

Heroes and Poets

Those Who Fought and Those Who Wrote

The Spanish-American War: Richmond Pearson Hobson

He was born at Magnolia Grove in Greensboro, Alabama, the son of Sarah Pearson and James M. Hobson. He graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1889. He was ostracized by his fellow midshipmen for his total abstinence from alcohol and tobacco. He maintained a superb academic record, graduating first in his class and became the highest-ranking midshipman: Cadet Battalion Commander (today's Brigade Commander).

Lt. Richmond Pearson Hobson (USN-MH) was 63 years old when he was awarded the Medal of Honor, some 35 years after his action in Santiago Harbor during the Spanish-American War. Present by the President on 29 April 1933, his Medal of Honor citation reads:

Richmond Pearson Hobson. Rank and organization: Lieutenant, U.S. Navy. Born: 17 August 1870, Greensboro, Alabama. (Medal presented by President, 29 April 1933.) Citation: In connection with the sinking of the U.S.S. Merrimac at the entrance to the fortified harbor of Santiago de Cuba, 3 June 1898. Despite persistent fire from the enemy fleet and fortifications on shore, Lt. Hobson distinguished himself by extraordinary courage and carried out this operation at the risk of his own personal safety.¹

One sentence! In light of what Lt. Hobson accomplished on this mission, a one-sentence citation not only doesn't reveal much, but worse, it was an insult to so briefly describe the operation by the person who developed, organized, and commanded a mission that was so well-done the commander of the Spanish flotilla commended him.

Although the Medal of Honor citation was an insulting one-liner, the finer details of the mission reveal that the mission developed and led by Lt. Hobson actually turned the tide of the campaign in favor of the Americans. The details of his mission were the subject of an article that appeared in *Retired Officer* magazine by Dale Walker.

At the beginning of Walker's article is this interesting introductory note:

¹ *The Congressional Medal of Honor: The Names, The Deeds* (Forest Ranch, Cal.: Sharp and Dunnigan 1984), 615

A young Navy Lt Richmond Pearson Hobson was kissed by American women of all ages. Tall, handsome, clean-cut, broad-shouldered, a model of Victorian heroism, a possible subject for a Frank Merriwell story² popular at the time or the drawings of Charles Dana Gibson.³ Hobson's features were so symmetrical beginning with his mid-parted hair that they might have been stamped out of a machine. His mental process forged at Annapolis, was cut from the same serenely self-confident templet.

Just thirty minutes before the blazing action started at the mouth of the Cuban harbor, which won him the fleeting worship of a fickle public and a belated Medal of Honor, Hobson had reflected that there was nothing disquieting about the imminent possibility of death. The mind and heart accepted the reality of things with deep, quick, keen, exquisite delight. Hobson's popularity would quickly wain. He was not terribly endearing like Charles Lindbergh nor did he display the flaws and weaknesses the public likes in its heroes. A roistering Gregory "Pappy" Boyington⁴ always wears better than a straight-laced Hobson. He just disappeared after 10-thousand women kissed him, after what he did in 35 minutes, a deed of great heroism.

The reason? People are pleased with what military people do, but soon forget the heroism required to maintain freedom. The total depravity of man. But it is true that people never will and never have been consistent in any attitude and this has been demonstrated by the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ on this earth and the fickle human public, demonstrated by every athletic hero, who was a hero today and a bum tomorrow, as is also the case in every field and aspect of life.

Here was a man, who was very professional, had tremendous integrity, had absolutely no fear of death, and no fear of life. That's enough to make anyone very unpopular. Fear of death and fear of life is one of the major motivating factors of the cosmic system. Walker goes on to write:

In the spring of 1898, the American Navy regarded the grand fleet of Spain with misdirected awe. Such was the quality of naval intelligence then, that few realized the nature of Adm. Pascal Cervera y Topete's command of a fleet barely capable of putting to sea, an armada outgunned and outclassed in every respect by American war ships.

² Gilbert Patten, writing as Burt L. Standish, made a career of generating serialized twenty-thousand-word stories featuring his fictional creation Frank Merriwell, a student athlete at Yale University who inspired others to emulate his example of manly boyhood.

³ An American graphic artist who was best known for his creation of the Gibson Girl, an iconic representation of the beautiful and independent American woman at the turn of the 20th century.

⁴ World War II Marine Corps ace of the famed Flying Tigers who spent a year as a Japanese POW and recipient of the Medal of Honor for leading an air attack on the Solomon Islands and personally destroying 26 Japanese planes shot down by his squadron.

