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DAILY ENTERPRISE

(U) HISTORY TODAY - 26 February 2015

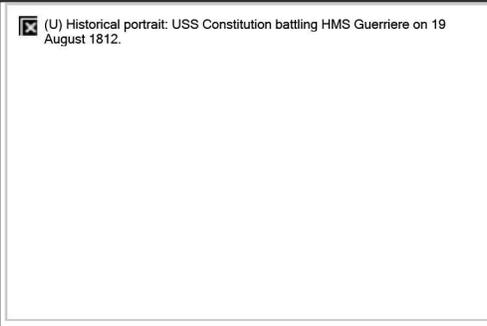
Run Date(s): 02/26/2015



(U) When talking about one-person operations in our business, most people probably think of William Friedman, and particularly his years in the 1920s, when he was a one-person SIGINT (or more often IA) operation.

(U) But a century before that, one-man operations were the norm, at least with certain military communications. When the British Navy was fighting Revolutionary and then Napoleonic France (not to mention Revolutionary America), a flagship had a flag lieutenant, who signaled other ships and read their signals in return. On other ships, a midshipman usually handled signals.

(U) Signaling, as the term "flag lieutenant" implies, was normally done by hoisting flags up halyards (ropes, you landlubbers!). Flagships typically had 15 halyards on each side of the ship to fly signal flags from. Each flag had a pre-arranged meaning.

 (U) Historical portrait: USS Constitution battling HMS Guerriere on 19 August 1812.

(U) To get into even more detail, "[The flagship's] halyards needed 973 fathoms [5,838 feet, more than a mile] of rope, and allowed many positions for hoisting signals, so that they could be seen from any desired angle. [Other ships of the line] needed to make fewer signals, and had 339 fathoms [2,034 feet, over a third of a mile] of halyards. To help spread the message, repeating frigates [ships too small to be in the battle line] were stationed on one side of a fleet in line of battle, to show the signals being made by the admiral."

(U) Historical portrait: the *USS Constitution* battling *HMS Guerriere* on 19 August 1812. ("Old Ironsides" won the famous naval fight of The War of 1812. More than a century after retiring from active service in 1881, the *USS Constitution* sailed under her own power for her 200th birthday in 1997, and again in August 2012, to commemorate the 200th anniversary of her victory over *Guerriere*. The *USS Constitution* is now berthed at Pier 1 of the former Charlestown Navy Yard, [Massachusetts], at one end of Boston's Freedom Trail.)

(U) By the way, the largest fighting ships in this period were called first rates; the next size down, second rate, and so on. (The smallest ships of the line were called third rates during this period; frigates, sloops, brigs, caravels, and other small ships didn't count.) So if you ever wondered where the adjectival expression "second-rate" came from, now you know.

(U) Click [here for a larger view of the image](#).

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(U) Have a question or comment on *History Today*? Email us at "DL cch" or 

Information Owner 
Page Publisher 
Last Modified: February 26, 2015
Last Reviewed: February 26, 2015

Approved for Release by NSA on 04-12-2019, FOIA Case # 84783

(b) (3) - P.L. 86-36

Doc ID: 6660644

~~DERIVED FROM: NSA/CSSM 1-52, DATED: 20180110, DECLASSIFY ON: 20430110~~
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10/26/2018