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Naval History of The American Civil War on Grenada Stamps.

CUMBERLAND, USS (frigate) (1843-1862)

1825-43 - US Navy; Boston Navy Yard, Boston; 1,726.

USS CUMBERLAND, a 1,726-ton sailing frigate, was built between 1825 and 1843 at the Boston Navy Yard. She was commissioned in November 1843 and served for the next few years in the Mediterranean. She was in the Home Squadron in 1846-48, sometimes as its flagship, and participated in Mexican War operations during this time.

CUMBERLAND made two more deployments to the Mediterranean in 1849-51 and in 1852-55.

In 1855-56, **CUMBERLAND** was converted to a sloop of war, allowing her to carry a battery of heavier, though fewer, guns. She was flagship of the Africa Squadron in 1857-59 and was again flagship of the Home Squadron in 1860.

As the secession crisis turned warlike in the spring of 1861, **CUMBERLAND** was at the Norfolk Navy Yard, Virginia, and was towed to safety when that facility was burned and abandoned on April 20. Thereafter, she served on Civil War blockading duty off the Confederacy's Atlantic coast, taking part in, among other things, the capture of Forts Hatteras and Clark in late August 1861.

On March 8, 1862, **CUMBERLAND** was anchored off Newport News, Virginia, when the ironclad **CSS VIRGINIA** attacked the Federal fleet blockading the James River at Hampton Roads. The conversion of the **VIRGINIA** during the past year from the former steam frigate **USS MERRIMACK** had been a remarkable test of Confederate ingenuity and resources. The **USS MERRIMACK** had been scuttled when Federal forces evacuated Norfolk in 1861.

The **VIRGINIA**, commanded by Flag Officer Franklin Buchanan and armed with 10 guns, steamed toward

Newport News Point, appearing like a "floating barn belching smoke."

In a battle that decisively demonstrated the power of the armored steam-powered warships against the earlier wooden sailing types, **VIRGINIA** methodically passed the 50-gun **USS CONGRESS** and rammed the 30-gun **CUMBERLAND**, creating a hole "large enough for a carriage to drive through."

CUMBERLAND's guns were unable to significantly hinder the Confederate ironclad, and she was incapable of sailing away from the encounter. She quickly began to sink

into the James River with her guns firing and 121 men aboard.

With her ram embedded in the **CUMBERLAND**, the **VIRGINIA's** engines struggled to free her from being pulled under the waves. The ironclad survived because her ram broke off, thereby freeing her to attack the **CONGRESS**, which had run aground trying to escape.

The **CONGRESS** soon surrendered. Musket fire from Newport News Point wounded Buchanan, but before he relinquished command, he ordered the destruction of the **CONGRESS**.

Lieutenant Catesby Roger Jones then assumed command of the **VIRGINIA**. The ironclad moved to attack the **USS MINNESOTA**, one of three vessels that had run aground

coming to the aid of the **CUMBERLAND**. The Union vessel was only saved from destruction because the tide had ebbed. The **VIRGINIA** returned to Norfolk, determined to finish destroying the Union fleet on the morrow.

Source: DANFS; M. Rosner.

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