

ECHOES

January 1997

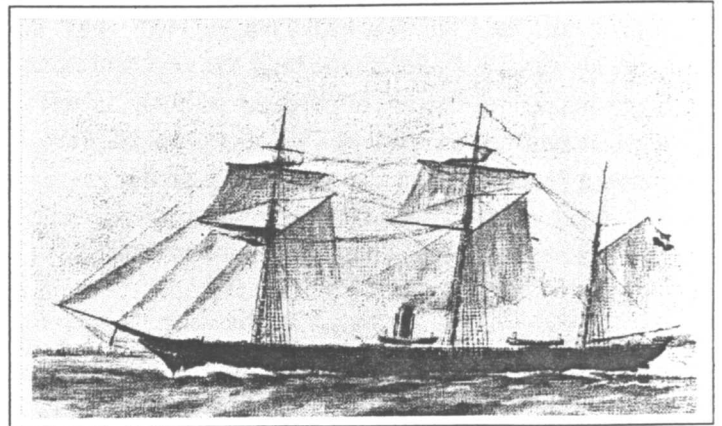
Pride In Victories At Sea

By Verne Cole

There are strong reminders of the nation's Civil War in the hills and mountains just to the west of Highway 395 through the Owens Valley in eastern California. During that war feelings ran high among the miners in the area, almost all of whom had left their homes in the East, Midwest and South within a few years before the war's outbreak.

The Civil War broke out just 12 years after James Marshall discovered gold in the American River. Many of those who had come to find easy pickings in the Mother Lode eventually drifted on to other mining ventures in California and Nevada. Others came West after hearing news of new silver or gold strikes. But they never forgot their homes and the friends and relatives they left behind.

As the war intensified, so did the partisanship. All across Southern and Central California there was strong support for the Confederacy, and the Secesh, as they were known, were feared by Unionists. After all, there were far



The Alabama -- under steam and sail

more Secesh in those areas and there was a threat that Southern California and the mining areas of Southeast California would secede and join the Confederate States.

General George Wright, commander of the U.S. Army's Department of the Pacific, in June 1862 ordered Lt. Col. George S. Evans to take 157 men of the California Volunteers from Fort Latham (near Santa Monica) to establish a post (Camp Independence) in the Owens Valley "for the protection of the settlers and miners." Ostensibly these troops were to protect from Indians -- and there were hostile Indians -- but they also dampened threats of violence between the opposing political camps.

Those favoring the Union gained the political power and kept California loyal, despite the thousands of Southern sympathizers. In all, 16,231 Californians enlisted in the Union armies, with most of them retained in the West on duty fighting Indians. No one knows how many left to join the armies in the Southern states.

In September 1862, the Secesh in Tulare County were blocking the shipment of supplies for the military, intimidating the Union people, and refusing to obey laws. Two-thirds of the troops at Camp Independence were moved to Visalia (Camp Babbitt) to keep the peace.

The stage is now set to explain just how the miners from Southern states, working in the oddly rounded hills

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January Luncheon Meeting

The January meeting of the San Joaquin Valley CWRT will be at noon Friday, Jan. 31 in the Downtown Club, 2120 Kern Street. Each member will be allocated five minutes to present a vignette, read an article or display and explain Civil War memorabilia.

Reservations may be made by sending a check for \$11 (\$5 for students under 25) made out to the Downtown Club. Mail to SJVCWRT, P.O. Box 5695, Fresno CA 93755. Seating will not be guaranteed unless a reservation is received by Jan. 28.

The program for the February 27 dinner meeting at the Remington will be presented by Phyllis Scott Johnson, Visual Arts Consultant, Clovis Unified School District. She will focus on the Civil War art of Winslow Homer and Julian Scott. She is the grand niece of Scott.

Pride in Victories at Sea

just west of Lone Pine, carefully followed the telegraphed reports of a string of Confederate victories -- at sea.

Rafael Semmes of Alabama, filled with foresight, resigned his commission as a U.S. naval commander two months before the Civil War broke out at Fort Sumter. He offered his services to Jefferson Davis and was sent north on a highly successful venture to purchase supplies for the South. He returned on April 4, 1861 and immediately received a commission as a commander. Semmes got permission to convert a packet steamer into a commerce raider and began a career that made him a hero to the Confederacy and a murdering pirate to Union sympathizers. Semmes named the ship the Sumter.

Immediately, the Sumter began capturing and sinking Union commercial vessels. The Navy scoured the Atlantic for it. In a little more than a year, the Sumter had sunk or captured 18 Union ships. Most of the crews and cargo were removed and usually the captured ships were burned.

