

The Grog Ration

A SURGEON'S SWORD

By *Bonnie Ayers D'Orlando*
Assistant Curator, Nahant Historical Society



Nahant is the smallest town in Massachusetts, only 1.26 miles square, a little peninsula jutting out into Massachusetts Bay from Boston's North Shore. Nevertheless, our small museum holds many fascinating artifacts. One is the

Navy "surgeon's sword." There is an old saying among historians: "If only this object could talk!" Sometimes they do.

Winthrop Donnison Hodges, Jr, the museum co-vice president, gave the surgeon's sword to the Nahant Historical Society on 13 July 2003. The Hodges family has deep roots in Boston and Salem, MA, and has lived here in Nahant, first summers and then year-round, since the mid 19th

century. The sword came in its leather and brass fitted scabbard with a chamois sleeve and a worn leather case. Don Hodges told me that his father had worn this sword, Winthrop Donnison Hodges the elder, with his naval dress uniform during World War II. The sword was certainly something that matched the Society's collection criteria of acquiring objects associated with "Nahanters," especially those who have defended our country.

However, the sword was not a 20th century weapon. The mastery of its craftsmanship was undeniable, especially the graceful, efficient design and the gilt over brass eagle-headed hilt. Unfortunately, the sword was stuck in its scabbard with verdigris discoloring the beautiful gilded brass tip of the scabbard. We were not able to locate any maker's marks on the



Surgeon General J. Winthrop Taylor's sword. All photos provided by the Nahant Historical Society.

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sword's hilt or scabbard's exterior. But there was another clue. Stamped in black in the interior of the flap of the worn leather case was the inscription "Dr. J. W. Taylor, USN." Due to the press of programs, exhibits and book publication, we were not able to spend much time in our search for the elusive Dr. Taylor. We wondered how Don's father had acquired the sword since he had not told his son the history of this marvelous weapon.

Finally, late in 2005, we learned two new clues from the wonderful Naval Historical Foundation's online references. First, there was a J. Winthrop Taylor, Surgeon, posted to the Rendezvous of the United States Navy Yard in Boston in January 1865; this we learned from a list compiled from a rare reference. Upon that discovery, Don Hodges and I knew we were now on the right track, because Don's paternal grandfather's name was Winthrop Taylor Hodges. Second, there was a further citation of Commodore J. Winthrop Taylor as Surgeon General 1878 to 1879, the Navy's highest medical post. A third reference appeared online from the vital re-



Dr. Taylor's sword and scabbard.

cords of Cambridge, MA: J. Winthrop Taylor of the U. S. Navy had married Anna Elizabeth Parker of Boston in Cambridge, 15 August 1842.

Our research in the Boston Directories showed that he maintained a private residence in that city for many years, listed in 1845 at a house at 34 Boylston Street, while those of 1855 and 1865 list him boarding at 4 Beacon Street.

A portrait was beginning to form of a naval surgeon posted to Boston, marrying a local young woman and enjoying civilian society in the area as duty permitted. No doubt Dr. Taylor and his wife Anna became close friends with a certain prominent Massachusetts General surgeon, later adjunct professor of Harvard Medical School, Richard Manning Hodges, and his wife, Fanny Gardner White. So close in fact was this friendship that Richard and Fanny named their second son (born in 1867), Winthrop Taylor Hodges.

In the spring of this year, progress on the puzzle of Dr. Taylor went suddenly full speed ahead. Through the help of the Naval Historical Foundation's History Research Chair, John C. Reilly, Jr., and André B. Sobocinski, assistant historian/staff writer of the Office of the Historian, U.S. Navy Medical Department, the Society received not only a short biography of Dr. Taylor's service written by Captain Louis H. Roddis of the Medical Corps, U.S. Navy, but also his image! Gentlemen, thank you so much.

You might think this was the end of our research, but it was not. Before the Nahant Historical Society was founded in 1975, the main repository for rare artifacts in town was the



