

The USS Yantic  
Survives Three Wars  
and an Arctic  
Expedition over a 60  
Year Career



The Yantic fights in the Civil War – Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships

**By Kathy Warnes**

<http://discoverfunhistory.webs.com>

© Copyright 2011 by Kathy Warnes. All Rights Reserved.

[kathywarnes@yahoo.com](mailto:kathywarnes@yahoo.com)

# Contents

Chapter One....The USS Yantic Begins Its Sixty Year Career  
in the Civil War.....Page 4

Chapter Two.....Edwin Woodward and Thousands of Savvy Sailors  
Sail the Yantic.....Page 8

Chapter Three.....The Yantic Challenges Greenland Ice and Yellow  
Fever in Haiti.....Page 12

Chapter Four.....The Yantic is Transformed into a Great Lakes  
Training Ship.....Page 16

Chapter Five.....The Yantic Ends Her Career in Detroit, but  
Her Memory Lingers.....Page 18

# Chapter One

## The USS Yantic Begins Its 60-Year Career in the U.S. Civil War

The life voyage of the *Yantic* covers over six decades of Great Lakes, American and Maritime history and features the lives of many sailors and soldiers.

The life story of the *Yantic* covers over six decades of Maritime and American history, three wars, several skirmishes, persistent rumors of her unseaworthiness, an expedition to Greenland. The *Yantic* played an important part in the lives of many sailors, soldiers, and ordinary people, including Robert Augustus Sweeney who won the Congressional Medal of Honor two times. The smallest of the Navy fleet of her time, she spent six decades proving that mighty men and events can effectively operate on small decks.

### The Yantic Survives “Over Age” and “Chicken Bone Reef”

Stories- both factual and fictional- swirled around the *Yantic*'s masts like the Great Lakes winds and the ocean storms that she battled, including the report that she had originally been designed to be the yacht of *Abraham Lincoln* and the slightly demeaning story of “Chickenbone Reef” in the Detroit River.

Tradition has it that after her thousands of Great Lakes training cruises, the *Yantic* sojourned so long and faithfully at her dock at the foot of Townsend Street in Detroit that decades of garbage dumping created a bar alongside her hull. Newspapers and mariners promptly dubbed the bar “[Chickenbone Reef.](#)”

Detroit newspapers reported that the Navy had considered the *Yantic* “overage” from about the turn of the Twentieth Century, but she continued her mission as a school ship and Great Lakes voyager for another three decades.

After surviving several efforts to remove her from her Detroit dock, the *Yantic* caught fire and the flames partially destroyed her. In 1930, the Navy decommissioned her, and finally she was dismantled in place. Between her launching in 1864 and her dismantling in 1930, the *Yantic* lived more nautical lives and adventures than many of her younger counterparts.

### The Yantic Hunts the CSS Tallahassee

A wooden hulled screw gunboat, the [USS Yantic](#) was built at the Philadelphia Navy Yard and christened after the Yantic River in Connecticut. She was made of African live oak, her green timber designed to repel water and shot and sheathed with copper. She was 179 feet, six inches with a thirty foot beam and wide spreading yard arms.

The *Yantic*'s steam engine generated 310 horse power and she could reach a speed of 8.3 knots. She cost \$206,262.93 and her original armament was two nine inch Dahlgrens and two each of 24 and 12 pounder guns. The keel of the *Yantic* was laid in 1862, and when she was launched on March 19, 1864, newspaper commented that she was the prettiest vessel ever launched in those waters.

The *Yantic* was commissioned on August 12, 1864, with Commodore Thomas C. Harris as her first commander. On August 13, 1864, the day after her commissioning, the *Yantic* along with the tugs *Aster* and *Moccasin* patrolled the Atlantic Coast north and east of Nantucket searching for the Confederate blockade runner *CSS Tallahassee*.

While the *Yantic* was being fitted for sea service the *CSS Tallahassee* had left Halifax, Nova Scotia, on August 20, 1864, and Federal warships immediately began to search for her. On that same day in Washington D.C., Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles sent identical telegrams to the commandants of the Navy Yards at New York and Philadelphia seeking vessels ready to go to sea and search for the *Tallahassee*.

On November 1, 1864, the *Yantic* visited Halifax, Nova Scotia, a port swarming with "secessionists and other sympathizers" to gather information about the activities of the *Tallahassee*, now renamed the *Olustee*. The *Olustee* eluded the American Navy ships, including the *Yantic*.

