
*Intelligence Reports of British Agents
in the Long Island Sound Area,
1814-1815*

BY RICHARD K. MURDOCH

BY the middle of 1814 when hostilities with England entered the third year, it was clear to all but the most fanatic that it was not the destiny of the United States to achieve a clear-cut victory, especially as the crumbling of the Napoleonic Empire freed more of the enemy's forces for concentration in the western hemisphere. A virtual stalemate had developed in the land fighting along much of the Canadian border from Eastport to the Great Lakes in spite of American victories on the inland waterways. On the high seas the only events worthy of note were the successes of a number of armed privateers. The larger warships, a few in number as compared to those of the enemy, were effectively bottled up by a tight blockade in Portsmouth, Boston, New London, New York, the Delaware River and Chesapeake Bay.¹ Even the proud *Constitution*, the symbol of New England seamanship and the vessel the enemy hoped to destroy above all others, was kept idle in Boston after seeking refuge there in April 1814 at the conclusion of her third successful cruise.² Coastal trade carried on in small schooners and sloops was becoming increasingly perilous with almost daily captures by the blockading vessels. Then in July came the seizure of Eastport and a portion of the Maine coastline, and a month later the most shattering blow of the entire war, the humiliating burning of a part of Washington.

¹ At the start of the war there were approximately a thousand fighting ships of all types in the Royal Navy as contrasted with 185 flying the flag of the United States and of these 165 were small gunboats not suitable for service on the high seas. Benson J. Lossing, *The Pictorial Field-Book of the War of 1812* (New York, 1896), pp. 231 and 234; and Samuel Perkins, *A History of the Political and Military Events of the Late War between the United States and Great Britain* (New Haven, 1825), p. 55.

² *Constitution* under the command of Captain Charles Stewart succeeded in reaching Marblehead on 3 April 1814, just ahead of two enemy warships. After a brief stay in Salem harbor *Constitution* slipped into Boston.

At the orders of Vice Admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane, commander on the American Station, constant probing of the defenses of coastal towns was carried on throughout the war by vessels of the enemy fleet.³ It was hoped that this would keep the local population in a state of alarmed confusion and might eventually result in the determination in some areas of New England already opposed to the fighting to cease making further contributions to the national war effort. In spite of holding the upper hand on all fronts the British remained apprehensive lest the American warships bottled up in northern ports make a dash for the open sea and possibly head for the Indian Ocean to interfere with the lightly defended fleet of East Indiamen. There was also the gnawing fear that somewhere in one of these coastal harbors an ingenious Yankee such as Robert Fulton might be working on some new infernal device capable of damaging or even destroying the largest warships.⁴ In June 1813 an attempt to blow up H.M.S. *Ramillies* had almost succeeded as she lay at anchor in Long Island Sound. This failure of the explosive-laden schooner *Eagle* out of New York to destroy the enemy warship was duplicated a month later when a submersible boat attached to the coppered hull of the same warship failed to explode because of mechanical trouble.⁵ Another effort, also unsuccessful, was made to destroy *Plantagenet* at anchor near Norfolk.⁶ Admiral Cochrane deemed it necessary to warn his subordinate commanders against mooring their vessels close to shore in the same location each night and to order them to employ guard vessels from sunset to sunup. The story told by Joshua Penny, a Long Island pilot captured by the enemy and held some time on *Ramillies*, gained great popularity with those living along the Sound. He reported that

³ Vice Admiral Sir Alexander Forrester Inglis Cochrane (1758-1832) was commander in chief on the North American and West Indian Station during the latter part of the war and made Bermuda his headquarters. For biographical sketches see *Dictionary of National Biography*, XI (London, 1887), 159-60; and John Marshall, *Royal Navy Biography*, 12 vols. (London, 1823-1830), I, part 1, 257-66.

⁴ For a dozen years Fulton tried unsuccessfully to interest several European powers in explosive devices to destroy large warships. He returned to the United States where shortly before the outbreak of hostilities a Congressional committee conducted an investigation of the potential value of Fulton's floating mines or 'torpedoes.' For drawings of Fulton's devices and an account of his career, see Lossing, *Pictorial Field-Book*, pp. 238-42. For additional information on his experiments in Europe, see Murray F. Sueter, *The Evolution of the Submarine Boat, Mine and Torpedo from the Sixteenth Century to the Present Time* (Portsmouth, England, 1907), pp. 27-35.

