Monday Maritime Matters

Description

Back to the days of our â€œbeginnings.â€•



Thomas Truxtun

Thomas Truxtun had been a privateer in the Revolutionary war, and a captain of merchantmen. He knew the sea. When we began to build our Navy, not from converted commercial vessels, but from the keel up as warships, Thomas was one of the men chosen to supervise the construction of one of the six frigates.



His charge was the USS CONSTELLATION.What was significant about Captain Thomas Truxtun and USS CONSTELLATION? He was the first to engage in a fight with foreign naval vessels, in this case it was the French ship *Lâ€™insurgente*> on February 9th, 1799 in the West Indies. The Lâ€™insurgente was captured as a prize and Lt John Rodgers was assigned as the prize crew master. The ship eventually became a US Navy warship.

A little more history of the man Thomas Truxtun from â€œSix Frigatesâ€• by Ian Toll: When first sent to Baltimore to begin construction of the CONSTELLATION, Truxtun took charge and selected the area at David Stoddardâ€™s yard, away from Fellâ€™s Point, where the shipbuilding took place in the area. More secluded, but not so far as to prevent laborers from getting there. Truxtun disdained the southern

maritime industry, making a point of letting the War Office know the ship could be built for less in Philadelphia. When he found out David Stoddard, the assigned Ship Constructor didnâ€™t like the Joshua Humpheryâ€™s design, and intended to alter the plans, Thomas Truxtun confronted Stoddard and ended that idea.

Further of note in this effort to built the CONSTELLATION, as funding got tight, and the authorization of 1794 to build the six frigates was amended in 1796, CONSTELLATION was one of the three vessels which would continue to be worked on and put to sea, along with UNITED STATES and CONSTITUTION, which, most likely is a credit to Thomas Truxtunâ€™s efforts: â€œWork on the 36 gun Baltimore frigate progressed under the autocratic supervision of Captain Thomas Truxtunâ€• says Ian Toll of those days.

Not only did Captain Truxtun put his energy into building the ship, he also, through self study of available British books, charts and tables, taught himself the â€œdifficult art of â€˜lunarsâ€™ â€“ a process requiring precise celestial observations and arduous logarithmic calculations.â€• As resultant output was a book, â€œRemarks, Instructions and Examples of Latitude and Longitude,â€• which was sent to the War Office with a suggestion his peers read it.Maybe the much lamented modern day concepts of using a â€œbusiness modelâ€• to run the Navy had itâ€™s roots with Thomas Truxtun. He said to McHenry â€œIf we are to have a navy, we must make officers manage that navy.â€• His philosophy was that running the navy was not like running merchant ships. The life of a naval officer was continuous work, attention to detail devotion to excellence in every aspect of duty and deportment. Midshipmen, not ensign, was the first step towards learning the â€œtrade.â€•

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There is more history of the man who not only had our first combat action in blue water, but the one who certainly, by his practice, set the course for some of the very practices that we value as tradition in â€œSix Frigates.â€•

One of the more interesting sections in the tale of Captain Truxtunâ€™s service was the great controversy in determining the value of the prize ship, Lâ€™insurgente. It sounds like there were some efforts to appraised her, via some influence, at a greater value than she was worth, backed by Captain Truxtun and some of his officers. Why? Each of the crew members received a portion of the value of the vessel as a reward for the captured. In the end,, after many investigations, it was determined no disciplinary action was to be taken and a lesser value assigned to the prize.

But, to put a little interesting humanity to this story of Captain Truxtun, after the success over the French, he began politicking to move, in seniority, from the position of 6 of 6 to a higher â€œlineal number,â€• , certainly above those positions of Captainsâ€™ Dale and Talbot, whoâ€™s ships were halted in construction is 1796 and they were released from their commissions for a time. As a result of the unsuccessful maneuvering, Captain Truxtun resigned his commission in 1799 and later refused a commission for the Barbary Wars.

Ships named for Thomas Truxtun (from WikiPedia):

- The first Truxtun was a brig launched in 1842 and destroyed after running aground off Mexico in 1846.
- The second Truxtun (DD-14) was a destroyer in service from 1902 to 1919.
- The third Truxtun (DD-229) was a destroyer in service commissioned in 1921 and accidentally wrecked in 1942.

- The fourth Truxtun (APD-98) was laid down as a destroyer escort DE-282 in 1943, but completed as a high-speed transport in 1945, later transferred to Taiwan and renamed Fu Shan.
- The fifth Truxtun (CGN-35), originally DLGN-35, was a guided missile cruiser.
- The sixth Truxtun (DDG-103) is an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer that has recently been launched.

The TRUXTUN (DDG-103) is scheduled for commissioning sometime in 2008. She is being built in Pascagoula., MS, and the construction has been delayed by Hurricane Katrina.

USS TRUXTUN (DDG-35), a nuclear powered vessel, now decommissioned, had a long and eventful life in the Pacific Fleet, serving in Vietnam on many deployments, and was one of the first ships to head to try to provide support for the USS PUEBLO (AGER-2).

In 1986, as part of the USS ENTERPRISE Battle Group, she sailed the Suez Canal to assist in Operations in the Vicinity off Libya, chronicled from my view point in this series.

Later, she sailed on support of Operation EARNEST WILL, escorting tankers in the Strait of Hormuz, and was part of DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM in 1990/91.

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