### **The Yantic Fights at Fort Fisher, North Carolina**

The *Yantic* joined the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron off Wilmington, N.C. On December 24, 1864, the Union attempted for the first time to capture Fort Fisher, North Carolina, and the *Yantic* suffered her first casualties in this battle.

During the naval bombardment of Fort Fisher, the *Yantic*'s 100 pounder rifle gun burst and mortally wounded the division officer, the gun captain, and four men. Taking matters entirely in his own hands, Commodore Harris ordered the *Yantic* hauled out of the line because he thought that she had been badly damaged.

Commodore Harris obtained medical assistance from the steamer *Fort Jackson* and reported all of the damage he could discover to the flagship *Malvern*. Commodore Harris returned the *Yantic* to battle, opening fire with his remaining guns, the 30 pounder rifle and 9 inch Dahlgren.

### **The Yantic Supports the Second Union Assault on Fort Fisher**

Christmas Day 1864 saw the *Yantic* assisting in the debarking of General Benjamin Butler's troops and covering the landing operations. Commodore Harris reported that the troops landed accompanied by cheers from the troops still aboard the transports and the men of war. Much to the amazement and disappointment of Commodore Harris, General Butler recalled the troops and the landing operation ceased.

The Union did not succeed in its first attempt to take Fort Fisher, and before it made another attempt, the military replaced General Butler with Major General Alfred H. Terry, who was considered more dynamic and aggressive than General Butler.

The *Yantic* provided a landing party and gunfire support for the second amphibious attack on Fort Fisher which began on January 13, 1865. The attack proved to be a bloody one

for the sailors and marines of the naval landing force who charged into withering Confederate gunfire and suffered heavy casualties in a frontal assault. The Union forces finally took Fort Fisher on January 15, 1865.

### **The Yantic Helps Capture Fort Anderson**

In her second major landing operation in just over a month, the *Yantic* participated in the capture of Fort Anderson, N.C. between February 17 and February 19, 1865. For the last two months of the Civil War, the *Yantic* performed blockade duties, part of the successful Union operation that prevented the Confederacy from trading successfully with overseas nations.

Great Lakes sailor John David Jones was one of the Great Lakes sailors who fought on the *Yantic*. One of the eight children of David Jones who helped found the Cleveland area's first rolling mill, John David Jones first went to sea as a cabin boy and later advanced to mate. In 1861, he enlisted in the Union Army as a private in Company B of the Seventh Ohio Volunteer Infantry.

He was discharged with a disability, and then he reenlisted in the Navy. He served on the *Yantic* and a cannon explosion during a battle partially deafened him. After the war, he sailed on the lakes and eventually he became a sailor evangelist and a Presbyterian minister. Chaplain Jones founded the Floating Bethel Mission which operated at 165 River Street on the Cuyahoga River in Cleveland, Ohio. It served as a religious haven for the men who made their living on Lake Erie and the other Great Lakes.

### References

- *Dictionary of American Fighting Ships*, Vol. A., 1991. Navy Department, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Naval History Division, Washington, D.C.
- Gragg, Rod. *Confederate Goliath: The Battle of Fort Fisher*. Louisiana University Press, 1994.
- Naval Historical Center Library, Washington Navy Yard.
- *Ohio History*. May 27, 1925, Volume 10, p. 157. Re: Chaplain J.D. Jones and the Floating Bethel. By C.W.. Brand for the Board of Trustees of the Floating Bethel. OMR/JDR, Box 12, Folder 87.

## Chapter Two

# Edwin Woodward and Thousands of Savvy Sailors Sailed the Yantic

Edwin T. Woodward, William, Sims, Robert Augustus Sweeney, and William S. Benson sailed on the Yantic through historic voyages including an Arctic expedition.

The Yantic began her career on a fighting note, and she enjoyed a contingent of brave officers and men. Edwin T. Woodward, a naval officer during and after the American Civil War, led the *Yantic* through some of its most important historic events.

Born in Castleton, Vermont, he received an appointment to the United States Naval Academy and entered there on November 21, 1859. The Civil War interrupted his academy career and he served on the sloop *USS Mississippi*, the garrison ship *Island* and the gunboat *USS Sciota* in the Gulf Blockading Squadrons, including two attacks on the Confederate batteries at Vicksburg in 1861 and 1862.

### The Yantic Attends Revolutionary and Civil War Ceremonies

[Captain Edwin T. Woodward](#) served in the Pacific Squadron in 1863 and in 1865 he was transferred to the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron. After a tour in the Philadelphia Navy Yard, Woodward was ordered to his first command, the *USS Yantic*. Under his command on April 25, 1881, the *Yantic's* crew took part in celebrations at the unveiling of Admiral David G. Farragut's statue in Washington D.C., before she sailed on to Mexican waters. In June at Progreso, Yucatan, she investigated the detention of the American bark *Acacia*.

