

SILAS WRIGHT TERRY

Across the Atlantic with Columbus's caravels

Ricky Dale Calhoun

After his rescue of the *Trinity* survivors and the *Poonah* and her passengers, Silas Wright Terry returned home to a hero's welcome in December 1882. He was granted three months leave in the spring of 1883. According to a notice in the Hopkinsville *South Kentuckian* of April 3, 1883, he attended a family reunion in Cadiz.

Terry was then assigned duty at the League Island Navy Yard in Philadelphia. He remained there until October 1884, when he was made commodore of a squadron composed of three sailing ship-sloops (a ship-sloop was a smaller version of a frigate) built in the 1840s, the *Portsmouth*, *Jamestown*, and *Saratoga*. The old ships were based at Annapolis, Maryland, and operated as a training squadron in conjunction with the Naval Academy. In May 1885 the squadron, with 400 midshipmen aboard, departed on a cruise to Fayal (Faial) Island in the Azores, Cadiz and Algeciras in Spain, and Gibraltar. However, upon reaching Fayal, Terry learned that a cholera epidemic was raging in Spain. After conferring with the Navy Department by cable, he cancelled the Spanish visit and proceeded to Funchal in the Madeira Islands. While at Funchal, the squadron exercised with the French training frigate *Resolute* and the Danish navy's corvette *Fyen*. The squadron arrived at Newport, Rhode Island, barely in time to participate in the unveiling of that city's statue of War of 1812 naval hero Oliver Hazard Perry on Sept. 10.

The Jan. 1, 1886 *Register of the Commissioned and Warrant Officers of the Navy of the United States* indicates that Terry was on extended leave at his home in Cadiz, Kentucky. The *South Kentuckian* of August 3, 1886 reported that Silas Terry, his wife, and two children had been staying at the Cerulean Springs Hotel for the past several weeks. Terry subsequently returned to duty as commander of the training squadron. The squadron participated in a naval review in Philadelphia harbor commemorating the centennial of the U.S. Constitutional Convention in September 1787.

In January 1888, Terry was assigned to administrative duties in Washington. He returned to the Naval Academy at Annapolis as an instructor at the start of the 1889-90

academic year and remained there until the end of December 1892. During that time the Terry family bought a house in Annapolis. The March 31, 1891 edition of the Annapolis *Evening Capital* noted that 8-year old “Miss Eleanor Terry, daughter of Commander Silas W. Terry, United States Navy, gave a phantom party to her friends in Annapolis last night.” (A “phantom” was a children’s dance party.)

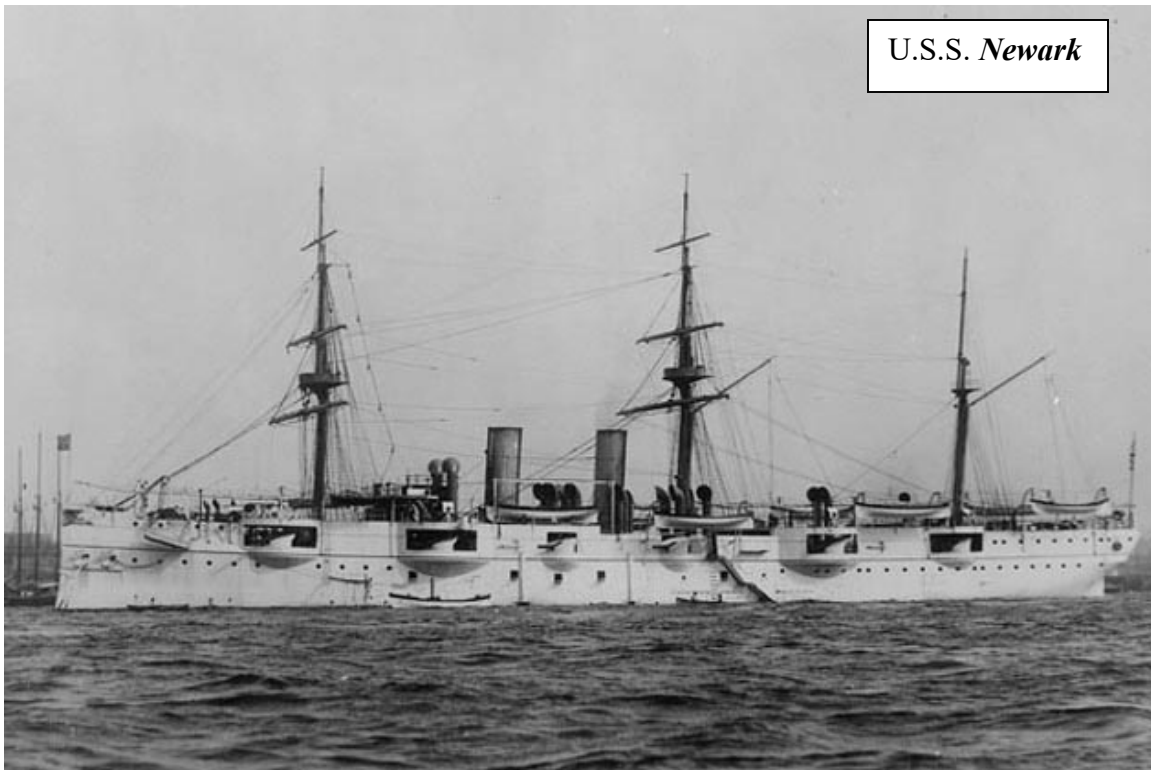
The Dec. 9, 1892 *Evening Capital* reveals that Silas Terry, along with other naval officers serving as members of a board tasked with investigating an accident involving a U.S. Navy ship in the Pacific, departed Annapolis aboard a train bound for San Francisco on Wednesday, Dec. 7, 1892. His mother, Eleanor Dyer Terry, died in Cadiz the next Friday, Dec. 9. Communications of the time were such that Silas could not be informed of her death until he arrived at Mare Island Navy Yard on San Francisco Bay the following week. He thus did not attend her funeral in Cadiz. It was almost certainly his unavoidable absence from her funeral that gave rise to the local myth that relations between Silas and his brothers were so embittered by the Civil War that they never met after the war.