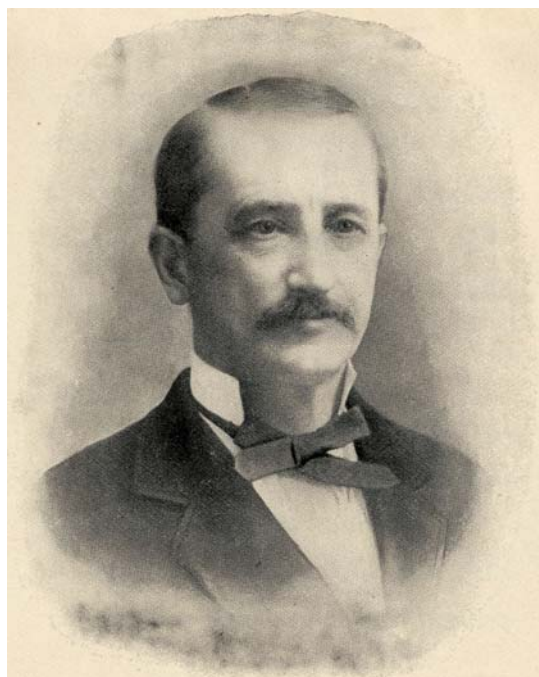
Close-up of Dr. Taylor's sword case.

Nahant Public Library founded in 1819, the third oldest library in Massachusetts. While I was checking the librarian's reports in Nahant's Annual Reports for another artifact with Library Director Daniel deStefano, we made another amazing discovery. In 1922 Winthrop Taylor Hodges, Don's paternal grandfather, had given to the Library a group of U. S. Navy orders to Dr. J. Winthrop Taylor dated from 1838 to 1877. Although Dr. Taylor had died when his godson was only 13 years old, Winthrop Taylor Hodges wanted his godfather's lifetime of service to be remembered. The sword, however, that unique and elegant clue, remained in the Hodges family until Don Hodges' gift stimulated the re-emergence of Dr. Taylor's story.



Hilt detail of eagle and anchor.

Born in New York on 19 August 1817, J. Winthrop Taylor was appointed as an assistant surgeon from Princeton, New Jersey on 7 March 1838. Most likely he had a medical degree, since the majority of naval surgeons did by the 1830s. He served



Dr. J. Winthrop Taylor (1817-1880)

mostly in the West Indies and Home squadrons during the early part of his career and was promoted to surgeon in 1852. In the Civil War, from 1861 to 1863, his skills were much needed aboard the steam sloop USS *Pensacola* of the West Gulf blockading squadron under Admiral Farragut during the difficult conflict to capture New Orleans and recover control of the

Mississippi River from Confederate forces. Taylor then reported back for the remainder of the war to the Naval Rendezvous at Boston, where recruits were screened for fitness for duty.

During the late 1860s into early 1871, he served in the Gulf and the North Pacific squadrons as fleet surgeon. In the summer of 1871, he was appointed Medical Director at the Naval Hospital at Chelsea, Massachusetts. During that time, Taylor also investigated an outbreak of yellow fever on the USS *Lancaster*, when that vessel arrived at the Navy Yard, Portsmouth, New Hampshire in 1875. Later he was called upon to serve on various courts martial, usually to determine a man's fitness for duty. In addition, he represented the Navy at various national medical conferences.

About the same time, in 1872, Dr. Richard Manning Hodges and his wife Fanny built their home in Nahant (no longer standing) near what is now 257 Nahant Road, overlooking the busy Tudor Wharf with its fishing vessels and summer sailing fleet. Probably Taylor was a frequent visitor when duty permitted, enjoying watching his godson grow.

On 28 October 1878, Taylor was appointed Surgeon General, the Navy's highest medical position. During his short administration, strict physical standards were set for midshipmen entering the Naval Academy. He worked to have the Naval Hospital Fund increased to over double the previous amount

to provide for the proper upkeep of naval hospitals. Also under his tenure, the first truly technical study of the Navy ration and its effect on sailors was made on board the USS *Minnesota*, from which recommendations were made, such as the issuing of more fresh vegetables, to reduce the crew's addiction to rum. A further study, Navy-wide, was started to monitor ventilation and air quality, long a concern of naval surgeons. Following his retirement on 19 August 1879, J. Winthrop Taylor passed away on 19 January 1880 at the age of 62. At this point we surmise that the sword and the packet of orders passed to his godson, Winthrop Taylor Hodges.

In preparation for our Civil War exhibition, Dr. Taylor's sword and scabbard underwent special treatment funded by Don



Sword's blade.

Hodges. Arms Conservator William MacMillan of Worcester, Massachusetts, was able to free the sword from its scabbard without damage and expertly clean both.