After that, the *Yantic* returned north to the eastern seaport where in October 1881, she took part in ceremonies commemorating the centennial of the Battle of Groton Heights and in the festivities celebrating the centennial of the American victory at Yorktown, Virginia. By 1885, Captain Woodward had gone on to command the *Swatara* and he spent his last command at sea aboard the *USS Adams* from 1889 to 1891.

### Edwin T. Woodward Becomes Tenth Light House District Inspector

Edwin T. Woodward became the Light House Inspector in the Tenth Light House District which included 114 miles of the St. Lawrence River and Lake Ontario, Lake Erie, and the Niagara River in 1892. While he served as Light House Inspector, acting for the United States Government he presented a life saving medal second class to Miss Maebelle L. Mason at the Cadillac Hotel in Detroit during the National Convention of the Grand Army of the Republic.

Maebelle had rowed more than a mile in a small flat bottomed punt from the Mamajuda lighthouse on the Detroit River where her father Orlo J. Mason was the keeper, and rescued a man who had capsized in his row boat.

Woodward retired on July 3, 1893 and died February 22, 1894 in Saratoga Springs, New York.

### **William Sowden Sims Serves on the Yantic**

Another illustrious *Yantic* officer, [William Sowden Sims](#) served on her from 1882-1897. Later in his career he applied some of the important lessons he had learned while he patrolled her decks.

Born on October 15, 1858, in Port Hope, Ontario, Canada, William was one of the five children of Alfred William and Adelaide Sowden Sims. His father was a civil engineer involved in constructing harbors on Lake Ontario, and William and his brothers and sisters lived in Canada until 1872, when the family moved to Orbisonia, Pennsylvania.

William Sowden Sims was appointed to the U.S. Naval Academy from Pennsylvania in 1876, and after graduating in 1880, Sims served on the *USS Tennessee*. Later he served on the *USS Swatara* where he received a promotion to ensign, and between 1882 and 1897, on the *USS Yantic*. In 1887, the Navy Department granted him permission to live in Paris for a year to perfect his French and absorb French culture.

In 1897, he served as naval attache in Madrid, Spain. While he served in Spain, he collected intelligence about the Spanish preparation for war and studied the gunfire systems of foreign navies which he insisted were superior to those of the U.S. Navy.

### **William Sowden Sims Designs Navy Defense Systems**

In 1900, the Navy assigned Sims to the China Station in the *USS Kentucky*, the Navy's newest battleship and from 1900-1902 he observed and reported on the superiority of a new system of British naval gunnery that used the continuous aim method of firing. He felt that the U.S. Navy's gunfire systems had deficiencies that imperilled its effectiveness as a fighting force. He implored the Bureau Chiefs and the Secretary of the Navy to reform the system, but they ignored him, so he wrote directly to President Theodore Roosevelt about his concerns in November 1901.

In 1902, after the Atlantic Fleet scored poorly in target practice, President Roosevelt recalled Sims from China and appointed him Inspector of Target Practice. Sims held this position for six and one half years, while serving as a naval aide to the president during the last two years of this assignment. He successfully improved the effectiveness of naval gunfire using the continuous aim systems and eventually it was introduced throughout the fleet.

After implanting a system of convoy defense against U Boats in World War I, Sims spent the last fourteen years of his life in Boston, where he wrote, lectured, and testified before Congress regarding what he considered deficiencies in the Navy. In 1921, Sims won the Pulitzer Prize for *Victory at Sea*, a factual and reasoned account of World War I. He died on September 28, 1936, and was buried at Arlington National Cemetery.



### **African American Sailor Robert Augustus Sweeney Brings Honor to the Yantic**

An African American sailor, also brought honor to the *Yantic*. [Robert Augustus Sweeney](#) was born February 20, 1853, at Montserrat, West Indies. He entered the US Navy from New Jersey and he earned his first Medal of Honor during Peace Time for heroism on October 26, 1881 at Hampton Roads, Virginia. One of his shipmates fell overboard from the *USS Kearsarge* at Hampton Roads and disregarding the danger from the strong tide, Ordinary Seaman Sweeney helped save his fellow sailor from drowning. The government awarded him his first Medal of Honor for his bravery.

