

## JONATHAN M. FOLTZ, SURGEON GENERAL OF THE NAVY (1871-72)

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JONATHAN MESSERSMITH FOLTZ, the sixth in succession to hold the office of Chief of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, and the second to bear the title of Surgeon General of the Navy, was born in Lancaster, Pennsylvania on April 25, 1810. April 25 was the birthday of Oliver Cromwell and St. Mark, so that he shared the day of his birth with two of the most notable names in human history.

Lancaster was a "Pennsylvania Dutch" town, and Foltz, as his name implies, was of German descent. Though small, Lancaster was of considerable importance as a manufacturing center of the long-barreled, small-bore muzzle loading rifles which helped push our frontier westward. Furthermore, until 1812, two years after Jonathan's birth, it had been the capital of the state. One realizes how long ago this was when it is recalled that James Madison was President when Foltz was born and the famous Sally Madison was the "Queen of the White House."

The young man studied medicine under a preceptor, as was then the common practice, and later attended Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia. Here one of his professors was Dr. W. P. C. Barton, the distinguished obstetric and naval surgeon, and first Chief of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery. Barton made a great impres-

sion on young Foltz and was largely instrumental in directing his attention to the navy as a career.

Foltz received his degree of M.D. in April 1870, when he was just twenty years old. He had already resolved



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to enter the navy. There were two hundred applicants, only seventeen of whom received permission to take the examination. Five passed with Foltz standing one on the list. Afraid that in spite of this he would not be commissioned, he collected letters of recommendation from several leading citizens including one from James Buchanan, afterward President of the United States, and walked to Washington when he received his appointment. An-

drew Jackson was President when he was commissioned on April 4, 1831. His first duty was the frigate *Potomac*, then fitting out for a three-year cruise around the world.

The *Potomac* was sent to the East Indies to punish Malay pirates for attacks on American merchantmen of the "pepper fleet" on the west coast of Sumatra. After a long voyage by way of the Cape of Good Hope, she arrived off Sumatra the last day of January 1832. On February 6, was fought the celebrated Battle of Quallah Batoe when the piratical stronghold of four forts and town was captured and destroyed by a landing force from the frigate. Foltz took part of this famous engagement so was thus a veteran of naval war when less than a year in the service. After some further time in the East Indies, the *Potomac* returned, in 1834, by way of Honolulu and Cape Horn, and so by the time he was twenty-four the young naval surgeon had also been around the world.

The next five years were spent in Washington, at the Navy Yard, or on short periods of special duty in Baltimore, Philadelphia, and other eastern cities. He published a book, *Medical Statistics for Three-Year Circumnavigation of the Globe*, and a number of professional and other articles. From Yale, in 1837, he received the degree of Master of Arts "for distinguished achievements in medical and surgical science." During this period, too, he was an attending surgeon at one of the last and one of the most famous duels in our history, the Graves-Cilley duel, fought on February 28, 1838, in which

Cilley was killed. Both men were members of Congress, and as Henry Clay was a friend of Graves, and had been consulted regarding the challenge, it was a factor in his defeat in the presidential campaign of 1844. This duel did much to crystallize public sentiment in the United States against dueling.

Among interesting friends made by Foltz during this period, were Edgar Allan Poe, and Samuel F. B. Morse, the inventor of the telegraph. In 1838 and 1839 when Foltz first met the latter he was regarded as a crack-brained experimenter who was trying to get the government to appropriate money to develop "an electrical machine to carry letters about like lightning." It was five years later that an experimental line was built between Washington and Baltimore and on the 24th of May, 1844, the first telegraphic message "What God hath wrought" was sent.

A cruise in European and South American waters followed this period of shore duty. In 1842, Doctor Foltz wrote several articles on the "Employment of Steamships of War in the United States Navy." These were published in the *Baltimore American* and attracted wide attention. The Secretary of the Navy quoted from these articles in his report, a report that led to the appropriation by Congress for the steam frigates, *Missouri* and *Mississippi*, the first large steam-propelled vessels of our navy.

His next experience at sea was in the war with Mexico when he served in the blockade of the east coast ports



of Mexico, the bombardment of Tampico and Alvarado, and the operations of the landing of Scott's Army at Vera Cruz. Of particular interest was his struggle with scurvy, or rather, with the inefficiency which permitted scurvy to develop in the blockading squadron in spite of the well-known and simple measures needed to prevent it. A number of cases occurred on the U.S.S. *Porpoise* on which Foltz was serving because his recommendations to obtain fresh fruit and vegetables at New Orleans were disregarded.

