

"Stars and Garters of an Admiral"¹

American Commodores in the War of 1812

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Au cours de la Guerre de 1812, la marine américaine était encore dans son stage de développement, au point de vue de ses politiques et traditions. Un signe évident de cette évolution était l'utilisation générale du terme « commodore » qui n'était pas un rang officiel à l'époque. Le présent article est une enquête préliminaire qui nous explique comment les représentants officiels du Département du Service naval ainsi que les officiers de la marine utilisaient le terme « commodore » lors de leurs communications officielles et nous démontre aussi que pendant la guerre, seulement quatre officiers supérieurs reçurent de façon constante et fréquente ce rang honorifique. L'utilisation moins courante de ce terme est aussi analysée et avec preuves à l'appui, cet article illustre bien la discordance qui régnait au sein des officiers.

One of the current trends in naval history literature is the attention being given to accuracy. Many, if not most, writers are striving to cast out the old misconceptions and get the story straight. They have dealt recently with topics as broad as the British blockade of the American seaboard during the War of 1812 or as specific as sailing to windward.² This article falls somewhere in between.

Common knowledge has it that an officer of any grade in the US Navy who acted as commander of more than one vessel on any station was considered a "commodore" during the war of 1812.³ At the time, however, there was no official paid rank of commodore in the US Navy and would not be until 1862. Nevertheless, the term "commodore" was applied to,

¹ Hull to Porter, 20 September 1820, cited in Linda M. Maloney, *The Captain From Connecticut: The Life and Naval Times of Isaac Hull* (Boston, 1986), 302.

² Wade G. Dudley, *Splintering the Wooden Wall: The British Blockade of the United States, 1812-1815* (Annapolis, MD, 2003). Sam Willis, "The Capability of Sailing Warships Part 1: Windward Performance," *The Northern Mariner/Le Marin Du Nord*, 8 (2003), 29-29.

³ While commenting on each other's most recent manuscripts, Don Hickey and the author debated the issue of who was a commodore. Eric Johnson, in personal correspondence, agreed with Don's view that it was right to call any squadron or flotilla commander a commodore. This was also the position of William Dudley when the author spoke with him at a meeting in Toronto. The strength of their arguments prompted the author to do a survey of the use of the term in contemporary documents which resulted in this article.

or adopted by, numerous officers.

The use of "commodore" in the early US Navy has received very little academic investigation, although it is widely employed in recent literature as seen in such titles as *Jack Tars and Commodores: The American Navy 1783-1815* and *The Commodores: The Drama of a Navy Under Sail** Even in Christopher McKee's landmark study of the officer corps, the only delineation of the term is: "The rank of captain is so well understood as to need no explanation here. It was the highest rank in the navy of 1794-1815, for Congress repeatedly declined to authorize the rank of admiral and would continue to do so until the Civil War. Failing the creation of admirals, commanders of squadrons had to content themselves as best they could with the courtesy title of commodore, which, once attained, customarily continued to be applied to the holder even he had ceased to command a squadron at sea."⁵

This article seeks to open a discussion of the topic by revealing the actual official use of the term as discovered during an informal survey of the contemporary correspondence and circumstances.

In the Royal Navy of 1812, commodore was a "temporary rank given to a captain in command of a particular squadron."⁶ The Admiralty used it to advance a deserving officer who, for the duration of his appointment, had rank equal to a brigadier general in the British Army. The man remained "posted" on the captains' seniority list and if he lived long enough he could expect to rise to the ranks of the admirals.

From 1805 a first class commodore in the Royal Navy could be the commander-in-chief of a squadron or station, received the wage of a rear admiral, was allowed a flag captain and answered directly to the Admiralty. A second class commodore was given command of a division of warships by his commander-in-chief, was permitted to raise a pendant, but received no additional pay and lacked a flag captain. This second category is the one into which Captain Sir James Yeo fit in March 1813 when he received his orders to go to Canada which stated: "During the continuance of your command you are hereby authorized to hoist a distinguishing Pendant as Commodore on Board such one of His Majesty's Ships as you may select."⁷

In the spring of 1814 the Admiralty revised the Canadian detachment and Yeo became a first class commodore when he was made "Commander in Chief of all His Majesty's ships & Vessels on the Lakes, intending that you shall have a Captain under you."⁸

⁴ William M. Fowler Jr., *Jack Tars and Commodores: The American Navy, 1783-1815* (Boston, 1984). Leonard Cuttridge and J. D. Smith, *The Commodores: The Drama of a Navy Under Sail* (London, 1970).

