

Preserving the Memory of Midshipman Richard Sutherland Dale

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On 22 February 1815, U.S. Navy Midshipman Richard Sutherland Dale, feverish and in pain, his right leg recently amputated at sea, died in Stennett's Hotel, St. George, Bermuda. He was the last U.S. officer to perish in the War of 1812, ironically, 60 days after the Treaty of Ghent was signed. He was 20 years old. Today, over two centuries after his death, Dale's grave is the site for an annual commemoration, marking the friendship of Bermuda and the United Kingdom with the United States. Here is the story behind that commemoration.

Midshipman Dale's Father - Commodore Richard Dale

Richard Sutherland Dale was the first son of Commodore Richard Dale (1756 – 1826), an American merchant mariner who became a naval officer in the Continental Navy under John Barry during the War for American Independence. Thus began his heroic and adventurous naval service, which included serving under John Paul Jones, on the *Bonhomme Richard*, the *Alliance*, and the *Ariel*. Commanding the American privateer *Queen of France*, he captured several British vessels. Following the Treaty of Paris, he became one of the six original commodores of the permanent U.S. Navy and commanded a blockade of Tripoli during the First Barbary War under President Thomas Jefferson.



The grave of Midshipman Richard Sutherland Dale in St. George, Bermuda

Upon retirement in Philadelphia, he directed the Union Insurance Company, was active in the Society of Cincinnati, and held leadership positions in a number of veterans' organizations and religious societies, until his death at age 69. The U.S. Navy has named five ships in his honor: USS *Dale*, 1840-1921; USS *Dale* DD-4, 1902-1920; USS *Dale*, DD-290, 1920-1931; USS *Dale*, DD-353, 1935-1946; and USS *Dale*, DLG-19 later DDG-19, 1963-2000.

Midshipman Richard Sutherland Dale And the Battle between USS *President* and the British Squadron

Richard Sutherland Dale was the second of eight children born to Commodore Richard and Dorothea (née Crathorne) Dale. Like his father, he joined the U.S. Navy, and with his father's influence, rapidly secured a position as a midshipman on his father's former flagship, the US Frigate *President* (44) under the command of Commodore Stephen Decatur.

Although the Treaty of Ghent was signed on December 24, 1814, word of it had not yet reached North America, when, at dawn on January 14, 1815 in treacherous weather, Decatur guided *President* past the British blockade of New York harbor. The ship was spotted and pursued by a British squadron, consisting of the frigates *Majestic*, *Tenedos*, and *Pomone*, led by HM Frigate *Endymion*, commanded by Post

Captain Henry Hope. Subsequently, a 15-hour battle raged south of Long Island, New York.

Endymion quickly overtook the *President*, which had damaged its hull on a sandbar off Sandy Hook. A close exchange of cannon fire ensued, to include bar and chain shot. *President* was outmaneuvered and suffered numerous casualties. Midshipman Dale was wounded in the right leg. Sources vary as to the cause of his injury (either a cannonball or a sniper's bullet). In a severely crippled state, *President* surrendered at 7:58 pm. However, when *Endymion* withdrew for repairs, Decatur made off to escape at 8:30 pm. Minutes later, Decatur surrendered again, when *Pomone* and *Majestic* closed on the crippled American.

Both *Endymion* and *President* were heavily damaged and sailed toward Bermuda for repairs. On the way, a heavy storm dismasted both ships. Dale's right leg was amputated. Arriving in Bermuda as a prisoner of war, he was housed in Stennett's Hotel, where he subsequently died on 22 February 1815, at the age of 20. He was buried in the nearby churchyard of St. Peter's Church (established in 1612), the oldest continuous usage Anglican church in the Western Hemisphere. His family, grateful for the care he received during his confinement, arranged for a large marble stone, resting on six pillars, to be placed over his grave. Midshipman Dale's story would have ended there, were it not for the efforts of a U.S. Navy officer over a century later.

1932: Captain Scarritt Adams Initiates a Ceremony to Honor Midshipman Dale



Captain Scarritt Adams.
Courtesy of Ms. Louise Hall Reider.

An annual ceremony, in St. George, Bermuda, marking Dale's death, began in 1932. The ceremony was initiated at the request of Captain Scarritt Adams (1907 – 1973), U.S. Naval Academy Class of 1930. Adams was born in St. Louis, Missouri and spent his early years in and around Boston. His family moved to Bermuda in 1917 for his mother's health. His father was a reporter for the *New York Times*.



A painting by Thomas Butterworth depicting HM Frigate *Endymion* and the US Frigate *President* on the night of 15 January 1815.

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In Bermuda, Adams developed a knack for sailing and a love of the sea.

