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CAPTAIN GEORGE MUSALAS COLVOCORESSES,
U. S. N.

George Musalas Colvocoresses after whom Colvos Passage near Seattle was named was born on the island of Chios¹, one of the easternmost of the Grecian Archipeligo, October 22, 1816, the son of Constantine Calvocoressi and Franka Grimaldi. His parents were partly of the Genoese stock that settled in Chios in the fifteenth century when the island is said to have been ceded to the Republic of Genoa by the Emperor Manuel Paleologus in return for services promised him in regaining the throne of Constantinople.

The name was undoubtedly a composite one originating from the marriage of a Calvi or Calvo (from the Latin calva, calvus) to a Coressi or Koresseos. The former family is today quite numerous in the vicinity of Genoa and the latter was the name of a Greek philosopher who lived at Chios. The correct spelling of the name, as used by the Greek members of the family, one of whom is now Mayor of Chios, is Calvocoressi, and George, though only a child of seven when he came to this country, undoubtedly spelt it that way, but his new friends probably finding it difficult to decipher his Greek writing changed it to its present form on the register of Norwich University and it has so remained there and on the Navy Register for over a hundred years.

The Calvocoressi were among the principal families on the Island, which under the Turkish rule enjoyed peculiar immunities in return for tribute paid to the Sultan, and while other parts of their land were groaning under the barbarian yoke Chios had self-government, good schools, a college, and a thriving shipping and commerce in the eastern Mediterranean. This was their situation at the outbreak of the Greek War for Independence in 1821 up to which time Chios had been known as the "Happy Isle." At first the inhabitants took no part in the uprising but later a force of insurgents from Samos under a leader named Lykurgos landed on the island where they were joined by natives in threatening the Turkish

¹ Called Scio in English.

garrison quartered in the Citadel. Hostages were demanded by the Turks from among the principal men, one of them a Calvocoressi, and a large fleet was dispatched to intimidate the inhabitants of Chios and check the Greek forces preparing to operate in the Archipeligo. Lykurgos after an ineffectual resistance to the landing of the Turks returned to Samos leaving the mostly unarmed Chians to bear the vengeance of the Mussulman. Hordes of fanatical barbarians had been sent from Asia to the unfortunate island and a reign of terror commenced that culminated in one of the most tragic events of modern times—the Massacre of Scio.

When the Turkish soldiers landed, the hostages were all murdered and their heads stuck on pikes about the walls of the Citadel, and a general slaughter of unarmed men and capture of defenseless women and children commenced.

Constantine Calvocoressi with his wife and four children, of whom George (aged seven) was the oldest, fled to the interior, taking refuge in a country village. This, however, was soon surrounded by the Turks, escape for all seemed hopeless and defense impossible. At this crisis the mother begged the husband to fly, urging that their only hope lay in his being able to ransom them and reminding him of the Turkish custom to kill the men but spare the women and children. In the *mêlée* that followed the father escaped, and after many vicissitudes and dangers reached the protection of the Austrian Consulate in Chios. George, his mother, grandmother, brother, one sister and an uncle were taken prisoners. The uncle with the other men was butchered and the aged grandmother was killed for trying to communicate with George, who was separated from his other relatives and treated with great cruelty by his captors.

Meanwhile Constantine through the aid of the consul and other friends was at work to secretly ransom the surviving members of his family and finally succeeded in doing so. Angelica, the youngest daughter, had been carried by a faithful nurse to a cave in the mountains, where they hid until they could safely rejoin the father. Thus were the survivors of the stricken family re-united, but not for long, conditions on the once Happy Isle were far too terrible to permit the former inhabitants to remain there, sixty thousand innocent and peaceful people are said to have been massacred in cold blood, the homes of many had been destroyed and those who had escaped sought refuge in other lands where they often remained throughout the Turkish rule. The people of the United States were

most active and sympathetic in the cause of the struggling Greeks and the Great Republic being looked upon as a haven of refuge and promise, George Colvocoresses and nine other Greek boys were placed on board the brig *Margarita* of Baltimore, then at Smyrna, and sent to seek their fortunes across the sea.