The maker's mark is now clearly visible on the blade close to the hilt: Ames Mfg. of Chicopee, Mass., America's foremost sword maker. The Ames family, sword makers since 1791, founded the Ames Manufacturing Company in 1832. This is a naval officer's sword, non-regulation, circa 1850-1865, based on an English design featuring an eagle-headed hilt with an acorn tipped finial attached to its quillon. The hilt is all gilt-covered brass except for the grip of carved bone. Naval decorations are numerous, including the main half guard with an eagle and anchor. The blade is engraved on the obverse with a laurel wreath surmounted by an eagle clutching a serpent in its beak and an anchor in its claws. The reverse side of the blade has another eagle and a small cap, finely inscribed: "Liberty." The scabbard is black leather with gilt-covered brass bands, the middle one engraved with an anchor.

Now Dr. Taylor's story and his superb sword will grace our exhibition, *Sacrifice of Self: Nahant and the Civil War*, along with other gallant men and women linked to our small seaside town. Open hours are on Wednesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays from 1 to 4 p.m. from 24 June to 2 September. Admission is free. ☞



Sword blade liberty cap and eagle, reverse.

Bonnie Ayers D'Orlando is the Assistant Curator at the Nahant Historical Society.

PHYSICIANS OF THE RIO DE LA PLATA NAVY

By Eduardo Gerding, MD
LCDR, MC, Argentine Navy (RET)

Before there was an Argentina there were the United Provinces of the Rio de la Plata. Named for the funnel-shaped estuary on the east side of South America, and comprising what is now Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay, and Uruguay, this transitional government rose to the political forefront during the decline of the Spanish Viceroyalty in South America. Like the Continental United States during the Revolutionary War, these United Provinces used a navy to fight and defend its cause for independence. And aboard these first naval ships of South America, were sickbays where physicians of many nationalities practiced their healing craft.

*In 1813, following the destruction of its modest fleet at the hands of the Spanish, the United Provinces, with the financial support of a Bostonian merchant named William P. White, rebuilt its navy. The result was a 350-ton flagship, *Hércules*, schooners *Fortuna* and *Juliet*, sloop *Tortuga*, and a felucca named *San Luis*. Commanded by the Irish-born William Brown (1777-1857), the first contest of this tiny squadron was the Spanish stronghold of Martín García, a heavily fortified island twenty miles above Argentina. The fleet surgeon aboard *Hércules* was one British-born Dr. Bernard Campbell. The ensuing battle—*Combate de Martín García*—would be a bloody affair.*

On the waters surrounding the island of Martín García was the Spanish fleet. On 11 March 1814, at noon, Brown's fleet opened fire against the Spanish forces. The *Hércules* stranded and was stormed by land fire. The crew suffered cross fire from the Spanish forces both from land and sea. She defended herself until 10 am on 12 March. As a result of this combat, Commander Elias Smith, Captain Martín de Jaume, Lieutenant Robert Stacy, and 45 sailors were killed by grapeshot. Dr. Campbell looked after the wounded while the priest Juan Andrés Manco Capac gave spiritual assistance to the mourning crew.

Dr. Campbell had to operate on 50 bloodied sailors in the darkness in order not to bring the enemy's attention. A witness described the action, "Our surgeon continued his work with few available elements: Four tourniquets, eight mattress[es], eight blankets, twenty varas (56 feet) of linen, ten pounds of lint, four pounds of tow, some splints, a box of instruments and that was all. In the meantime, fifty wounded sailors were bleeding and suffering, moaning in the frigate *Hércules* pierced hull. What could be used of the medicine chest? We could use



only the laudanum to alleviate pain and the Peruvian bark to calm fever. The rest was useless as it was good only for treating diseases but not for dealing with traumatismos or wounds."

The next morning *Hércules* again could set sail. On 16 March, Brown attacked the island Martín García. A land attack was organized, and it was then that William Brown ordered the fife and drum to play "Saint Patrick's Day in the Morning" as a means to inspire his crew.*

Hércules, once again, was pummeled. She received no less than 82 cannon blows. Plumb plates were placed under her water line and the hull covered with leathers and tar. Henceforth she was nicknamed the "*Black Frigate*." The patriot forces had only three casualties. In the mean time the Rio de la Plata fleet went after the Spanish vessels which fled to the river Uruguay. Brown left a small garrison on the island and returned to Buenos Aires where he was lauded as a returning hero. It was the Rio de la Plata first naval victory.

Dr. Bernard Campbell did not see the combat as glorious. In a letter to William P. White, dated 22 March 1814, he wrote:

*The crews were composed of 12 different nationalities. Most of the sailors, however, were Irish.



