

Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper: Civil War Naval Cartoons

By Gary McQuarrie

CARTOONS BECAME A REGULAR FEATURE in the nation's illustrated newspapers of the Civil War, typically appearing on the back page of each issue and occasionally on an inside page of an issue. While *Harper's Weekly* specifically used cartoons to support the policies of the editorial page, shaping public opinion, thwarting critics, and demanding effective leadership from the government, focusing on editorializing to its northern Republican middle class audience, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated News* (Leslie's hereafter) sought to reach a broad readership that expressed multiple opinions and outlooks. Though cartoons often made fun of or critiqued individuals or Union policies, they could also be affirmative and supportive. The cartoons simplified a topic by employing caricature and symbolism with irony, puns, satire, and parody.

As in the case of wartime illustrations in these newspapers, cartoons involving the Navy made up a smaller proportion of those published. *Leslie's* and *Harper's Weekly* published a similar number of cartoons involving naval subjects. Until summer 1862, *Leslie's* featured one of the nation's best and most influential cartoonists,

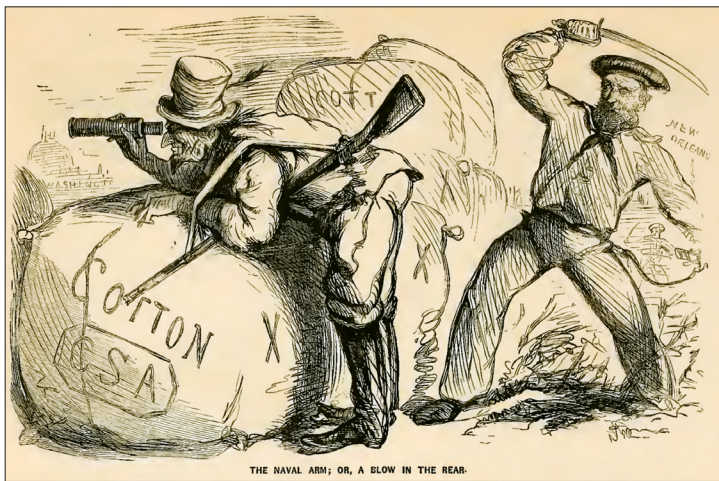
Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles portrayed as wild-looking 'The Old Man of the Sea,' and a burden to President Lincoln, while a Confederate ironclad (*Merrimack*) and blockade runner (*Nashville*) have the run of the seas, suggesting an inadequate Union Navy. Cartoon by Frank Bellew published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Volume XIV, No. 340 (Supplement with No. 339), p 32, May 3, 1862.



SINBAD LINCOLN AND THE OLD MAN OF THE SEA.