In September 1862 the Sumter put into harbor at Gibraltar for coal and repairs and three Union ships, including the USS Kearsarge, moved in to block the harbor and to wait for the Sumter to make a break. Instead, Semmes and crew abandoned the ship and fled into Spain. The vessel was sold in December 1862.

Semmes was looking for a way back to the Confederate States when he got word he was being promoted to captain and was to go to England to take command of a new, speedy cruiser that had been built by the British for the Confederacy.

He named the ship the Alabama, and beginning in September 1862, with a mostly British crew, became an even more feared Confederate raider. He sailed wherever he could find Union ships and sank or captured 69 more Union vessels, ranging as far as the China Sea.

It hardly mattered what kind of Union ship -- the Alabama sank or captured all it could find -- whether sailing from the Orient with tea and spices; carrying goods from the factories of New England to France, Germany, China, India or Russia; or even whalers from New England, filling their holds with whale oil -- anything to hurt the Union's economy. The Alabama even sunk a Union gunboat, the Hatteras, in the Gulf of Mexico near Galveston..

Every time the telegraph reported another ship sunk by the Alabama, the miners of Lone Pine cheered and toasted the Alabama's success. They named those peculiar rounded hills where they worked, the Alabama Hills. They taunted the Union miners who worked in the Independence area a few miles to the north, but the presence of Federal troops at Fort Independence discouraged outright conflict between the groups of miners.

The commander of the USS Kearsarge was Captain John Ancrum Winslow, who, like Semmes had served in the U.S. Navy during the siege of Vera Cruz in the Mexican War. Winslow, with the encouragement of his superiors, spent much of the Civil War in dogged pursuit of Semmes across the trackless seas. He had caught him in Gibraltar, only to have him, but not his ship, escape.

Finding Semmes and the Alabama became an obsession for Winslow. Finally, on June 14, 1864, the Alabama put into port in Cherbourg, France, for repairs. The Kearsarge moved in to block the harbor. Semmes decided to fight and headed for the open sea and the Kearsarge.

The battle raged just off the Normandy Peninsula. Frenchmen, who had been alerted to the probable battle, crowded the shore to watch. The ships were equally matched, except that the Kearsarge hung out an armor shield

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The San Joaquin Valley Civil War Round Table officers for 1997 are:

President	Barbara Moats
Vice President	Rick Kubiak
Secretary	Carol Berry
Treasurer	Wayne Bowen



Other board members are: Verne Cole, newsletter editor; Robert M. Wash, Ken Moats, and the immediate past presidents, John Taylor and Bill Head.

Change of address? Call Verne Cole, 435-8410 or Wayne Bowen, 291-4885.

Pride in Victories at Sea

made of steel chains. Many of the Alabama's cannon balls were deflected. In little more than an hour, the Alabama was sinking. Its decks were littered with dead and wounded. Semmes and crew abandoned ship. Then Winslow watched in anger as a British yacht which had sailed from Cherbourg to watch the battle, rescued Semmes, several of his officers and about 40 men in all. They were taken to England and toasted as heroes.

Winslow picked up many more survivors. He became a hero in the United States and was promoted to rear admiral. Semmes returned to Alabama and also was promoted to rear admiral and given the command of the James River Squadron. A few months later, he was forced to burn his ships, and formed his sailors into an infantry unit. He was given a rank as brigadier general by Jefferson Davis, although that was never confirmed by the Senate.

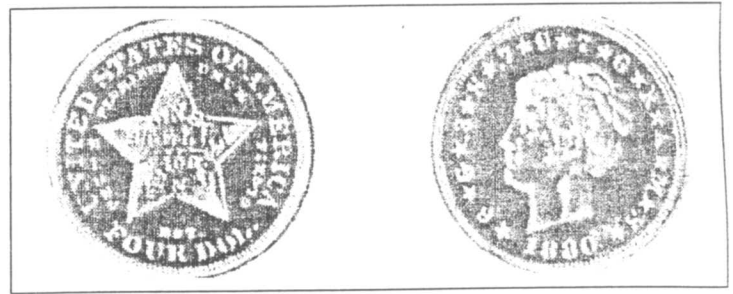
About eight miles west of Independence, on the eastern edge of the Sierra was a major mine with Union sympathizers. They jubilantly named their mine the Kearsarge Mine, the company town where the miners lived became Kearsarge City. The Kearsarge Trail ran close to Kearsarge Lake, from where Kearsarge Peak could be seen, and on through Kearsarge Pass. They showed those Confederate sympathizers in the Alabama Hills just how they felt.

