

**The Naval War of 1812:
A Documentary History**

**Volume I
1812
Part 5 of 7**

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and officer requirs that I ought to be removed from under his Comd¹ With the highest respect [&c.]

Sam^l Angus

ALS, DNA, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 240.

1. Angus experienced career difficulties from this time forward. For a sympathetic account of Angus's part in these matters, see Harold D. Langley, "Respect for Civilian Authority: The Tragic Career of Captain Angus," *American Neptune* XL, no. 1 (Jan. 1980): 23-37. For Chauncey's account of Angus's arrest, see DNA, RG45, CL, 1813, Vol. 2, No. 122, Chauncey to Hamilton, 26 Dec. 1812, and No. 121, Chauncey to Hamilton, 2 Apr. 1813.

Chapter Four

The Gulf Coast Theater: February–December 1812

In West Florida, as in East Florida, the southern frontier of the United States along the Gulf Coast bordered on lands claimed and governed by the Spanish during the years immediately before and during the War of 1812. From Pensacola to Mobile, the coast was thinly garrisoned by Spanish troops and their claim extended to the Mississippi River. Contrarily, the United States also claimed a large area of West Florida by virtue of an understanding with France at the time of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803.¹

On 26 September 1810, a group representing Americans living in West Florida took advantage of revolutionary ferment spreading through Spain's American colonies and pronounced the formation of a republic in West Florida. This led to the United States' annexation of lands south of the Mississippi Territory, from the Mississippi River east to the Perdido River.² Such was the situation when the war broke out in June 1812, and it remained unchanged until the spring of 1813 when an expedition against Mobile was mounted from New Orleans. Otherwise, from the Perdido to the Apalachicola Spanish troops garrisoned isolated outposts and exercised a tenuous sovereignty over unruly American settlers and restless Indian tribes. The principal tribes traditionally inhabiting the region were Creeks, Chickasaws, Cherokees, Seminoles, and Choctaws.

Although the British had been ousted from the Floridas in 1783, they maintained contacts with that area through merchants at trading posts, gathering intelligence from friendly Indians and exploiting the hospitality of their Spanish allies after the commencement of the Peninsular War.³ The possibility of encouraging a rising of Indians against the encroaching United States did not escape British observers. During the War of 1812, such plans were developed and bore fruit. An uprising of Creeks and other Indians during 1813 and 1814 would prove to be a major distraction for American policy in the West. On the other hand, it led to the creation of effective land forces in the

southeast which eventually came into play against the British when they finally chose to exercise a southern strategy in 1814-1815.⁴

The two American military men most closely associated with West Florida and New Orleans after the Louisiana Purchase were U.S. Navy Captain John Shaw and Brigadier General James Wilkinson. Shaw had been the first naval commander to be sent to New Orleans after the acquisition of that city. He had established the New Orleans Naval Station and made a favorable impact on local citizens. He was replaced after two years by Master Commandant David Porter, then returned to succeed Porter in 1811.

For his part, Wilkinson was the senior American military officer present at the time of the Louisiana Purchase and took formal possession of the area for the United States. Wilkinson's reputation, however, was murky at best. It was strongly suspected that he was working closely with Spanish authorities, and was involved in encouraging Aaron Burr's conspiracy in 1805-1807. He was called away to defend himself in courts of inquiry and courts martial, but returned to New Orleans almost immediately after the outbreak of the war. Thus, the first year of the War of 1812 in New Orleans was a time of tense relations between two men whose orders were to defend the city, the state of Louisiana, and the Mississippi Territory. It may be considered fortunate that Great Britain did not choose to launch an attack on the United States up the Mississippi Valley during these first months of conflict.

1. Cox, *The West Florida Controversy*.

2. For documents pertaining to these events, see Clarence E. Carter, ed., *The Territorial Papers of the United States*, Vol. IX, *The Territory of Orleans, 1803-1812* (Washington, D.C., 1940): 891-909; and ASP, *Foreign Relations*, III: 394-98.

3. William S. Coker, "John Forbes and Company and the War of 1812 in the Spanish Borderlands," in William S. Coker, ed., *Hispanic-American Essays in Honor of Max Leon Moorhead* (Pensacola, 1979), pp. 61-97.

4. Frank L. Owsley, Jr., *Struggle for the Gulf Borderlands: The Creek War and the Battle of New Orleans, 1812-1815* (Gainesville, Fla., 1981).

The Status of Naval Forces at New Orleans

Captain John Shaw had only a small force at his disposal before the War of 1812 began. It was composed of some 400 officers and men,

distributed among two brigs of war and eleven gunboats. The brig Siren,¹ commanded by Lieutenant Michael B. Carroll, was armed with 16 24-pound carronades and manned by 60 men; likewise, the brig Viper,² commanded by Lieutenant Daniel S. Dexter, was manned by 60 men, but carried less armament, 12 12-pounders and 2 6-pounders. The gunboats were a motley collection of shallow-draft vessels, rigged either as schooners or sloops, and carried but two cannon and a variety of small arms. Although the gunboats were well-suited for navigating the shallow waters of the Mississippi delta, they were ill-suited to pursuit and attack offshore. Their primary duties were the enforcement of the embargo laws, the seizing of smugglers, and the protection of American commerce. British and French men-of-war, privateers, and pirates, some of whom were from rebellious Spanish-American colonies, frequently harassed American shipping in the Gulf of Mexico. The document which follows, contains a listing of the officers and vessels of the U.S. Navy stationed at New Orleans in early 1812.