Immediately after America and Spain went to war, the American North Atlantic fleet under Rear Adm. William T. Sampson was ordered to intercept the Spaniards then headed westward from the Cape Verde Islands to Cuba. Adm. Cervera outwitted the American hunters however and with ships, cruisers *Infanta Maria Teresa*, *Christóbal Colón*, *Vizcaya*, *Almirante*, and the *Furor*, and they swept into the fortified harbor of Santiago de Cuba under its protective land batteries. Adm. Sampson and Whitfield Scott Shelly, commander of Sampson's flying squadron, thus found themselves stymied on 01 June.

The glory of George Dewey's Asiatic squadron, which had pounded the Spaniards to pieces off Manila on May Day past, had eluded them. And with the first class battleship, *USS Oregon*, which had just completed a voyage around the Horn, at flank speed, from dry dock in Bremerton, Washington, and the other vessels of the North Atlantic Fleet, Samson established a blockade at Santiago.

It was at this time that Adm. Sampson conceived a plan of sinking a ship in the very neck of the harbor.⁵ Then the harbor spreads way out and the Spanish fleet was inside the harbor. The idea was to sink a ship in the narrow harbor and eliminate the Spanish fleet.

During the period of tactical debate, a recent transfer from Sampson's flagship, *USS New York*, came to the Admiral's attention: Lt. Richmond Pearson Hobson, an expert in ship construction and a self-assured 1889 Annapolis graduate with added dimension of being a southerner of impeccable credentials. It might be remembered that there was a great rejoicing over that fact that in the Spanish-American War, old Confederate generals such as Fighting Joe Wheeler, who fought at the Battle of San Juan Hill, and Fitzhugh Lee, former Governor of Virginia, put on Yankee blue to fight the Spaniards. They were brought into the U.S. Army to fight in the Spanish-American War. The purpose of all of this not only to give them general officer commissions, but also to heal the breach because in 1898 the War between the States was as hot as the day of Appomattox. The reason for this is because of that evil operation called Reconstruction imposed by the radical Republicans in which the South was brutally treated after the war. By everyone except U. S. Grant.

Hobson was born on 17 August 1870 in Greensboro, Alabama. His mother was the daughter of Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of North Carolina, Richmond Hobson. His father, James M. Hobson, who served in the Confederate Army, was wounded at Malvern Hill. He also fought at Chancellorsville and Spotsylvania, all in Virginia, and had suffered 14 mos. captivity in a Yankee prison.

Young Hobson had attended Southern University in Greensboro and as something of a child prodigy entered the Naval Academy at age 15.

⁵ "Santiago de Cuba nestles in a valley of the Sierra Maestra that is pierced by a pouch-shaped bay. The bay's entrance, cutting into high bluffs that rise from the sea, is nearly invisible offshore. The chief bluff, about 200 feet high, is El Morro, crowned by a colonial fortress, Morro Castle (Castillo del Morro). Santiago de Cuba was a focal point of the Spanish-American War, and many reminders of that conflict are found in the area. Decisive engagements were fought near the city on the hills of El Viso and San Juan. The harbor was partially blocked by the scuttled collier *Merrimac*; and the principal naval action of the war was fought along the coast near the port on July 3, 1898" (*The New Encyclopaedia Britannica: Micropaedia*, 15th ed. [Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2010], 10:433).

He was a solitary youngster with few friends and after graduating with highest honors he opted to study ship construction rather than vie for the great opportunities as a line officer. None of his peers or superiors dreamed that this studious loner, his nose forever in books, would seek distinction and win it in combat.

He applied for a post as a naval observer in the Sino-Japanese War of 1896 and early in 1898 he was able to wrangle a job with Admiral Sampson. His plan was a very simple one. Sampson consulted with Hobson on the proposed blockade of the Spanish and Cuban coast and Hobson soon came up with a scheme whereby a ship could be quickly scuttled by timed explosions of torpedo-like mines attached to her bottom hold plates. The expendable ship was the old collier [a coal transport ship], the USS *Merrimac*, originally a four-thousand ton Norwegian steamer. The woebegone *Merrimac* represented one of those essays on profiteering in wartime. It had been salvaged and acquired by a New York firm and repaired at a cost of 48-thousand and then sold to the government for 342-thousand dollars.