Terry was promoted to captain on Jan. 9, 1893, and assumed command of the cruiser U.S.S. *Newark*. The *Newark* was a choice command. The ship, commissioned in 1890, marked the transition from the Civil War era “Old Navy” of wooden sailing ships and coastal ironclads to the “New Navy” of modern ocean going steel warships. *Newark* was the last American warship built with sails and the first with a modern armament of breech loading guns. Sails were retained as a precaution against mechanical breakdown and to extend the ship’s cruising range, but *Newark* relied primarily upon her engines. At 4,083 tons displacement, the *Newark* was 327 feet long and was armed with twelve 6-inch guns mounted in armored casemates, six on each broadside. The cruiser had two steam engines that gave a maximum speed of 18 knots (20.71 mph), which was fast for her day. The *Newark*’s fuel bunkers carried enough coal to give her a cruising range of 8,300 nautical miles.

Terry’s first cruise as captain of the *Newark* was a novel one. *Newark*, along with the gunboat *Bennington*, steamed across the Atlantic to Cadiz, Spain, where replicas of Christopher Columbus’s ships *Nina*, *Pinta*, and *Santa Maria* had been built as part of the 400th anniversary commemoration of Columbus’s voyage of discovery. *Newark* took the

Nina in tow, and, in company with *Bennington* towing the *Pinta*, the Spanish gunboat *Isla de Cuba* towing the *Santa Maria*, and escorted by the Spanish cruisers *Infanta Isabel* and *Reina Regente*, retraced Columbus's route via the Canary Islands across the Atlantic to St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, along the southern coast of Hispaniola, and through the Windward Passage to Havana, Cuba. At Havana, the Spanish gunboat *Nueva Espana* assumed the role of towboat for the *Nina*. *Newark* became flagship of the escort and led the task force to Hampton Roads.

An Associated Press report described the scene, "Fort Monroe, April 22.—After a



stormy time, especially around Cape Hatteras, the Spanish fleet towing the caravels of Columbus has entered Hampton Roads. The cruiser *Infanta Isabel*, with the *Pinta* 100 yards astern, was in the van. When the vessels were abreast of Fort Monroe the water battery paid them a most unusual complement and saluted before the Spaniard had fired in honor of the American flag. (According to naval etiquette, a foreign warship fired to salute the flag of the country whose harbor it was entering; the harbor fort then returned the salute.) Such distinction has never been paid any nation in the history of the world. But this compliment to the nation under whose banner the New World was discovered seemed to please the Russian and Dutch flagships so well that they followed the lead."

After a few days at Hampton Roads, during which time thousands toured the caravels, the ships proceeded to New York escorted by thirteen U.S. Navy warships and vessels “representing every nation of prominence on the earth. There are five English vessels, three French, two German, three Brazilian, one Argentine, three Russian, one Dutch, and three Spanish, besides the three caravels.” *Newark* led the flag-dressed multi-national flotilla into New York harbor past the U.S.S. *Dolphin* with President Grover Cleveland, cabinet members, and foreign dignitaries on board, on Thursday morning, April 27, 1893.

A full-page illustrated report of the event that appeared in the May 10, 1893 *Asheville Press and Banner* began, “The Columbian Naval Review in New York harbor was a grand success. Our greatest peaceful naval event, joined in by all the leading naval powers, is now part of history bigger than that of our country. It marks an epoch in the chronicles of the globe itself. The collection of warships was the biggest ever known. Ten nations were represented and more than 10,000 officers and men participated. So large a number of steamboats, pleasure craft and tugboats was never before congregated on the Hudson River, while hundreds of thousands beheld the magnificent spectacle from the shore.” The New London, Connecticut, newspaper *The Day* of April 28, 1893, published another lengthy account of the event. (Both are available online in PDF format from the Google Advanced Book Search’s newspapers feature.)

At the conclusion of the celebration in New York, three civilian tugboats took over the task of towing the Columbus caravels. *Newark* escorted them north along the New England coast to the Saint Lawrence. Mechanical problems in one of the tugboats forced the *Newark* to take the *Santa Maria* in tow while the group was steaming up the river to Quebec. The June 18, 1893 *Montreal Daily Witness* described their arrival at that city, “On their way up the caravels were met and welcomed some little distance down the river by steamers and yachts from the city having on board the press representatives, the Spanish and American consuls, the mayor, attorney general and other officials, and on their arrival came to anchor, the ‘Santa Maria’ at the Queen’s Wharf and the others in the stream opposite the city.”

On June 24, 1893 the *Quebec Saturday Budget* reported, “The Spanish caravels arrived at 6 p.m. last Thursday, and were received by a twenty-one gun salute from the

Citadel. In the evening their officers and those of the *Newark* were entertained at the Garrison Club House...” The caravels were then towed up the river to Montreal and Lake Ontario, through the Welland Canal, and through the Great Lakes to Chicago, where the ships were exhibited at the World’s Columbian Exposition. In its entirety, the voyage took 147 days.