⁵ Lengthy accounts of the *Eagle* affair and subsequent reaction including bitter editorials condemning the use of such 'devilish and immoral' means of conducting naval warfare were carried in many newspapers, especially those opposed to the war. See articles in *Charleston Courier*, 7 July 1813, and *Providence Gazette and Country Journal*, 14 August 1813. The second attack on *Ramillies* was described in considerable detail by Sir Thomas Hardy who referred to it as the work of a 'diving boat' that had been invented by 'a gentleman living in Norwich [Connecticut], U. S.' A. M. Broadley and R. G. Bartelot, *Nelson's Hardy: His Life, Letters and Friends* (London, 1909), p. 163.

⁶ The torpedo charge exploded some distance from the warship and did no more than throw water on her foredeck. *Norfolk Ledger*, 14 August 1813; and Lossing, *Pictorial Field-Book*, p. 693.

'Sir Thomas Hardy [the captain] had not slept for nine nights,' for fear of torpedoes after the second attack on his vessel.⁷

It was because of these events that Sir Thomas Masterman Hardy, commander of the squadron blockading Long Island Sound and the port of New York, gave orders to his subordinates to keep close watch on all marine activity in the various ports under their surveillance.⁸ Some American citizens possibly attracted by offers of substantial reward or perhaps convinced that the unpopular war appeared to be endless threatening complete ruin to many of the mercantile class, volunteered to act as British agents. It is likewise true that some older Americans still harboring resentment at the severing of ties with the mother country in 1783, regarded themselves as more British than American. The blue signal lights hoisted on the shore near New London on the evening of 12 December 1813 to warn the enemy fleet of the attempted escape of Commodore Decatur's little squadron was no doubt the work of disaffected persons, and for years thereafter the term 'Blue Light Federalists' was applied to a number of New England political figures.⁹ The fact that a number of disenchanted citizens were aiding the enemy was lamented by the editor of the New York *Columbian* who wrote, 'It is a fact, that the enemy have their agents, or "friends," in the heart of our city, who furnish to their vessels on the coast, every information they can desire. . . .'¹⁰ A bit later a postal official in New York complained that important local news reached the British fleet anchored in the Sound by way of agents in Connecticut considerably faster than if the information had been sent by regular post.¹¹ Some of the agents were actually spies, British officers on parole or in disguise who mingled with the local population virtually certain to go undetected as long as they remained in the larger population centers where strangers were not as a rule objects of curiosity.¹²

⁷ It appears that Penny was involved in at least two recorded efforts to destroy *Ramillies* by underwater explosions. Lossing, *Pictorial Field-Book*, p. 693; *Niles Weekly Register*, VI, 221, 4 June 1814; and *Salem Gazette*, 28 May 1814.

⁸ For biographical sketches of Sir Thomas, see *Dictionary of National Biography*, XXIV (London, 1890), 359-61; and Marshall, *Royal Navy Biography*, II, 153-69.

⁹ Seeking safety from enemy attack the frigates *United States* and *Macedonian* and the sloop of war *Hornet* were moored above Gales Ferry in the Thames River. The two frigates were eventually dismasted. Forrest Morgan (ed.), *Connecticut as a Colony and as a State*, 4 vols. (Hartford, 1904), III, 77. When a second effort to put to sea, this time in March 1814, failed, the editorialist in the *Niles Weekly Register* for 19 March 1814 exploded with, 'The Nation that blockaded all Europe is in league with traitors to manage three small vessels—pshaw!—'tis too disgusting—too abominable to think of.'

¹⁰ As reprinted in *Niles Weekly Register*, VI, 353, 23 July 1814.

¹¹ *Niles Weekly Register*, VII, 348, 28 January 1815.

¹² According to a news account in the New York *Commercial Advertiser* of 23 August 1814, 'A young man, dressed in Navy uniform, who had been two or three weeks in this city, has at length been suspected of being a Spy. He was yesterday arrested, examined before the Police, and committed to prison.'

As numerous intelligence reports, some written and some oral, reached the British fleet they were screened to eliminate excessive repetition and to identify any that appeared to require closer attention. A comparison of many of these reports from New York and New London sources with local newspapers indicates that a considerable quantity of information was drawn *verbatim* from editorials and letters that appeared periodically concerning the most recent development of the national war effort. From time to time the Secretary of War found it necessary to insert short notices in the major newspapers pointing out that it was in the nation's interest to refrain from printing material that might convey vital information to the enemy.

One of Sir Thomas' duties, a duty that later fell to Sir Henry Hotham upon assuming command of the Long Island Sound blockading force,¹³ was to read over most of these intelligence reports that had been collected by his subordinates, extracting strategic information worth sending to Bermuda, Halifax or London, and taking immediate action on matters of tactical importance.¹⁴ The reports of British agents reproduced below were all eventually received on board the blockading fleet during the last six months of the war and the information pertains only to activities in and around New York and along the Connecticut coastline. They were received at a time when the Royal Navy was especially concerned with preparations known to be underway to make several major warships of the United States ready for sea duty. In addition there was a great desire to know of the progress being made in the construction of three new, large warships as it was suspected that they were to have a radically different type of armament.