This was over the protest of the Naval survey Board. Then, Hobson worked out a scuttling operation down to the last detail. He compiled information on the tides, time of moonset and sunrise, the configuration of the channel, the location of the shore batteries flanking it, the explosives and timers needed and the composition and exact duties of a skeleton crew of seven which would take the collier on her final voyage. Although it was a line officer's job he kept fighting for it and he won command. He has seven men under his command to get this large ship in and then sink it at the right spot.

He had developed this plan to such a fine degree that Admiral Sampson finally agreed to let him take it in. Hobson's plan then called for the *Merrimac* to be maneuvered into the channel and he was going to sink it at a perfect spot. He undertook a special reconnaissance to survey Santiago Harbor in very great detail including the old 16th century Morro Castel whose dungeons were very famous. To accompany him on this mission he picked the seven best men in the Atlantic Fleet.

The mission got underway early on 03 June 1898. Hobson had a lifeboat slung from a cargo boom aft on the starboard side for insurance. He had an old twin-hull catamaran secured to the rail. He also tinkered with the problem of firing the explosive charges and decided they should be exploded separately and in succession rather than simultaneously to give them a two-percent rather than a one-percent chance of living.

They started out at night and, at about that time, the moon fooled them, and came out and was very bright for the rest of the evening. Two-thousand yards from the channel entrance, Hobson gave the order, "Full speed ahead!" At 3:15, the *Merrimac*, making 9 knots, went into the harbor's channel. When the defenders woke up and realized what was happening they opened fire with everything they had. They threw a tremendous amount of shells at the old bucket. A Spanish picket boat lying in the shadows of the cliff on the port side of the channel fired on them with very deadly effect.

The *Merrimac* failed to respond to the port helm because a rudder had been blow away. Roughly the collier was not in a position to block the channel so Hobson gave the orders that the anchor chains be dropped and the mines fired. But with shrapnel exploding all around the ship and its crew scurrying about, everything seemed to go wrong. The bow anchor was dropped but its chain had already parted. The stern anchor and its gear seemed shot away, and it was. The *Merrimac* just drifted around while the Spanish blew it to pieces. Hobsons's men did succeed in firing a couple of the canisters. That exploded some of the bottom plates and the ship began to sink, and eventually it did, but not quite where they wanted it to. It took 35 minutes for the whole mission to be completed and at that time Hobson gave the command to abandon ship. When he gave that command he was amazed to see all seven of the men were there with only one minor injury.

When they got into the water, they found the catamaran floating around, so they climbed aboard and at 6 A.M., they were just floating around. The American fleet did nothing to come out and rescue them. But the Spanish did.

They sent out a steam launch and Hobson asked them in good Spanish, "Is there an officer aboard?" A middle-aged gentleman of considerable rank stepped forward. It was Admiral of the Fleet Cervera. He put them in Morro Castle but he was so impressed by what they'd done he treated them very well. Every Spanish officer in Morro Castle came to shake hands with Hobson, so impressed with what he did.

Hobson had a fairly good cell because all he had to contend with were flies and other insects. Scratched out all over the walls was the word, *muerte*, "death." Finally, they decided on an exchange after they'd been in prison for a short time. The British counsel arranged it. So on 06 July, about a month later, Hobson learned that Major General William Shafter of the U. S. Army and Spanish Governor-General Blanco y Erenas had concluded negotiations. He and his crew were to be released. The releasing procedure, had them come up the trail, Hobson and his crewmen, and William Harding Davis, who was writing at that time for a couple of papers was also there. A waiting band struck up the "Star-Spangled Banner," but no one cheered, or shouted, or gave orders. But every man in the U.S. Army anywhere within the vicinity, several thousand of them, all came to attention in absolute silence. Then a red-haired, red-faced trooper leaned down the trail and shouted, "Three cheers for Hobson!" And the mob rushed at him with a roar and he was given a hero's welcome.

Toward the end of his short, four-year, naval career, Hobson was concerned with several things. They were rather technical—the fighting side of his profession. He did do some very fantastic things for the Navy. But he had to retire because of an eye infection he received in China, and a bout of typhoid fever.

In 1907, he was elected to Congress and he served four terms for the State of Alabama in which he crusaded for several things: (1) a bigger Navy and (2) the prohibition of alcohol in the Navy. In Washington he was one of the leading exponents in 1907 until the day he died, by warning against a major war with Japan and he said the Japs would attack Manilla and Pearl Harbor first.

When prohibition became a reality, Hobson became interested in something else and that was the use of drugs in the services, especially the Navy. He founded the World Narcotics Defense Association in which he served as president until his death. He campaigned for a bill to forbid the importation, manufacture, or use of heroin in the United States.