During the long voyage that followed George was shown great kindness by the mate of the brig, who taught him some English and upon their arrival in Baltimore took him to the home of his mother and wished to have him remain there, but Providence had ordained it otherwise. The Greek Relief Committee, of which General Robert Goodloe Harper, son-in-law of Charles Carroll of Carrollton, was a prominent member, took charge of the boys and their names and histories were published in the newspapers. Young George appears to have made a particularly favorable impression upon these gentlemen and General Harper obtained from President Monroe the promise of a cadetship for him in the national military academy when he should reach the required age.

The notice of the arrival of the Greek lads attracted the attention of Captain Alden Partridge, late of the U. S. Army and then head of the American Literary, Military and Scientific Academy at Norwich, Vermont. This gentleman, not less distinguished for his benevolence than his ability as an educator, wrote to the Postmaster at Baltimore stating that he had seen mention of the arrival of the Sciot boy, George Colvocoresses, whose story had particularly impressed him, that in common with his countrymen he felt deep sympathy with an interesting and oppressed people and desired to contribute to their aid. He enclosed a pamphlet of his institution and expressed the wish to take this lad and educate and bring him up as his son. He mentioned friends who would care for the boy at points on his journey to Vermont and arranged to defray the expenses.

This most generous offer was replied to by Mr. E. J. Cole, a member of the committee, who warmly approved of the Captain's intention and stated that young George was one of the most intelligent and interesting lads he had ever known, and that from his education and manners he was evidently of good family. Accordingly George departed in a stage coach for his new home, stopping with General Jacob Morton in New York and Bishop Brownell in New Haven. Reaching Norwich he lived with Captain Partridge's brother, Aaron, and his wife, Mary, where he remained for nine years. The Captain gave him some land and cattle and he worked upon the farm and attended instruction at the Academy. Referring to

his boyhood he said: "The Captain was to me as a father," and he always felt the warmest affection for those in whose care he had been placed. As further indicating the relations that existed between the Captain and his protégé it is sufficient to say that in after years, when the former married, his eldest son was named George M. Colvocoresses Partridge and that the first born to Captain Colvocoresses was named after that son.

At the age of sixteen a midshipman's warrant was obtained for George by Captain Partridge and he entered the U. S. Navy, Feb. 12, 1832.

The schooling aboard ship in those days was a rough and ready one that taught self development, at least, and history gives no reason to be ashamed of the officers it produced. The Military Institute had afforded advantages to young Colvocoresses beyond those enjoyed by many of his comrades and throughout his life he was given to serious reading.

His first cruise was on board the frigate *United States* in the Mediterranean and afforded him an opportunity to visit his parents and relatives. He was later transferred to the *John Adams*, the *Delaware*, and the *Potomac* of the same squadron and returned to Norfolk aboard the last named ship via the coasts of Africa and Brazil in 1837.

He then was granted permission to attend the naval school at Norfolk for one year, and as passed midshipman was attached to the Wilkes Exploring Expedition in 1838, serving successively aboard the *Porpoise*, *Peacock*, *Vincennes* and *Oregon* until the return of the expedition in 1842. During this expedition about which Captain Colvocoresses later published a book entitled *Four Years in a Government Exploring Expedition*, they visited many unknown islands, a small one of which in the Fiji group still bears the name of Ndravuni or Colvocoressis Island, after the custom of naming these islands for the officers who first sighted them. They explored the western coast of this continent from Alaska to Cape Horn and the ice fields of the Antarctic region making extensive surveys of the coast bays and rivers of what are now the States of Washington and Oregon. It was undoubtedly for his part of this work that Colvos Passage and Colvos Rocks were given the abbreviated and familiar service form of Colvocoresses. The service on this expedition, with the ships of that day, was not without much danger and hardship; two of the original vessels were lost and two of the offi-

cers, Lieutenant Underwood and Midshipman Henry, were killed by treacherous attack from savages of the Fiji Islands. While the hard work accomplished by the expedition was not so much appreciated at the time, it has become of growing importance, establishing our claim to Wilkes Land, the curtailed northwest boundary and other debatable territory, and in recognition of his services the National Geographic Society has recently erected a fine monument to Commodore Wilkes in Arlington National Cemetery.