1. *Syren*, 240 ton brig, was built for the navy at Philadelphia in 1803. Her first commanding officer was Lieutenant Charles Stewart, who commanded *Constitution* during 1814-1815. *Syren* saw duty in the Mediterranean, 1804-1806, and was laid up in Washington Navy Yard for a year. She carried dispatches to France in 1809. After 1810 she was generally referred to as *Siren*.

2. *Viper*, designed as a cutter by Josiah Fox and built at the Gosport Navy Yard, was commissioned as *Ferret* in 1809, with Lieutenant Christopher Gadsden as her first commanding officer. She enforced the embargo on the Carolina and Georgia coasts during 1807-1809. Rerigged as a brig and given the name *Viper* in 1810, she sailed to New Orleans in 1811.

CAPTAIN JOHN SHAW TO SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

New Orleans Feby 3rd 1812.

Sir

I have the honor herewith to enclose you a correct statement of all the Naval force, now under my command, exhibiting the particular place or places at which the several armed vessels, are at the present moment, employed for the protection of our commerce:—as also, a list of the commissioned and Warrant officers and those Acting as such, taken from the General Muster-book, of the Purser of the station; not including those attached to the Brigs *Siren* & *Viper*. Sir, I have the honor to be [&c.]

John Shaw

[Enclosure]

A correct statement of the distribution of the [Naval force] on the New-Orleans Station; exhibiting their weight of [metal], commanders names, number of men, and the several places at which they are Stationed—February 3rd 1812.¹

Vessels	32 pounders	24 prs.	18 prs.	12 prs.	9 prs.	6 prs.	Howitzers	Commanders	Number of men	[Where Stationed]
Brig <i>Siren</i>	16		2					Michael B. Carroll	60	New Or[leans under repairs]
Brig <i>Viper</i>			12		2			Danl S. Dexter	60	New Orl[eans redy for sea]
Gun Vessel <i>No. 64</i>				1	2			John D. Henley	26	Lake [Ponchar]train
" <i>No. 24</i>	1				2			George Merrill	27	ditto ditto
" <i>No. 25</i>		1			2			Thos S. Cunningham	26	ditto ditto
" <i>No. 23</i>			1		2			William Carter [jr]	28	Mob[ile Bay.]
" <i>No. 58</i>		1			2			Chas C. B. Thompson	26	[ditto]
" <i>No. 11</i>			1			2		Richard Dealy	28	[ditto]
" <i>*No. 65</i>				1	2			Louis Alexis	27	Barr[itaria]

" <i>*No. 156</i>		1			2			Thos Ap. C. Jones	28	ditto
" <i>*No. 162</i>		1			2			Francis H. Gregory	46	ditto
[" <i>No. 66</i>		1			2		2	Robert Spedden	22	in Dock]
[" <i>No. 27</i>		1			2			Jonn D. Ferris	20	ditto]
[" <i>No. 163</i>	1				2			_____	25	ditto]
" <i>No. 5</i>		1			2			James Roney	28	New [Orleans] ready for service
" <i>No. 22</i>					2			John L. Dixon	21	Cu[ttting Timber]

***Gun Vessels *No. 162, 156 & 65*, have, a few days [since, been ordered] to Baritaria [, in pursuit] of a collection of pirates, [who are said to] have made [arrangements,] for adopting that as [their place of] general rendezvous.

J[ohn Shaw]

ADS, DNA, RG45, CL, 1812, Vol. 1, No. 28.

1. This enclosure is badly deteriorated, leaving several torn sections. Except for the signature, which is conjectural, the bracketed portions have been supplied from Shaw's letterbook copy, in Shaw's hand. See Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., Naval Historical Foundation Manuscripts, John Shaw Papers, Letterbook, 18 June 1810-22 Apr. 1812.

latter on the 27th of March last, and express much solicitude to receive their Warrants from the Navy Department. With great respect I have the honor to be [&c.]

John Shaw

ALS, DNA, RG45, CL, 1812, Vol. 1, No. 28.

News of War Arrives in New Orleans

Secretary of the Navy Hamilton lost little time in dispatching copies of the declaration of war to Captain Shaw at New Orleans, as he had done for other station and squadron commanders. New Orleans was the most distant of the stations from Washington, but the news arrived there on 9 July, in the relatively rapid time of three weeks. Four letters follow which show how the news of war would affect naval readiness. The first one is addressed to Secretary Hamilton from New York, offering the navy a vessel which later became the U.S. ship Louisiana, of great value during the 1814-1815 Battle of New Orleans. The second document is Captain Shaw's response to Secretary Hamilton, indicating his immediate doubts about the readiness of the station for war. The third document depicts Lieutenant Daniel Dexter's attempt to notify the brig Siren of the state of war. Finally, there is Louisiana Governor William Claiborne's letter which reports on naval events to the Navy Department.

J. H. LAURENCE & CO. TO SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

New York
July 4th 1812

Sir,

We have a very fine Coppered Ship of about 350 Tons, called the *Remittance* of New York, detained at New Orleans by the Embargo, and which we expect will remain there on account of the War, provided the news of the War reaches there before she can sail after the 4th July. This Ship is well constructed to arm, having a great breadth of beam, 2 flush decks, and is a remarkable fast sailer for a Mer-

chantman, and should the Government require to arm any Vessels in New Orleans for the defence of the River she will be well calculated for the purpose.

Should any object of this Kind be in the view of the Government, we shall be disposed to sell this Ship at a moderate valuation, and will thank you in making such arrangements in New Orleans, if you will give a reference to her, and to her consignees Mess. Harrod & Ogdens of New Orleans in whose charge she is, with the power to sell. We have the honor to be [&c.]

