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**Associate and Manager**

**How we got the British Signals.**

**A REMINISCENCE OF THE WAR OF 1812**

In the Summer of 1811, I was passenger in a ship lying at Long Hope in the Orkney Islands, waiting for a convoy to Scotland daily expected from Leith in Scotland, to protect us to the Baltic Sea. The detonation of a week swelled our fleet to about twenty vessels of various nations, among which were three or four Americans. Becoming impatient with delay, seeing no prospect of a speedy deliverance, and fearing the French cruisers which then infested the German Ocean, we had no choice but to await the arrival of the expected brig, or from a convoy of our own, sufficiently formidable to defend ourselves in case of attack.

We determined on the latter; and a Yankee commander of a brig, which rejoiced in the security of ten wooden guns, and myself, undertook the management. We selected his brig as a lookout vessel and a large American ship painted entirely black, our Commodore, who was required to carry by day a large red flag at the main, and a lantern at the peak during the night.

This difficulty being overcome, our next was to obtain signals to inform the fleet from time to time of the intentions of our Commodore. This caused some perplexity, but we, after some deliberation, contrived, with three pieces of different colored bunting, the ensign and pendant, to form seventy-five questions and answers, including a few points of the compass, in our course to Leith.

Walking one afternoon on the highlands overlooking the Portland Firth, I met a gentleman, a passenger in one of the vessels forming our fleet to whom I mentioned the arrangements we had entered into, and had exhibited a plan of the signals. He examined them attentively, was amused with the contrivance, and remarking that he had a taste for painting, asked me if I had ever seen the signals used by the British Navy! I answered in the negative, wishing him to explain what they were.

We sat down, and with my pencil on the back of a letter, I marked down with lines and dots, used by heraldry painters, each signal as he described them, including the compass signals. I never knew the name of the gentleman, but presume he was a British naval officer on furlough.

I thought no more of these signals, but

on going aboard our ship, threw them into my trunk among various loose papers.

Our fleet sailed, making a truly formidable appearance with our black commodore and his bloody flag, the lookout brig ranging ahead and sometimes far astern, and our vessels of various nations, firing their canon almost every hour in the day, and running up and down signals by way of amusement. In this manner we passed along the coast of Scotland within sight of the land, and sometimes sufficiently near to discover the towns, observing what we then considered remarkable, that no vessels were to be seen, save at a great distance, and those standing to the shore.

Thus we continued quietly on our course, until the afternoon of the third or fourth day, when our attention was drawn to a vessel bearing down upon us. At the time her top-gallant sails were only visible, but soon the topsails appeared above the horizon, when our commodore ran up the signal "a large merchantman ahead!" Having charge of our signals, and observing that the stranger's yards were very square and her canvas dark, I answered, "A man of war." Immediate preparations were now made for action, by our fleet coming together, hauling up courses, and taking in top-gallant sails; but not a flag was displayed save the bloody one of our commodore. In a short time the hull hove up, and we then discovered the vessel to be a large gun-brig displaying the British flag; and if any doubt existed as to her character, they were soon dispelled by a heavy shot thrown directly across our bows, when we knew to, as did all the fleet, and displayed our national colors. In a few moments a boat was alongside and the officer mounting the side ladder, exclaimed, "In the name of heaven, who are you?"

We informed him of what the reader already knows, and entering our cabin explained the plan of our operations. Being one of those jolly fellows with which the British navy then abounded, he laughed heartily at the idea, helped us to finish a bottle of wine and stated that the fishermen from all parts of the coast north of where we were then lying, had run into Aberdeen, and expected an Algerian fleet near the coast. They were certain of the fleet, from the circumstance of a large black ship carrying a red, bloody flag. This rumor was transmitted to Leith, and his vessel was despatched to ascertain the cause of the alarm.

In bidding us good afternoon, he observed that he would pay a visit to our commander and merely request him to haul down his red flag, adding that we were sufficiently formidable without it, to frighten all the Frenchmen we might meet, before our arrival at Leith. Such proved to be the fact. We continued our course, falling in with no vessel until we reached Leith, when we were announced as a large fleet of merchantmen under convoy of a United States gun-brig.

The reader will naturally inquire, what has all this to do with the last war with the U.S.A.? To which answer, that it was not given by way of introduction, but when we were in possession of her signals, and the use I subsequently made of them.

"Sir, do you know what vessel you are on board of?"

"Why yes, sir," he replied, "on board his Majesty's ship Sea Horse."