He earned his second Medal of Honor during peace time for heroism on December 20, 1883 at the Navy Yard in New York. When one of his shipmates fell overboard from the *USS Yantic* at the Navy Yard in New York, Ordinary Seaman Robert Sweeney and landsman J.W. Norris of the *USS Jamestown* risked their own lives to save their shipmate. Sweeney won his second Medal of Honor and Landsman Norris the Medal of Honor for their life saving actions.

### **William Shepherd Benson Serves on the Yantic**

Yet another William, [William Shepherd Benson](#), served aboard the *Yantic* and went on to a distinguished career as first Chief of Naval Operations, holding the post throughout World War I William Shepherd Benson, Admiral, United States Navy, was born in Macon, Georgia on September 25, 1855, and graduated from the United States Naval Academy in 1877.

William Benson first saw sea duty on the *USS Hartford* in the South Atlantic Squadron. He subsequently served aboard the old *Constitution*, and the *USS Yantic* during the Arctic Expedition of Army Lieutenant Adolphus Washington Greely, aboard the *USS Dolphin* and in 1888-1889 and the *USS Chicago* in 1898-1899.

He was advanced to Ensign in 1881, to Lieutenant in 1893, to Lieutenant Commander in 1900, to Commander in 1905 and to Captain in July 1909. During 1909-1910 he was Chief of Staff of the Pacific Fleet, at the same time commanding the *USS Albany*. From 1911-1913, he commanded the *Utah*, the largest warship then in the world.

Commander Benson retired with the rank of Rear Admiral in September 1919. From 1920 to 1928 he served as Chairman of the U.S. Shipping Board, from 1920 to 1921 he was trustee of the Emergency Fleet Corporation. He was advanced to Admiral on the Retired List, June 1930. He died in Washington, D.C. on May 20, 1932 and was buried in Section 3 of Arlington National Cemetery.

### **References**

- Brooklyn Eagle, August 29, 1872, "Fortress Monroe: Naval News-The Steamer *Yantic* Going to the East Indies."
- Callahan, Edward W., editor. *Officers of the Navy of the United States and of the Marine Corps from 1775 to 1900*. New York, L.R. Harmersly, 1901.
- *Official Records of the Union and Confederate navies of the War of the Rebellion*, Washington ,D.C. Government Printing Office, 1894-1922

- *Register of the papers of William S. Sims, Naval Historical Collection*, Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island, Manuscript Register Series No. 31

## Chapter Three

# The Yantic Challenges Greenland Ice and Yellow Fever in Haiti

The *Yantic* helped search for Lt. A.W. Geely's missing Arctic expedition and when she sailed to Haiti, she encountered Frederick Douglass and yellow fever.

The officers and crew of the *Yantic* bravely met the challenges they faced on the *Yantic*. In June 1883, the *Yantic* headed for the Greenland coast, under the command of Commodore Frank Wildes, as the tender for the steamer *Proteus*.

The *Proteus* carried the men of the second relief party sent out to search for the [Greely Expedition](#) led by Lt. A.W. Greely, USA. After touching at Disco, Upernavik and Littleton Island, the *Yantic* returned to New York on September 29, 1883. She carried some of the men of the relief party that Lt. Garlington led and also the officers and men of the *Proteus* which had been crushed in heavy ice on July 23, 1883. Neither the *Proteus* nor the *Yantic* found any trace of the Greely expedition.

### The Yantic Searches for the Greely Expedition

*The New York Times* of September 30, 1883 reported that the United States sloop of war *Yantic* beat up the bay yesterday morning and came to anchor off the Battery at noon. The *Yantic* was the reserve ship of the [Greely Relief Expedition](#), and picked up the members of the expedition in Melville Bay after the *Proteus*, the relief ship which bore them and their supplies, was crushed in the ice.

There were not many outward evidences of the *Yantic's* experience in the ice, but her bow plates were not as secure as they were when she started out. The crew was in good health and spirits, and only one man short. That one man was Henry Wilson, the gunner's mate who died of apoplexy between Upernavik and St. John, Newfoundland on the return voyage.

The relief party consisted of the commander, Lieut. E.A. Garlington, Seventh Cavalry, Lieut. J.C. Colwell, United States Navy; Dr. J.S., Harrison, Surgeon; Ser. John Kenney, Seventh Cavalry; Corp. Frank Elwell, Company E. Third Infantry; F. Moritz, Company A, 17th Infantry; Private John J. Murphy, Company F. 11th Infantry; Private Richard Rogge, Company H, Third Infantry; Private W.H. Lamar, Signal Corps, United States Army; Private F.W. Ellis, Signal Corps United States Army; and the Newfoundland dog Rover.

