

Farragut, George Anthony Magin ^[1]

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by Richard G. Stone, Jr., 1986

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George Anthony Magin Farragut, pioneer, soldier, sailor, and father of Admiral David Glasgow Farragut (1801–70), was born under the British flag in Ciudadella, Minorca, the son of Anthony and Juana Mesquida Farragut. His Spanish surname seems to have been pronounced "Farragood." Having received some schooling at Barcelona, Spain, he took to the sea at the age of ten. According to Farragut's own account, written some forty-four years later, he was a fireship crew member during the Russian naval victory over the Turks at Chesma in July 1770.

Arriving in the western hemisphere in 1773, Farragut plied the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico where he learned of the outbreak of the American Revolution ^[2]. At the beginning of 1776 he proceeded to Charleston, S.C., to offer his services, first as an officer on a privateering vessel, then as a lieutenant in the state navy of South Carolina. Farragut fought the British both at sea and ashore. As a galley officer he was present at the fall of Savannah, Ga., in December 1778 and at the unsuccessful Franco-American attempt to recover that port the next year. When in early 1780 the British mounted a threat to Charleston, S.C., he went ashore with the rest of Commodore Abraham Whipple's Continental and state squadron. During the siege of Charleston he commanded a battery, and he became a prisoner upon General Benjamin Lincoln's capitulation of the city on 12 May. Following his exchange at Philadelphia, Farragut returned to the South, served as a volunteer in the American victory of January 1781 at Cowpens, S.C., where he reportedly saved the life of Colonel William Washington, and then obtained a commission—initially as a captain and later as a major—from Governor Abner Nash ^[3] to serve with North Carolina state troops. Briefly with artillery and afterward with cavalry, Farragut fought through the final stages of the war in the lower South.

With hostilities at a close, Farragut returned to the sea. By 1790 he had arrived in the Southwest Territory, which in 1796 would become the state of Tennessee. There, both by purchase and by compensation for his wartime services to North Carolina, he obtained title to acreage in Knox County. For about seventeen years he enjoyed some prominence in the affairs of Tennessee: he served as muster-master of the territory's militia forces, participated in General John Sevier ^[4]'s 1793 campaign in northern Georgia against the Cherokee ^[5] and Creek Indians, and apparently performed services, both official and personal, for his old friend William Blount ^[6], the territorial governor. Neither Farragut's hispanic background—he seems to have struggled in vain to master idiomatic English—nor his association with Blount (of Blount-conspiracy notoriety), prevented his 1807 appointment, through the intercession of his friend Governor William C. C. Claiborne of Louisiana, as a U.S. Navy ^[7] sailing master.

Farragut's last years were spent in and around New Orleans, an area congenial to him because of his Latin origins. He commanded (1810–13) the gunboat *Alligator* on Lake Borgne, helped as Claiborne's personal representative to facilitate the absorption of portions of Spanish West Florida into the Orleans territory, and served as parish magistrate for Pascagoula. Prematurely aged after an adventurous life filled with exposure, hardship, and pain—a disabled arm dated back to the Revolution—Farragut was dismissed without prejudice from the navy in 1814. Even so he served during the 1814–15 New Orleans campaign as a volunteer reporter of British activities between Pass Christian and Pascagoula. He died at his Point Plaquet, Miss., plantation.

In 1795 Farragut married Elizabeth Shine (1765–1808) of Kinston, Dobbs County (her birthplace is now in Lenoir County ^[8]), N.C. Two of the couple's five children became naval officers. One of them, the future admiral, James Glasgow Farragut (named in honor of his father's friend in North Carolina, James Glasgow), took the name "David" in honor of his foster-father, David Porter. Porter was a naval officer who, after the death of Mrs. Farragut, adopted the youth in appreciation of George Farragut's deathbed kindness to Porter's father. Of restless, even fiery, temperament, George Farragut was considered a reckless man by some contemporaries; in his mature years he once piloted a pirogue from New Orleans to Havana, Cuba. His boldness and daring were inherited in full by his illustrious son.

References:

Marshall D. Haywood, "Major George Farragut," *The Gulf States Magazine* 2 (September 1903).

Charles Lee Lewis, *David Glasgow Farragut: Admiral in the Making* (1941).

Samuel Cole Williams, "George Farragut," ^[9] *East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications* 1 (1929).

Additional Resources:

Finding Aid for the George Farragut Papers MS.2406. University of Tennessee Libraries, Special Collections:
http://dlc.lib.utk.edu/spc/view?docId=ead/0012_000138_000000_0000/0012_000138_000000_0000.xml ^[10]

Haywood, Marshall De Lancey. *Major George Farragut*. [Montgomery, Ala. : Gulf States Historical Magazine]. 1903. <https://archive.org/details/majorgeorgefarra51hayw> ^[11] (accessed July 30, 2013).

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