

Voyage of the Thousand Cares: Master's Mate Lawrence with the African Squadron, 1844-1846

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Review

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Gilliland, C. Herbert, Editor *Voyage of the Thousand Cares: Master's Mate Lawrence with the African Squadron, 1844-1846*. Naval Institute Press, \$27.95
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80 cannon on the African coast

A sailor's journal details disruption of slave trade

On January 1, 1808, the United States took the first step in ending its "peculiar institution" by banning the importation of slaves. Eleven years later, Congress passed a law allowing the president to use armed ships to interdict and seize United States flagged slavers. This was closely followed in 1820 by a Congressional decree labeling any American engaged in the transportation of slaves from Africa a pirate and therefore punishable by death. These laws, while effective within America's borders, did not end the slave trade. Instead, slave ships brought their human cargo to Brazil, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and other agrarian locales.

In an attempt to end the slave trade, Great Britain, Portugal, Austria, and Prussia signed the Quintuple Treaty of 1841, stipulating that their navies could seize slave ships from those four nations. The United States abstained from signing the Treaty as Briton's impressment of sailors and the War of 1812 were still fairly fresh wounds. However, in 1842, the United States and Great Britain signed the Webster-Ashburton Treaty. This agreement mandated that each nation position and support a naval force of no fewer than 80 guns off the African coast to interdict slavers. Unlike the Quintuple Treaty, Webster-Ashburton specified that American ships could only seize United States flagged slavers and vice versa.

From the Webster-Ashburton Treaty was born the United States Navy's African Squadron, which operated between 1843 and 1862. On October 11, 1844, *Yorktown*, Commander Charles Heyer Bell commanding, set sail for the

African coast with Master's Mate John C. Lawrence aboard. Lawrence, an educated man in his early to mid-20s who was also an experienced seaman, kept a journal while aboard *Yorktown*, and later the captured slave ship *Pons*. His writings were never meant for publication but they do provide a look into this little-known squadron. The journal begins with *Yorktown's* sailing and on most days Lawrence wrote just a few insignificant lines. Oddly, Lawrence pays almost no attention to the ship, its operation, or even his crewmates. Instead, his journal reads more like a tourist's log, recording where he had been and whom he had seen. During *Yorktown's* days and weeks at sea, Lawrence occasionally waxes semi-poetic and writes about superficial topics to temporarily avert boredom.

Lawrence writes a great deal more about his time ashore than he does while aboard *Yorktown*. Unlike the rest of the crew, who in fifteen months received shore leave only once, Lawrence enjoyed almost unfettered access to land whenever the ship hove into an anchorage. He used this time to see whatever sights Angola, the Ivory Coast, Gold Coast, and Cape Verde had to offer.

During his forays ashore, Lawrence met people of some importance. Most notably, he came into some contact with Captain Theophile Conneau, a successful slave ship operator who made a fortune, and the governor of Liberia, Joseph J. Roberts. However, like many 20-something men, Lawrence seemed unimpressed by what he saw and by the people he met. In fact, he tends to look down upon those of a different color, creed, or country.

On December 1, 1845, Lawrence devoted much more ink to his work. On that day *Yorktown* captured the slave ship *Pons* with 903 slaves aboard. The human degradation and horrid conditions of the ship weighed heavily on Lawrence. He was appointed second in command of the prize crew under Lieutenant Richard C. Cogdell, a well-know drunkard and sub-standard naval officer, and ordered to sail the ship to Cape Mesurado, Liberia, to offload the human cargo. The trip took two weeks and only 764 former slaves lived to reach land. To put the *Pons'* capture into context, editor C. Herbert Gilliland reports that between 1843 and 1862, the African Squadron seized 34 ship and freed 3,676 Africans bound for the Americas B almost one-quarter of whom came from *Pons*.

After taking two weeks to unload the people and then take on stores, *Pons* sailed for New York City for disposition. On the way, Lawrence succumbed to a fever and died on January 30, 1846. The journal ends with Lawrence's December

7, 1845 entry, the last several pages having been removed.

Alone, Lawrence's journal amounts to little more than the shallow observations of a somewhat impetuous and opinionated youth. Even his writings relating to *Pons* proved disappointing, thought this could have been because there are no words that can encompass so much misery. However, Gilliland's research and writing makes **Voyage of the Thousand Cares** a worthwhile read. He conducted extensive research to put Lawrence's observations and services into the proper historical context. Through his work, Gilliland brings Lawrence's journal to life and provides the reader with the requisite background knowledge need to understand of the Master Mate's experiences.

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