⁵ Christopher McKee, *A Gentlemanly and Honorable Profession: The Creation of the U.S. Naval Officers Corps, 1794-1815* (Annapolis, MD, 1991), 29. This quote is the only specific explanation to the term given in McKee's book.

⁶ Brian Lavery, *Nelson's Navy, The Ships, Men and Organization, 1793-1815* (London, 1989), 98. The Royal Navy use of the term is also taken from a CD-Rom entitled "The Complete Navy List of the Napoleonic Wars, 1793-1815" (Brussels, 2003).

⁷ Admiralty Lords to Yeo, 19 March 1813, William Dudley, (ed.), *The Naval War of 1812: A Documentary History* (Washington, D.C., 1992), vol. 2, 436.

⁸ Croker to Yeo, 29 January 1814, William Crawford, (ed.), *The Naval War of 1812: A Documentary History* (Washington, D.C., 2002), vol. 3, 390.

In Canada Yeo appears to have been unique in this position. There is no evidence that he sent Robert Barclay to command the Lake Erie squadron and Daniel Pring to command on Lake Champlain as commodores in 1813, nor does it seem that his authority allowed him to make such an appointment. Even a year later, with higher standing, he does not appear to have made Pring, Peter Fisher or George Downie commodores, in turn, of the Lake Champlain squadron.⁹

The US Navy did not define the rank of commodore until passage of An Act to establish and equalize the Grade of Line Officers of the United States Navy (16 July 1862) which provided for up to nine admirals and eighteen commodores on active duty (there were also to be the same number of retired officers of these grades).¹⁰ An advisory board of three senior officers selected the men deserving of promotion to the rank of commodore which was evidently permanent, put the new man in command of a first rate ship and allowed him a specific salary, depending on the nature of his station.

In 1812 there was no official definition of who was a commodore in the US Navy. In fact, the whole matter of rank and promotions was extremely contentious. Officers frequently complained to the Department of the Navy about their own lack of promotion and the apparently unjustified promotion of others. Seniority made a difference in some instances but not in others, and some of the officers considered themselves "post captains" even though the service did not have a ladder to an admiral's rank as the Royal Navy did." This confusion was a symptom of a new navy slowly developing its own rules and conventions often based on the model of the large and long-standing Royal Navy. As McKee noted, "American naval officers owned, borrowed, read and internalized the professional British naval literature."¹¹

Without any hard and fast rules, the situation was ripe for personal interpretation, one of the outcomes being that the honorific "commodore" was often used. But where, and

⁹ Barclay has frequently been inaccurately depicted as a commodore, the most recent example being in Barry Gough, *Through Water, Ice and Fire: Schooner Nancy of the War of 1812* (Toronto, 2006), 82, and *passim*. The documents of the period show no evidence of him being referred to as a commodore by himself or his superiors; for a sample of such documents see Robert Malcomson, "The Barclay Correspondence: More from the Man Who Lost the Battle of Lake Erie." *The Journal of Erie Studies*, 20(1991), 18-35. For contemporary use on the lakes, see Yeo's correspondence in Library and Archives of Canada, Manuscript Group 12, Admiralty 1, vols. 2736-2738, and documents of the court martial held by the Admiralty to investigate the loss of the squadron at Plattsburgh on 11 September 1814, William C. H. Wood, (ed.), *Select British Documents of the Canadian War of 1812* (Toronto, The Champlain Society, 1920-28), vol 3, 400-98. They refer to "Commodore Yeo" (and to "Commodore Macdonough") but Downie is only ever identified as "captain." A more thorough examination of relevant documents is needed, however, to form a definitive answer as to Royal Navy practice, compared to US Navy practice.

¹⁰ *United States Statutes at Large*, 37th Congress, Session 2, Chapter 183.

¹¹ Among the many complaints over promotion are: Bainbridge to Jones, 14 March 1813, Record Group 45, Naval Records Collection of the Office of Naval Records and Library from the United States National Archives (USNA) at Washington, D.C., microfilmed series M125, Letters Received by the Secretary of the Navy from Captains, vol 27:42; Stewart to Jones, 1 April 1813, USNA, M125, 27:116. Arthur Sinclair called himself a post captain in Sinclair to Cocke, 25 August 1813, Sinclair Letters, Alderman Library, University of Virginia, as did John Shaw, in Shaw to Shields, 9 June 1813, USNA, M125, 31, after item 162.