It was not until 1933, that they woke up and realized what he had done in those 35 minutes at Santiago Bay. They looked up all the background information in the newspapers, but some of the people didn't like Hobson, didn't like a non-line officer being recognized and there was a lot of pettiness because of his great courage in Congress. But when the President Franklin Roosevelt said, "I want a citation," they wrote a citation—one sentence. Why? All of the services have politics. In time of peace, it is almost inevitable with few exceptions like MacArthur in the Army, but very few men in peacetime who are general officers are capable enough to carry the ball.

In this citation, one sentence. It never bothered Hobson that until 1933, he was never decorated. Even though all the men of his crew received decorations and one member of the crew received the Medal of Honor. Thirty-five years later they finally got around to it.

If you are a professional, it doesn't make any difference. Hobson was the ultimate professional. It never bothered him. Never raised his voice. Was never bitter. He was a magnificent man of great integrity. It is from the status of professionalism that causes men like Hobson to come into focus, do great things, and move on in history. Because of men such as him, we have and we enjoy freedom. Hobson represents literally hundreds of thousands of men who have done their job well and because they did their job well as a unit there were no special heroes. They were all heroes because each one did his job right. Not only hundreds of thousands of servicemen but hundreds of thousands of police officers, and other truly dedicated public servants.

People who do their job professionally are never recognized, are never rewarded, never receive any acclaim from the fickle public they protect. They are often ridiculed, often maligned, and very, very often rejected. Why? Because it is inevitable that especially in peacetime when there is no continuing national pressure; historically those who are responsible for peace, the American military, those who make it possible to enjoy peace and prosperity and freedom are not only ignored and rejected, but it often is a time when the function of Cosmic One and Cosmic Two goes into major activity. There is a complete change in priorities followed by rejection of truth.

Most believers today are in the cosmic system and are helping Satan in his modus operandi. It's that small Pivot of believers who today, tomorrow, and the next day will be in Bible class, taking in doctrine wherever they are, growing in grace; these are the ones who buy time for the client nation. They make it possible for good missionaries to get going for evangelism, and for continued function in pulpits. It is biblical truth that holds the line during peacetime. Peacetime is worse than wartime. In wartime, people are united ... people are united in an endeavor to preserve their freedom. Civilian and military together. But in peacetime, every selfish Progressive goes his own way in arrogance, in Cosmic One.

Doctrinal Orientation Opposes the Current Cultural Decline

Only a few people with truth—unbelievers who understand establishment and born again believers who are faithful in perception of doctrine—are required in any period of history for the preservation of a client nation. The major factor in holding the United States of America together right now includes you, Doritos, streamers, those who show up here three days a week, and those few churches where Bible doctrine is taught accurately and consistently. The positive volition of these Christian soldiers is holding this country together. But the loss of honor among an ever-growing number of citizens who are continuously propagandized by disinformation dispensed by the Dark Side are converting human good into evil characterized by the inflexibility expressed by their rhetoric and the violence associated with their crusades. Here is a comment on this hidden agenda of their assaults on freedom:

At a time when more than 400,000 children are in foster care nationwide, the city of Philadelphia is threatening to cut ties with Catholic Social Services (CSS) because of the group's policy against placing foster children in same-sex households. Whatever one's personal beliefs, it's clear that this case is about more than one gay couple or one obviously targeted religious group. It's about freedom of conscience for everyone.

Given the immense good that CSS and other religious charities do, surely there is another way intelligent people in the City of Brotherly Love (and elsewhere) can resolve their differences. The ultimate aim of secularists, of course, isn't to place foster kids with gay couples or force devout bakers to create wedding cakes for gay weddings but to banish God from the village square. Lest you celebrate too soon, remember: The state is a soul-less, ruthless and insatiable machine, and its only purpose is to increase its power and subjugate its citizens for maximum efficiency.

Every time religious liberty is put to the test, freedom holds its breath.⁶

This inspires us to take a look at the virtue of honor. It is a word that is difficult to define since its application has to do with the foundational standards subscribed to by a given culture. Honor among the people of Islam is starkly different than among those of Victorian England or the original population of the American colonies.

Whenever people gather in a common piece of real estate and establish a nation, their foundational documents contain standards and laws to which all its citizens are bound to submit to and uphold. These laws are intended to guard and defend the standards to which the greater majority subscribe and for which they are obliged to protect and defend. These standards contain generally accepted foundational principles that express devotion to law and order whose tenants are borrowed from historical experiences and religious teachings.

