

**THE "LUCKY LITTLE
ENTERPRISE" AND HER
SUCCESSORS IN THE
UNITED STATES NAVY**

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The "Lucky little Enterprise" and her successors in the United States Navy by F. Stanhope Hill

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F. STANHOPE HILL

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THE
"LUCKY LITTLE ENTERPRISE."

AND
HER SUCCESSORS
IN THE
UNITED STATES NAVY.

1776-1900.

BY F. STANHOPE HILL,

AUTHOR OF "TWENTY YEARS AT SEA," "HISTORICAL CONTINUITY OF
THE ANGLICAN CHURCH," ETC., ETC.

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS:

1900.

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TO THE CADETS

OF THE

MASSACHUSETTS NAUTICAL TRAINING SCHOOL.

THE early predecessor in the navy of the United States of the vessel that is now used as the training ship of the Massachusetts Nautical Training School was the armed schooner *Enterprise*. From her remarkably successful career in the brief naval war with France, 1799-1800; in the brilliant naval operations against the Barbary Powers, 1801-1805; and in the war with England in 1812-1814, she became familiarly known in the service as "the Lucky Little *Enterprise*."

Among the young men who began their naval career in the little *Enterprise* nearly a century ago were Hull, Bainbridge, Decatur, Porter, Lawrence, Macdonough, Somers, Burrows, and others who either lived to write their names high up on the scroll of fame or, like Lawrence, Somers, and Burrows, gave up their lives in the service of their country.

If the cadets of the *Enterprise*, who under careful instruction are now learning the seaman's art, should find in this brief chronicle of heroic deeds an incentive to aim for the same high standard of honor, devotion to duty and sturdy patriotism that characterised the young sailors of whom I write, my labor will be more than repaid.

For the historical data in this paper I have drawn upon the Library and Naval War Records of the Navy Department, Emmons's United States Navy, Cooper's Naval History, Roosevelt's War of 1812, Captain A. S. Barker's Deep Sea Soundings, and various contemporary sources.

F. STANHOPE HILL,
Secretary Massachusetts Nautical Training School.

BOSTON, January 1, 1900.

THE STORY
OF THE
"LUCKY LITTLE ENTERPRISE."

"I have done the State some service."

IT is very doubtful if the naval history of any nation can show a more brilliant record, for a vessel of her size, than was gained during the first fifteen years of the present century by the little twelve-gun schooner *Enterprise*, afterward rigged as a brig, and the predecessor on the navy list of the United States of the present steam sloop-of-war *Enterprise*, now used as the school-ship of the Massachusetts Nautical Training School.

It is also noteworthy that during her long and eventful career, the *Enterprise* never met with a reverse, nor a serious mishap, never failed to capture any antagonist with whom she joined issue in battle, and when forced to escape from absolutely overpowering odds, as in 1813-14, she was always able to distance her pursuers—in one case, only after a chase of seventy hours.

During her very active service in the West Indies, in the war of 1798-99, between the United States and France, as well as later in the Mediterranean, where she took part in our conflict with the Beys of Tunis and Tripoli, the *Enterprise* invariably gave a good account of herself, as might have been expected when we note the men, afterward famous in our naval history, who as lieutenants commanded her.

Among these were sturdy Isaac Hull, ten years later the gallant commander of the *Constitution*, and Stephen Decatur,

whose heroic exploit in the destruction of the *Philadelphia* in the Bay of Tripoli was but the prelude to a long and brilliant career, that culminated in 1815 in the absolute humiliation of the Barbary Powers by the squadron under his command. Other captains of the little *Enterprise* were Charles Stewart, afterward when in command of the *Constitution*, the captor of the *Cyane* and *Levant*; and James Renshaw, who for nineteen months was a captive at Tripoli. David Porter of *Essex* fame, father of the late Admiral of our Navy, served as a junior lieutenant in the *Enterprise* in the operations against Tripoli, and among her officers at that time were midshipmen James Lawrence, "the Bayard of the Sea," who gave up his life on the deck of the ill-fated *Chesapeake*; Joseph Bainbridge and Thomas Macdonough, who gained the glorious victory over the British fleet on Lake Champlain.

It makes one fairly dizzy to recall the names of the young officers attached to that little schooner during the years 1800-1805, who were to become world heroes within a scant decade. The *Enterprise*, then as now, was really a school-ship, and the young officers on board of her were there acquiring the practical training and imbibing the professional spirit that made them self-reliant, patient, fearless and patriotic. And her graduates, as they passed on to a broader field of duty in their country's service, did not fail to profit by their early training.

The first vessel in the United States service bearing the name of *Enterprise* was a sloop, armed with twelve four-pounder guns, and carrying fifty men. Commanded by Captain Dickenson, she was one of a fleet of seventeen vessels on Lake Champlain in 1776, the whole under the command of Brigadier-General Benedict Arnold in the operations against Crown Point. They were officered and manned principally by soldiers and landsmen. This fleet fought a drawn battle with the British fleet off the Island of Valcour, October 11, 1776, which lasted five hours, in which some of the vessels were disabled and sunk. Two days later, in a running fight to the southward, one of the vessels was

captured, after great loss. Soon after, the remainder of the American fleet was run on shore in a small creek, about ten miles from Crown Point, and destroyed by their own officers to prevent their falling into the hands of the enemy, with the exception of the *Enterprise*, which, with the good fortune that seemed her birth-right, escaped both capture and destruction. But the resistance of the Americans had been so stubborn that it discouraged the British commander, General Sir Guy Carleton, who retired to Montreal for the winter. Arnold received great credit for his heroic conduct on Lake Champlain, and the fight off Valcour, which was the first naval battle in the history of the United States, was called "the naval Bunker Hill."

In the summer of the year 1798, the continued aggressions of French cruisers upon our mercantile marine had caused the somewhat tardy abrogation by Congress of all existing treaties with France, and American cruisers were ordered to capture any French vessels that might be found near the coast preying upon our commerce. The scope of this order was very shortly extended by authorizing the capture of such vessels wherever found, and Letters-of-Marque and Reprisal were issued to private armed ships.

Early in 1799 our government built and equipped at Baltimore, Md., two schooners of about one hundred and sixty-five tons, the *Enterprise* and the *Experiment*. They each cost \$16,240; their armament was twelve six-pounders, and their complement was about seventy men. These light, fast, handy little vessels, built on the fine modelled lines that had already made the Baltimore clippers famous for speed and seaworthiness, were especially intended to deal with the small fore-and-aft-rigged French privateers which fairly swarmed in the West Indies, readily avoiding capture by our heavy, square-rigged cruisers. The wisdom of this policy was speedily proved by the remarkable success of the new schooners against the enemy.

On April 1, 1800, the *Enterprise*, commanded by Lieutenant