¹² McKee, *A Gentlemanly and Honorable Profession*, 214.

by whom? The documents surveyed to answer these questions fell into two sets: official correspondence of the US Navy; and other relevant material.

The correspondence of the Department of the Navy during the tenures of Secretaries of the Navy Paul Hamilton, William Jones and Benjamin Crowinshield comprised two categories of letters sent out by the secretary and the separate groups of in-mail from captains, masters commandant and officers below that rank. They included thousands of items ranging from the simplest request for stationery to complex descriptions of naval engagements. Given the extent of the material, the surveys in this investigation covered only parts of the different categories.¹³ Of most interest were the addresses, salutations, signatures and the department notes made on the corners of most items sent by the secretary and those received by him, but most of the letters were also skimmed for the use of the term. One type of communication of particular interest was the "circular", which was a memo sent from the secretary's office to a list of officers showing their ranks and stations (see Table One).

Consistent through the many hundreds of pieces of correspondence inspected was the fact that no officer ever signed himself as commodore. There were some men who were consistently referred to or addressed as commodores, but none of them added that honorific to his signature in a letter. A look at muster rolls for the Lake Ontario squadron in 1813 shows that Isaac Chauncey wrote commodore after his name; other officers similarly added their ranks or appointments to their names on such documents as well.¹⁴

Between June 1812 and December 1814 there were thirty captains in the US Navy. Tables Two through Five show that seventeen of them were referred to as commodores at some point, but of these only four (Bainbridge, Chauncey, Decatur and Rodgers) were consistently and frequently given that honorific in the correspondence of the secretaries' office, their peers and subordinates.

Table Two shows that references to Nicholson, Tingey and Murray were also consistent although their names appeared in relatively few documents. Tingey commanded the navy yard at Washington and Murray commanded at Philadelphia, while Nicholson was apparently in retirement and died in 1813.

¹³ The microfilmed records surveyed were part of RG 45 in the USNA and included: M149, Letters Sent by the Secretary of the Navy to Officers, vol.11, covering 1 July 1813 - 31 December 1814; M209, Miscellaneous Letters Sent by the Secretary, vols. 10-12, covering 15 May 1809 to 21 October 1816; M125, vols. 25-7, covering September 1812 - 15 April 1813, vol. 31, covering 1 September - 15 October 1813, vol. 34, covering January and February 1814; M147, Letters Received by the Secretary from Masters Commandant, vols. 1-3, 1813 and vols. 1-3, 1814; M148, Letters received by the Secretary from officers below the rank of commandant and from warrant officers, vols. 23-28, covering 1 July 1813-31 December 1814. Material reviewed mentioned James Barron and Edward Preble a few times as commodores but they were omitted from the officers' list since they did not participate in the war.

¹⁴ RG 45, USNA, Microfilm Series T829, Rolls 13-17. This material was used in connection with another project during which it was noticed that Chauncey signed himself as commodore and so did the purser and other officers. Whether this was conventional practice is one of the aspects that might deserve further attention.

Table One
Officers, as named, in a circular issued by Secretary of the Navy William Jones
on 17 December 1813¹⁵

Captain Isaac Hull, Commanding Naval Officer Newburyport
 Commodore William Bainbridge, Commanding Naval Officer New Bedford
 Capt. O. H. Perry (or Comg, Naval Officer Newport R.I.)
 Commodore Stephen Decatur
 Capt. Samuel Evans
 Commodore Jacob Lewis
 Commodore Alexander Murray
 Capt. Samuel Angus
 Capt. Charles Ridgely
 Commodore Joshua Barney
 Capt. Charles Morris
 Capt. Joseph Tarbell
 Capt. Charles Gordon
 Lieut. T. N. Gautier, Commanding Naval Officer Georgetown, S. Carolina
 Capt. John H. Dent, Commanding Naval Officer Savannah, George
 Commodore Hugh G. Campbell, St. Marys
 Captain Daniel T. Patterson Commodore Isaac Chauncey
 Captain Jesse D. Elliott
 Captain Thomas Macdonough