In preparing these reports for publication an effort has been made to identify only the more important personages, places and vessels and also to explain events to which the writers seem to be making allusion. The actual format of the reports has been altered only to facilitate reproduction and minor changes have been made in punctuation but none in spelling, grammar or abbreviations. In some cases a portion of the report has been omitted if it in no way had anything to do with conveying information to the receiver. The original manuscripts are located in the County Record Office, Beverley, East Yorkshire, on loan from the present owner, Lord Hotham, who has generously given his permission for

¹³ Sir Henry Hotham (1777-1838), Captain of the Fleet under Vice Admiral Sir John Borlase Warren, flew his flag from *Superb*. For biographical details, see *Dictionary of National Biography*, XXVII (London, 1891), 406-7; and Marshall, *Royal Naval Biography*, I, part 2, 615-21 and 872.

¹⁴ Sir Henry received specific instructions from Admiral Cochrane about inspecting communications to and from the mainland. Cochrane to Hotham, Bermuda, 27 July 1814. Henry Hotham Papers, DDHO/7/4.

their reproduction in part or in full. A microfilm copy in the Library of the Department of the Navy, Washington, D. C., was kindly made available by Mr. W. Bart Greenwood, Navy Department Librarian. The copy in the Navy Department's possession bears the identifying reference number of DDHO/7/2.

I

Intelligence from T. Sheldon respecting the Enemy's force & movement at New York. 26th August 1814

[Endorsed on back] Intelligence from Shelding, New York.¹⁵

President. Kept as a guard ship in the River getting under weigh occasionally & training a large Body of Seamen in Sun Boats Bayes & Galleys. Comm^{dr} Decatur has the Command of the Naval Forces consisting of some 1000 to 1200 guns.¹⁶

Torpedoes. There are upwards of 200 preparing much of those ready near Frogs Point, Hell Gate; they are at present in the cellars & Houses of confidential Democrats & are to be placed in the diff^t passages to New York in such a manner as that Ships moving up may strike them & cause them to explode.¹⁷ A Sloop has been said to take on board several to be placed in the same manner in Fischers Island Sound.¹⁸

The Steam Frigate. Is advancing rapidly her upper deck beams which [are] 13 or 14 inches thick & the same breadth are now laying & it is expected she will be ready in late September. She is to mount from 40 to 50 Guns of diff^t calibers, has a Round Bow & Stern. To be impelled either end foremost, will only be from 5 to 6 feet above water & provided with thick Plate Iron—¹⁹

Batteries. Are throwing up & works exerting in every direction & people of all descriptions working gratis hourly upon them. Two considerable ones are building to command the pass of Hell Gates & Chevaux de Frises are preparing to sink in all the entrances to the City & Island—²⁰

¹⁵ There appears no way to associate T. Sheldon (Shelding) with the Shelton or Sheldon families although there was a carpenter, Joseph Sheldon, who served the British during the Revolution at Horns Hook. *Minute Book of a Board of General Officers of the British Army*, New-York Historical Society Collections, XLIX (New York, 1916), 154.

¹⁶ For a short account of Commodore Stephen Decatur's activities in preparing the defenses of New York harbor, see *Providence Gazette and Country Journal*, 27 August 1814. It is impossible to identify the source of Sheldon's information about the strength of American naval forces.

¹⁷ These 'floating torpedoes,' casks containing gunpowder, would approximate the modern naval mine. A line of torpedoes joining Long and Staten Islands served as an outer defense for New York. Perkins, *History of the . . . Late War*, p. 168. For details on the use of 'explosive barrels,' see Sueter, *Evolution of the Submarine*, p. 262.

¹⁸ Fischer's Island Sound at the eastern entrance to Long Island Sound was used by vessels skirting the Connecticut shore on the way to New London and New York from the east. The ships of the blockading squadron frequented these waters in search of merchant shipping often using Block Island as a supply base for fresh water and beef as the island was undefended. Broadley and Bartelot, *Nelson's Hardy*, p. 161.

¹⁹ *Fulton the First*, actually a floating battery with a steam engine, was built in the shipyard at Corlear's Hook. Launched on 29 October 1814, the ironclad was completed too late to take part in the war. The secretary of the navy was informed by letter of the launching and of the projected armament. David Porter to William Jones, New York, 29 October 1814, as printed in the *Connecticut Gazette* (New London), 9 November 1814. For a sketch and description of the vessel, see Lossing, *Pictorial Field-Book*, pp. 976-77. There was considerable debate in Congress on the real value of these floating batteries. *Niles Weekly Register*, VI, 34, 12 March 1814.