### The Proteus is Wrecked

Dr. Harrison described the wreck of the *Proteus*. The ice pack began moving about 8:30 Sunday afternoon July 23 off Cape Sabine. There was a pack on either side of the *Proteus* a mile long, half a mile wide, and six feet thick. The ice nipped the *Proteus* at 4:30 and

began crushing in her sides, which creaked and groaned and split as the work of the pack went on. The *Proteus* was not raised up by the ice as is generally the case, but was held on a level as though in a vice while the ice piled up as high as her decks around her.

The men saw that she was doomed and began throwing out stores. The tide changed and the floes began moving away. The ship's sides were broken in. She was as useless as a tub, and when the ice moved away she sank like a plummet. The water was deep and not a trace of her was left. The expedition had almost reached open water when the ship was caught, and immediately after she sank the ice cleared away, leaving open sailing.

### **Lt. Gibson, Executive Officer Discusses the Odds of Finding the Greely Expedition**

Lt. Gibson, the executive officer of the *Yantic*, said that as the vessel was going into Disco Bay an iceberg began to turn over at the narrow mouth of the bay. The *Yantic* put on all steam to get out of the way, but the iceberg grounded and did not go over. When asked about Lt. Greely's chances, Lt. Gibson said that in the first place Greely had no dogs. A distemper broke out among them and most of them died before he got to Lady Franklin Bay.

According to Lt. Gibson, to make the retreat south Greely must have sledges to carry supplies. There were three very small depots between Lady Franklin Bay and Littleton Island. Should the ice harden and Greely get to Littleton Island he would have a very poor chance of outliving the winter. Very little success attended expeditions in the fall. If he wintered at Lady Franklin Bay, where he had a comfortable house used his gun, his chances would be good.

Lt. Garlington was asked if it would not have been prudent to wait for clear water before going into the ice. His reply was that the leads were good and the conditions looked favorable to getting through. The indications were as favorable as he could have expected to find them, and the course followed was dictated by the best reasoning. In case of retreat this fall, Greely would find the sleighing difficult. It was common talk on the *Yantic* that Captain Pike of the *Proteus* was a poor navigator and that the crew began plundering the stores when the ship broke up.

Lt. Garlington said that when the ship was supposed to be off Cape Town she was 150 miles away in Melville Bay. Where the *Proteus* was caught was in the neighborhood where the *Neptune*, *Alert*, and *Discoverer* were caught. The relief party went to Washington and Lieutenant Garlington made his report.

### **The Yantic Goes to Haiti, 1889**

The United States government sent [Frederick Douglass](#), one of the most famous African-Americans in American history, to Haiti as Minister Resident and Consul General on January 26, 1889. The *Yantic* had beat him there by a few weeks. Douglass arrived in Port au Prince in time to witness the end of a civil war in Haiti.

General Florvil Hyppolite, an American protégé, had just won a battle with French supported General F.D. Legitime. The American Navy, including the *Yantic* had twice entered Haitian waters to intimidate Legitime partisans. Admiral Lee had arrived first and

reported to the Secretary of the Navy that he felt that negotiations with the Haitians should be backed up by cannon.

Later, Rear Admiral Bancroft Gherardi broke a naval blockade that partisans had set up to allow William Clyde, a New York arms merchant, to deliver ten shiploads of weapons to Hyppolite forces. In his first message to Secretary of State James G. Blaine, Douglass reported that "Haiti has now entered upon a condition of settled peace and prosperity under the guidance of a wise and stable administration."

Frederick Douglass clearly approved of the actions of the United States Navy and the *Yantic*.

### **The Yantic is Quarantined with Yellow Fever**

During her deployment to Haiti, the *Yantic*, entered Puerto Prince with yellow fever on board and Health officer Smith visited her and made a report of facts furnished him by Surgeon McCarthy of the *Yantic*. On Friday, December 28, Lt. Charles Richards Miles of Brooklyn was taken sick with yellow fever and remained in serious condition.

H.R. Keller, an equipment yeoman, 32 years of age, was taken sick, with the same fever on December 29 and was convalescing. Mark Lambert Bristol, a naval cadet, 20 years of age, caught the fever December 31 and was out of danger. Charles W. Rowe, a corporal of marines, was taken sick with the fever December 31 and he died on the morning of January 7th, 1889.

The *Yantic* arrived at Port au Prince at 11 p.m. on December 28, and lay to one and one half miles from the city and a quarter of a mile from the shore. She lay outside of the Galena and nobody went ashore in the steam laundry, but the captain, surgeon and Lt. Tyler. The men lay off shore while waiting for them to return. Bumboats went alongside with fruit, but no other communication with the shore was had. When the *Yantic* first arrived at Port au Prince, December 28, she lay less than a ship's length from the shore. The crew was not allowed to go on shore at all, and communicated only by the steam launch and bumboats.