Oil painting of frigate *Hércules* and the Spanish *Gobernadora*

“I have written to. . . Buenos Ayres [sic] after our last action for some medicine but did not address to any person in particular. . . consider that some of the bravest men who died in the last engagement would perhaps have been still alive had there been proper medication aboard to use. . . there was not[thing] in our medicine chest fit for some old women or hectic patients more than for seamen who being in perfect health want the remedies more necessary for wounds, accidents etc. which we were not at all furnished. . . One ounce of adhesive plaster with a little silk for ligature would have been of more utility to the ship than the whole medicine chest which had none of those articles. . . I had no other ligature than whipping twine or any of the trash of thread. I could find among the tailors for which reason I request if any respect is paid to the lives of men who venture their lives in the concern that I may be supplied with the following articles: white silk for ligatures, white wax, Emplastrum Adhesivum, Empl.cumminim, Ung^t risine flavae, Un^t.altheae, Tinctura opii, Id.camphorata, Tinctura Rhabarbari, Tinctura Benzoi comp, Tinctura myrrhae, Aqua Lythargyri acetate, Cloth for bandages, Lint, Rags, Calomelas, Ung^t Hydrargyri fortius, Copaiba, Tatrtris potasae Acidulus, Flores Anthemedis, Antimonium tartarisatum, Sulphas sodae, Sulphas zinci, Sulphas ferri, and merc. precipitat.ruber.

These are the articles I stand most particularly in need. . . at present. I hope you will send this as soon as possible as I have severe persons in the sick list at present for whom I can do nothing for want of medicine. Several of the wounded have been sent to Buenos Ayres [sic] (some of which I have not seen). We have several wounded yet on board.”

At this time most wounds were the result of musket balls, grape shot and cannon balls. Incised wounds were also frequent due to the use of swords and sabers. Treatments included amputation, probing, stitching, bandaging and bleeding. Gunshot wounds to the limbs almost always rendered them useless and would almost certainly

lead to amputation. Arms and legs which could have been preserved in later years were sacrificed.

English born surgeon of the Rio de la Plata Navy, George James Guthrie (1785-1856) was in favor of amputation as soon as possible after the injury before “fever, inflammation, suppuration and gangrene” could take their toll. Wound-probing was accomplished using a combination of bare fingers and

musket ball forceps. It was a frequent belief that probing for foreign bodies was easier if the casualty was placed in the position in which he had been at the time of the injury.



Admiral William Brown (1777-1857). Brown's victories in the Independence War (1810-1818), the Argentina-Brazil War (1825-1828), and the Guerra Grande in Uruguay (1839-1852) earned the respect and appreciation of the Argentine people. Today he is regarded as one of Argentina's national heroes. Creator and first admiral of the country's maritime forces, he is commonly known as the "father of the Argentine Navy."



Medicine chests like this were used by physicians of the Rio de la Plata

The real harmful practice was bleeding. The importance of shock was simply not understood. “Large and repeated bleedings with peculiar good effect in preventing the onset of gangrene following gun-shot wounds”

One sailor named Joaquin Altolaguirre had his lower maxillary bone shattered by grapeshot on 10 March 1814, and could only eat liquid meals. On 20 June, he was provided a 12-pesos monthly pension for life. Similar pensions were given to three other crippled members of the crew.

This hard experience led to the appointment of British practitioner Pierce Reading as an assistant to Dr. Campbell while another surgeon was appointed to the *Belfast*. On 3 April, William Brown told Catalonian Minister of the Treasury Department Juan Larrea (1782-1847) about the squad’s need for doctors which at that time were not eager to embark.

In the case of the Combate de Martín García, Dr. Bernard Campbell was no doubt the right man in the right place. He suffered the universal experience of military doctors giving assistance under enemy fire while demanding a proper medicine chest for his patients. Our early

naval commanders learned the hard way the importance of having physicians aboard with proper assistance and medications.

Even though we may have a good picture of well known privateers and descriptions of the battles they engaged in, to date no additional information has been located on the Rio de la Plata’s first naval physician, Juan Gordon. Dr. Gordon was born in the province of San Juan and joined the navy in 1811.

Moreover, little information has surfaced about Charles Handford, a former surgery professor who served aboard *Hércules* in 1815 during the Pacific campaign. Like Dr. Campbell, these early physicians faded away into history. Nevertheless they left a legacy of outstanding professionalism and conducted themselves bravely in times of extreme peril. ☞

Dr. Eduardo César Gerding is a retired Lieutenant Commander in the Argentine Navy. He has published Navy history articles in *The Buenos Aires Herald*, *The Southern Cross*, and medical articles for *The International Review of the Armed Forces Medical Services* (Belgium). Presently, Dr. Gerding works at the Health Division of the Argentine Naval Hydrographic Service. He is a life member of the Naval Institute and a member of the Society for the History of Navy Medicine.