²⁰ On 17 August 1814, the Committee of Defense for the city of New York issued a report indicating that 'the works on the heights are progressing rapidly,' and that people from all walks of life were volunteering their labor. *New York Commercial Advertiser*, 17 and 23 August 1814.

Troops. The Numbers could not be accurately ascertained but they are only Militia all the regulars having been ordered to Canada—²¹

II

Sept. 27th. The number of men under arms in New York & its immediate vicinity is estimated by all accounts at from 20 to 27 Thousand.²² Cannon is wanted for the fortifications on Brooklyn Heights, and those of the President (frigate) has been designed to be landed for the purpose but I have not heard they have actually been landed. Capt. Porter is to go to Sea in the Fire Fly,—instead of the Flambo as before stated—to be ready in 3 weeks.²³

His squadron, the Flambo—brig—22 guns

Firefly
Spark
Torche

Capt. Perry—has not succeeded in getting fast Vessels in Boston but have contract'd with Churchill Builder in the Connecticut River to build 2 Brigs of 400 Tons each by the 1st May—on the same Building is the Macedon.²⁴

III

27th September. Reporting the Enemy's Forces at New London²⁵

To Henry Hotham

27 September 1814

I have had less opportunity of gaining information on the points to which your instructions allude respecting New London, than any other place.²⁶ I have learnt

Chevaux de frises were obstacles of wood or metal with projecting spikes used to close gaps in navigation channels.

²¹ There were approximately 6,000 militia under arms in or around New York City at the end of August 1814. Lossing, *Pictorial Field-Book*, p. 970. A portion of the militia, under Colonel Alexander Macomb, was then employed in defending the Lake Champlain area against the invasion of General Prevost. J. T. Headley, *The Second War with England*, 2 vols. (New York, 1853), II, 148.

²² It is doubtful if there were as many as 20,000 militia under arms in the New York-New Jersey area. When the secretary of war issued a special Militia Requisition, the quota for New York was set at 12,150 infantry and 1,350 artillery. *Niles Weekly Register*, VI, 321-322, 9 July, 1814.

²³ After returning from Valparaiso and the loss of *Essex*, Commodore David Porter was given command of *Fulton the First* while awaiting the construction of a flotilla of fast small craft ('Porter's Flying Squadron') including brigs and schooners. The British expressed great interest in these vessels because of their reported speed and cruising range. The war ended before the fleet was ready to put to sea. Archibald Douglas Turnbull, *Commodore David Porter 1780-1843* (New York, 1929), pp. 237-39.

²⁴ Although honored for his accomplishments on the Great Lakes Oliver Hazard Perry found it difficult to arouse much enthusiasm in the Bay State for a renewed war effort for, after the capture of Eastport, many political leaders were reluctant to take actions that might further antagonize the enemy. There was talk in Boston of trying to get *Constitution* out of the harbor to reduce the risk of an enemy attack. The frigate *Congress*, laid up in Portsmouth, had been dismantled, an indication that her fighting days were over. *Niles Weekly Register*, VI, 267, 18 June 1814. The name Churchill may be a reference to James Church and Company of Hartford. *Macedonian*, a 400-ton brig, was built in Connecticut in 1814. *Niles Weekly Register*, VII, 412, 25 February 1815.

²⁵ External evidence indicates that this dispatch was probably written by James Nash, captain of *Saturn*, 54 guns, one of the vessels in the blockading squadron under the command of Henry Hotham.

²⁶ Hotham had issued orders to his subordinate commanders to pass along all information

however the Military force for the defence of that town has been considerably augmented since I have been on this Station, and that a numerous militia may be collected in a short time. The number of troops which are kept in it and the vicinity varies according to circumstances. Fort Trumbull appears a strong and well situated Redoubt as is Fort Griswold, which is ditched & palasaded and not open in the rear, but it appears to be commanded by higher ground at no great distance; of its strength by land, the height of its parapet and the number of men kept in it I have not been able to obtain any knowledge.²⁷ The enemy's Ships of War lie 10 to 12 miles up the Thames River; the United States & Macedonian are said to be unrigged, with 100 Seamen (only) on board each to defend them from attack;²⁸ and the Hornet Sloop is fitted, manned & ready for service, lying a little below the frigates, and It is not to be expected they could be destroyed without much resistance from the enemy if the inhabitants of New London received any assurance that their property would be respected.