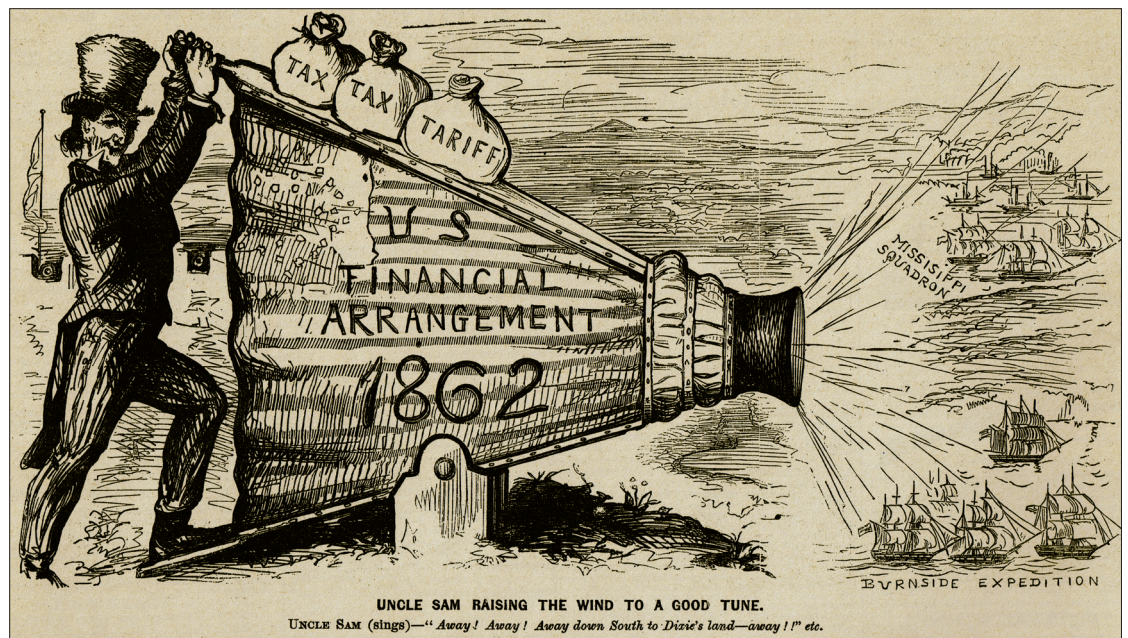
Leslie's: Civil War Naval Cartoons

Thomas Nast—while working at *Leslie's* in the early part of the war, he also freelanced at the same time for the other weekly illustrated newspapers—Nast usually signed his cartoons with a distinct cursive capital 'N' or as 'Th. Nast.' William Newman was also identified as a cartoonist with this illustrated newspaper during the Civil War and signed with a similar cursive capital 'N.' Cartoons in *Leslie's* after 1862 signed with a cursive capital 'N' may be reasonably assumed to be Newman's, but prior to 1862 there would be some uncertainty as to which were Nast's and which were Newman's. Frank Bellew (who signed by a



Depicts the Confederates ignoring the potential blows of the Union Navy through its blockade or naval attacks on port cities. Cartoon (appears to be signed in lower right, but artist is not known) published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Volume XII, No. 311, p 400, November 9, 1861.

Depicts Uncle Sam (U.S. Government) raising significant taxes and tariffs in 1862 to fund the formation of the Mississippi Squadron and Burnside Expedition and (singing) to send them 'Away down South to Dixie's land—away, away!' Cartoon (unsigned) published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Volume XIII, No. 324, p 192, February 8, 1862.



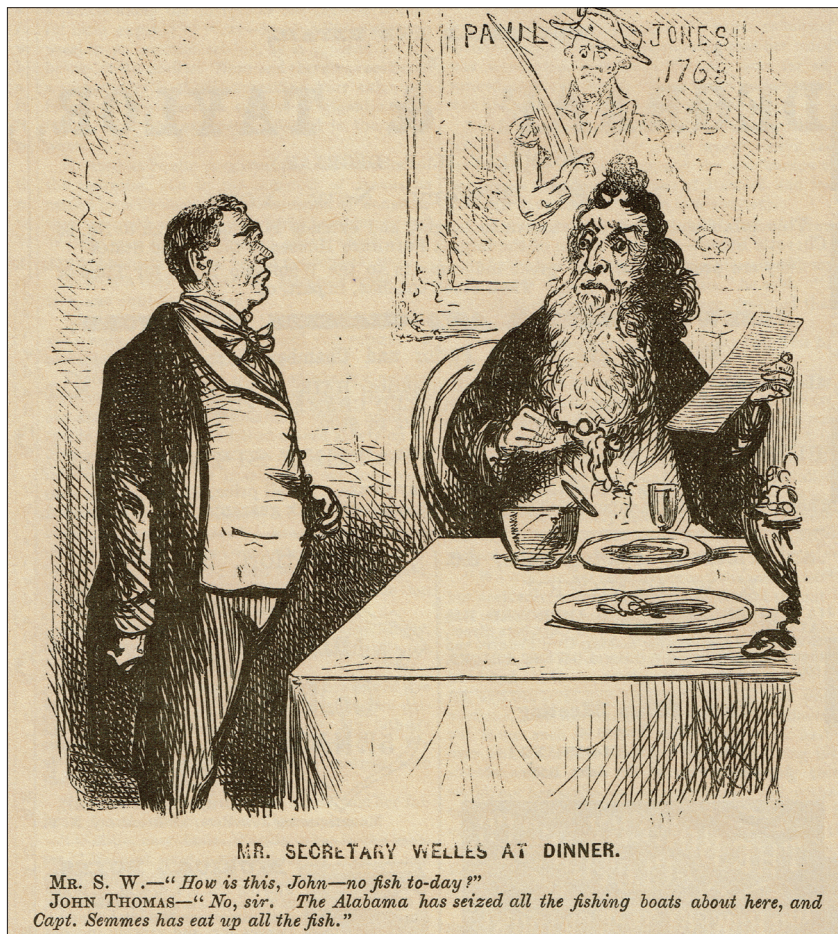
UNCLE SAM RAISING THE WIND TO A GOOD TUNE.
UNCLE SAM (sings)—"Away! Away! Away down South to Dixie's land—away!!" etc.



