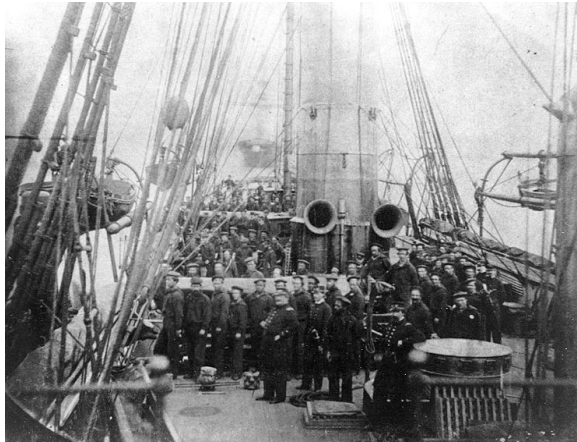


## **A Retired Muscoda Farmer receives his Medal of Honor 40 years late**



Crew of the Kearsarge shortly after the battle of Cherbourg

In 1904 John Hayes was a 72 year old retired Navy sailor living on a pension, in Muscoda Wisconsin. It was a long way from Newfoundland where he was born. He had farmed from the late 1860's till his retirement in the Port Andrew area, near the Wisconsin River. He had not always been a farmer though. In his youth he had been a cooper. Tiring of that trade he signed to go to sea on a British Merchant ship. In 1857, at the age of 24, he joined the U.S. Navy, and served on the Pacific Coast for two years. He then returned to the merchant service.

When the Civil War began on 1861, John Hayes who loved his adopted country, determined to rejoin the U.S. Navy and serve in the way he knew best. His service in the Civil War was as a coxswain aboard the U.S.S. Kearsarge, a federal sloop of war. For two years his ship had been hunting the rebel sloop

C.S.S. Alabama, a commerce raider. The Rebel ship, under the command of Captain Raphael Semmes, had had great success, sinking 65 union vessels (mostly merchant ships) since her commissioning on August 24, 1862. She had taken \$6,000,000 in prizes (about \$123,000,000 in today's dollars). The ship now was badly in need of resupply and refitting.



A PAINTING OF THE C. S. S. ALABAMA

For this purpose the Alabama put in to the port of Cherbourg, France on June 14, 1864. This is where the Kearsarge, under the command of John A. Winslow finally overtook her.



Captain Raphael Semmes, Alabama's commanding officer, standing by his ship's 110-pounder rifled gun.

Captain Semmes, knowing there was no escaping the federal ship, prepared

his men for battle. On June 19, 1864 the Alabama left harbor and engaged the Kearsarge in one of the most famous naval battles of the Civil War. Due to the greater accuracy of the Kearsarge gun crews, within an hour C. S. S. Alabama sustained the greater damage, being reduced to a shattered hulk, and sunk. Hayes was second captain of the number 2 gun (a 32 pounder) and was instrumental by his steel nerve and unflinching efficiency in maintaining the regular and destructive fire that sunk the Alabama. In those days it took nerve to stay on duty during a battle. Grapeshot, chain, and splinters often raked the deck, shredding bodies into pieces. Blood often covered everything.



Forty confederate sailors were killed, and seventy captured. Captain Semmes escaped capture when the British yacht Deerhound rescued him and took him to Britain. Many in the Kearsarge crew were noted for their bravery:

*Report of Acting Master Sumner, U.S. Navy, commending the conduct of the division under his command in the action between the U. S. S. Kearsarge and the C. S. S. Alabama.*

U. S. S. KEARSARGE,  
Cherbourg, June 20, 1864.

JAMES S. THORNTON,  
Lieutenant-Commander and Executive  
Officer, U. S. S Kearsarge.

*SIR: In obedience to your desire I beg leave to submit my report of the conduct of the men of the third division, under my command, in the recent action with the rebel steamer Alabama. During the whole action entire steadiness of conduct prevailed among the men, and no one man could be distinguished from another in courage or fortitude. But among those showing still higher qualifications I am pleased to name Thomas Perry (boatswain's mate) and **John Hayes** (coxswain), first and second captains of No. 2 gun; George E. Read, first loader of same gun; also Robert Strahan (captain top), first captain of No. 1 gun; James H. Lee, sponger, and Joachim Pease (colored seaman), loader of same gun. The conduct of the latter in battle fully sustained his reputation as one of the best men in the ship.*

*I am, sir, very respectfully, your obedient  
servant,  
D. H. SUMNER,  
Acting Master.*

Hayes continued in the Navy after the war, sailing on the U.S. S. Hartford to China. He was discharged in August of 1868. Though the Congressional Medal of Honor had been awarded to him on December 31, 1864 he was never informed of the honor. After a short stint sailing on the great lakes out of Milwaukee, Hayes married Celia Johnson and moved to the farm, where they raised three children. After losing his first wife in 1878, he married Mary S. Nelson. With advancing age, he gave up farming and moved to Muscoda, Wisconsin. He had no idea that he was due any honors until 1904, when he read an old 1864 naval order and became aware of having

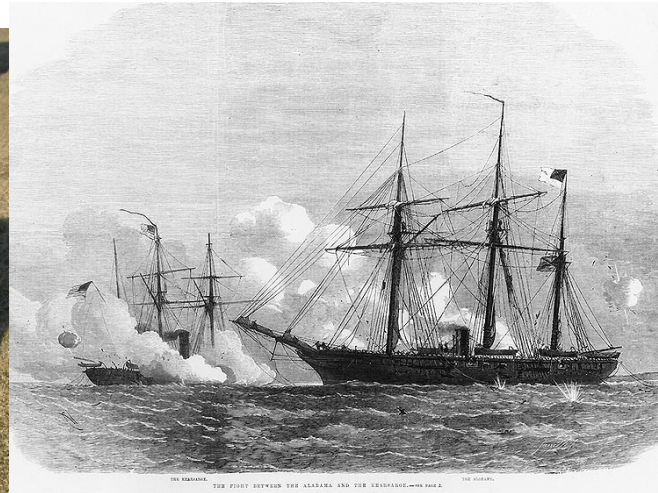


been awarded the Medal. He wrote the Navy Department in July 1904 saying that he had just learned about the medal. He wrote: "That medal is mine and I want it. I am too old to work and am receiving a pension of \$12.00 per month" The Navy department found his medal in their archives, corroded, and with the ribbon almost rotted away. They sent it to him nonetheless, and told him he was entitled to \$100.00.



After receiving his medal, Hayes moved to Blairstown, Benton County, Iowa in 1907 to live with his daughter in his old age. He died on January 28, 1911, and was buried in the Pleasant Hill Cemetery in Blairstown, far from the ocean he once sailed.

Photo # NH 59354 "The Fight Between the Alabama and the Kearsarge"



**His Medal of Honor Citation reads:**

*"Served on board the U.S.S. Kearsarge when she destroyed the Alabama off Cherbourg, France, 19 June 1864. Acting as second captain of the No. 2 gun during this bitter engagement, Hayes exhibited marked coolness and good conduct and was highly recommended for his gallantry under fire by the divisional officer. "*