IV

John Nash, Captain, 31 Oct. 1814²⁹

There appears to be no alteration in the Enemy's Naval Force at New London since Commodore Hotham left this Anchorage;³⁰ the Hornet is ready for Sea, manned, but ordered to remain for the protection of the two Frigates up the River. 'The Steam Frigate was launched this day. Her construction as follows: Single Deck, with about 12 Ports on each side 32 Prs., Square Bow & Stern, with 3 Guns at each end, of 100 pound Caliber, short Guns-Spar Deck arched over & Bomb proof, Principle of the Engine to throw hot water; she is not cased with Iron, as before reported—Fire Vessel not unassailable to board her.'³¹ She is to come down (so it is said) from New York to New London with the President, to keep the Enemy clear of that Port, while the Squadron of Frigates make their escape—supposed to be ready in a Month from the time of launching, others say she will not be made use of till the Spring, 'she is to have short masts with a kind of Gunter Sails, to assist her occasionally before the Wind, her name is the Demi Locusta.' A Mr. Vos a Dutch Gentleman informs me its pretty certain and well known that all the American Men of War are provided with furnaces for treating shot, and the Frigate Constitution he knows to be fitted in that way—³² on the 25th instant, sailed from New

dealing with coastal defenses and ship movements in the Sound. New London was being watched carefully as several reports indicated that torpedoes were being manufactured there.

²⁷ Forts Griswold and Turnbull defended the entrance to the Thames River and during 1814 they were heavily garrisoned to prevent enemy attempts to ascend the river to attack the three American warships moored above New London. Perkins, *Political and Military Events*, p. 171.

²⁸ After deciding that *United States* and *Macedonian* could not be moved safely through the enemy blockade, Decatur took most of the crew to New York in April 1814. Morgan, *Connecticut*, III, 77-78.

²⁹ A portion of this report is not reproduced here as it has no bearing on the collection of military information.

³⁰ This report was addressed to Nash, acting as commander of the blockading squadron, while Hotham on *Superb* was absent in Halifax. Disposition of the squadron off New London, 9 October 1814. Henry Hotham Papers, DDHO/7/100.

³¹ This portion of the report apparently was quoted directly from the New York newspapers.

³² Vos, an Amsterdam merchant and ship owner then in the United States, was employed by the Dutch minister as intermediary with the British.

York by the Hook, the Swedish Ship Gustaf Adolph for Gottenburg and France, also the Tingall in which Colⁿ Barclay went Passenger, and in the former Lord Courtney, also an American Minister for Europe.³³

V

Collection of New York Intelligence, 10th November

To Commodore Hotham by way of the Saturn

[Because of the length and rambling nature of this report, it is not reproduced here. The writer reported the news of the launching of the steam frigate and stated that the President and John Adams were expected to sail before 10 November.³⁴ He made reference to the arrival of a schooner in Newport apparently from China and to the expectation that other vessels from the Orient with valuable cargoes were awaited in New Bedford and New York.]³⁵

22 Dec^r 1814

VI

Intelligence obtained from . . . Master of Jay (Sloop)

President—In the Stream ready for Sea, manned with 500 Men—many of them British Subjects.³⁶

Peacock—Ready for Sea & in the Stream³⁷

Hornet—Alongside the Navy Yard has been hove out.³⁸ Copper repair'd

John Adams—& getting ready for Sea with all possible despatch

Macedonian—A new brig 450 Tons lately launched in the Connecut—intended as a Privateer—purchased last Wednesday by the United States & now fitting out as a Sloop of War

A new Ship building in a Merchant's Yard to be launch'd the 16th January, purchased by the United States & to mount 36 Guns³⁹

Fulton the First—The above person was on board of her on Saturday, 11th Inst. The Carpenters was then working on her—Capt. Porter has the Command & was

³³ According to two reports in the New York *Evening Post* of 24 October 1814, 'The Swedish ship Gustaf Adolph, for France and Gottenburgh, with between 60 and 70 passengers, including Lord Courtney and suite, sailed about 2 o'clock this afternoon'; and 'The Flag of Truce ship Fingal, Capt. Stanton, sailed yesterday afternoon for Havre-de-Grace, with 120 passengers. Among the number is a Government Messenger, with *despatches for our Commissioners at Ghent*. The Fingal is to stop at Amboy to take on board Col. Barclay.' Colonel Thomas Barclay, former British Consul General for the United States, left London on 20 January 1813 on *Valiant* en route to New York to assume his duties as General Superintendent for the exchange of prisoners. *National Intelligencer*, 13 March 1813. The 'American Minister' or 'Government Messenger' was John Henry Purviance on the way to Ghent with despatches.

³⁴ The corvette *John Adams* reached New York on 7 October 1814. *Connecticut Gazette*, 12 October 1814. This vessel is not to be confused with the sloop of war *Adams*, 28 guns, destroyed by her own captain, Charles Morris, in the Penobscot River to prevent capture by the enemy.