Dr. Campbell’s signature. A study of the signature made by graphologist Felisa Reder de Müller revealed an “untiring professional with high ethical standards.”

FROM THE ANNUAL REPORTS OF THE SURGEON GENERAL OF THE U.S. NAVY: A VISIT TO THE PARIS MORGUE

The Paris morgue was more than its name implies. In her book, Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-De-Siècle Paris, Vanessa Schwartz writes, "At the Paris morgue city and state officials, in conjunction with the popular press, turned the allegedly serious business of identifying anonymous corpses into a spectacle—one eagerly attended by a large diverse crowd. The popularity of public visits to the Paris morgue during the nineteenth century was part of a spectacular 'real life' that chroniclers, visitors and inhabitants alike had come to associate with Parisian culture." In 1874, Navy Surgeon Michael Bradley, USS Alaska, European Squadron, visited this peculiar destination when it was approaching the zenith of its popularity. The following is an excerpted account of his visit.

I never fully comprehended the full weight, terrible truth, and awful grandeur of the sentence, "In the midst of life we are in death," so often uttered over the remains of the departed, until I paid my first and only visit to the gay, cheerful, and frolicsome capital of France. The revelation was made by mingling with the lively Parisians as they thoughtlessly laughed, chatted, sat, and walked on the brilliant streets that spread over the catacombs, the subterranean vaults and passages, containing the bones of thousands of human beings; entering and leaving omnibuses with them at the Place de la Bastille, where so much blood was shed during the civil wars; promenading with them on the Place de la Concorde, where Louis XVI and his consort Marie Antoinette, were executed; transacting business with them in the Quarter Latin, where shops and dissecting rooms adjoin each other; and, lastly, attending service with them in the church of St. German l'Auxerrois, whose bell tolled the signal for the commencement of the massacre of the Huguenots on the eve of St. Bartholomew, 1572.

Wherever I turned or went with the active, bustling throng, I was sure to meet monuments commemorative of departed greatness, as the Pantheon, Hôtel des Invalides, and the cemetery of Père la Chaise will attest.

Having finished the preliminary remarks, I will now take up the subject of this paper, the morgue of Paris.

The first morgue erected in Paris was in the year 1542; the second in 1804, on the Ile de la Cité, at the end of the bridge of St. Michel, within a short distance of the portals of the cathedral of Notre Dame. The structure was 60 feet wide, 45 feet deep, and contained but one room. The present morgue was erected about ten years ago, and, like the old one, is located on the Ile de la Cité, behind and within a stone's throw of Notre Dame. It is substantially built of yellow sandstone, one story high, and presents a front of 150 feet, with a depth of 30 feet.

In the middle of the building is the exposition hall, where the bodies of unknown persons are deposited for four days; if the state of the body permits, five days. They are placed behind a glass partition, on inclined black marble slabs, twelve in number, arranged in two rows. The bodies are nude, kept moist and at low temperature by small streams of water playing on them. The clothes are also exposed, and often lead to the identification of the late wearers. Bodies badly decomposed are not placed on

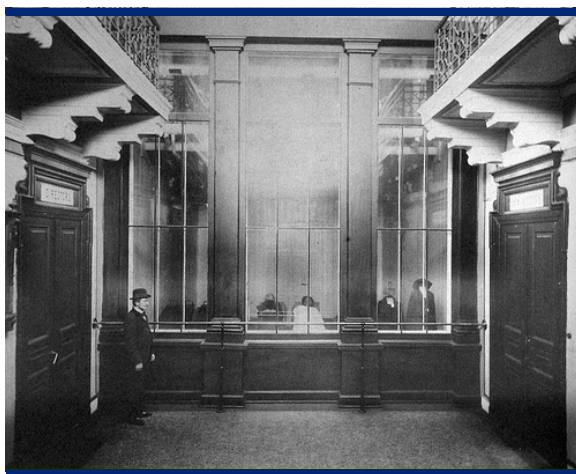
exhibition; are kept in an adjoining room (sale des morts) for three days, and if not recognized sent to the public cemetery, the transportation taking place at 6 a.m. from 1st April to 30th September, and at 7 a.m. from 1st October to 31st March.