Depicts Union Navy under Captain Charles Wilkes, illegally capturing the Confederate diplomats James Murray Mason and John Slidell (portrayed as skunks) aboard the British mail packet RMS *Trent* (in the coat pockets of John Bull [England]), on November 7, 1861, the so-called Trent Affair. Mason and Slidell were bound for Europe to lobby for the Confederacy's diplomatic recognition and possible financial and military support. Brother Jonathan (U.S.) is shown doing a favor to John Bull (England) by removing the skunks. The crisis was resolved when President Lincoln released the envoys and disavowed Wilkes's action without apologizing. Cartoon by T. [or J.?] Sunn published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Volume XIII, No. 315, p 48, December 7, 1861.

small triangle or with his initials in a small triangle) drew cartoons for *Leslie's*, but also drew cartoons for *Harper's Weekly*—he is credited with inventing the character of ‘Uncle Sam.’ However, many cartoons in this illustrated newspaper were unsigned.

With the challenge of quickly standing up a Navy large enough to implement a naval blockade of the Confederacy and his physical appearance of wild white hair and a flowing beard lending itself to caricature, Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles was a common subject of naval-related cartoons. Welles was typically portrayed as Father Neptune or the Old Man of the Sea, and as a doddering and incapable old man. In the political cartoons of the Civil War, ‘Columbia’ symbolized the United States and its people, named after Christopher Columbus. She was superseded by ‘Brother Jonathan,’ who became ‘Uncle Sam.’ The English counterpart to Uncle Sam was ‘John Bull,’ typically a stout gentleman with a top hat and cane.



Depicts Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles lamenting to his waiter that there is no fish on the menu today—the waiter responds by telling Welles [incorrectly] that the Confederate raider CSS *Alabama* has seized all the fishing boats and her Captain Raphael Semmes has eaten all the fish [*Alabama* did not stop fishing vessels (*ORN*, Series I, Volume 3, p 677-681)]—The artist confused Semmes with Charles W. Read who had captured or destroyed fishing vessels during a June 1863 raiding spree in the northeast Atlantic and evaded the Union Navy until his eventual capture late that month. The artist deftly placed a portrait of John Paul Jones, known in part for his raids on British merchant ships during the Revolutionary War period, just behind Welles. Cartoon (unsigned) published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Volume XVI, No. 407, p 272, July 18, 1863.



Depicts Captain Andrew Hull Foote's Western Gunboat Flotilla's (along with Union troops) capture of Fort Henry on the Tennessee River in early February 1862. Cartoon (by Thomas Nast or William Newnan) published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Volume XIII, No. 327, p 240, March 1, 1862.

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As in *Harper's Weekly*, naval-related cartoons appeared in *Leslie's* principally in the first 12 months of the war. Subsequently, the establishment of a large navy and its many wartime successes apparently no longer justified a particular focus on the Navy or Secretary Welles as the war continued; the final few cartoons appearing in this illustrated newspaper during the war actually emphasized the new relative world power of the United States now having a large navy—both the U.S. and Russia were rivaling the formerly dominant global naval capabilities of England and France. The later cartoons (in 1864) mainly reflected successes of the Union Navy. Key naval cartoons appearing in *Leslie's* during the Civil War are shown, along with some contextual descriptions.

Depicts John Bull (England) selling English-made ships, particularly commerce raiders, to the Confederacy, creating a significant nuisance for the Union. Cartoon apparently by William Newman (Nast left *Leslie's* in 1862) published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Volume XVI, No. 396, p 96, May 2, 1863.



Depicts the Confederacy as a scorpion, one of the most stupid as well as one of the most venomous of creatures—when 'cornered' (in this case by the Union Army and Navy) with no avenue of escape, it usually stings itself to death by striking its own head (torching the cotton), the softest and most vulnerable part of its body. Reflects the successes of Mississippi River campaign of early 1862. Cartoon (unsigned) published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Volume XIV, No. 344, p 96, May 24, 1862.





HIGHLY PROBABLE.

CAPTAIN—"Want to join us, eh! my brave little fellow? Guess you're several years too young for the Army, but you'll do for the Navy—you'll be grown up before old Welles wakes up!"



THE MUSCOVITE ALLY!

AMERICAN SAILOR—"Bless my soul, my hearty, what kind of a Covy are you to come into this fight?"
RUSSIAN SAILOR—"A regular Muss-covy to be sure."

Depicts a young lad wishing to enlist in the Union Army, but the recruiter notes that he is too young for the Army but that he'd be a candidate for the Navy because he'd be grown up before old Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles wakes up! Cartoon apparently by William Newman (Nast left *Leslie's* in 1862) published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Volume XV, No. 374, p 160, November 29, 1862.