³⁵ The schooner *Sally*, 200 tons, Captain Van Allen of New York, from Macao with a cargo of tea, reached Newport, Rhode Island, late in October after a voyage of over four months. *New York Commercial Advertiser* and *Newport Mercury*, 29 October 1814.

³⁶ It is probable that there were a few deserters from the Royal Navy on board *President*, possibly Irishmen who believed they had good reason to dislike their masters.

³⁷ The sloop *Peacock*, 18 guns, Master Commandant Lewis Warrington, had reached New York on 29 October 1814 after avoiding the blockading squadron.

³⁸ Captain James S. Biddle succeeded in November in bringing the sloop *Hornet* from the Thames River to New York in spite of the efforts of the enemy to intercept her.

³⁹ The government was anxious to augment the squadron of fast-sailing sloops and Baltimore schooners in expectation of the arrival of a large enemy convoy from Europe.

attending to her equipment—this Vessel cannot be ready before the spring—the guns are all mounted—viz. 14 long 32 Pounders on each side, a long 32 in her Bows & Stern—to have 500 Men—the casting of the machinery 5 feet thick & about the Ports—Bow & Stern 4 feet 3.

Chasseur—Privateer fitting out for another Cruize.⁴⁰

Sloop Essex Junior⁴¹

Brig Holland⁴²

“ Victorian

& 5 other fast Vessels fitting out to take Cargoes to France

Three Block Houses building on Sandy Hook

Several Carpenters engaging to work on the Lakes during the winter

It is the general opinion that the United States will agree to our terms

VII

Intelligence received from Mr. Williams Dec^r 29th 1814

Dec^r 26, 1814. The President shifted her berth from the North River to the loading place Staten Island & will sail the first favorable opportunity.⁴³ The Peacock & Hornet Sloops ready for Sea & is accompany the President— Mr. Tremain requested Mr. Williams to inform the Admiral that the President, Peacock and Hornet was to Rendezvous off Madeira or the Cape de Verd Islands to meet the Constitution.⁴⁴ Mr. T. obtained this Information from unquestionable authority—It is supposed the American Squadron will attack our outward bound East India convoy as it is reported in America that only One Frigate accompanies the Convoy— Commodore Decatur to Command—The Squadron has not sail'd in the Afternoon of the 27th Inst.

Captain Porter fitting out 6 Stout Vessels Consisting of Brigs & schooners to mount from 18 to 20 Guns built for Privateers of the first class & purchased by the United States—to be ready for Sea by the Latter end of January & reported they are to cruise off the Coast of Ireland. The John Adams Sloop paid off & laid up by the Navy Yard alongside the Alert.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ *Chasseur*, 14 guns, 356 tons, launched in December 1812, was often called 'the Pride of Baltimore,' and was commanded by Captain Thomas Boyle, one of the most successful masters of privateering vessels. For more details on the cruises of *Chasseur* and the activities of Captain Boyle, see William A. Fairburn, *Merchant Sail*, 6 vols. (Center Lovell, Maine, 1945-55), II, 813; and George Coggeshall, *History of the American Privateers, and Letters-of-Marque, During our War with England in the years 1812, '13 and '14* (New York, 1861), pp. 132, 139. 358-59.

⁴¹ The British letter-of-marque whaler *Atlantic* was captured by *Essex* near the Galapagos Islands on 28 May 1813, and after being fitted out with 20 guns, was renamed *Essex Junior*. Lossing, *Pictorial Field-Book*, p. 725. The news of the loss of *Atlantic* together with six whaling vessels, was forwarded to England by Commodore Sir William Bowles, stationed off Buenos Aires. Sir William Bowles to John Wilson Croker, Buenos Aires, 5 September 1813, in Gerald S. Graham and R. A. Humphries (eds.), *The Navy and South America 1807-1823: Correspondence of the Commanders-in-Chief on the South American Station*, Navy Records Society, CIV (London, 1962), 105-6.

⁴² The reference may be to the letter-of-marque schooner *Hollins*, Captain Stockett, then preparing to join the fleet accompanying *President*. *Hollins* was one of the famed 'Baltimore schooners.' *Providence Gazette and Country Journal*, 31 December 1814.

⁴³ The first news made public of the preparations on board *President* appeared in the New York *Commercial Advertiser* on 4 January 1815, although it was common knowledge along the waterfront at least a month earlier that Commodore Decatur was about to put to sea.

⁴⁴ The actual rendezvous was to be off the island of Tristan d'Acunha.

⁴⁵ The sloop *Alert*, 18 guns, was kept in New York as a guard ship. *Niles Weekly Register*, VI, 76, 2 April 1814.