Table Two
Officers *consistently* identified as commodores in official correspondence of the navy
secretaries and other officers during the War of 1812

Officer	Life	Age 1812	Ent'd Navy	Captain From
More Active				
John Rodgers	1773-1838	39	9 March 98	5 March 99
Stephen Decatur	1779-1820	33	30 April 98	16 Feb 04
William Bainbridge	1774-1833	38	3 Aug 98	20 May 00
Isaac Chauncey	1772-1840	40	11 June 99	22 April 06
	average age	37.5		
Less Active				
Samuel Nicholson	1743-1813	69	10 June 94	10 June 94
Thomas Tingey	1750-1829	62	9 Sept 98	23 Nov 04
Alexander Murray	1755-1821	57		1 July 98
	average age	62.6		

¹⁵ USNA M146, 11:171

Tables Three and Four show officers who were respectively called commodores occasionally or rarely by the secretaries, peers and subordinates. The few references to Sinclair and Macdonough as commodores (Table Five) appeared in the correspondence of their subordinates, but not in their peers' or the secretaries' letters.

Table Three
Officers *occasionally* identified as commodores in official correspondence of the navy secretaries and other officers during the War of 1812

Officer	Life	Age 1812	Ent'd Navy	Captain From
Joshua Barney	1759-1818	53	20 Aug 13	25 April 14
Hugh G. Campbell	1760-	52	27 July 99	16 Oct 00
Jacob Lewis	c. 1764-?	48	Nov 12	mast cmdt
John Shaw	1773-1823	39	3 Aug 98	27 Aug 07
	average age	48		

Table Four
Officers *rarely* identified as commodores in official correspondence of the navy secretaries and other officers during the War of 1812

Officer	Life	Age 1812	Ent'd Navy	Captain From
John Cassin	c. 1758-1822	54	13 Nov 99	3 July 12
John H. Dent	1782-1823	30	11 July 99	29 Dec 11
Isaac Hull	1773-1843	39	9 March 98	22 April 06
Oliver Perry	1785-1819	27	7 April 99	10 Sept 13
	average age			

Table Five
Officers *rarely* identified as commodores in official correspondence of other officers during the War of 1812

Officer	Life	Age 1812	Ent'd Navy	Captain From
Arthur Sinclair	7-1831		29 June 98	24 July 1832
Thorn. Macdonough	1783-1825	29	5 Feb 00	11 Sept 1814

An officer's age and experience (including merchant and naval service) can be seen as factors in his identification as commodore in some cases, most obviously Nicholson, Tingey and Murray. These factors also appear to have propelled Barney and Lewis into eligibility, since neither man had a long enough naval career to justify any senior rank. Although invited to enter the US Navy at its inception, Barney did not take a commission

as a master commandant until 20 August 1813 at age 54, rising to captain the following April. He was infrequently referred to by Secretary Jones as "Commo Barney" but more often in this way: "Joshua Barney Esqr. Commanding the US Flotilla St. Leonards' Creek." Similarly, Lewis was an old mariner turned privateer who accepted a master commandant's commission in November 1812 and commanded the gunboat flotilla at New York for the balance of the war.

John Cassin and Hugh Campbell were older officers who had been in the service since 1799, but neither man was universally known as a commodore. Clearly, age alone did not qualify a man for the appointment; the four most active men who *were* so identified by nearly everyone had an average age of 37.5 years.

Similarly, length of service in the navy did not make the difference since nearly all the men here entered the navy in 1798 and 1799. However, five of the six men in Tables Four and Five only attained a captaincy after 1811, which suggests that one had to be an experienced captain to be officially considered a commodore. Unless you were Isaac Hull, who was made captain the same day as Chauncey was; despite his age and experience, and even his unprecedented destruction of HMS *Guerriere* in August 1812, Hull was rarely identified as commodore. Or Jacob Lewis, who was a master commandant, and, the only officer of that rank described as a commodore in official correspondence; Lewis achieved no remarkable renown so being called "commodore" must have been an acknowledgment of his long career at sea.