Depicts American sailor Lincoln welcoming a Russian sailor as an ally, reflecting the visit to New York and San Francisco by the Russian Navy during the fall of 1863—a visit apparently intended to show solidarity with the U.S. government. Cartoon (unsigned) published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Volume XVII, No. 428, p 192, December 12, 1863.



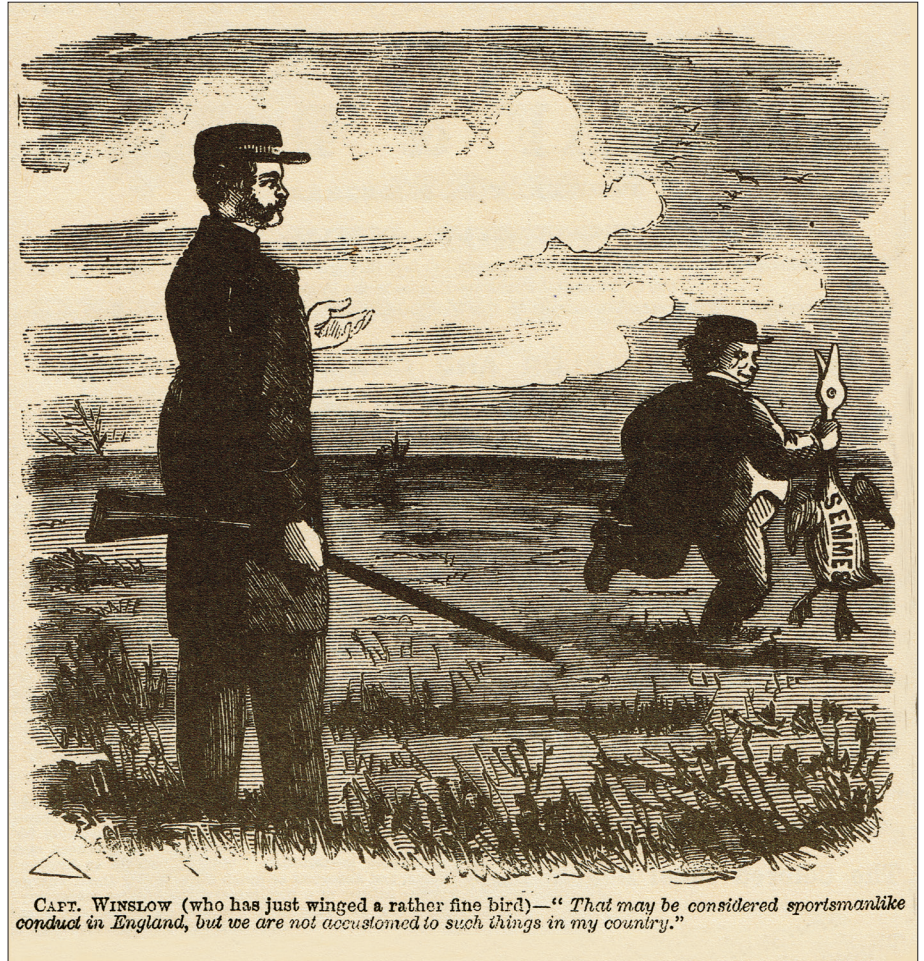
AN EXPLANATION WITH BRAZIL.

UNCLE SAM (to Plenipotentiary)—"See here, my sailor boys aren't posted on matters of etiquette. I'll tell 'em how bad they've been. As to the Florida, there she lies, many a fathom deep. If her owner, Jeff, wants her, let him come here and dive for her."

Depicts Uncle Sam explaining to a Brazilian plenipotentiary (envoy) that CSS *Florida* had sunk after a questionable collision with the U.S. Army transport *Alliance* at Newport News, Virginia on November 28, 1864 and could not be delivered to Brazil per a final court order and that Confederate President Jefferson Davis could come dive for her if he wanted her for the Confederate States Navy! *Florida* had been captured by an illegal attack by USS *Wachusett* while anchored at Bahia, Brazil, and towed to the U.S. as a prize. The court had ordered her returned to Brazil. Cartoon (unsigned) published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Volume XVIII, No. 469, p 416, September 17, 1864.

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Depicts Captain John Winslow of USS *Kearsarge* having winged Captain Raphael Semmes of CSS *Alabama* (sunk the vessel) in their naval battle off Cherbourg, France in June 1864. Cartoon (unsigned, although the typical Frank Bellew triangle appears in the lower left, albeit without his initials) published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Volume XVIII, No. 461, p 304, July 30, 1864.