Following one year at MIT, he was accepted at the U.S. Naval Academy in 1926. Upon graduating in 1930, he became a gunnery officer on the USS *Goff*. In 1932 he wrote to the reverend of St. Peter's Church, sending a check, with the request that on Memorial Day, the Dale gravestone would be draped with a U.S. flag and decorated with a wreath of white passion flowers.

Adams' career advanced, to include post-graduate school, intelligence training with the FBI, war duty in the Pacific, command of the USS *Whiteside*, Chief of Staff of the Naval Striking and Support Forces in Southern Europe, command of the USS *Mount McKinley*, the USS *Baltimore*, and the U.S. Naval Receiving Station in Brooklyn, New York. Throughout, he continued the yearly practice of honoring Midshipman Dale.

In 1956, when the Stennett's hotel was restored (the building is now a branch of Butterfield Bank) a historic marker was placed on the exterior wall. The marker reads:

In this building
then known as the Stennett's Hotel
died on February 22, 1815
in his twenty-first year,
Midshipman Richard Sutherland Dale
of the American Frigate *President*,
severely wounded when that vessel,
commanded by Commodore S. Decatur,
after a 15 hour engagement,
was captured by Captain Henry Hope
and brought into St. George's Harbour.
Midshipman Dale is buried in
St. Peter's Churchyard.

Captain Adams retired from the Navy in 1960. Upon returning to Bermuda in 1963, he attended the Dale commemoration for the first time. By then, the U.S. military had a significant presence in Bermuda dating from 1941 (The U.S. Army left in 1948, the Coast Guard in 1965, and the Air Force in 1970. The Navy and Marines remained until 1995). After the war, members of the armed forces routinely participated in the Memorial Day ceremony to remember Midshipman Dale.

The 1967 Ceremony with USS *Luce*

The Dale commemoration ceremony reached a peak in 1967 when Captain Adams coordinated with the U.S. Naval Sta-



USS *Luce* – DDG38

tion to bring the USS *Luce* to Bermuda for the event. It was the first time a U.S. destroyer had entered the tiny harbor of St. George. On the day of the ceremony, *Luce* sailors formed an honor guard in St. George's town square. The Marine Corps supplied a color guard and firing squad. The Bermuda regiment sent trumpeters. American Society members were also present. St. George's Mayor Leon Fox of St. George, Captain Paul Arbo, Commander of Destroyer

Squadron 8, and Captain John Drake of USS *Luce* formed the official party. The ceremony began with a fanfare heralding the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Dale from St. Croix, arriving in an open carriage drawn by two horses. Mr. Dale, the great grandnephew of Midshipman Dale, and Mayor Fox inspected the honor guard. The Marines and the *Luce* sailors then marched up the street to form a double column in front of St. Peter's church.



Mr. and Mrs. Dale arrive by carriage.
Photo courtesy of Louise Hall Reider



The Marine Corps color guard climbs the steps of St. Peter's Church.
Photo courtesy of Louise Hall Reider.



Luce sailors form a double column in front of St. Peter's Church
Photo courtesy of Louise Hall Reider

Next, the clergy led a procession that passed through the column to the graveyard behind St. Peter's. An Air Force chaplain read from the Bible. The Marines fired three volleys. An Air Force bugler played taps. Mrs. Arbo laid a wreath on the grave on the behalf of USS *Luce*. Mrs. Dale laid a wreath for Captain Adams. The American Society laid a third wreath. The ceremony was carried on local television. Immediately afterwards, Captain Adams and Mayor Fox oversaw an afternoon reception for 200 to honor Captain Arbo and the staff and officers of the *Luce*. Captain Drake hosted a luncheon on deck for 40 people. Local residents hosted members of the ship's crew and staff privately in their homes for dinner.

Captain Adams passed away in 1973. By that time, the Dale ceremony was an island custom. The event was discontinued in 1995 with the departure of the U.S. Navy from Bermuda. Midshipman Dale's story would have ended there, were it not for the efforts of Captain Adams' daughter over a decade later.

Twenty-first Century Developments

The Dale ceremony resumed in 2006 when Captain Adams' daughter, Louise Hall Reider, visited the island from Seattle, Washington. She spoke with Mr. Beau Evans of the Friends of St. Peter's Church. Together, they decided to resume the ceremony on the anniversary of Dale's demise, using the occasion as a public relations/fund raising event for St. Peter's. Ms. Reider continues her father's practice with a monetary gift to St. Peter's so that each year a wreath of white passion flowers is placed on the grave.

My husband, John Rodgaard, and I came across the Dale gravesite while visiting Bermuda in November 2013. We were attracted by the small U.S. flag and the bronze War of 1812 emblem beside the weather-worn marble gravestone. With a bit of research, we were captivated by the story of Midshipman Dale. Since then, we have attended the annual commemoration ceremony.