In actual practice, seniority was not considered the key criteria in the Department of the Navy. An example of a pointed statement on that issue was made by Secretary Jones to Lieutenant James Renshaw in September 1813 when that officer complained about not having been promoted to master commandant. "The absolute rule of seniority has at no time prevailed," wrote Jones, "as may be seen by early promotions of Junior Officers, over those of long standing, and with this you must be perfectly acquainted." A lieutenant junior to Renshaw who had been promoted over his head, Jones explained, "was an officer of uncommon merit, second to no Lieut, in the Navy, had great advantages of enterprising service, having been actively employed long before the War, and ever since on one continued cruize." The "rule of seniority" was not followed in any naval service, added Jones, which was why "there are so many greyheaded Lieutenants, and youthful Captains, in the most celebrated Naval Service in the world [the Royal Navy]."¹⁶

Selection to a higher rank clearly involved a number of intangibles and required the secretary and his advisors to make decisions based, in part, on subjective factors. Secretary Crowinshield was shown to be collecting just this sort of information early in 1815 when there was much talk about the rank of admiral being formally added to the service. Master Commandant Robert Spence wrote to Rodgers, his mentor, about a conversation he'd had with Crowinshield at Baltimore. "He was anxious to learn from me," reported Spence, "who was considered the Candidate to head the list of Admirals . . . he said he had conversed with

¹⁶ Jones to Renshaw, 15 September 1813, USNA, M149, 11:87

Officers who advocated Murrays appointment."¹⁷

In the view of the Department of the Navy, their peers and subordinates, the four men who stood at the top of the active navy during the War of 1812 - Bainbridge, Chauncey, Decatur and Rodgers - must have been addressed as commodores because they had attained high status due to their seagoing experience, knowledge and skill as mariners, their career achievements, age and long-held captaincies. Apart from the three oldest officers in the navy, none of the others possessed these qualities to be so honoured so consistently by everyone, especially by those in authority.

In the official circles, Oliver Perry was not widely acknowledged as a commodore until he was advanced to captain after his great victory at Put-in-Bay, 10 September 1813. This statement, which may seem like heresy to some readers, is based on the fact that no document from the Secretary Jones's office used the honorific prior to that date. The correspondence was typically addressed to "O. H. Perry Esqr. Comg. U. S. Naval Forces, on Lake Erie", a form used for other men who held commands similar to his, whereas Chauncey and company always had a form of "commodore" in their addresses. Chauncey never referred to Perry as commodore and only a few of his subordinates did before the battle. Even after the battle of Put-in-Bay brought Perry great prominence, he was only infrequently identified as a commodore. Purser Samuel Hambleton, for instance, referred to him in 1814 as "captain" when writing to Secretary Jones for a decision in a dispute he was having with the department over his accounts from 1813. He had provided Perry with double the normal rations for a master commandant (following a 1799 law allowing such an increase to the commander of a squadron) and this expense had been denied, which is another indication of how Perry's rank was actually viewed at the Navy Department.¹⁸

But then Perry was only a master commandant before Put-in-Bay and, contrary to popular understanding, officers of that rank were not officially considered "commodores." They and officers beneath them who held independent commands generated plenty of official correspondence but none of the material examined shows references to them as commodores.

Master Commandant Daniel Patterson provides a less well known, but perfect case in point. In October 1813 he was "invested with the command of the Naval Forces of the U. States on the New Orleans Station", taking over from "Com. Shaw." Jones's instructions are addressed to "Daniel T. Patterson Esqr. Master Commandant, US Navy, New Orleans." It refers to "Commodore Shaw" but there is no mention of Patterson assuming the honorific of commodore, nor is permission given for him to fly a distinguishing pendant or to draw any extra rations or take special privileges.¹⁹

" Spence to Rodgers, 17 January 1815, Crawford, 3:327. Crowinshield discussed the notion of adding admirals to the list of naval officers in Crowinshield to Eppes, 28 February 1815, printed in *Niles Weekly Register*, 18 March 1815.

¹⁸ Hambleton to Jones, 5 May 1813, USNA, M148, 26:64. *United States Statutes at Large*, 25 February 1799, 5th Congress, Session 3, Chapter 10, "A Law fixing the pay of captains and commanders of ships and vessels of war of the United States."

¹⁹ Jones to Patterson, 18 October 1813, USNA, M149 11:122.