CAPT. WINSLOW (who has just winged a rather fine bird)—“That may be considered sportsmanlike conduct in England, but we are not accustomed to such things in my country.”

Depicts failure and weakness of the Union naval blockade in preventing CSS *Tallahassee* from escaping its port of Wilmington, North Carolina, and of the navy in failing to capture the Confederate vessel during its August 1864 raid into the northeastern Atlantic on commerce and fishing vessels (and planned, but ultimately aborted, raid into New York Harbor). Suggests the raider could just as well slip into port and kidnap Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles! The artist used the face of Raphael Semmes, commander of CSS *Alabama*, rather than that of the commander of *Tallahassee*, John Taylor Wood, either because he did not know what Wood looked like or he was comparing him to Semmes. Cartoon apparently by William Newman (Nast left *Leslie's* in 1862) published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Volume XVIII, No. 469, p 416, September 17, 1864.



WHAT THE CAPTAIN OF THE TALLAHASSEE IS EXPECTED TO DO.



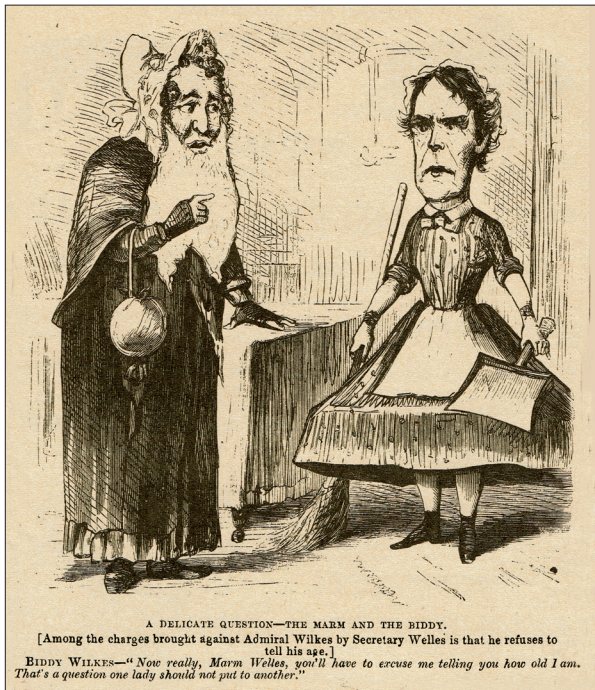
AMERICAN NAVAL OFFICER GOING INTO ACTION—NEW STYLE INVENTED BY COMMODORE FARRAGUT.

Depicts famous scene of Rear-Admiral David G. Farragut lashed to the rigging of his flagship USS *Hartford* during the Battle of Mobile Bay, August 5, 1864. Farragut had ascended the rigging to have a better visual perspective on the situation and to warn of potential torpedoes in the channel. Cartoon (unsigned) published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Volume XVIII, No. 468, p 400, September 10, 1864.



THE BRITISH-BUILT PIRATE SEMMES AND MOTHER BRITANNIA.
 BRIT.—“Did the nasty, lanky Yankee sink his pretty, itty ship! Never mind, then—his mammy shall build him another, she shall. Don't he cry then—” etc.—See *London Times* and other English journals.

Depicts the Confederate raider Raphael Semmes of CSS *Alabama* (a British-built raider) as a toddler being comforted by Mother Britannia, who promises to build him another ship. Captain John Winslow of USS *Kearsarge* (the bitter syrup administered to Semmes) had sunk *Alabama* off Cherbourg, France in June 1864. Cartoon (unsigned) published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Volume XVIII, No. 460, p 288, July 23, 1864.



A DELICATE QUESTION—THE MARM AND THE BIDDY.
 [Among the charges brought against Admiral Wilkes by Secretary Welles is that he refuses to tell his age.]
 BIDDY WILKES—“Now really, Marm Welles, you'll have to excuse me telling you how old I am. That's a question one lady should not put to another.”

Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles (the Marm) believed Charles Wilkes (the Biddy) too old under existing regulations governing promotions to receive a promotion to the rank of commodore. Wilkes, who had prior conflicts with Welles, wrote the secretary a scathing letter in response. Wilkes was court martialed and found guilty, with a public reprimand and a suspension for three years. President Lincoln reduced the suspension to one year and the other charges were dropped. In July 1866, Wilkes was promoted to rear-admiral on the retired list. Cartoon (unsigned) published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Volume XVIII, No. 446, p 64, April 16, 1864.

Sources

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- W. Fletcher Thompson, Jr. *The Image of War: The Pictorial Reporting of the American Civil War* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1960), p 100-103.



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