The Steam frigate alongside Beckman's wharf—not yet ready & it is supposed that she will not be fitted before April.⁴⁶

Dec^r 29, 1814

7th January 1815

VIII

'The President is now ready for Sea & at Staten Island with the Hornet; Peacock in the East River ready to go down, only waiting for her Bread—the President has sent her 32 p^d Carronade to the Lakes, & has now mt^d 42 p^{dr} brot down from N. London from the United States. Her Complt of Men consists of 420 Seamen & officers, with a Detachment of Marines 55—Decatur has discharged a Number of Land Men & Boys & reduced his Number of Midshipmen to 12 so that the whole Crew are really all Seamen, 150 of which did belong to the U. S., the remainder lately enlisted.'⁴⁷

Decatur informed some of the officers who has families that the Squadron would be about 12 or 18 Months if the War Continued—She has 7 Months provision below the Hatches, as he means to put them to allowance 2/3d on leaving the Hook—Their first intention was to take provisions on the Gun Deck—But have since concluded to put it on bd of a fast sailing Brig to rendezvous at a given point.⁴⁸

A Gentleman was authorized by the Naval authority here to call on Mr. . . . who has past all his Life in the Indian Ocean, to know whether the Island Pulo far—⁴⁹ at the Eⁿ Entrance of the Straits of Malacca, would not be an Eligible Situation for a Cruizer to intercept the Trade between Bombay & China, & whether it would be most prudent to pass thro' Malacca Straits or those of Sundra.

Mr. B. inform him he thought it a good Situation, & recommended the Passage thro' the Straits of Sundra—Mr. B. knows they made application to E & K (Eastmann & Kirk) the principle chart store & several others for charts of those Seas.⁵⁰ I suppose they have been supplied by a Capt. W. (Werten, Weatin) who is part owner of the Brig M (Macedonian) with J. A. (John Jacob Allet) which Brig is to take the Surplus provisions & to meet at agreed point—⁵¹ Decatur informed his Crew—that he wasn't going immediately into Warm Weather, it would be necessary for them to provide some warm Clothing.

⁴⁶ According to the 'Plan of the City of New York about 1804,' Beckman's Slip was located on the East River, off Front Street, in the Third Ward. Charles Burr Todd, *The Story of the City of New York* (New York, 1888), see map facing p. 438.

⁴⁷ A report late in April 1814 stated that 'Commodore Decatur with his officers and crew goes to the President frigate, at New York; Captain Jones with his officers and crew to the lakes. . . .' *Niles Weekly Register*, VI, 132-33, 23 April 1814.

⁴⁸ *Tom Bowline* was assigned as the supply ship for the squadron.

⁴⁹ Although the identity of the exact island seems vague, it may have been one of the Riouw or Lingga Archipelagos. It is reported that the word 'pulo' means island in the Malayan tongue.

⁵⁰ From 1813 to 1817 the bookstore of James Eastburn and George Kirk was located on the site of the old Federal Hall and it contained a popular 'reading room.' Henry Collins Brown (ed.), *Valentine's Manual of Old New York*, New Series, IV (New York, 1920), 80; and *Diary of William Dunlap 1766-1839*, 3 vols., New-York Historical Society Collections (New York, 1930), II, 469. The names enclosed within parentheses in this report were apparently added by someone other than the original author.

⁵¹ Possibly the reference is to John Whetten of the firm of Whetten and Dickey, owners of the brig *Sphinx* in 1812. Fairburn, *Merchant Sail*, IV, 2161, and V, 2781. John Jacob Allet probably is a reference to John Jacob Astor.

Therefore presume he may look off Ireland & France thence to Mediria or Cape D. Verd Is—

He says his Instructions are not to man prizes, But destroy every thing he meets.⁵² He has a number of Ship Masters volunteers—several of whom have been in the India Trade—Capt. Rodgers from the Command of a China Ship, he has rated on the Books as Chaplin—⁵³ Capt. Robinson who went to Europe in the Dutch Ship with Mr. Rogers & lately return'd in the . . . from Dartmouth—appointed 2nd Master—the other names cannot obtain.