Foltz became, in 1847, the personal physician of Mr. Buchanan who also came from Lancaster. When Buchanan was elected President, he had Doctor Foltz ordered for duty to attend him throughout his inauguration and was given a room at the White House. He continued to attend the President to a considerable extent for more than two years, visiting Washington frequently whenever Mr. Buchanan desired his professional services. The President seems to have considered placing him in charge of the "Medical Bureau of the Navy" as he referred to the newly established Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, but did not do so. Foltz, however, was his personal physician for about three years, staying at the White House when he was in Washington, and may be considered as the first of a number of naval medical officers who have served in the important capacity of "Physician of the White House." Foltz has left one notable recollection of Buchanan, too, as the pessimistic prophet of disunion. In 1850, Buchanan had told him that "In four years from

this time this Union will not be in existence as it now exists. There will be two republics; Maryland and Delaware will join the North and there will be a civil war or insurrection."

In May 1861, however, the latter part of Buchanan's prophecy was already proved correct, and Foltz, then on duty at the Naval Home at Philadelphia, was ordered to join the steam frigate *Roanoke*, to begin his exciting service in the Civil War. This service was to make him one of the men who "fought with Farragut." He was at the bombardment of Pensacola and with Farragut on the *Hartford* as Fleet Surgeon when that officer who had just taken over command of the fleet assembled it to take New Orleans and open the Mississippi. In the next two years he saw the capture of New Orleans and Port Hudson, the passage of Vicksburg, and numerous engagements with Confederate men of war on the river.

He found time amid these stirring scenes to record a historic date in the history of the United States Navy. In his diary, under the date of August 31, 1862, he wrote in capital letters "Last Day of Grog in the Navy—The World Moves!" Grog was the name for the ration of spirits which was originally issued in the British Navy, in 1740 by Admiral Edward Vernon. It is said that the Admiral wore a boat cloak made of grogram, a type of cloth, and that he was known to his men as "Old Grog" and from this the mixture of rum and water which he ordered used in the fleet under his command came to be called *grog*. The original regula-

tions for the government of the Continental Navy, written by John Adams in 1775, allowed "Half a pint of rum per man every day." Various regulations were issued for its use. For a time, whiskey was substituted for rum; various dilutions were prescribed; it was allowed for those on the sick list or in the brig; and money allowances of five or six cents a day were paid in lieu of it. In 1829 Congress directed the Secretary of the Navy to appoint a board of medical officers to report on the necessity of its use by midshipmen, and also its effects on their health and morals. The board consisted of three of the most distinguished men in the early history of the Medical Corps, two of whom were later to serve as Surgeons General of the Navy. They were William P. C. Barton, Lewis Heermann, and Thomas Harris. They reported unanimously against the use of grog though no action was taken on their recommendations. Not until thirty-three years later did Congress direct that the spirit ration cease—September 1862. The "tot of grog" famous in naval song and story, ended in the United States Navy, and its end was recorded by Foltz as a triumph for both sobriety and efficiency.

With the normal termination of his cruise in 1863, he was sent ashore as a member of the Examining Board at Philadelphia. His next sea duty was in 1867. Many of the reactionary elements in the governments of Europe had been elated at the troubles of the great Republic of the New World, and freely prophesied her downfall. Their predictions were now proved wrong;

and now it was determined to send a strong naval force to Europe, headed by our most famous admiral, Farragut, on a "conquering hero cruise" to show the Old World that democracy has survived one of its severest ordeals. Many commercial and diplomatic contracts were to be reestablished as well. The squadron visited England, France, Russia, Sweden, Denmark, Italy, Greece, and Turkey. Foltz went as Fleet Surgeon at Admiral Farragut's request and remained at sea until 1870. He was employed as President of the Medical Examining and Retiring Board at Philadelphia until his appointment in October 1871 by President Grant, as Surgeon General of the Navy.

The statutory retiring age at that time was sixty-two years. Doctor Foltz, therefore, retired April 25, 1872, having held office only about seven months. The President continued him in office until June 18, and he performed some duty in connection with inspections until April 1, 1873. His death occurred April 12, 1877. His naval service covered a period of forty-two years.

With justifiable pride he once said: "I have been more at sea than Admiral Farragut, outrank all the captains of the fleet, and have been in more battles than any."

He had married, in 1854, Miss Rebecca Steinman of Lancaster. Of her children, one became a physician like his father; another graduated at West Point and became a general in the United States Army. A third son, Mr. Charles S. Foltz, became his father's biographer. This biography, published



In 1931, under the title of *Surgeon of the Seas*, was a best seller among works of non fiction during the year of its publication.

In appearance Dr. Foltz was rather short and stocky, very erect, and active. His eyes were blue, his hair brown and wavy. He was a man who possessed high administrative talents and great professional knowledge. Industry, conscientious devotion to duty, and un-

failing patriotism were among his most outstanding characteristics. He had been the warm personal friend of President Buchanan and his professional adviser. Admiral Farragut placed implicit confidence in his ability and integrity. His most marked characteristic was summed up by himself in his tribute to the sailor: "The sailor's greatest ambition is to do his duty. May I ever do mine."