"Then sir, you labor under a great mistake. You are on board the United States frigate President, and I am Commodore Rodgers at your service."

"The dying dolphin never assumed a greater variety of colors than did this poor fellow's face," Sir," said he, "you are disposed to be humorous and must be joking!" I assured him it was no joke, and to satisfy him on that head, handed him my commission. At the same moment the dying dolphin never assumed a greater variety of colors than did this poor fellow's face," Sir," said he, "you are disposed to be humorous and must be joking!" I assured him it was no joke, and to satisfy him on that head, handed him my commission. At the same moment the

discovering some of the enemy's vessels within reach of his guns, and the thought no sooner entered my mind than I sought them from among my papers and put my plan into immediate execution. I drew a mariner's compass, in the centre of which was represented the frigate President lying at anchor in the harbor, and in the points, the thirty-two signals by which the convoying man-of-war designated to the fleet, the course to be steered during the night, to avoid a pursuing enemy; below I painted the ten numbers, represented by many flags, with two others forming the affirmative and negative.

I was not personally acquainted with Commodore Rodgers at the time, although intimate with most of his ward-room officers by one of whom I sent the picture with a letter addressed to him, showing how the signals were to be used, and observing, that he should obtain the number of one of the largest class of British frigates, and by hoisting it when an enemy was in sight, it would, without doubt, decoy her within his reach, but by all means to remove from the stern of his frigate the two gilded stars which then adorned it.

Meeting the officer entrusted with these despatches a few days afterward, he informed me that the Commodore, soon after he had taken them into his cabin, appeared on deck, apparently highly pleased, and ordered one of the warrant officers to have some blue bunting painted black, very much to the surprise of the officers, who could not conceive for what purpose he intended it; but I was satisfied that the signals were to be made, one of them being black and yellow, and the former color not being used in our service.

The president sailed, and I thought no more of the affair until some weeks after, when taking up a newspaper I therein saw it stated that he had captured the British government schooner Highflyer, by stratagem.

Soon after the peace in 1815, dining with Commodore Rodgers at his house in Washington, he related to me the following circumstances, which I give nearly in his own words:

"I acknowledged the receipt of your letter," he observed, "and was determined to have the signals made on board, and to try the experiment, none of my officers understood for what purpose they were intended. I cruised some time without meeting an enemy, until one afternoon we fell in with a schooner, some six or eight miles to windward of us. We hoisted the British ensign, which she answered by displaying another, and at the same time a signal at her maintop-gallant mast head, which

I immediately discovered was like one of those you had given me. From the list of British frigates I selected the signal number of the "Sea Horse," one of the largest class, known to be on our coast and hoisted it. She bore down at once, and coming under our stern, I ordered her to heave to and I would send a boat on board of her. This order was obeyed, and I despatched a Lieutenant to bring her signal-book, embracing on him and the boat's crew the strictest secrecy, respecting our character. He was politely received by the Captain, whose schooner proved to be the "Highflyer." Our Lieutenant's coat attracted attention—not being of the latest London fashion, although the crown and anchor was on the button; but the captain casting his eyes on the frigate, seeing the British ensign, and now and then the red coat of a marine appearing above the hammock noting his mind was apparently set at rest.

"This Lieutenant informed him that he was requested to bring his book of signals on board the "Sea Horse," in order to have some alterations made, as there was a rumor that the Yankees had possession of something like the signals, and it was therefore necessary to change the numbers. The red had the desired effect, and the Lieutenant returned with it, which placed me in command of the whole correspondence of the British navy. I then sent the gig for the captain, requesting him to come on board and bring any despatches he might have in charge."

"In reaching our deck he seemed surprised at the size of the vessel, praised her cleanliness and the order in which everything appeared; admired the red coats of the marines, and on being invited into the cabin, handed me a bundle of despatches for Admiral Warren, who he observed must be forty miles to leeward. I ordered refreshments, and in company with several of my officers, we entered into general conversation.

"I asked him what object Admiral Warren had, in cruising in that neighborhood? He said to intercept the American privateer and merchantman but particularly to catch Commodore Rodgers, who he understood had command of one of the largest and fastest sailing frigates in the United States navy! I inquired of him what kind of a man this Rodgers was, and he had never seen him! He said no, but he had understood that he was no odd character and difficult hard to catch. After conversing on several other subjects I abruptly put this question to him.

He turned on his visitors a look of almost savage industry. There was, indeed,

an exasperated look—

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