The Peacock has 175 Men at Quarters, the Hornet 160—It is universally believed they are bound round the Cape of Good Hope, as it is too late for Cape Horn—The Guns of the 74s to the E'ward are on their way from Washington;⁵⁴ Some of them have reached Brunswick (New Jersey)—the Contractors have 6000 Dollars to land them at Boston—the Independence is to carry 32 prs below, 24 prs on the Gun Deck and Congreve Guns 24 prs (late in the *Stranger*) on 2d Deck & Gang Ways.⁵⁵

Flambeau Porters Squadron

Flambo	Brig	22 Guns	Capt. Porter	Lightened by President to feet	President inches
				22	— 10
Fire Fly	do	20 "	" Chauncey		
Spark	Schnr	20 "	" Gamble		
Grampus	do	—			
Torche	do	Guns 10	Lieutenants		
Spitfire	do	— ⁵⁶			

The above schooners are commanded by Lieuts of the Navy—Men Inlisted for 6 Months only; they have all a Long Gun 32 pr amid ships, the remainder Carronades—They are offering a high Bounty to Baltimore Captains to go sailing Masters—⁵⁷ as the Lieuts are not acquainted w. the management of the Schooners & 'they will be ready in ab. 15 Days'—destination suppose Coast of Ireland or Eng-

⁵² With a limited crew it was impossible to spare prize crews for the captured vessels.

⁵³ The reference may be to Captain Rogers of *Hunter* of Boston, captured off Canton by H.M.S. *Doris* on 18 March 1814. He returned to Newport on board the schooner *Sally*. *Newport Mercury*, 29 October 1814.

⁵⁴ These guns were being transported to Boston to be put on board the new warship *Independence*, 'safely launched' on 20 June 1814 in the shipyard at Charlestown, Massachusetts. *Niles Weekly Register*, VI, 299, 2 July 1814.

⁵⁵ According to a news item in the *Connecticut Gazette* of 28 September 1814, 'the valuable ship *Stranger*, prize to the privateer *Fox* of Portsmouth' with arms, armament and rockets that were destined for the Great Lakes, was brought into Salem harbor. A full description of the Congreve Rockets captured on *Stranger* and the plans to use them on *Independence*, was printed in the *Niles Weekly Register*, VII, 55, 6 October 1814.

⁵⁶ These vessels were not fully readied for action until after the conclusion of the Peace of Ghent. At that time they were commanded by Lt. John B. Nicholson (*Flambeau*), Lt. George W. Rodgers (*Firefly*), Lt. John M. Gamble (*Spark*), Lt. Wolcott Chauncey (*Torch*), and Lt. Alex J. Dallas (*Spitfire*).

⁵⁷ Sailing masters were employed to command prizes taken in battle. There were 230 of them in 1815, each earning \$40 per month, the same pay as a lieutenant. 'Estimate of Pay and Rations of Officers . . . for the year 1815,' *American State Papers: Naval Affairs*, 4 vols. (Washington, 1834-61), I, 364.

land—Perry has found some diff^{ty} in procuring Vessell of that Description at Boston—has got a few

Sea Men are very scarce—37D^{lls} pr Month given in Letters Marques to France—Tom Hazard (Brig) Elipse (Brig) Petipas Ship, St. Bart. at Staten Island⁵⁸

⁵⁸ There were several vessels by the name of *Hazard*, one belonging to a merchant in New Bedford. According to a report of 12 September 1814, in the New York *Commercial Advertiser*, 'arrived in New York fine fast-sailing British brig *Eclipse* . . . prize to the privateer *Chasseur*.'

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CAST YOUR MONEY ON THE WATERS

In the early summer of 1820, the ship *Jane*, on a voyage from Lisbon to the Delaware Capes, became becalmed in Lat. 38° 28' N., Long. 52° 28'. The crew, with little to do, were passing the time leaning on the rails and talking when a chest was seen floating on the surface of the sea. An attempt was made to snare it by harpoon without success, so seaman Benthall dove overboard and brought the chest alongside. The chest was found to be empty with no marks of ownership but, on closer examination, gold coins were found concealed in grooves or interstices of the chest. *Jane* eventually reached Philadelphia and a libel for salvage was filed in the District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania with this imposing caption:

'Levi Hollinsworth and son; Jonathan Ogden, owners of the ship *Jane*; Frederick S. Luburg, master; James Fairfowl, 1st mate VS Seventy Doubloons and three small pieces of Gold, each of the value of an eighth of a Doubloon.'

Although many of the elements of salvage were absent, the court, sitting in Admiralty, was largely motivated by moral considerations and question of policy when on 29 September 1820, a decree was handed down specifying that one half of the amount salvaged be deposited in the court for the period of one year, to await the owner showing up after which time, this sum was to go to the libellants. In the interim, Mr. Hollinsworth, his son and Mr. Ogden, owners of the ship *Jane*, were to receive one third of the amount recovered, the residue to be divided among the ship's officers and crew except that the part to be divided among the sailors, carpenter, steward and cook be so allocated that seaman Benthall would receive two shares as it was he who dove overboard and retrieved the chest.

The chest was probably plundered by sea robbers who did not find the gold coins but removed the contents before throwing it overboard, making it a matter of casting your money on the waters.

CAPTAIN EDGAR K. THOMPSON, U.S.N. (Ret.)