sup> James Monroe, then a foreign minister acting under instructions from U.S. Secretary of State James Madison, demanded British disavowal of the deed, the restoration of the four seamen, the recall of Admiral Berkeley, the exclusion of British warships from U.S. territorial waters, and the abolition of impressments from vessels under the United States flag.<sup>[16]</sup>

The event raised tensions between the two countries and, while possibly not a direct cause, was one of the events leading up to the War of 1812. In fact, many Americans demanded war because of the attack, but President Jefferson turned to diplomacy and economic pressure in the form of the ill-fated Embargo Act of 1807.

The Federal government began to be concerned about the lack of war material. Their concerns led to the establishment of a tariff protecting the manufacturers of gunpowder, which helped ensure the fortunes of the DuPont company.<sup>[17]</sup>

The humiliating incident had significant repercussions for the U.S. Navy. The public was shocked that *Chesapeake* had not been able to put up any resistance and surrendered so quickly, questioning the ability of the Navy to defend the country from a possible British invasion, despite the expensive and controversial frigate-building program. A court-martial blamed Barron and suspended him from service for five years as punishment.<sup>[18]</sup>

In 1820, Commodore Barron challenged and mortally wounded Commodore Stephen Decatur in a duel over remarks Decatur had made about Barron's conduct in 1807 (Barron was also wounded). Decatur had served on the court-martial that found Barron guilty of being unprepared and barred him from command for five years.

*Chesapeake* herself proved unlucky during the War of 1812, when on 1 June 1813,

after a long and surprising series of naval victories over the Royal Navy, the British frigate HMS *Shannon* captured *Chesapeake* in a ship-to-ship action near Boston. The Royal Navy commissioned *Chesapeake*, but put her up for sale at Plymouth in July 1819.<sup>[19]</sup> Her timbers are now part of the Chesapeake Mill in Wickham, England.

NOTE: Please send your personal mailing address, phone number or email address changes to Wayne Courreges so he can update your GSW 1812 Texas Society roster contact information:

[wcourreges@icloud.com](mailto:wcourreges@icloud.com)

### **Society of Texas Chapters**

**Rowley Chapter** in Dallas is very active in marking graves and participating in the ROTC awards,

**Luna Chapter** is also marking graves and giving ROTC Awards.

**Austin Chapter** is also active in ROTC presentations.

I have heard nothing from the Zachary Taylor Chapter or the David Crockett Chapter. If you are active or wish to get a chapter going let me know.

### **REMEMBER OUR WAR OF 1812 VETERANS**

If you have not yet paid your Texas Society War of 1812 annual dues, please do so today.

Mail your \$45.00 check to:

Wayne Courreges  
P. O. Box 9266  
Austin, TX 78766

When you are late paying your annual dues, our Texas Society loses our National membership allocation. **Annual dues are due the first week of January each year because the annual report is submitted the middle of January. Thank you for your membership and support!!!!**