OFFICERS OF GREEK DESCENT
IN THE UNION NAVY, 1861-1865

By GEORGE P. PERROS

A mericans of Greek descent participated in the conflict of the Civil War on both the Union and Confederate sides. Accordingly, it is the limited purpose of this article to present some salient facts on a handful of compatriots whose careers in the United States Navy spanned the Civil War.

Thomas Burgess, in his book Greeks in America (1913), mentions three natives of Greece who were officers in the United States Navy during the Civil War. Of the three, George Musalas Colvocoresses is best known among those acquainted with the annals of Greeks in the United States. Little, however, is known of the second officer, George Sirian, who, at the start of the Civil war, was a resident of the State of Virginia. Photius Fisk (Kavasales), the third officer, is probably better known than Sirian.

Ella Lonn, in her book Foreigners in the Union Army and Navy (1951), p. 630, finds Colvocoresses, a native of Chios, as probably the most interesting of the foreign-born officers who held the rank of commander in the Union Navy; she characterizes him “as Greek as his name.” The Dictionary of American Biography, Vol. IV, pp. 326-327 (1930), with a bibliographical note, The National Cyclopedia of American Biography, Vol. 23, p. 339 (1933), Appleton’s Cyclopedia of American Biography, Vol. 1, pp. 699-700 (1888), and the Washington Historical Quarterly, Vol. XXV, pp. 163-170 (July 1934), print biographical sketches of the officer. The sources include some particulars on the antecedents of Colvocoresses. He was made a captive of the Turks during the massacre of Greeks on Chios in 1822. His captors removed him to Smyrna. There, he was ransomed by some friends of his family, and was put on board an American brig, then in port, named the Margarita, with nine or ten others through the port of Baltimore, and were received by the Greek Relief Committee. With the consent of that body, Captain Alden Partridge, a military educator, assumed the responsibility for the care of Colvocoresses.

Photius Fisk (Kavasales), the third officer, is probably better known than Sirian.

The boy was enrolled in a military academy at Norwich, Connecticut, of which Captain Partridge was the founder and head; and his award, receiving a good education, remained there until he procured, on February 21, 1832, an acting midshipman’s warrant in the United States Navy.

A summary account of the naval service of Colvocoresses, based on a report prepared by the Division of Naval History, Navy Department, shows the following sea-going and land-based assignments discharged by the officer: USS United States, USS John Adams, USS Delaware, and USS Potomac, (Mediterranean Sea, Coast of Africa, Coast of Brazil), 1832-1837; Naval School at Norfolk, 1837; warrant Passed Midshipman, 1838; Wilkes Exploring Expedition: USS PORPOISE, USS PEACOCK, USS VINCENNES, USS OREGON, 1838-1842; USS OHIO, Receiving Ship at Boston, 1843; USS WARREN, USS SHARK, and USS RELIEF, (Pacific Ocean), 1843-46; made lieutenant, 1844; USS Receiving Ship at New York, 1847; USS ALLEGHANY (Coast of Brazil and Mediterranean Sea), 1847-1849; USS GERMANTOWN and USS PORPOISE, (Home Squadron and Coast of Africa), 1850-1852; USS Receiving Ship at New York, 1854-1855; USS LEVANT (East Indies), 1855-1858; Portsmouth Navy Yard, 1858-1861; Commissioned Commander, 1861; USS SUPPLY 1861-1863, and USS SARATOGA, 1863-1864 (For details of his service while in command of the Supply and the Saratoga, see the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion); USS DACOTAH, 1864; USS WACHUSETT, 1864-1865; USS ST. MARY’S, in the Pacific (For reports of his search for the CSS SHENANDOAH, see the Official Recorts, Series I, vol. 3), 1865-1866; placed on

Mr. George Perros was an archivist at the Bureau of Archives in Washington D.C. He recently retired and lives in Washington.
the Retired List, Jan. 11, 1867, and commissioned a captain on the Retired List, Apr. 4, 1867.

