

# The US Naval Academy and Its Summer Cruises: Professionalization in the Antebellum US Navy, 1845-1861.

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## **The U.S. Naval Academy and Its Summer Cruises: Professionalization in the Antebellum U.S. Navy, 1845-1861**

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### Abstract

The rise of professionalism in the U.S. armed forces has been a hotly debated topic. Some, like Samuel P. Huntington, believe that it emerged in the postbellum era. Others, like William B. Skelton, assert that the U.S. Army had the ingredients of a profession before the Civil War. This study contends that the U.S. Navy also exhibited professional qualities before the Civil War. Beginning in 1845, it had a centralized school for selecting and training officers at Annapolis, Maryland. Then, at sea, as students progressed from year to year, the navy assessed almost scientifically their abilities as officer-trainees.

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# The U.S. Naval Academy and Its Summer Cruises: Professionalization in the Antebellum U.S. Navy, 1845–1861



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The rise of professionalism in the U.S. armed forces has been a hotly debated topic. Some, like Samuel P. Huntington, believe that it emerged in the postbellum era. Others, like William B. Skelton, assert that the U.S. Army had the ingredients of a profession before the Civil War. This study contends that the U.S. Navy also exhibited professional qualities before the Civil War. Beginning in 1845, it had a centralized school for selecting and training officers at Annapolis, Maryland. Then, at sea, as students progressed from year to year, the navy assessed almost scientifically their abilities as officer-trainees.

**E**DUCATION and training at the antebellum United States Naval Academy show that the U.S. Navy established many of the elements of a professional officer corps before the Civil War. Pivotal in the professional development of young naval officers were not only their training on shore, in a safe and structured environment, but also the ways the navy integrated that training at sea, beginning in 1851, on summer practice cruises. Before the creation of the Naval School—later the Academy—at Annapolis, Maryland, in 1845, the U.S. Navy educated its young officers at sea, apprenticeship style. Once indoctrinated into the sea through on-the-job training, the midshipmen then studied at numerous

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**Mark C. Hunter** received his Ph.D. in history from the University of Hull, United Kingdom, in 2004, under the supervision of Dr. David J. Starkey, maritime historian. Dr. Hunter did his postdoctoral studies at Memorial University of Newfoundland, Institute of Social and Economic Research. His research interests include maritime and naval history, including the activity of maritime non-state actors such as pirates and smugglers.



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