⁶ Kathleen Parker, "Philadelphia's unnecessary war on Catholics," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, sec. A, May 24, 2018.

The believer in Jesus Christ is bound to subscribe to what Scripture defines as honorable thought, decision, and action and these are revealed throughout both testaments. Internal laws restrict certain actions that are punishable by the state while external threats must be defended by military action if necessary.

The biblical words for honor are the verb, **τιμάω (timáō)**, the noun, **τιμή (timḗ)**, and the adjective, **τίμιος (tímios)**. These words possess the following requirements to which all are to subscribe and execute: “esteem, reverence, favor, respect, rank, dignity, prized, and precious.”

These concepts are contained in the Royal Family Honor Code taught in Romans 12–16 and may be summarized as follows:

1. **Respect for the privacy of the royal priesthood:** Live and let live; therefore, abstain from gossip, maligning, judging, character assignation, evil speculation, rumor, and hearsay. Galatians 5:1; Romans 14:7–13.
2. **Love all people with unconditional love:** Hold no grudge or resentment, especially other believers. Hebrews 13:1; 1 John 3:11; Romans 12:9–10.
3. **Recognize that all believers have a common objective:** Demonstrate courtesy, thoughtfulness, and sensitivity toward those in the congregation who may be at a different stage of spiritual growth, whether they are more advanced in doctrine or less advanced than yourself. Romans 15:5–7.
4. **Build integrity: do not distort morality:** Integrity is the standard of the royal family, superior to morality which belongs to the believer and unbeliever. Romans 13:1, 8–10.
5. **Never assume that production is a means of divine blessing:** Talent, personality, intelligence, sacrifice, asceticism, and ability never merit blessing from God. Production is a *result* of spiritual advance, never the cause. Matthew 6:33.
6. **Depend totally on the integrity of God:** Dependence on God requires awareness of His attributes through understanding Bible doctrine. Your point of reference with the integrity of God, which is the love of God, includes His righteousness, justice, and omniscience within His policy of grace. Right thinking creates right motivation, and right motivation leads to right action. Romans 12:1–2.

7. **The royal family honor code is for all believers:** The code is God's system, *His* code, not yours. Both the laws of divine establishment and the honor code sustain your advance, blessing, and happiness. All believers rely on these two divine systems. Romans 12:3; 13:1-8.
8. **More is demanded of the strong than the weak:** We are all royalty, yet no two believers are equal. The principle of *noblesse oblige*⁷ applies. *Maturity* imposes the obligation of honorable, generous, and responsible behavior that is the concomitant of high rank or noble birth. The strong are obliged to tolerate the nonessential, inconsequential, and occasionally obnoxious opinions and actions of the weak. Romans 15:1-4 cf. 14:1.
9. **Orient to authority:** Authority protects freedom. Like human freedom, Christian freedom is not an isolated quality. Your freedom as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is an integral part of a system that includes free will, privacy, private property, and authority. 1 Peter 2:13-18; Hebrews 13:7, 17; Isaiah 54:17.
10. **Reciprocate for the privilege of hearing doctrine taught:** Christian giving is a matter of honor under the royal family's code of conduct. God measures giving by the motivation behind the gift, not by its monetary value. Giving is commanded, but your giving must not be irresponsible. You must never jeopardize the health and welfare of your family or renege on your financial obligations in order to donate to the church. Mark 12:41-44; 1 Timothy 5:8.⁸

Loss of Establishment and Biblical Honor when Under Pressure

World War 1 was a traumatic exercise for Britain and its loss of thought was starkly realized in the horrors of trench warfare during World War I in the poetry of Wilfred Owen (1893-1918).

From age nineteen Owen wanted to be a poet and immersed himself in poetry, being especially impressed with Percy Bysshe Shelley and John Keats. He wrote almost no poetry of importance until he saw action in France in 1917.

He was deeply attached to his mother to whom most of his 664 letters are addressed. He was a committed Christian and became a lay assistant to the vicar of Reading.

⁷ "Noblesse oblige—used to denote the obligation of honorable and generous behavior associated with high rank or birth: nobility obligates" (*Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, 2d ed. (1953), s.v. "noblesse oblige."

⁸ These principles of the royal family honor code are extracted from, R. B. Thieme, Jr., *The Integrity of God*, 3d ed. (Houston: R. B. Thieme, Jr, Bible Ministries, 2002), 141-44.