One can cite an excerpt from The National Cyclopedia of American Biography for a concise statement of Colvocoresses’ role in the Civil War:

“At the outbreak of the Civil War he was commissioned commander and with the U.S. Ship Supply captured the blockade runner STEPHEN HART, which was carrying supplies to the Confederacy. In 1863 he was transferred to the SARATOGA under Rear Adm. Dahlgren, and assigned to duty off the South Carolina and Georgia Coasts. He trained his crew for landing expeditions and made several sorties in August, 1864, destroying bridges and encampments, capturing enemy troops, guns and ammunition and freeing slaves. These achievements won two citations in general orders by Adm. Dahlgren and commendation by Secretary Gideon Welles.”

The commendatory letter from the Secretary of the Navy, dated September 15, 1864, reads as follows:

“Sir: I have received from Rear-Admiral Dahlgren the reports of the several expeditions recently despatched from the U.S.S. SARATOGA into the waters and counties of Georgia, which were originated and conducted by you with commendable discretion, and zeal and crowned with success.

“The Department desires to return to you and those under you command its thanks for your zealous and good services to the country on the occasions referred to.” (Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion, Series I, vol. 15, p. 643.)

It should be noted that Colvocoresses recounted his experiences as a member of the Wilkes Exploring Expedition to the South Seas and the Antarctic (1838-1842) in a book titled Four Years in the Government Exploring Expedition (1852), a work so popular that it was issued in five editions. In his later years, Colvocoresses, endowed with a quick mind and with a pleasing personality, often gave lectures on his voyages and on topics of natural history. Ironically, the retired officer met a violent end in civilian life; on June 3, 1872, he was shot and killed by footpads on a street in Bridgeport, Connecticut, while on a business trip from his home in Litchfield, Connecticut.
Burgess furnishes no details on the naval service of George Sirian, apart from reporting that the Greek Seafarer, becoming a gunner, attained the rank of warrant officer. The same source adds the interesting sidelight that Sirian married the daughter of George Marshall, a Greek, who "pupishes probably the first manual of naval gunnery in our service." Rear Admiral George Partridge Colvocoresses, the son of Captain George M. Colvocoresses, in a letter published in the Portsmouth (Va) May 2, 1923, provides another general report on Sirian:

"George Sirian was the native of another island that was raided by the Turks; his mother fled with him to the beach and placing him in the bottom of an empty boat, shoved it from the shore. She awaited a dreadful fate while her boy drifted out to sea and was finally picked up by men of the U.S.S. MACEDONIAN (I believe) then cruising in the Mediterranean waters. The boy was received with great kindness, adopted by the crew, became a sailor and by intelligence and good conduct in time was given the warrant of Gunner. He served with credit, was much respected and died at a good old age."

Incidentally, the younger Colvocoresses served during the Civil War as a seaman; that he received his warrant as Gunner on January 14, 1843, to date from June 17, 1841; and that on June 29, 1853, his warrant was again antedated, effective from April 20, 1837. The main facts of his service afloat and ashore follow: USS FAIRFIELD (Brazilian Squadron), 1837-40; USS NORTH CAROLINA (Receiving Ship, New York), 1841; USS BRANDYWINE (Mediterranean Sea), 1841-42; Washington Navy Yard, 1842-43; USS CONSTITUTION (East Indies and Pacific), 1843-46; New York Navy Yard, 1846-47; Bomb Vessel USS HECLA (Home Squadron, Mexican War), 1847-48; Norfolk Navy Yard, 1848-49; USS JOHN ADAMS and USS DALE (Both vessels in the African Squadron), 1849-53; Norfolk Navy Yard, 1853; Receiving Ship at Norfolk, 1853-55; USS CONGRESS (Flagship of the Mediterranean Squadron), 1855-58; Norfolk Navy Yard, 1858-59; USS LANCASTER (Flagship of the Pacific Squadron), 1859-61; New York Navy Yard, 1861-62; USS SABINE (Recruiting Service at New London, Conn.), 1862; U.S. Naval Academy, Newport, Rhode Island (School Ship USS CONSTITUTION), 1862-64; USS VANDERBILT (North Atlantic Blockading Squadron), 1864-65; Receiving Ship at Norfolk, 1865; Naval Magazine at Norfolk, 1866-67; USS PISCATAQUA (Flagship of the Asiatic Fleet), 1869-70; Norfolk Navy Yard, 1870-71; Naval Magazine at Norfolk, 1871-72; USS YANTIC and USS IDAHO (Ordnance Storeship at Yokohama, Japan), 1872-74; Norfolk Navy Yard, 1878-8; Retired list, December 15, 1880.