Upon the return of the expedition to New York, Captain Partridge wrote to the Secretary of the Navy requesting that his friend and protégé be allowed to visit him and attend the commencement exercises at Norwich University, stating that he had scarcely been a day off active duty since he entered the service ten years previous. A furlough was granted for this purpose and one can imagine what a happy reunion took place.

Passed Midshipman Colvocoresses was next ordered to the Receiving Ship at Boston and while serving there wrote to the Department requesting orders to a vessel which was sailing shortly for Constantinople to bring back the remains of Commodore Porter, with permission to visit his parents in Greece, who, he learned, were in poor health and of advanced age. This request was not granted as the vessel had already sailed, but he was informed that his application would be favorably considered when another ship was sent to the Mediterranean. He never saw his parents again.

In 1843, George Colvocoresses was ordered to the U. S. S. *Warren* as Master and served aboard her, the *Shark* and the *Relief* in the Pacific being promoted to Lieutenant on this cruise. On returning to the United States in 1846 he was granted a leave and while spending this in Norwich he met and fell in love with Eliza F. Halsey, the charming young niece of Commander Thomas W. Freelon, U. S. N., who resided there, and they were married in May, 1846.

Following his marriage, Lieutenant Colvocoresses was for many years actively employed, mostly at sea, serving aboard the *Allegheny*, the *Germantown*, and the *Porpoise* along the Brazilian, African and Mediterranean coasts. On the former station he contracted the dread "Yellow Jack," was nearly buried at sea, the Chaplain being in the act of performing the last rites when the flag which covered him was seen to move and his life was saved, but his health was impaired for some years following. Between these long

cruises it is pathetic to note on the official records the short leaves granted for the purpose of visiting home at long intervals and the slender allotments made for the support of the growing family, but such was the life of a junior naval officer in those days.

From 1855 to 1858, Lieutenant Colvocoresses served as Executive Officer of the Corvette *Levant* and took active part in the bombardment, capture, and destruction of the Barrier Forts on the Canton River, at the time that Tatnall made his famous statement that "blood is thicker than water" and we helped the British.

At the outbreak of the Civil War, Lieutenant Colvocoresses, who had been enjoying his first real shore duty with his family for three years, at the Portsmouth navy yard, was ordered to command the U. S. S. *Supply* and was promoted to Commander. While on this duty, his wife, who had been in failing health, died and he took his son, who subsequently attended Annapolis and became Rear Admiral George Partridge Colvocoresses, U. S. N., with him, as captain's clerk.

On one of her cruises to and from the South Atlantic Blockade, the *Supply* captured a valuable blockade-runner laden with arms and munitions for the Confederates. She flew the British flag and was named the *Stephen Hart* of Liverpool. Her case involved some interesting points in international law and has been frequently quoted in text books. The capture was entirely due to the skill and ingenuity of Commander Colvocoresses, who by disguising his vessel was enabled to approach the *Hart* within range of his guns and after boarding her continued a persistent search until the papers that condemned her were discovered hidden in a tea-pot in the cook's galley.