J. H. Laurence & Co.

ALS, DNA, RG45, MLR, 1812, Vol. 5, No. 24.

CAPTAIN JOHN SHAW TO SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

New Orleans July 10th 1812

Sir,

The Act of Congress, declaring War against "the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and the dependencies thereof," reached this city yesterday morning; since which, I have dispatched boats, to the several Divisions, with information and instructions, correspondent with that occurrence.

From my former communications, to the Honl Secretary of the Navy, it will have been observed, that the force under my command, is by no means adequate to the defence of the extensive coast, which it has to guard, even against pirates and privateers, in a state of peace; and how much less so, must it be, in a time of War! In addition to the Gun boats, which have been ordered to this Station from New York, but which by the by, have not yet arrived, -I would suggest, that a few copper-bottomed Schooners, mounting, from 10, to 12, guns each, are almost indispensably necessary. Such vessels would enable us, if sent out amongst the West-India-Islands, greatly to annoy the Commerce of the enemy, on its passage from Jamaica to England.

I have to inform you, and it is with much regret that the Brigs *Siren* and *Viper* are both out; -the former will stretch along the Coast, to the Westward, and will touch in, at Vera Cruz; -the latter has sailed for the Havannah, having on board, Mr Stephen Kingston, our Consul for that Port. They have both been ordered out, in conse-

quence of, official requisitions made on me by Governor Claiborne*-The *Siren* having but very recently sailed, I have given orders, that a dispatch-boat, be immediately sent after her, to inform her of the existence of War with England. I am wretchedly off, for want of officers: my late returns exhibit the names of those under my Command.

We are well supplied with Shot, both Cannon & grape; but of Muskets and pistols fit for service, we are greatly deficient. Cannon-powder, will also be in great requisition. I had the honor to receive your circular of the 6th May,¹ to which due compliance shall be given, whenever Major [Daniel] Carmick shall call for the Marines.

I shall go on myself, to the Eastward, tomorrow, for the purpose of seeing that the several passes, leading to New Orleans, are properly guarded by the Gun Vessels:-My absence from this City, shall not exceed ten days.

Before I can close this letter, I feel impelled by the sensations, excited by the peculiarity of my situation, to assure you, that I have always been most sincerely disposed, to co-operate with the Military; and to employ, on the suggestion of the Governor, the Naval force, at the head of which, I am placed, in any case required by the public interest; and that, with this disposition, and the most ardent desire, which I have had opportunities heretofore, of demonstrating, to serve the United States with the most faithful zeal,-it operates, as the Honorable Secretary must be sensible, as a considerable damper, on that spirit of ambition and enterprise, so essential to every service, especially in a time of War, to be placed, either directly, or indirectly, under the control of any person, holding no kind of rank in, nor in any way connected with, the Naval Service; thereby giving them an opportunity of appropriating to themselves, those laurels, to which others may be justly entitled. Should the Brigs *Siren* and *Viper* be captured, as is much to be apprehended, I shall, in common with every other individual in the community, greatly lament the loss, while, as a commanding officer, it is a subject, in which I am but little concerned. General Wilkinson arrived here, yesterday. With great respect, I have the honor to be

John Shaw

*For the *Siren*, a verbal demand

ALS, DNA, RG45, CL, 1812, Vol. 2, No. 101.

1. See p. 107.

[Enclosure]

New Orleans July 10th 1812

The following Statement, exhibits the number and distribution of the Naval force under my Command, as attached to this Station.

Brigs	<i>Siren</i>	Cruising towards Vera Cruz
	<i>Viper</i>	Gone to the Havannah
	<i>Enterprise</i>	Just arrived at New Orleans
	No. 5	
	" 65	Mobile Bay
	" 23	
Gun Vessels	No. 24	Off the Rigolets
	" 64	
	No. 156	
	" 163	
	" 162	At the Balize & to the Westward
	" 66	
	" 27	

NB. *No. 11*, Was, on a late survey, found to be so rotten as to make it impossible to repair her; & she was condemned accordingly.

John Shaw

ADS, DNA, RG45, CL, 1812, Vol. 2, No. 101.

LIEUTENANT DANIEL S. DEXTER TO
LIEUTENANT THOMAS AP CATESBY JONES

U.S. Gun Vessel *No. 162*,
Balize, July 13, 1812

Sir

Immediately on receipt of this you will proceed in Gun Vessel *No. 156*, under your command, in pursuit of the Brig *Siren*; she sailed on the 8th inst. for Vera Cruz; and as she has orders to keep along shore, she will most probably touch, agreeable to instructions, at many

places short of the port for which she is destined. I enclose you a small packet for Capt. [Lieut. Michael B.] Carrol,¹ like wise the Act declaring war. In case you should be fallen in with by the Enemy and captured, you will destroy the enclosed dispatches for Capt. Carroll. As the capture of the *Siren* at this time would be so serious a loss to the service, I feel confident that you will use every exertion to overtake her; running the coast down will be the most probable way of effecting it; and the danger of falling in with a superior force of the enemy thereby greatly diminished. Do all you can to annoy the Common enemy of our Country, and be at all times guarded against surprize: Do not suffer yourself to be deceived by any Colours. Should you not fall in with the *Siren*, you will return to this place, and report yourself to the Commanding Officer. Respectfully your's &c &c

(Signed) Dan^l S. Dexter

Mr. Jones, Commdg. G. V. No. 156.

Copy, DNA, RG45, Daniel Dexter Letterbook, pp. 8-9. In Dexter's hand.