John is a retired Navy captain and naval historian. He is the North American Secretary for the 1805 Club and the commander of the National Capital Commandery (Washington, D.C. chapter) of the Naval Order of the U.S. (a non-profit civic organization founded in 1890 by Admiral George Dewey to preserve the history of the U.S. maritime services). Through these two organizations, and working with the Friends of St. Peter's Church, he organized a project to fund a new marble gravestone to rest atop the original.

The unveiling of the new gravestone took place at the 2016 commemoration ceremony, marking the 201st anniversary of Dale's death, with then Bermuda Governor George Ferguson in attendance and Reverend David Raths officiating. For this occasion, the new gravestone was covered by an American flag. Prior to the wreath-laying, members of the official party removed the flag and handed it to two Sea Cadets, who folded it and presented it to John.



called Kings Square, in front of the former hotel were Dale died. There, the T.S. Admiral Somers Sea Cadets, led by Lt. Commander Michael Frith (SCC), gathered for inspection by the governor of the island, His Excellency, Mr. John Rankin. The governor's arrival was announced by Mr. David Frith (father of Lt. Commander Frith) serving as the town crier and pipe major, in 18th century attire. Additional officials joined Governor Rankin, including the U.S. Consul General to Bermuda, Mrs. Mary Ellen Koenig. After the inspection, Mr. Frith took up his bagpipes and joined drummer Peter Profit (in kilts), to lead a procession



T.S. Admiral Somers Sea Cadets await inspection by the governor in Kings Square.



up the hill to St. Peter's churchyard. Behind Mr. Frith and Mr. Profit were the Sea Cadets, the official party, and various Bermuda citizens and tourists; about 100 people in all. The Reverend Thomas Slawson, rector of St. Peter's Church and Reverend Erskine Simmons, Chairman of the Board of St. Peter's presided over the ceremony, in a rugged church-

Dale's new gravestone was draped in the American flag for the 2016 unveiling. Captain John Rodgaard USN, Ret and Bermuda Governor George Fergusson look on at the 2016 Dale commemoration ceremony.



Captain John Rodgaard USN, Ret. holds the flag that covered the new gravestone of Midshipman Dale in 2016

The 2018 Ceremony

The 2018 commemorative service for Midshipman Richard Sutherland Dale was much like the ceremonies of previous years: an example of the history and charm of St. George, which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The event began in the late afternoon on St. George's town square,



The Procession to St. Peter's Churchyard
photo by Ms. Gillian Outerbridge and used with permission

yard littered with centuries-old gravestones, many crumbling, and most no longer legible. The Sea Cadets stood at attention, holding both the Union Flag and the U.S. flag with 15 stars. The ceremony began with an opening prayer and the singing of the Naval Hymn, Eternal Father Strong to Save. Governor Rankin and the Mayor of St. George, Her Worship Ms. Quinell Francis read Bible verses about men and the sea (Luke 8: 22 – 25 and Psalm 107:1 – 3, 23 – 32). Dr. Erskine Simmons led everyone in The Lord’s Prayer. On behalf of Queen Elizabeth II, Governor Rankin laid the first wreath of red, white, and blue carnations. The U.S. Consul General, Mrs. Mary Ellen Koenig, representing the people of the U.S. laid a second wreath of white passion flowers. John and I each laid a wreath for The 1805 Club and the Naval Order of the U.S. respectively. Led by soloist, Miss Laverne Daniels, those assembled sang the national anthems of both Great Britain and the U.S.

The Dale commemoration has come to symbolize the friendship between the U.S., Great Britain, and Bermuda. It is a remnant of the War of 1812 and, for some, a reminder that the U.S. once had military a presence on the island during most of the 20th century. More importantly, it is an opportunity to honor a young sailor, who, like so many others before and since, died on foreign soil, far from home. The inscription on the gravestone reads:



In Memory
Of
RICHARD SUTHERLAND DALE
eldest son of *Commodore Richard Dale*
of *Philadelphia* in the U.S. of *America*
and Midshipman in the U.S. Navy.
He departed this life in *St. George's Bermuda*
on the 22nd day of February, A.D. 1815
aged 20 years 1 month and 17 days.
He lost his right leg in an engagement between
the U.S. Frigate *President* and a Squadron
of His *Brittanick* Majesty's Ships of War
on the 15th of January A.D. 1815.
His confinement caused a severe complaint
in his back which in a short time
terminated his life.

This stone records the tribute
of his Parents' gratitude
To those inhabitants of *St George's*
Whose generous and tender sympathy
Prompted the kindest attentions
To their son while living,
And honored him,
While dead.



The grave of Midshipman Dale, with wreaths.

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The author is grateful to Ms. Reider for supplying material for this article.

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