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of the Yacht Deerhound  
in Rescuing Survivors of the Alabama**

**Extracts from the  
Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies  
in the War of the Rebellion,  
Series I, vol. 3, pp. 665-669**

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**Letter from John Lancaster, esq., owner of the yacht Deerhound, to the London Daily News, giving an account of the part taken by his vessel in the rescue of Captain Semmes and a portion of the crew of the C. S. Alabama.**

HINDLEY HALL.  
Wigan, June 27, 1864.

SIR: As two correspondents of your journal, in giving their versions of the fight between the Alabama and the Kearsarge, have designated my share in the escape of Captain Semmes and a portion of the crew of the sunken ship as "dishonorable," and have, moreover, affirmed that my yacht, the Deerhound, was in the harbor of Cherbourg before the engagement, and proceeded thence on the morning of the engagement in order to assist the Alabama, I presume I may trespass upon your kindness so far as to ask for an opportunity to repudiate the imputation and deny the assertion. They admit that when the Alabama went down the yacht, being near the Kearsarge, was hailed by Captain Winslow and requested to aid in picking up the men who were in the water; but they intimate that my services were expected to be merely ministerial, or, in other words, that I was to put myself under the command of Captain Winslow, and place my yacht at his disposal for the capture of the poor fellows who were struggling in the water for their lives. The fact is that when we passed the Kearsarge the captain cried out, "For God's sake do what you can to save them," and that was my warrant for interfering in any way for the aid and succor of his enemies. It may be a question with some whether, without that warrant, I should have been justified in endeavoring to rescue any of the crew of the Alabama, but my own opinion is that a man drowning in the open sea can not be regarded as an enemy at the time to any-body, and is therefore entitled to the assistance of any passer-by. Be this as it may, I had the earnest request of Captain Winslow to rescue as many of the men who were in the water as I could lay hold of, but that request was not coupled with any stipulation to the effect that I should deliver up the rescued men to him as his prisoners. If it had been, I should have declined the task, because I should have deemed it dishonorable—that is, inconsistent with my notions of honor—to lend my yacht and crew for the purpose of rescuing those brave men from drowning only to hand them over to their enemies for imprisonment, ill-treatment, and perhaps execution. One of your correspondents opens a letter by expressing a desire to bring to the notice of the yacht clubs of England the conduct of the commander of the Deerhound which followed the engagement of the Alabama and Kearsarge. Now that my conduct has been impugned I am equally wishful that it should come under the notice of the yacht clubs of England, and I am quite willing to leave the point of "honor" to be decided by my brother yachtsmen, and, indeed, by any tribunal of gentlemen. As to my legal right to take away Captain Semmes and his friends, I have been educated in the belief that an English ship is English territory, and I am therefore unable even now to discover why I was more bound to surrender the people of the Alabama whom I had on board my yacht than the owner of a garden on the south coast of England would have been if they had swum to such a place and landed there, or than the mayor of Southampton was when they were lodging in that city, or than the British Government is now that it is known that they are somewhere in England.

Your other correspondent says that Captain Winslow declares that "the reason he did not pursue the Deerhound or fire into her was that he could not believe at the time that any one carrying the flag of the Royal Yacht Squadron could act so dishonorable a part as to carry off the prisoners whom he had requested him to save from feelings of humanity. I was not aware then, and I am not aware now, that the men whom I saved were or ever had been his prisoners. Whether any of the circumstances which had preceded the sinking of the Alabama constituted them prisoners was a question that never came under my consideration, and one which I am not disposed to discuss even now. I can only say that it is new doctrine to me that when one ship sinks another in warfare the crew of the sunken ship are debarred from swimming for their lives and seeking refuge wherever they can find it and it is a doctrine which I shall not accept unless backed by better authority than that of the master of the Kearsarge. What Captain Winslow's notion of humanity may be is a point beyond my knowledge, but I have good reason for believing that not many members of the Royal Yacht Squadron would, from motives of humanity, have taken Captain Semmes

from the water in order to give him up to the tender mercies of Captain Winslow and his compatriots. Another reason for that hero's forbearance may be imagined in the reflection that such a performance as that of Captain Wilkes, who dragged two "enemies" or "rebels" from an English ship, would not bear repetition. Your anonymous correspondent further says that "Captain Winslow would now have all the officers and men of the Alabama as prisoners had he not placed too much confidence in the honor of an Englishman who carried the flag of the Royal Yacht Squadron." This is a very questionable assertion, for why did Captain Winslow confide in that Englishman? Why did he implore his interference, calling out, "For God's sake do what you can to save them?" I presume it was because he could not or would not save them himself. The fact is that if the captain and crew of the Alabama had depended for safety altogether upon Captain Winslow, not one-half of them would have been saved, He got quite as many of them as he could lay hold of time enough to deliver them from drowning. I come now to the more definite charges advanced by your correspondents, and these 11 will soon dispose of.