1. Enclosure not found.

GOVERNOR WILLIAM CLAIBORNE TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

New Orleans July 20th 1812.

Sir,

Since my last letter, I have had no intelligence from the *Viper* or *Siren*, -as relates to the latter vessel, I omitted in my last to inform you, that immediately on the receipt of the declaration of War, Commodore Shaw dispatched a Messenger to the Balize, with a view of preventing her departure; -But previous to his arrival, she had gone to Sea. I advised the Commodore, to dispatch a pilot Boat after her, with information of the War, & orders to return to Port with all possible dispatch, which I believe he has done.

There are several privateers, fitting out at this port, & the Citizens concerned are very anxious, that Commissions for Letters of Marque & reprisal, should be sent out.

The General Assembly of the State, will be in Session in 9 days. It is understood, that at the late election for Governor, I obtained a great Majority of the Vote of the people, & the general opinion seems to be, that the popular sentiment in my behalf, will be sanctioned by the Legislature. I am, Sir, with great respect & esteem [&c.]

William C.C. Claiborne

LS, DNA, RG45, MLR, 1812, Vol. 5, No. 158.

Supplies for the Gulf Coast

Matters of supply on the New Orleans station were unusually complex because of that city's distance from the manufacturing centers of the Northeast and the consequent time lags and increased prices created by heavy overland and river transportation charges. The usual method of obtaining needed commodities required Captain Shaw to place orders through Navy Agent John K. Smith at New Orleans. If goods were not available locally, Smith would request William Helms, the navy agent stationed at Newport, Tennessee, to place orders on establishments in the Northeast. Also, the secretary of the navy would respond to requests from the station commander, if they were substantial, by writing to Helms directly from Washington. The document which follows is of this type.

SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON TO WILLIAM HELMS

Genl Wm Helms
Newport, Tennessee

Navy Depart
8 July 1812

You will contract in the best terms in your power for the delivery at New Orleans of

One hundred tons of assorted shott
Two hundred barrels of cannon powder
Forty thousand pounds of assorted cordage &
Fifteen thousand gallons of whiskey

with respect to the shott & cordage Capt Shaw will write to you, stating particularly the kind most wanted, and You will make your contracts accordingly. of the powder one tenth part must be priming powder, the residue, cannon powder. that is 20 lbs of priming & 180 lbs of cannon powder.

For the faithfull performance of all these contracts good Security must be given:—All the articles are to be delivered at the expense of the Contractors to the Navy Agent at New Orleans. The powder & shott must be delivered within six months from your signing the contracts; and upon the contracts for those two articles you may engage to advance, one fourth of their respective amounts. The cordage & whiskey must be delivered in the course of twelve months from the date upon the contract for them no advance can be made; nor can any payment be made upon them till the appropriations for the 1813 shall be made—they will not be required for expenditures during the present year—and we have not the means of anticipating our supplies of these articles. However after the appropriations for the year 1813 shall have been made, you may engage to advance, if necessary, one fourth the amount of the contracts for cordage & whiskey. The balance as well as the balance upon the contracts for shott & powder to be paid upon the Contractors producing to you the receipts of the Navy Agent at New Orleans therefor.

Having made these contracts, you will be pleased to transmit them to this office keeping copies thereof for your government, and sending copies to the Navy Agent at New Orleans for his Government.

Paul Hamilton

Copy, DNA, RG45, MLS, Vol. 11, pp. 114–15.

The Shaw–Wilkinson Feud

Attempting to ensure that navy and army forces would cooperate to the fullest extent, Secretary Hamilton ordered Captain John Shaw to place himself under the command of Brigadier General James Wilkinson upon the latter's arrival in New Orleans. Wilkinson had spent the past year in Washington defending himself against charges that emanated

*from his questionable conduct in the Burr Conspiracy (1805–1807).¹ He was acquitted on 14 February 1812, and the War Department ordered him to return to his former post as the commanding general at New Orleans.² In early August, Wilkinson arrived at New Orleans on board the U.S. brig *Enterprise*, commanded by Lieutenant Johnston Blakeley. General Wilkinson then presented his orders to Captain Shaw, accompanied by detailed instructions to Shaw for the naval defense of the city. The following documents include: Blakeley's arrival report, Shaw's initial response to departmental correspondence delivered by Blakeley, Shaw's heated protest to Secretary Hamilton against being placed under the orders of an army commander, and, enclosed with the last, Wilkinson's correspondence with Shaw.*

1. For a definitive account, see Thomas P. Abernethy, *The Burr Conspiracy* (New York, 1954).

2. Wilkinson's controversial career is portrayed in Royal O. Shreve, *The Finished Scoundrel* (Indianapolis, 1933), and James Ripley Jacobs, *Tarnished Warrior: Major General James Wilkinson* (New York, 1938).

LIEUTENANT JOHNSTON BLAKELEY TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

US Brig *Enterprise*
New Orleans 3d August 1812

Sir

I have the honour to acquaint you that agreeably to your instructions to me in may I have deposited in the public Library of this place the model of the frigate, which was entrusted to my care, in comple[te] order. Situated as I am here I am unable to refrain from soliciting your permission to return to the Atlantic States in the *Enterprise*. In making this request, a request known and assented to, by Capt Shaw I am actuated by a conviction of the little utility which would attend her operations on this station. The coast of this Country affords no encouragement to a vessel drawing as much water as ours; but its dangers and its difficulties, it appears, we will not be allowed an opportunity to test. I therefore pray you, should this meet your approbation, to order the *Enterprise* to any atlantic port you may think proper. I have the honor to be [&c.]

