DUNCAN NATHANIEL INGRAHAM MEDAL AND ITS RELATION TO THE “KOSZTA AFFAIR”

STEVEN E. WATTS

I bought this very large medal at a Heritage auction and was curious about the recipient, a Navy man, and the background of the medal itself since it was “Presented by the President of the United States to Commander Duncan N. Ingraham.” What happened on the July 2nd, 1853 to warrant Congress giving Commander Ingraham a gold medal?

Duncan Nathaniel Ingraham was born December 6, 1802 in Charleston, South Carolina, to Nathaniel Ingraham and Louisa Harriett Hall. He belonged to a family eminently naval in its character. His father, at the age of 20, took part as a volunteer with his intimate friend John Paul Jones, in the engagement of the Bon Homme Richard with the Serapis off the British coast. His uncle, Captain Joseph Ingraham, United States Navy, was lost in the ship Pickering which foundered at sea in 1800. His cousin, William Ingraham, a lieutenant in the navy around 1784, was killed at the age of 24 by the Indians at Nootka Sound on the west coast of Vancouver Island.

Duncan entered the United States Navy as a Midshipman on June 18, 1812 (age 9) and served during the War of 1812 on board the frigate Congress and on Lake Ontario in the Madison. He was promoted to Lieutenant on January 13, 1825, Commander on September 8, 1841 and Captain on September 14, 1855. He also saw action during the war with Mexico as a member of Commodore Conner’s staff at the capture of Tampico. In 1853 he was the commanding officer of the sloop USS St. Louis attached to the Mediterranean squadron. When he entered the port of Smyrna, Turkey, he was informed that one Martin Koszta was being held prisoner on the Austrian brig-of-war Hussar.

Martin Koszta, who was of Hungarian birth, had taken part in the political movement of 1848-49, which had aroused enormous sympathy in the United States, to detach Hungary from the dominion of the Emperor of Austria. In fact Martin was one of Kossuth’s foremost captains and had fled with Kossuth to Turkey after the revolt was put down. The Sultan was besieged by Austrian demands for their extradition. The United States Navy came to the rescue of Kossuth and his fellow fugitives (among them Martin Koszta) by offering them passage to the United States in the Mississippi in 1850, commanded by Captain John C. Long. Martin lived in America for two years and had declared his intention, in due form of law, to become a citizen of the United States, at the same time renouncing all allegiance to any foreign power. He left for Turkey on business in 1853. He was placed under the protection of the United States by the American consul at Smyrna and the American charge d’affaires ad interim at Constantinople, John B. Brown. When the Austrian Consul-General, M. De Westbecker, received word that Koszta was in Smyrna, he sent men and had him taken by force and transferred to the Austrian brig Hussar, where he was badly treated and confined in chains. He would be taken back to Austria and there, inevitably, he would be executed. A small American community headed by J. Langdon appealed to the American Consul, Edward S. Offley to try to get Koszta released. The Turkish authorities would do nothing. Mr. Offley appealed to the American consul for Koszta’s release to no avail. At that same time Commander Ingraham’s ship the USS St. Louis entered the port. An appeal for help was sent to Ingraham, who visited the Hussar and was told by the Lieutenant on watch that they held no prisoners. Captain Ingraham and the Consul went to the Austrian Consulate, where, after a scene of the most violent kind, Westbecker admitted that the prisoner was on board and gave a forced consent for them to see him. Returning on board the Hussar, Commander Ingraham thus addressed Captain von Schwartz: “When I came on board a short time since, your Lieutenant lied to my face. The meanest of my cabin boys would not have been guilty of such cowardice. Where is the prisoner? I wish to see him.” Koszta claimed protection of the American flag to the Commander. An appeal was sent to Constantinople to the United States charge d’affaires, John B. Brown, and on July 2nd a dispatch was received instructing Ingraham to defend the honor of his flag and obtain possession of Mr. Koszta’s person, by force if necessary. The captain of the St. Louis sent word that if Koszta was not handed over to him within four hours he would open fire. His exact words were: “Sir: I have been directed by the American charge at Constantinople to demand the person of Martin Koszta, a citizen of the United States, taken by force on Turkish soil and now confined on board the brig Hussar, and if a refusal is given to take him by force. An answer to this demand must be returned by 4 o’clock P.M.” Ingraham had calculated the odds, should battle ensue. His St. Louis, mounting 18 guns, would face the Hussar (16 guns) and the schooner Artemisia (12 guns), plus “a steamer of four guns,” although the American cannon were of slightly larger caliber than those of the Austrians. Mr. Offley made
a last appeal to the Austrian Consul-General who finally yielded to his representations. The two Consuls agreed that M. Koszta should be delivered into the keeping of the French Consul-General, pending the decision of the higher authorities of the parties concerned. The “Koszta Affair” involved an interesting question of international law, i.e. the right of an alien domiciled in any country to the protection of that country, and has served as a precedent for the American government in somewhat similar cases that have arisen.3 This incident is also one of the very few in the history of American naval diplomacy to have had an entire book devoted to it: Andor Klay, Daring Diplomacy: The Case of the First American Ultimatum.4 Koszta was ultimately released and allowed to return to the United States.

Ingraham’s actions were subsequently given full backing by the United States government, which awarded him a Congressional gold medal on August 4, 1854 as a testimonial of the high sense entertained by Congress of his gallant and judicious conduct. Ingraham’s actions also earned him the admiration of the European left, which had long supported Hungary’s battle for independence from the Austrian empire. In London an Ingraham testimonial fund was established to collect money for a presentation to the hero of Smyrna. Money was collected and used to make a gold pocket chronometer. This, and a parchment recording the committee’s appreciation of Ingraham’s efforts, was then presented to the United States ambassador. Nearly 18 months later, the committee received a letter from Captain Ingraham, in which he wrote that “it is with no common feelings I accept this token of goodwill from the citizens of another country, and from that class who are the bone and sinew of all governments."5 The citizens of New York also presented him with a gold medal.6

Commander Ingraham married Harriott Horry Laurens, granddaughter on the paternal side of the patriot Henry Laurens, President of the Continental Congress. They had 11 children.