The *Yantic* sailed from Port au Prince for New York, January 1st, 1889 and when the *Yantic* arrived back in New York, she laid up at the Brooklyn Navy Yard. According to the *Brooklyn Eagle* she was thoroughly fumigated and cleaned of the [yellow fever](#) which she took on board during her recent trip to Haiti.

#### References

- *Brooklyn Eagle*, August 18, 1885. The Yantic Quarantined
- *Brooklyn Eagle*. January 5, 1888. "The Yantic May as Well Be Destroyed Now."
- *Brooklyn Eagle*. January 11, 1889. A Yellow Flag: Keeping the Yantic at Quarantine."
- Sweeney, Fionnqhuala. *Frederick Douglass and the Atlantic World*. Liverpool University Press, 2007
- *New York Times*, September 30, 1883

- *New York Times*, January 12, 1889

## Chapter Four

# The Yantic is Transformed into a Great Lakes Training Ship

The Yantic fights a hurricane, travels to the Michigan Naval Brigade and becomes a training ship on the Great Lakes.

After its adventures Greenland and Haiti in 1891, the *Yantic* welcomed in the New Year at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, according to a *New York Times* story. At this point in time, she was a bark-rigged, wooden steamer, 900 tons displacement, and carried a crew of 135 men. Her armament consisted of two antiquated smooth bore Dahlgren guns, one nine inch muzzle loading rifle, and one Parrott rifle. She had been detached from Rear Admiral Gherardi's squadron the summer before to undergo extensive repairs and alternations to fit her for service as an apprentice training ship.

### The Yantic is Transformed

The crew of the *Yantic* at this point was made up of short time men, men having served most of their enlistment in cruising vessels and then sent to the *Yantic* or vessels like her. The *Yantic's* class of vessel never left home waters and the men could complete their enlistments on home soil.

The Navy Department issued orders to transfer every man from the *Yantic* who had less than two and a half years to serve, unless they signed an agreement to reenlist when their current enlistment expired or as an alternative they could waive their right of transportation when discharged in a foreign port. The Navy further directed that the vacancies caused would be filled from the squadron of evolution without delay.

### The Yantic Fights a Hurricane

The *New York Times* story said the *Yantic* would be going to the Bering Sea, but the reason the Navy selected her were somewhat unclear. The *Yantic* was one of the ships of Admiral Luce's squadron that forced the release of the American steamer *Haytian Republic* by Haytians in December 1889. In 1890 she obtained some notoriety and in appropriation for repairs by an encounter with a hurricane from which she emerged somewhat the worse for wear. The commander of the *Yantic* in January 1891 was Charles H. Rockwell and Lieut. J.D. Kelley was her executive officer.

### The Yantic Goes to the Michigan Naval Brigade Despite Canadian Protests

The [\*New York Times\*](#) reported on October 16, 1897 in a story datelined Boston that the old United States corvette *Yantic* had been fitted out at the Charleston Navy Yard for the

Michigan Naval Brigade and left for Detroit on October 5, 1897, where she would be used as a practice ship. The *Yantic* proceeded under easy steam to the St. Lawrence where she was turned over to the men of the Michigan Naval Brigade and they guided her through the canals to Detroit. Her batteries had been taken out, but otherwise she was as shipshape as she had been when she was in commission.

The Canadian press protested against the *Yantic* going up the St. Lawrence, arguing that her presence in the Great Lakes would violate the Webster-Ashburton Treaty with Great Britain relating to the maintenance of war vessels on those waters. By December, the *New York Times* reported that the *Yantic* had passed from the Welland Canal into Lake Erie and was expected to reach Detroit in a few days. She had made the trip through the canal more quickly than estimated.

### **Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt Cruises to Detroit**

On August 8, 1897, [Assistant Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt](#) submitted a Naval Militia Report to Secretary Long on the condition of the naval militia which he recently inspected. Secretary Roosevelt after visiting the War College and Torpedo Station at Newport, went to Mackinac and cruised to Detroit with the first and third division of the Michigan State Naval Brigade. He then went to Chicago and inspected the First Battalion of the Illinois naval force, meeting also the officers of the Second Battalion, which is situated along the Mississippi River.

After this he proceeded to Sandusky to inspect and review the Ohio Naval Militia and closed his trip by an inspection of both battalions of the New York Naval Militia at the end of their cruise at Gravesend Bay, Long Island.