Several of those names stuck. They are on the maps today as reminders of the intensity of feelings during the Civil War, even in a remote high desert and mountain area in Eastern California.

Sources: "Campfire and Battlefield, The Classic Illustrated History of the Civil War," by Rossiter Johnson. "Who Was Who in the Civil War," by Stewart Sifakis. "Battle Cry of Freedom, The Civil War Era," by James McPherson. "Battles and Leaders of the Civil War," Vol. IV, edited by Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel. "Gold Mining in California," by Gold Mines and Maps published of Alameda, Cal. "The Boys in The Sky-Blue Pants," by Dorothy Clara Cragen.

Southern California Conference

The 6th annual Southern California Civil War Conference will be held in San Juan Capistrano April 26 Admission is \$18, which includes lunch and coffee. For information or payment, contact the San Diego Civil War Round Table, P.O. Box 22369, San Diego, CA 92192.



\$4 Stellas: Stephens' Idea

By Rick Kubiak

Historians remember him mainly as vice president of the Confederate States of America. In his later years, however, Alexander H. Stephens was also responsible for the striking of hundreds of pattern \$4 gold Stellas.

Stephens got off with a light sentence after the Civil War. He was paroled Oct. 16, 1865, having spent fewer than six months imprisoned at Fort Warren in Boston Harbor. Northerners and Southerners alike cheered him as



Stephens.

he returned to his Georgia home. But he was barred from holding public office until the 1870s, when Congress passed a sweeping amnesty act.

By then Stephens was frail and sick, and had to rely on crutches and a wheelchair to get around. Nevertheless, he was elected to Congress and served another 10 years. One of his pet projects was the development of the new "international" coin. The April 1879 issue of the American Journal of Numismatics reported: "Honorable Alexander H. Stephens, member of the House of Representatives from Georgia, has, it is said, prepared a bill for the coinage of a new gold piece, worth 400 cents, of the metric system, for which he proposes the name of Stella (star)."

In late 1879, the Philadelphia Mint began striking pattern Stellas in gold, aluminum, copper and white metal. Two distinct obverses were used: Charles E. Barber's Flowing Hair design, and George T. Morgan's Coiled Hair version, inspired by a popular hairstyle of the day.

The reverse of both Stellas had a large, five-pointed star with a recessed inscription, ONE STELLA/400 CENTS. The Philadelphia Mint struck 425 Flowing Hair and 10 Coiled Hair Stellas dated 1879 and 15 Flowing Hair and 120 Coiled Hair \$4 patterns dated 1880.

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Stephens' Idea For \$4 Stellas

The March 1911 issue of *The Numismatic*, official publication of the American Numismatic Association, stated: "No United States pattern or regular gold piece seems to have acquired anything approaching the interest and popularity of the Stella, and the popularity is not diminished by the advance of time . . ."

It seems likely that a few of the Stella were once owned by the person responsible for their creation, Alexander Stephens. He died in 1883, a few months after he was sworn in as Governor of Georgia.

Edited and reprinted in part from an article entitled "Stellas Proposed By Reb Leader," by Thomas Lamarre from the July 16, 1996 issue of the *Canadian Coin News*.

Dues are Due

Dues for 1997 are payable to the treasurer, Wayne Bowen, SJVCWRT, P.O. Box 5695, Fresno, 93755. Checks should be made out to SJVCWRT.

The dues are \$25 for individuals, and \$40 for families, of which \$5 goes to battlefield preservation. Newsletter subscriptions are \$10. New membership cards will be mailed upon receipt of dues. Dues payments made in the latter part of 1996 are considered as 1997 dues.

San Joaquin Valley
Civil War Round Table
P.O. Box 5695
Fresno, CA 93755



President's Corner

It seems a long time since we've gotten together. so I hope you're as ready as I am to start the program year, greet friends, talk/study the Civil War, and hear the speakers our program chairman is lining up for us.

There are several ways in which you can take a more active role in the Round Table, both structured and non structured. Plan a program focussing on a topic that has significance for you; come out to the organizational meeting of our next Discussion Group scheduled at 7:15 p.m. Thursday, February 13 at the home of Ken and Barbara Moats, 4780 N. Delno in Fresno. Time, place and topic of discussion for the series of meetings will be decided at that time .

Or you can join other members for the very informal Coffee & Civil War get-togethers on the second Saturday of each month. This program barely got off the ground last year before the holidays caught up with us.

You also could contribute to the newsletter via opinions, articles, and items of interest. This would greatly please the editor. Happy New Year!

--Barbara Moats