The morgue is open daily to the public from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. in summer, and from 8 a.m. to sundown in winter. Adjoining the exposition hall is the office. The registrar (greffier) and his clerk are on duty from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Here everything that is known of the deceased is carefully registered—the name, age, description vocation, when and where found, cause and kind of death, and if delivered to friends or sent to the potter's field.

The registrar is in constant correspondence with the chief of police, who has control of the morgue. La sale des morts contains fourteen marble slabs, with arched zinc covers. Bodies too much decomposed for the exposition hall are kept here three days, and are subjected to the irrigating process. La sale d'autopsie is used by the medical inspector and his assistant when there is a suspicion the deceased has been murdered or poisoned.

One of the two attendants (garçons de service) is always on duty. They cannot have their wives or children, within the inclosure [sic]; in other words they are not permitted to make a home of the morgue.

The annual average for the last ten years of the number of dead bodies exposed at the morgue is 340, including men, women, and children found in all parts of the great city of Paris.



The Paris Morgue, 1883. Note the bodies in the background

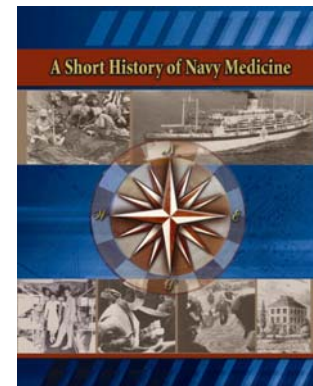
**Not long after Surgeon Bradley's visit, Parisian authorities decided that the morgue had wrongly become a Parisian tourist attraction. In March 1907, it was officially closed to the public.*

SCUTTLEBUTT: MARITIME MEDICAL HISTORY HAPPENINGS

A Short History of the Navy Medical Department

The Office of the Historian, Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, has just released a 52-page history of the Navy Medical Department. Electronic copies of this monograph can be obtained by writing to:

andre.sobocinski@med.navy.mil



The U.S. Navy Dental Corps Birthday Ball

Celebrating "Serving with VALOUR in World War I"

The "Great War" was anything but. The mythic battlefields of France—Aisne-Marne, Bois de Belleau, Boursesches, Chateau Thierry, Meuse-Argonne, and Somme-Py—were stages from which blazed the infernos of unimaginable carnage. World War I marked the advent of machine guns, gas warfare and tanks which brought new ways to mangle the human body and mind. In this atmosphere, it could be said that the U.S. Navy Medical Department stood firm and served with valor. Within every Marine battalion there were Navy hospital corpsmen, physicians, and dentists. Two of these Dental Corps officers LCDR Alexander Lyle and LTJG Weedon Osborne—were recipients of the Medal of Honor for their heroic actions in France. And one other Navy dentist—Cornelius Mack—was awarded the Navy Cross.

On 18 August 2007, the Navy Dental Corps will be honoring the careers of heroic World War I dentists at its 95th annual birthday ball. For more information please contact:

CDR Lena Hartzell, 202-762-3065, lena.hartzell@med.navy.mil

Museum's New Vietnam Gallery Set to Open

The Marine Corps Recruit Depot Museum in San Diego, CA, will open a new "Vietnam Gallery" on 20 July 2007. Artifacts and photographs from the MCRD museum collection are at the center of the exhibit; and photographs from the National Archives, *Leatherneck* magazine, and the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery Library and Archives are prominently featured. For more information about this gallery please visit the website: www.mcrdmuseumhistoricalsociety.org.



MCRD Museum

Call for Papers—2008 Meeting

The Society for the History of Navy Medicine invites submission of abstracts for papers for its Second Annual Papers Session, to be held during the 10 – 13 April 2008 meeting of the American Association for the History of Medicine in Rochester NY.

Papers may address any aspect of the history of medicine as it relates to navies and / or the maritime environment (including air, space and sub-surface). Historians, graduate students, and medical practitioners are encouraged to submit proposals.

Deadline for submission of your 250-word abstract is 15 November 2007. Electronic submission is preferred, to thomaslsnyder@gmail.com. Hard copy submission by the same deadline, may be sent to:

Thomas L Snyder, MD
Captain, Medical Corps, U.S Navy, Retired
Executive Director
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The Grog Ration is looking for original historical articles to publish in its November-December 2007 edition. As of now, there is an opening for a cover story (1,000-2,500 words) and two feature stories (500-1,000). If you are interested in submitting an article, or even historical trivia, please contact André B. Sobocinski at: (202) 762-3244 or e-mail: andre.sobocinski@med.navy.mil.

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