The highlight in the service of Sirian in the Civil War occurred while he was attached to the USS VANDERBILT; that warship, as a part of the largest naval force that had ever been assembled under the Union banner, participated in the combined Army and Navy attacks on Fort Fisher, North Carolina — the first on December 24 and 25, 1864, and the second on January 13, 14 and 15, 1865. Fort Fisher, a formidable earthwork erected by the Confederates on the peninsula between Cape Fear River and the Atlantic Ocean, guarded the approaches to the port of Wilmington, North Carolina. In the first attack on the fortification, the USS VANDERBILT threw "upward of 800 shells" against Confederate positions. In the second assault, the vessel occupied a position in the line of attack, and, in addition, members of its crew were among the landing party of sailors and marines who attacked the right flank of the fortification while the Army moved against the left flank. The capture of Fort Fisher on January 15, 1865, after one of the most gallant Confederate defensive actions in the war, closed the port of Wilmington, virtually "the last gateway between the Confederate States and the outside world," and shortly thereafter led to the fall of that city. J. Thomas Scharf, the Confederate historian, tells of the signal importance of these events in his History of the Confederate States Navy. (1894).

Sirian died in Portsmouth, Virginia, his hometown, on December 21, 1891, at the age of 73; he had been born on December 15, 1818. The Portsmouth (VA) Star for May 2, 1923, reported that the late Mr. Sirian had owned and lived for many years in the house at the southwest corner of Fourth and Henry Streets in Madison Ward, and that the late officer was in the remembrance of the older inhabitants of the town.

Photius Kavasalas (Fisk), born in 1808, also hailed from the Grecian Archipelago. Sources with biographical information on him are the New York
His early life, like that of Colvocoresses and of Sirian, was marked with tragic episodes. While an infant, he was taken to Smyrna. During an outbreak of the plague in 1814, he was found crying in the streets of that ancient city; he had apparently lost his entire family from the pestilence. American missionaries took Kavasales and another Greek boy named Anastatius to Malta. The Rev. Photius Fisk, an American missionary, saw Kavasales on the island, where he was studying at a Jesuit College. The Clergyman counseled the lad to go to the United States for his education. Finally, Kavasales and Anastatius were put aboard the American brig America, and on February 21, 1823, they reached Salem, Massachusetts. The boys were immediately befriended by the Rev. Elias Cornelius, pastor of the Tabernacle Church. After spending some time in Salem, Kavasales and Anastatius went to Litchfield, Connecticut, to become the charge of the Rev. Lyman Beecher.

After having attended Amherst College, Kavasales sailed to the Mediterranean Sea as a representative of the Board of Foreign Missions to deliver a cargo of provisions for the relief of destitute Greeks, then fighting for independence from Turkey; but, upon finding himself unable to help their struggle, he returned to the United States. In 1828, he became a communicant of the Congregational Church, and began to study for the ministry. He graduated from the Auburn (N.Y.) Theological Seminary, was ordained at Halifax, Vermont, and then discharged his ministerial duties in New England.

On December 23, 1841, President John Tyler nominated Kavasales to be a chaplain in the United States Navy, and the Senate confirmed the appointment on March 14, 1842. "His appointment to the Navy Chaplaincy in 1842, was chiefly owing to the action of John Quincy Adams, then in the House of Representatives. While... Kavasales' linguistic abilities and his Greek birth and history were especial elements in his favor, giving him, in the eyes of a classical scholar like Mr. Adams, a great advantage over several other candidates, Joshua Giddings and Gerritt Smith were also influential in his interest."