Shortly after this event, Commander Colvocoresses was ordered to command the U. S. S. *Saratoga*, and owing to the great difficulty in recruiting the naval service sailed with only twelve able seamen on board, the rest of the crew being landsmen and himself the only regular naval officer, the others being volunteers. With such means the *Saratoga* was sent to defend the town of Lewes and the large fleet of coasting vessels at the Delaware breakwater against expected attack by Rebel cruisers. Mooring his vessel with springs on her cables so as to command the approaches to the anchorage he set about drilling his crew and putting his imperfectly equipped ship in fighting trim. Months passed, trying the patience of all, a stormy winter brought disaster to many of the vessels that crowded for shelter under the lee of the breakwater, but the *Saratoga's* lifeboats,

provided by the forethought of her commander, rescued many a poor seaman and relieved the distress of others. More than once when his men had been trained to a degree of efficiency, some vessel bound for the blockade would arrive with orders to take the better part of them and raw recruits be left in their place. Under the discouragement and monotony of this service the *Saratoga's* commander made the best of his situation. It was afterwards written of him by his son who accompanied him: "One who knew him well never heard him complain. His modesty and reserve never led him to seek personal advancement. He was simple in his habits, just and most honorable in his dealings with all men and affectionate in his family relations."

The Rebel cruisers never appeared and in course of time the *Saratoga* was ordered to join the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron, under Admiral Dahlgren, which was operating off Charleston, S. C. The Admiral was at first not greatly pleased by the accession of a sailing vessel to his iron-clads and steam gun-boats and the *Saratoga* was sent to blockade Doboy Sound on the coast of Georgia, where there was apparently little to do. Commander Colvocoresses, however, by his zeal and energy soon discovered a suitable field of action and he became one of the Admiral's most trusted officers. Gathering information from every possible source, and reconnoitering in a canoe by night the rebel batteries along the coast, soon placed him in a position to plan and conduct with rare skill and success several raids into the enemy's country. Some of these operations have been described by Admiral Daniel Ammen in his book, *The Navy in the Civil War*, and in the *Records of the Rebellion*.

For these services he was highly complimented and twice thanked in general orders of the commander-in-chief, and received a letter of commendation from the Secretary of the Navy for his "zeal and good services to the country."

Toward the close of the Civil War, Commander Colvocoresses was detached from the *Saratoga* and ordered for short periods to command the *Tuscarora*, the *Dacotah* and *Wachusett* and finally the *St. Marys*, which was stationed off the west coast of South America to protect shipping and be on the lookout for the C. S. S. *Shenandoah*, rumored to be in that vicinity. The *Shenandoah* failed to appear and the war ended.

While stationed off the Delaware breakwater, Commander Colvocoresses had married as his second wife Miss Adaline M. Swasey, a younger sister of the wife of Captain Alden Partridge.

One more incident in the naval career of Captain Colvocoresses will illustrate most clearly what manner of man he was. While the *St. Marys* was anchored in the harbor of Valparaiso, her commander was notified by the Spanish Admiral, then operating against the Republic of Chile, that the city was to be bombarded at a certain hour and that the *St. Marys* had better be moved to avoid danger. Commander Colvocoresses, who had taken his position with a view of protecting U. S. citizens and property, in anticipation of this demand, replied to the Admiral that although the *St. Marys* was not a powerful ship she represented a great nation that would resent any insult to the flag she flew, and that she would not be moved. This firm stand on his part prevented any damage to American lives and property as the Spanish ships, in the action that ensued, were careful to fire in another direction.

On returning from his cruise in the Pacific in 1867, Commander Colvocoresses was promoted to Captain and placed on the retired list, having seen more active service than any officer of his date and received many letters of commendation from his commanding officers.

He lived for several years with his family at the home purchased for them at Litchfield, Connecticut, during his last cruise, until his adventurous life was brought to an untimely end by the pistol bullet of a robber at Bridgeport, Conn., on the night of June 3, 1872. He was waylaid near the landing of the night boat which he intended taking for New York on a matter of business. The small bag he was carrying was found slashed open with a knife, his sword-cane was broken, and some bonds that he was known to possess were never found. Efforts of police and detectives failed to locate the criminals but an old pistol with which he had been shot in the back was found on some nearby railroad tracks.

His remains were buried in the Litchfield Cemetery, and a clause in his will provided for the erection of a handsome monument to the memory of his benefactor, Captain Alden Partridge.

HAROLD COLVOCORESSES, *Major, U. S. M. C., Ret'd.*