J. Blakeley

ALS, DNA, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 2, No. 135. The previous letter, designated No. 134, is a duplicate but it contains a clerk's notation on the lower left corner "NB 30th Augt 1812 ordd to St Marys." Evidently, Secretary Hamilton ordered *Enterprise* to St. Marys immediately upon receiving Blakeley's request; see Hamilton to Blakeley, 30 Aug. 1812, DNA, RG45, SNL, Vol. 10, p. 137.

CAPTAIN JOHN SHAW TO SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

(Duplicate)

New Orleans Augt 4th 1812

Sir,

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your several letters, with their duplicates, bearing dates of the 19th and 20th of June; and it will be perceived by a recurrence to my communications, to the Navy Department, of the 3rd Feby last, of the 11th April, of the 1st and 15th June, and of the 12th Ult.—that the information required by your circular of 20th June, acknowledged above, has, in the fullest extent, been anticipated by me; that, in those communications, I have made minute representations, of the number and condition of the armed Vessels in commission on this Station; of their incompetency to guard the extensive portion of coast assigned to them for protection, and, I may now add, particularly, of the Island and City of New Orleans, owing to its great exposure, from being vulnerable to attack, at so many different points.

On a consultation with General Wilkinson, the guarding as effectually as possible, the entrance by the way of Lake Bourgne, and the Rigolets, having been considered, to be an object of the first importance; I have ordered the Balize Division, to form a junction, at those points, with the Division of the Lakes.

The Brig *Enterprise*, is now at anchor below this City; from which, have lately been sent to the Navy-Hospital, 2 Acting Lieutenants, 2 Midshipmen, and 22 of her Crew; where they are now confined with the yellow fever; a number, which although great, is still liable to be daily augmented, from the same vessel.

The Brig *Viper*, has returned from the Havannah, since the date of my last; and requires some small repairs, before she can again proceed on a cruise. From the *Siren*, for the safety of which, I entertain considerable apprehensions, I have as yet, heard nothing.

The Security of this State, against the inroads of an invading enemy, seems, in my opinion to require, two Block-Ships to be immediately built; one to mount thirty, 32 pounder cannon, to be stationed at the principal entrance at the Balize; and the other, mounting twenty-four, 24-pounders, to be placed in the Rigolets. The Carpenters' estimates, furnished to me, on plans which I had drafted, amount to about forty thousand dollars for the two.* With these, well manned, a most powerful opposition might be made, to any probable force which might attempt to penetrate through those passes; and, should circumstances, continue to urge the necessity of such a measure, I shall hope to be justified in going immediately into it, on the concurrence of General Wilkinson; as any considerable delay, might put greatly to hazard, the safety of this State and the adjoining Territory. It is believed that they may be got ready in the course of, from two to three months.

I have this moment received a letter by express, from Lieut. Commt. [Louis] Alexis, commanding a Division of Gun Vessels off the pass of Cat-Island; stating, that a body of Indians, urged on by British agents, are collecting for hostile purposes against our settlements on the Pasagola; where they have already murdered some of the Inhabitants, and will probably extend their depredations along the coast to the Westward of that river. Lieut. Alexis, has sent on shore, at the Bay St. Louis, from the armed Vessels, a draft of fifty men, for the protection of the affrighted inhabitants, coming in from every direction. However inadequate, as heretofore suggested, our force is, to the ends of an efficient defence; we, as officers, happy in risking our lives in the service of our Country, shall not shrink from the arduous duty, which we now anticipate. I have been greatly indisposed for a week past; and although now on the recovery, am still confined to my room. I have received no letters from the Honl Secretary since the 19th Ult. With Great respect [&c.]

John Shaw

*Exclusive of Contingencies

ALS, DNA, RG45, CL, 1812, Vol. 2, No. 156.

CAPTAIN JOHN SHAW TO SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

New Orleans Augt 17th 1812.

Sir

I have the honor to enclose herewith for consideration the copy of a letter which I have lately received from Gen. Wilkinson, together with a duplicate of my reply;¹ and have to solicit of you a retrospective examination of the circumstances and the principles, which form the basis of this correspondence:

Motives originating, in a sense of duty towards my officers, in a respect for myself and my situation; in an unconquerable repugnance which I feel to a deviation from the antient usages of my profession, and the inevitable destruction, to every thing like order or discipline among the Naval forces intrusted to my Command, to be apprehended from such an innovation, forbid the introduction of the precedent, that a Naval Commander shall consider himself subject to the orders of a Military officer. Nothing of the kind has ever before been heard, or thought, of; no construction of the existing laws, or of my orders from the Navy-Department, can justify me in fixing on the naval Service so dangerous and so degrading a precedent. I consider myself subject to such orders, and to such only as come to me, either-directly from the Navy-Department, or from a Naval officer senior to myself in rank.