Windows into the unofficial use of the honorific "commodore" are found in the letters and diaries of various officers working in conjunction with the commanding naval officers or items written by friends and family. For example, William Henry Harrison refers to "Com. Perry" in one letter to Secretary of War John Armstrong and to "the Commodore and myself in another."²⁰ Similarly, naval Surgeon Usher Parsons records in his diary the daily activities of "the Commodore", but also refers to him as "Capt. Perry."²¹ Did these officers address Perry as "Commodore" in their conversations and did he allow or expect this title even though Jones, Chauncey and others never used it? A thorough examination of his personal papers might reveal the answer.

There is no denying that some officers adopted the honorific at the first opportunity and proudly announced it whether it was officially sanctioned or not. Arthur Sinclair provides a clear example of this. He was one of the officers who took offence at the slightest suggestion that his rank was not being respected. In August 1813, for instance, he reminded his friend Colonel John H. Cocke, with underlined script for emphasis, that, "I have been a Master Commander for more than a year and am now a Post Captain, the highest rank in our Navy and you are addressing me by the old fashioned title of Lieut Comdr. If you don't address me respectfully I won't call you Colnl that I won't."²² He complained to Secretary Jones that the position of flag captain in the US Ship *General Pike* under Chauncey was beneath his rank, and was rebuked by Jones who commented that "the pretensions of Officers are extravagant."²³

Sent to Erie, Pennsylvania in the spring of 1814 to take command of the Lake Erie squadron, run hard aground by the neglect of the erratic Jesse Elliott, Sinclair viewed his new place in the world from a loftier height. Writing to Cocke, he crowed, "Since I last wrote you, my Dear Jack, I have been called into service again and honored with a separate and important command giving me a Flag, with the Rank, pay and emoluments of a Commodore."²⁴ His wife echoed Sinclair's advancement in the world when she wrote to a friend, "it will be a gratification to all your household to hear . . . that your friend and my husband takes command on Erie; with the pay and rank of Commodore."²⁵

Another excerpt from the Sinclair family correspondence from this period reveals Arthur's view of himself, but also suggests that there was a smidgeon of doubt or impropriety about the matter, perhaps even some snickering behind the "commodore's"

²⁰ Harrison to Armstrong, 15 September and 9 October 1813, Dudley, 2:565 and 570.

²¹ Usher Parsons, *Surgeon of the Lakes: The Diary of Dr. Usher Parsons, 1812-1814*, edited by John C. Fredriksen (Erie, PA: Erie County Historical Society, 2000), 38, 41, 49, 56, etc.

²² Sinclair to Cocke, 25 August 1813, Sinclair Letters. Sinclair used "Master Commander" instead of the proper "master commandant."

²³ Jones to Sinclair, 16 September 1813, M149, 11:90. A portion of the Sinclair letters are published in the author's *Sailors of 1812: Memoirs and Letters of Naval Officers on Lake Ontario*. (Youngstown, N. Y.: Old Fort Niagara Association, 1997). The author points out that he mistakenly referred to Sinclair as a commodore in the introductory remarks of this title.

²⁴ Sinclair to Cocke, 16 May 1814, Sinclair Letters.

²⁵ Mrs. Sarah Sinclair to Ellen Mordecai, 1 May 1814, "Kennon Letters." *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 36 (1928), 365.

back. In a letter between family friends there is a reference to Mrs. Sinclair asking her husband about whether she should address him as captain or commodore. The letter quotes Arthur's reply: "They address me as Commodore from the Navy Department; I have seventeen sail under my command, carry a Flag, receive the pay, have two stars on my epaulettes, a marine guard at my door, and a private Secretary; and I think the Devils in it, if I am not as much a Commodore as any of them." Mrs. Sinclair's sister adds as an aside, "I write this to amuse you my dear girl; but do not let any person see it, but your own family; as the ill-natured would say he is boasting."²⁶

While it is true that Secretary Jones's instructions to Sinclair listed seventeen vessels (two of which were dismasted prizes while two others had been destroyed by the British the previous December), nowhere in this official document is there a mention of "commodore" or any exalted perquisites.²⁷ Indeed, when President James Madison wrote to Jones about strategy for the 1814 campaign, he refers to "Capt: Sinclair" and in Jones's reply, although there is a reference to "Commodore Barney", he agrees to "instruct Captain Sinclair to remain with the Squadron on Lake Erie."²⁸