The history of the naval service of Kavasales, derived from the Navy Registers and from the publication of the Navy Department entitled United States Navy Chaplains, 1778-1945 (1948), p. 93, discloses the following sea shore duty, along with the periods of an inactive status: USS COLUMBIA, July...
Leonidas D. Rodocanachi, also known as Leonidas Rody, was another officer of Greek extraction in the Union Navy. Burgess does not mention him in *Greeks in America*. Though the information about him on hand is scanty, yet it suffices to attest his Greek ancestry and his service in the Union Navy. With the aid of the Navy Registers, and of the publication of the Adjutant General of Massachusetts titled *Massachusetts Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines in the Civil War*, vol. VII, p. 506, and vol. VIII, p. 620, one can deduce Rodocanachi’s naval career. These sources reveal that the was born in Greece; that on November 2, 1861, he enlisted, at Boston, as Landsman in the United States Navy for “3 yrs. or war”; that he served on the receiving ship USS OHIO, the USS SAGAMORE, and the USS CIR-CASSIAN; and that on August 22, 1863, he was appointed Acting Master’s Mate, and in 1865, Mate.

The Navy Registers disclose that in 1863 and 1864, Rodocanachi, as an officer, served on the USS NEPTUNE, which, during his duty aboard her, was at first a unit of the West India Squadron, and was afterwards assigned to special convoy service in the West Indies. In 1865 he was attached to the USS TIoga, operating with the Gulf Squadron. In the following year Rodocanachi reported for duty at the United States Naval Academy; he was honorably discharged from the Navy on May 22, 1867.

In short, there were, at least, two commissioned, and two warrant, officers of Greek birth in the United States Navy during the Civil War.

---

**Blue Dawn Diner-Restaurant**

1860 VETERANS HIGHWAY, CENTRAL ISLIP, N.Y. 11722

TEL. (516) 234-6001 F (516) 348-9708

ΟΔΗΓΙΕΣ: Εκκίνηση 57 στο δεύτερο φως, στην Veterans Highway δεξιά μέχρι την Blue Dawn Diner

**ΓΙΑ ΤΟΥΣ ΤΑΞΙΔΕΥΟΝΤΑΣ ΣΤΟ ΛΟΝΓΚ ΑΙ-ΛΑΝΤ**

Ελληνικά φαγητά για τους “Ελληνες καλογραφάδες (σοβιβλάκα, μουσοκάκι, παιτίτσα, απαντόπητες κ.ά.), Φαγητά φρέσκα σε μεγάλη ποικιλία για αυτούς που θέλουν να βρεθούν τα θέρμανση, Σαλάτα Bar για τους... χορτοφάγους, breakfast για άλλους. Σπίτια γλυκά και γεωμέν αφέντα πολλά.

24 ΩΡΕΣ ΑΝΟΙΧΤА - ΣΤΗΝ ΥΠΗΡΕΣΙΑ ΣΑΣ

ΠΛΗΡΩΣ ΑΝΑΚΑΙΝΙΣΜΕΝΟ

---

Το κατάστημα ′Ελληνικών Δώρων

**KENTRIKON ΑΣΤΟΡΙΑΣ**

31-12 23rd Ave. (κοντά στην 31st Street)

(718) 721-9190 και (718) 721-9191

′Εκλεκτή συλλογή από μπουμπουνέρες, στέφανα, βαπτιστικά, ύφαντα, έργοχειρά, αντικείμενα τέχνης, κεραμεία, βιβλία, περιοδικά και έφημεριδές. – Κάρτες για δώσεις τις περιπτώσεις.

ΠΛΟΥΣΙΩΤΑΤΗ ΣΥΛΛΟΓΗ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΩΝ ΔΙΣΚΩΝ

και TAPES, VIDEO CASSETTES

′Ανοικτό Δευτέρα - Σάββατο 10 π.m. - 8 μ.μ. – Κυριακές 12-6 μ.μ.

Διεύθυνση: Χριστίνα Σαρηγιάννη