By your orders to me dated May 20th I am particularly and plainly instructed that on the requisitions of General Wilkinson, I am to co-operate with him, with the force under my command in all objects that may be undertaken for the public good:² This order which ought to be and which I presume is reciprocal between the Naval and Military forces. I shall on every occasion which may offer, execute with that promptitude and pleasure with which every good officer performs the duty which he owes to his country. I am persuaded, however that officers of the army, would not submit to orders from those of the Navy, whatever their respective rank might be; nor can I suppose that Naval commanders will consider themselves subject to orders from the Military, unless they shall receive plain, unequivocal and positive instructions to that effect, from the honorable Secretary of the Navy: Such a measure, altogether, I trust, as unnecessary, as it would be unprecedented I flatter myself, will never be adopted. For however eminently skilled a military officer may be-in the profession of arms, if he be arrayed in the amphibious garb of a Naval-Military Commander, he will, in acting under it be much less likely to ac-



Major General James Wilkinson, U.S.A.

quire laurels than to bring disgrace on himself and the service in which he may be employed. In a word, the Military know nothing about naval affairs; and why therefore should a General of the army, be placed in the situation of a nominal commander of Naval forces, merely to give him credit for incidental achievements, in which, as he cannot know how to direct them he can of course take no conspicuous part. The propriety of these remarks, will appear the more obviously if it be considered, that the South-Western portion of our Maritime frontier depends chiefly or almost solely on the Naval forces of this Station for defence; as an invading enemy cannot approach the Military fortifications with vessels of war. Of course our Naval force would have to fight on their own element, where the Military could not so much as be spectators. If for reasons however, which I am not able to comprehend, it should be judged expedient to place me as the Senior Naval officer on the station subject to the orders of any Military officer, I must beg of the Honorable Secretary to be recalled and to be placed according to my rank in the service, on board of such Frigate as he may think proper to assign me.

The block-Ship contemplated to be built for the defence of the Rigolets, is now under consideration, which I have proposed to lay down and have built at, or in the vicinity of the Bay St Louis, and as the timber will be procured from the woods by the men belonging to the Service, the whole expense will not exceed, perhaps, from fifteen to sixteen thousand dollars, considerably less than formerly suggested.

I have carefully examined two ships, and have recommended the purchase of one of them called the *Remittance*, as one of those intended for the defence of the Balize. We are truly unfortunate with our men, there being at this time 102, on the Hospital returns. The cases however are of a much less malignant cast, than those of the last season—we have as yet buried but few.

The British ship of war, *Brazen*—of 28 guns, was at anchor off the Balize, on the 10th instant; at which time a Frigate and another Sloop of war, were cruising to the Eastward. As there are still some hopes of the *Siren's* getting in, I have judged it expedient to draft from the Gun boats, men sufficient to fill up the crew of the *Enterprise*, which for some time past has been lying at anchor, with a number of her men in the Hospital. She goes immediately to the Balize in order to co-operate with the *Siren* on her return, in an attack on the British Ship should an opportunity be afforded. In order to protect the

mouth of the River, a battery mounting 12 heavy guns, will, in my opinion be preferable to the block-ship mentioned in my last.

General Wilkinson has required three of our best equipped gun Vessels to return again to Mobile Bay, from whence they had recently been withdrawn—for the purpose of keeping out the British from that quarter; which, in the event of an attack will most certainly, unless aided by a battery on shore, fall a sacrifice to the measure.

The whole force now here, consists of 2 Brigs, the *Enterprise* and *Viper*, and 9 Gun Vessels, Viz: *Nos 162, 163, 66,* and *No 27,* at the Balize; and *Nos 5, 23, 24, 64,* and *65,* between Cat Island and the Rigolets: *No 156,* commanded by Mr Thomas ap. C. Jones, dispatched on the 10th ult in quest of the Brig *Siren*, has not yet been heard from. A large re-inforcement of Gun Vessels, appears to me indispensable for the defence of this coast.

Mr Smith, the Navy-Agent has been in a bad state of health for a considerable time past; which has been the case with myself also, for four or five weeks. I am now however in a state of convalescence, have much arduous duty before me, and few officers to take a hand in it. Should it be found absolutely necessary, I shall appoint some more acting Masters, and increase the number of Acting Surgeons; in doing which, and in the performance of all other duty, I must again assure you, that the best exercise of my judgement will be used with a single eye to the interest and honor of the public Service.

In compliance with your order of the 8th ult. I have written Gen. Helms, Navy-Agent, residing at Newport Tennessee on the subject of Shot powder &c:—& I have just received yours of the 16th ult to which due attention shall be given. I have as yet received no orders from the Navy-Department on the subject of the increase of expenses, incident to a State of War, nor information, how far I may be at liberty to act in cases of immurgency, without precise and specific instructions from the Honorable Secretary. With great respect, I have the honor to be [&c.]

John Shaw

ALS, DNA, RG45, CL, 1812, Vol. 2, No. 179.

1. Shaw's reply, dated 11 Aug. 1812, may be found enclosed with Shaw to Hamilton, 17 Aug. 1812, DNA, RG45, CL, 1812, Vol. 2, No. 171.

2. See Hamilton to Shaw, 20 May 1812, DNA, RG45, SNL, Vol. 10, p. 41, right hand side. Letterbook contains two pages numbered 41.

[Enclosure]
Private Official

Head Quarters
New Orleans. August 7th 1812.

Sir

I beg leave to call your immediate attention to the following requisitions, which are deemed indispensable to the defence of this Capital and the adjacent Territory; and I trust that every exertion compatible with sound Economy may be made to carry them into prompt Effect, delays being dangerous in the Present state of affairs.

Your Battering Cannon should all be mounted and Equipt for Service with the utmost dispatch.

Two Small fast sailing Vessels must be purchased and manned to reconnoitre the Coast from the Chandelier Islands to the Bar of Pensacola Bay, and from thence to keep up a communication with this City by the Lakes.

A Suitable Vessel must be purchased to form a heavy floating Battery at the mouth of the River to defend that point in Co-operation with the *Enterprize*, the *Viper*, and *Syren* should she return; This floating battery should be armed, Equipt & manned and take her Position as soon as possible, and the other Vessels should be ordered to the same station without a moments unnecessary delay.