Ingraham was promoted to Captain on September 14, 1855. In March 1856 he was appointed Chief of the Bureau of Ordnance and Hydrography. He served in this position until 1860 when he took command of the flag ship USS Richmond assigned to the Mediterranean. He left the USS Richmond on January 2, 1861 when he learned that South Carolina had left the Union. Ingraham resigned from the United States Navy on February 4, 1861 and offered his services to the Confederacy. He was appointed Captain in the Confederate Navy on March 26, 1861 and was assigned as commandant of the Warrington Navy Yard in Pensacola, Florida. On November 16, 1861 he was assigned to command the naval station at Charleston. While in Charleston, Ingraham supervised the construction of the ironclad ram Palmetto State. On January 30, 1863 Ingraham commanded the Palmetto State which, along with the Chicora, another ironclad, attacked the Union blockaders and claimed victory. In March 1863 he was relieved of his sea command due to his age, but he remained in charge of the shore installations until Charleston fell to Union forces in 1865. Ingraham remained in Charleston after the war and died there on October 16, 1891.

Since March 25, 1776 when the Continental Congress authorized a gold medal be given to George Washington, Congress has commissioned gold medals as its highest expression of national appreciation for distinguished achievements and contributions. At first it was awarded mostly to citizens who participated in the American Revolution, the War of 1812, and the Mexican War. However Congress later broadened the scope of the medal to include actors, authors, entertainers, musicians, pioneers in aeronautics and space, explorers, lifesavers, notables in science and medicine, athletes, humanitarians, public servants, and foreign recipients. Per committee rules, legislation bestowing a Congressional Gold Medal upon a recipient must be co-sponsored by two-thirds of the membership of both the House of Representatives and the Senate before their respective committees will consider it. A Congressional Gold Medal is created by the United States Mint to specifically commemorate the person and achievement for which the medal is awarded. Each medal is therefore different in appearance, and there is no rule of reaching a standard design for a Congressional Gold Medal. Congressional Gold Medals are also considered “non-portable”, meaning that they are not meant to be worn on a uniform or other clothing, but rather displayed much like a trophy.7

The resolution authorizing Ingraham to receive a Congressional Gold Medal reads:

A Joint Resolution directing the Presentation of a Medal to Commander Duncan N. Ingraham.

Be it resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the President of the United States be, and he is hereby, requested to cause to be made a medal, with suitable devices, and presented to Commander Duncan N. Ingraham, of the navy of the United States, as a testimonial of the high sense entertained by Congress of his gallant and judicious conduct on the second of July, eighteen hundred and fifty-three, in extending protection to Martin Koszta, by rescuing him from...
illegal seizure and imprisonment on board the Austrian war-brig *Hussar*.""}8

There have been four ships named after Ingraham. The first was DD-111 commissioned on May 15, 1919 as a *Wickes* class destroyer and later converted to DM-9 a minesweeper. It was sunk as a target off Pearl Harbor July 23, 1937. The second was DD-444, a *Gleaves* class destroyer, commissioned on July 17, 1941 and sunk on August 22, 1942 when she collided with the oil tanker *Chemung*. The third was DD-694, an *Allen M. Sumner* class destroyer, commissioned on March 10, 1944 and was sold to the Greek Navy on July 16, 1971. The fourth was FFG-61, an *Oliver Hazard Perry* class frigate, commissioned on June 25, 1988 and is still in service based out of Naval Station Everett, Washington.

Figure 2: Reverse of the Duncan Nathaniel Ingraham Medal

TESTIMONIAL OF THE HIGH SENSE / ENTERTAINED
BY CONGRESS / OF HIS GALLANT AND JUDICIOUS
CONDUCT / ON THE 2D OF JULY 1853. / JOINT
RESOLUTION OF CONGRESS AUGUST 4TH 1854 (Figure 3). In the exergue is the American eagle, with outspread wings, holding an anchor in its talons; above are 31 stars, the whole lighted by the rays of the sun. The medal was designed by Eastman and Longacre. Unfortunately the mint did not keep records, or they were destroyed, indicating how many bronze medals were made of this size. The mint sold this medal in a 3 inch size for $6.25 in 1972.8

Figure 3: Inscription on the reverse of the Duncan Nathaniel Ingraham Medal

The Duncan Nathaniel Ingraham Medal is 102mm in diameter, 9mm thick, weighs 1 pound 1.1 ounces and is made of bronze. There is a 2mm lip around the circumference on both sides, with another 2mm lip set 1mm lower than the outer border. The obverse (Figure 1) has a port broadside view of the sloop-of-war *St. Louis* (left) and the Austrian brig-of-war *Hussar* (right) at anchor in Smyrna, with a boat plying between. There is a second Austrian war vessel (*Artemisia*) and three mail steamers in the distance. The city of Smyrna and the ruins of the Acropolis, on Mount Pagus, are in the background. In the exergue is SMYRNA AMERICAN SLOOP OF WAR *ST. LOUIS*, AUSTRIAN BRIG OF WAR *HUSAR*. The reverse (Figure 2) has a laurel (left) and oak (right) wreath surrounding the inscription: PRESENTED / BY THE / PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES / TO / COMMANDER DUNCAN N. INGRAHAM / AS A

Endnotes:

3. The Encyclopedia Britannica, Volume 17