In Michigan, Secretary Roosevelt was able to see only the First and Third Divisions and from their commander to the most recently enlisted landsman, he had nothing but praise for the workmanlike way in which their duties were performed. No battalion on the Coast he said, can make a better showing and he considered these divisions fit now to be put in charge of one of the smaller cruisers.

He concluded by saying, "I would like to call attention to the fact that in most of the organizations there is urgent need for more liberal appropriations by the state authorities. Unless the general government is aided by the state, it makes it very difficult to bring the organization up to the proper point of efficiency. The department has but \$50,000 to spend, and there are already fifteen organizations among which this has to be divided."

### **The Yantic Becomes A Training Ship for the Great Lakes**

The state of Michigan had organized its own naval militia in 1893 to teach its recruits the appropriate maneuvers. When the Spanish American War broke out in 1898, Michigan activated its reserves and the United States Navy began a program of providing decommissioned naval ships to train naval reserve units in several states. In 1898, the Navy brought the *USS Essex* to the Great Lakes for the Ohio Naval Militia in Toledo, the *USS Hawk* came to Cleveland and the *USS Dorothea* to Chicago. The Navy removed the *Yantic* from general navy service in 1898 and loaned her to the naval militia of the state of



Michigan to serve as training ship on the Great Lakes. The next year, 1899, she was re-engined at the Detroit Shipbuilding Company.

#### References

- *Brooklyn Eagle*, March 20, 1889. "The Yantic Thoroughly Fumigated."
- *Brooklyn Eagle*, May 25, 1889. "In Peril at Sea: The Yantic Within an Ace of Foundering."
- Mansfield, J.B., ed. *History of the Great Lakes*, Volume II. Chicago: J.H. Beers & Co., 1891
- *New York Times*, January 4, 1891. "The Yantic's Destination: Believed that she will be Sent to Behring Sea."
- *New York Times*, October 16, 1897. "The Yantic Sails For Detroit: To Be Used There by the Michigan Naval Brigade-A Canadian Protest
- *New York Times*, December 7, 1897.
- *Marine Record*, Cleveland, Ohio, May 20, 1897

## Chapter Five

# The Yantic Ends Her Career in Detroit, but Her Memory Lingers

The *Yantic* was a fixture on the Great lakes for years and eventually she was moored in Detroit, Michigan. She sank at her doc in 1930, after over 60 years of service.

The United States Navy assigned the *Yantic* as a training ship on the Great Lakes and she served as a training base for sailors for many years. Then her career took another turn.

Shortly after 10 o'clock on the morning of May 31, 1903, a crowd of people boarded the *Yantic*. The crowd consisted of the ladies of the G.A.R. , naval veteran members of the G.A.R., Port of Detroit command No. 8, Naval Veterans in command of Captain Henry S. Deane, members of Gilbert Wilkes command, Spanish War veterans and naval reserves.

They boarded the *Yantic* at the public lighting dock near the foot of Bates Street in Detroit. Behind them marched 150 children from the Amos School in charge of Principal Mandeville, assisted by Miss Lavina Bettys, Miss Mabel Maitland, Miss Anna Sutherland and Miss Carrie Trix, teachers in the school.

### The Yantic Carries School Children for a Detroit River Cruise

Towed by a tug, the *Yantic* swung out into the River and headed down stream. The weather seemed to adjust itself to the Memorial Day mood when a stiff breeze tempered the warm rays of the sun and stirred the river waters into white caps glinting and glistening in the sunlight. The sunlight danced off the happy faces of the children and the breeze carried the sounds their laughter across the water. Once on the water, all hands were piped on deck and the Memorial Day exercises began.

The Letter Carrier band played "Nearer My God to Thee," and gray haired Civil War veterans, veterans of the Spanish American war and the naval reserves, many with uncovered heads, stood reverently. Many of the living veterans wiped tears from their eyes as they saluted their comrades. National Chaplain Alex S. McWilliams offered a prayer and then Commanding Officer Henry S. Deane delivered a short address, commemorating the occasion.

"At no other time in the world do we do such honor to ourselves as when we honor our dead heroes," said Detroit Mayor Maybury, in a brief address to the crowd. "To honor the living is a graceful act, but it is likewise the most natural thing to do. It is an unselfish thing to honor the dead, because there is nothing to expect in return for such devotion. Our nation has reason to be proud in many ways, but in none perhaps much more than in the deeds of her army and navy..."