You will be pleased to have as suitable Vessel in readiness to Sail on Tuesday the 10th Instant under a Competent Officer with an Engineer whom I have Employ'd for the Purpose, to ascertain the Communications of Lake Borne with the Gulph, and to make a suvey of the passes of Cat Island, & Christian, and the Rout from thence to Pearl River, and the Regulets. The Crew will of course be properly found & provisioned for the Service.

The three Gun Boats required for Mobile Bay, are intended to defend that Station against the Entrance of any foreign Vessels, armed or charged with arms or military Stores of any Kind, and I trust no obstacle may intervene to prevent their reaching their Destination as soon as may be. This Command being an highly interesting one, I will recommend that it should be Confided, to an Officer of Experience, discretion and Intelligence, who is to keep you, and also the Commanding Officer at the Pass of Christian regularly advised by Express of every occurrence worthy of note.

Should this little Squadron find itself menaced by Superior force, before the necessary plan of Co-operation can be carried into Effect, it must retire into Shoal-water and there defend itself with the Characteristic Courage of the Navy of the United States, untill it may receive Succour from the Troops, with a detachment of Artillery which your Officer is hereby authorised to require from the Commanding Officer at Fort Stoddart who will be held in readiness for this Service.

A heavy floating Battery to bear 18 or 20 Twenty four pounders is deemed necessary to assure the defence of Mobile Bay in the Progress of the War.

Will you be pleased to give me your Ideas of the most Oconomical, Prompt & Effectual Plan, on which such a Battery may be built.

To obviate any misunderstanding and to authorise your Conduct, I think it necessary to transmit you under Cover a Transcript of my Instructions received from the President of the United States under date of the 15th of April, and to prevent any derangement or distraction of the force under your Command, it is Indispensible that you should consider yourself subject to my requisitions and orders only, otherwise my Plans may be disconcerted and our Co operation destroy'd

With Consideration & Respect I have to the honor to be [&c.]

Jas Wilkinson

Captain J. Shaw
United States Navy
Commanding the New Orleans Station

(True copy from the Original)

Copy, DNA, RG45, AF 8, 1812.

[Enclosure]

Extract from the orders of the President of the United States to Brig General Wilkinson dated the 15th April 1812.

"You will be pleased to make such disposition of the Troops, and such arrangements respecting the fortifications, arms, ordinance,

arsenals, military and other stores, as well as of the naval force as your own Judgement may Suggest”

A True copy from the original New Orleans, Head Quarters August 7. 1812

(Signed) James Wilkinson

Copy, DNA, RG45, AF 8, 1812.

Contact with the Enemy

The first contact report sent in by U.S. naval forces at New Orleans is contained in the following letter from Lieutenant Daniel Dexter to Captain Shaw. Dexter was in command of a division of gunboats at the Balize, near the mouth of one of the passes of the Mississippi. H.M. sloop Brazen appeared and made a nuisance of herself, but she was not brought to action. Several days later, she and all of the vessels on the New Orleans station were caught up in a tremendous hurricane.

LIEUTENANT DANIEL S. DEXTER TO CAPTAIN JOHN SHAW

U.S. Gun Vessel No. 162, Balize, 10th August, 1812.

Sir,

I have the honor to inform you that an English Sloop of War mounting 28 guns, (32pd Carronades) hove in sight yesterday morning, and came to an anchor off the Bar about 12 O'Clock. She is called the *Brazen*, Capt. Stirling.¹ A pilot boat went out, thinking her to be a merchant man, and after being detained several hours, was permitted to return, with five of the crew of the American Ship *Beaver*, captured by the *Brazen* last Tuesday bound from the Havana to this place. They report that there is a Frigate (said to be the *Cambrian*) and an 18 gun brig off the coast, about 60 miles to the Eastward; and that it is the intention of the enemy to lay off the mouth of the Mississippi in wait for several American merchantmen expected from the Havana, of whom they had information from the *Beaver*.

For further particulars, I beg leave to refer you to Mr Scrivner, the gentleman who is so good as to become the bearer of this letter, and who has been a prisoner on board the English sloop of War.

Last night she made an attempt with her boats to cut out two privateers (one American and the other French) lying to the northward of pass au L'Ottre, but, as we heard no firing, and one of the privateers being in sight this morning, Close in shore, we must conclude that the enterprize was not executed.

The Brig *George Washington* is ashore on the Bar, and I have dispatched my boats to assist in getting her off, and towing her in.

The wind having been invariably ahead since I received your last instructions, I have not been able to get out of this place.

Should the Sloop of War again come to an anchor near the bar, and it proves calm, I shall attack her with the three boats I have here, provided I am not reinforced before such opportunity offers.

Inclosed is a report of the effective force & equipment of the squadron under my Command.² I have the honor to be [&c.]

(Signed) Dan^l S. Dexter

Capt. John Shaw,
Comdg Naval Officer, N. Orleans

Copy, DNA, RG45, Daniel Dexter Letterbook, p. 14. In Dexter's hand.

1. A sloop of war rated at 18 guns, based on Jamaica station.
2. Enclosure not copied in letterbook.

Hurricane Damage

Just as Captain Shaw was attempting to set his small naval force on a war footing, a devastating hurricane struck the Mississippi delta. The 19 August hurricane was the worst experienced there in years. It set back military preparations many months, with great material damage and some loss of lives, as detailed in the reports which follow. The first is Captain Shaw's, written only four days later. Following this account are two from Lieutenant Daniel Dexter who provides a vivid descrip-

tion from the perspective of a gunboat division commander. Reports such as these afford an appreciation of the weakness of the naval forces on the New Orleans station and show how vulnerable they were to natural catastrophes. A fourth document contains Secretary Hamilton's reaction to news of the storm which had reached Washington before Shaw's report. In this instance, the secretary, through his chief clerk Charles Goldsborough, shows himself entirely sympathetic to Shaw's distress and authorizes wide discretion in rebuilding the station flotilla, including the procurement of two blockships.