That Arthur Sinclair fancied himself a commodore seems clear, but others did as well, prompting Isaac Hull to protest late in 1814 that "every midshipman that has command of a gunboat on a separate station [is] taking on himself the name of *Commodore*." Hull expanded the point with, "You now see, not infrequently, three commodores' broad pendants flying where there are not more than four ships together. Indeed, we now have so many commodores, that to be a captain is rather of the two the most honorable."²⁹

The whole matter of rank and seniority, promotion and station in the US Navy remained unresolved issues through the better part of the 1800s. There was a movement to legislate changes in the naval regulations in 1814 and 1815 that failed and the navy commissioners penned new regulations in 1818, but the confusion persisted.³⁰ An example of how the situation bred continuous problems was seen in a dispute over rank and who should be flying a senior broad pendant at Boston between Hull and John Shaw beginning in 1819.

As Linda Maloney explains in her authoritative biography of Hull, by this time convention had it that, if three commodores were present, the senior man flew a blue

²⁶ E. B. Kennon to R. Mordecai, 23 May 1814, "Kennon Letters." *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 37(1929), 51.

²⁷ See note 14 above regarding double rations. The highest rate of pay in the navy at that time was the \$ 100/month and 8 rations received by a "captain of a vessel of 32 guns or upwards", Jones to Glennie, 4 January 1814, USNA, M209, 12:64. The dismasted *Detroit* and *Queen Charlotte* were still at Put-in-Bay when Sinclair arrived at Erie and the *Little Belt* and *Chippewa*, though on his list, had been burned by the British during their raid on Buffalo on 30 December 1813.

²⁸ Jones to Sinclair, 7 April 1814, Crawford, 3:419. Jones to Sinclair, 15 April 1814, Crawford, 3:420. Madison to Jones, 4 May 1814, Crawford, 3:460. Jones to Madison, 6 May 1814, Crawford, 3:460.

²⁹ Hull to Daggett, 18 November 1814, cited in Maloney, 259.

³⁰ Rules, Regulations, and Instructions, for the Naval Service, 20 April 1818, U.S. Congress, *American State Papers: Naval Affairs* (Washington D. C., 1834), vol. 1, 560.

pendant, the next in line had a red one and the junior member had white.³¹ Shaw was junior in seniority to Hull but when he took command of the USS *Independence* at Boston in 1819 he hoisted a blue pendant while Hull who commanded the dockyard had never assumed such pretense.

In time Shaw's ostentatious manner rankled Hull to the point that he asked then-Secretary of the Navy Smith Thompson for a clarification. Thompson explained that neither Hull nor Shaw was entitled to hoist such a pendant since neither man was "appointed to the command of a Squadron of vessels on separate service" by the president or the navy secretary.³² Although this was communicated to Shaw he kept his pendant aloft and, as Hull later complained, strutted about "wearing all the *stars* and *garters* of an admiral."³³

Superficially, the affair ended in 1821 when John Rodgers, acting as a member of the board of navy commissioners, instructed Shaw, who had ignored the secretary's directive, that their 1818 regulations did not give him the right to hoist a broad pendant as commodore. Shaw replaced it with a captain's long pendant and, thereafter, Hull remained the senior officer at Boston, though he did not assume the honorific of commodore.

The survey of navy documents and other sources done in the preparation of this article was limited, so a definitive explanation of who deserves to be depicted as a commodore is not justified. Given that the Department of the Navy had no rule governing the honorific, such a definitive answer is not attainable anyway. However, there does appear to have been an official, conventional understanding of who could rightly be called commodore. War of 1812 writers can hardly go wrong when they assign the term to Bainbridge, Chauncey, Decatur and Rodgers. Beyond those men, some qualification of the term and its use would seem to be required if the accurate depiction of contemporary conditions is a priority. It would be correct to explain that unofficially an officer might be called commodore by his subordinates, friends and family, or he might insist on being addressed in this way. It will be up to the individual writer to ferret out a man's preferences and compare those to the conventions practised by the navy hierarchy of the day.

³¹ Maloney, 2n, 510.

³² Thompson to Hull, 17 May 1820, cited in Maloney, 295. While Perry's command on Lake Erie was not separate, being in Chauncey's jurisdiction, Sinclair's command there was; still, the department documents did not identify him as commodore. Thompson was, perhaps, showing his lack of knowledge of the use of the term during the War of 1812.

³³ Hull to Porter, 20 September 1820, cited Maloney, 302. Rodgers to Shaw, 16 May 1821, cited in Maloney, 310.