When Mayor Maybury finished his speech, the gathering, accompanied by the band, united in singing "America," after which the school children recited "Heroes of the Sea." Then came the impressive feature of the occasion, the dropping of flowers over the side of the vessel by the children, the benediction and taps bringing to a close the exercises. The cruise of the *Yantic* was short, the old man-o-war dropping down the river opposite Sixth Street, and again making its way back to the foot of Bates Street, where the party debarked.

### **The Naval Reserves Use the *Yantic* as a Clubhouse**

The *Detroit Free Press* chronicled the movements of the [\*Yantic\*](#) in the summer of 1903. In August, 1903, the *Free Press* reported that the *Yantic*, moored at the foot of Second Street in Detroit, obstructed all of the passenger boats that passed up and down the river.

The Detroit harbormaster Major Bixby who was also a government engineer, had the responsibility of deciding what to do with the naval reserve ship. He passed on the problem by saying it was out of his jurisdiction. The *Yantic* was moored at the foot of Second Street and used as a club house by the Naval reserves.

The *Toledo Blade* recorded some of the *Yantic's* problems by noting on July 5, 1905 that one her way home from Monroe Piers on July 4, she went ashore in the Detroit River near Fighting Island.

### **The *Yantic* Sails to a Home Port in Hancock, Michigan- 1907-1917**

From 1898-1907 the *Yantic* served as a training ship for the local battalion in Detroit and then in 1907 the Detroit Brigade began to use the *Juan de Austria* for its training ship. The *Yantic* went north to Hancock to serve the second battalion, Michigan Naval Militia and was stationed there until 1917 and the beginning of World War I.

The Navy docked the *Yantic* at the former Lake Superior Smelting Works directly across from downtown Houghton and used the *Yantic* for regular drills of reserve units in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Naval militiamen were drilled in boat handling, weaponry, beach assaults, navigation skills, signaling and other marine specialties. Every summer the *Yantic* and her crew participated in a two week cruise with other naval reserve ships from the Great Lakes region. The *Yantic* was one of the ships gathered at South Manitou Island in Lake Michigan for maneuvers and gunnery practice.

The *Yantic* received a necessary reconditioning during her berth at Hancock. Workers removed one of her three masts and changed her rigging as well as refitting her with new freshwater engines that increased her cruising speed to 12 mph. The Navy also added several smaller boats to her training equipment, including a steam cutter, a sailing launch, two whale boats and a dinghy. This variety of small ships attached to the *Yantic* made a wide range of multiship training maneuvers possible. One of the *Yantic's* removed yard arms was put on display at the Hancock Naval Reserve Center in Hancock.

## **The Yantic is a Training Ship for World War I Sailors**

When America entered the First World War in 1917, the Navy brought the [Yantic](#) back into official service, still as a training vessel. She was recommissioned and assigned to service with the Great Lakes Naval Training Station near Chicago. After the Armistice the Navy struck the *Yantic* from its list on July 24, 1919 and ordered her sold. By December of 1919, the Navy withdrew the *Yantic* from its sale list and again assigned her to duty as a training ship. On this deployment she served as a training ship from the Naval Reserve Force of the 9th, 10th, and 11th Naval District.

## **The Yantic Returns to Michigan-1921-1930**

The *Yantic* was again commissioned on May 15, 1921 and operated out of Cleveland until June 30, 1926. Then she was decommissioned and loaned to the state of Michigan to be used as a training vessel. She spent her last years at dock in Detroit and her boilers heated the Brodhead Armory near Belle Isle. On October 22, 1929, the *Yantic* sank alongside her moorings at the foot of Townsend Avenue, prompting more romantic mariners to remark that the “old lady had gone to her well earned rest.”

A board of inquiry into her sinking revealed that she had structural weakening caused by natural deterioration of her wooden hull. Her anchor and silver alloy bell were displayed at the Brodhead Armory for many years in the center of its lawn at the intersection of East Jefferson and Baldwin Avenues. Alongside the flagpole erected in 1943 is a large, white navy stock anchor which came from the *Yantic*. Her hull is buried in a filled in boat slip in Gabriel Richard Park on the Detroit Riverfront near the Belle Isle Bridge.

The Navy struck the *Yantic* from its list on May 9, 1930, but her story and heart live on.

### References

- *Detroit Free Press*, “Cast Flowers on the Waters,” May 31, 1903\ *Detroit Free Press*, August 4, 1903. “The Yantic”
- *Toledo Blade*, July 5, 1905. “The Yantic”
- Mansfield, J.B., ed. *History of the Great Lakes*, Volume II. Chicago: J. H. Beers & Co., 1891
- Michigan Technological University Archives and Copper Country Historical Collections, Houghton, Michigan