They maintain that my yacht was in the harbor of Cherbourg for the purpose of assisting the Alabama, and that her movements before the action prove that she attended her for the same object. My impression is that the yacht was in Cherbourg to suit my convenience and pleasure, and I am quite sure that when there I neither (lid nor intended to do anything to serve the Alabama. We steamed out on Sunday morning to see the engagement, and the resolution to do so was the result of a family council whereat the question "to go out" or "not to go out" was duly discussed, and the decision in the affirmative was carried by the juveniles rather against the wish of both myself and my wife. Had I contemplated taking any part in the movements of the Alabama, I do not think I should have been accompanied with my wife and several young children.

One of your correspondents, however, says that he knows that the Deerhound did assist the Alabama, and if he does know this he knows more than I do. As to the movements of the Deerhound before the action, all the movements with which I was acquainted were for the objects of enjoying the summer morning and getting a good and safe place from which to watch the engagement. Another of your correspondents declares that since the affair it has been discovered that the Deerhound was a consort of the Alabama, and on the night before had received many valuable articles for safe-keeping from that vessel. This is simply untrue. Before the engagement neither I nor any of my family had any knowledge of or communication with either Captain Semmes, any of his officers, or any of his crew. Since the fight I have enquired from my captain whether he or any of my crew had had any communication with the captain or crew of the Alabama prior to meeting them on the Deerhound after the engagement, and his answer, given in the most emphatic manner, has been, "None whatever."

As to the deposit of chronometers and other valuable articles, the whole story is a myth. Nothing was brought from the Alabama to the Deerhound, and I never heard of the tale till I saw it in an extract from your own columns. After the fight was over, the drowning mnn picked up, and the Deerhound steaming away to Southampton, some of the officers who had been saved began to express their acknowledgments for my services, and my reply to them, which was addressed to all who stood around, was, "Gentlemen, you have no need to give me any special thanks? I shoould have done exactly the same for the other people if they had needed it." This speech would have been a need- less and indeed an absurd piece of hypocrisy if there had been any league o~ alliance between the Alabama and the Deerhound.

Both your correspondents agree in maintaining that Captain Semmes and such of his crew as were taken away by the Deerhound are bound in honor to consider themselves still as prisoners, and to render themselves to their lawful captors as soon as practicable.

This is a point which I have nothing to do with, and therefore I shall not discuss it.

My object in this letter is merely to vindicate my conduct from mis- representation, and I trust that in aiming at this I have not transgressed any of your rules of correspondence, and shall therefore be entitled to a place in your columns.

I am, etc.,

JOHN LANCASTER.

The EDITOR OF THE DAILY NEWS.

(Official Records, Series I, vol. 3, pp. 665-668)

**Letter from the President of the Confederate States to John Lancaster, transmitting a joint resolution of the Congress of the Confederate States thanking him for his friendly conduct toward the officers and crew of the C. S. S. Alabama.**

CONFEDERATE STATES OF AMERICA,  
EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT,  
Richmond, Va., March 1, 1865.

SIR: It becomes my pleasing duty to transmit to you a certified copy of a joint resolution of thanks to Mr. John Lancaster, of England, for his friendly conduct toward the commander, officers, and crew of the Alabama, passed by the Congress of the Confederate States of America and approved 14th February, 1865.

Permit me, as the Executive of the Confederate States, to join in returning to you the thanks of the people of the Confederacy and to express my own appreciation of the gallant and humane conduct displayed by yourself and the crew of your yacht, the Deerhound, in the rescue of Captain Raphael Semmes, the commander, and a portion of the officers and crew of the late C. S. S. Alabama.

Be assured that my countrymen will never cease gratefully to remember your generous conduct, and I trust that our seamen, under similar circumstances, will ever be prompt to emulate your noble example.

Accept the tender of the esteem and regard with which I am, very respectfully, your friend,  
JEFFERSON DAVIS.

Mr. JOHN LANCASTER,  
Lancashire, England.

[Enclosure.]

**Joint resolution of thanks to Mr. John Lancaster, of England, for his friendly conduct toward the commander, officers, and crew of the Alabama.**

Resolved by the Congress of the Confederate States of America, That the thanks of Congress and of the people of the Confederate States are due and are hereby tendered to Mr. John Lancaster, of Lancashire, England, for his friendly and humane conduct in receiving in his yacht, the Deerhound, from the imminent peril of death by drowning, Captain Raphael Semmes, the commander, and a portion of the officers and crew of the late Confederate States steamer Alabama, on the occasion of the combat between that vessel and the United States steamer Kearsarge in the waters of the British Channel on the nineteenth day of June, eighteen hundred and sixty-four; and that his Excellency the President of the Confederate States be requested to inform Mr. Lancaster of the passage of this resolution, and to communicate to him a copy thereof.

TH. S. BOCOCK,  
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

R. M. T. HUNTER,  
President of the Senate pro tempore.

Approved, 14th February, 1865.  
JEFFERSON DAVIS.

CONFEDERATE STATES OF AMERICA,  
Department of Justice.

I do hereby certify that the foregoing is a true copy of a resolution of the Congress of the Confederate States of America approved on the fourteenth day of February, one thousand eight hundred and sixty-five, and of which the original roll is on file in this office.

In faith whereof I have hereunto set my hand and affixed the seal of the said Department, this seventeenth day of February, anno Domini one thousand eight hundred and sixty-five.

[SEAL.] GEO. DAVIS,  
Attorney- General.

(Official Records, Series I, vol. 3, pp. 668-669)