CAPTAIN JOHN SHAW TO SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

New Orleans August 23rd 1812

Sir,

I greatly deplore the necessity I am under of communicating to you, the calamitous condition of the small naval force attached to this station—of the City of New Orleans—and, as I presume, of the surrounding Country; produced on the afternoon and night, of the 19th instant, by a hurricane (from the N.E.) which, both in violence and duration, exceeded any thing of the kind, within the recollection of the oldest inhabitant of the country:

The Brig *Enterprize*, which, by considerable exertion, I had got fully manned, and which was on the very eve of dropping down to the Balize, was driven ashore, high & dry; but fortunately, however, without loss of lives, and with little or no injury to her hull: The relaunching of her, the bottom being a soft mud, will, I am apprehensive, be attended with considerable difficulty and consumption of time. The Brig *Viper*, also in Port, undergoing some slight repairs, was completely unrigged, and, with the loss of her bowsprit, mainmast, and guns, completely cut-down, fore and aft, to her waterways: This was occasioned in part by the extreme violence of the gale, and partly by the accidental circumstance of three or four large Merchant vessels running foul of her. Gun Vessel No. 64, commanded by Mr William Johnson, was stranded in Lake Ponchartrain, within about half a mile of Fort St. Johns: The lives of none of her crew, however, were lost, nor has she received much injury; but as she has been forced, by the violence of the tempest, over an extensive level shallow mud bottom, we anticipate much trouble in getting her off again. The Ship *Remittance*, which had just been purchased for service as contemplated

when I last wrote you, has received but little, or no injury. The *Ketch Etna*, which had for some time previously been employed as a sheer-hulk; being driven from her position, by several large Merchant vessels, sunk, and had Two men drowned. The Navy-hospital, had one half of its roof carried away, and the Kitchen and other appendant buildings, blown down; and as it contains upwards of an hundred patients, it appears indispensably necessary, that it be immediately repaired. I feel much anxiety for the fate of the Brig *Siren*, which as I had heard had just got in and was at anchor off Ship-island, as well as for that of the Gun Vessels at, and in the vicinity of, the Bay of St. Louis, and at the Balize: from none of which, have we as yet, had time to receive any intelligence.

In the Arsenal-yard, much injury has been sustained: The Sail-makers loft and the joiners shop, both under the same roof, as also the office, and the pursers Store-room, two separate apartments in another building, were blowed down. In short the injury sustained to the Naval Service, by the hurricane, cannot be repaired at a less expense, than from twenty to thirty thousand dollars.

The Military has also sustained much injury: The *Barracks* are for the most part, unroofed; and a brick-wall of considerable height, fronting them and the parade-area, and making a part of that, by which the whole were enclosed, was entirely demolished. The losses of a more private and individual character, are incalculable: The Market-house, which, in point of spaciousness and elegance, was perhaps equaled by scarcely any in the United States, was completely leveled; and under the ruins of which several, perhaps many, persons, were buried, who had sought shelter from the storm. Many of the houses in the City and Suburbs, perhaps upwards of an hundred, were destroyed, and a still larger number, were unroofed: Indeed, the devastation which presented itself to the view, on the succeeding morning, appeared well calculated to produce a solemn, unaffected gloom on the countenances of the inhabitants of the country; and to attune their hearts to the "humiliation & prayer," for which, by the President's Proclamation, the day had been set apart.

The subject of my last communication being one which lies near my heart, and which is, in my opinion, of the greatest importance to the well-being of the Service in which I have the honor to hold a commission, I hope to be pardoned for again adverting to it, and, in the most respectful manner, soliciting such orders and instructions, in reply, as shall enable me with certainty to pursue, without any

apprehension or danger of mistaking, my duty, such as shall clearly point out and define the nature of the situation and command in which I am placed; and by which I shall learn whether or not, after having for twenty-two years, sustained the character of a Seaman, and more than half of that time, that of a Naval officer, I am now to consider myself, as having found my way and sorely against my will too-into the army. No officer will go greater lengths than I will to serve my country; I am ready, with all my heart and soul, to cooperate with Gen. Wilkinson, or with any branch of the Government, in the execution and support of its laws-in which I should consider myself as fully discharging my duty as an officer, and which certainly ought to satisfy the General: But no; nothing but being directly under his orders, as well as subject to his requisitions, will serve his purposes; but to which I cannot submit, without direct orders to that effect from Government through its regular and legal organ, the Honorable Secretary of the Navy; to whom alone, and the senior Naval officers in the Service, do I owe obedience. According to the principles which the General is desirous of establishing, and the arrangements he wishes to adopt, the naval as well as the Military appropriations, must be subject to his control; or in other words, he would possess the Command over, and allow me to be responsible for, that portion of the Naval appropriations, allotted to this station. Should the Naval Commg officer in this quarter, be necessarily subjected to the command of the Military (from which I can anticipate nothing but a chaos of confusion) I must beg leave to repeat the request which I made in my last, of being removed from my present, and of being placed in the command, of a Frigate, where I shall not fear to meet the "tug of war." I wish to seek honorable employ, and to continue to perform those duties, incident to that, in which I commenced.

From a full view of the peculiarity of my situation, arising from the circumstances insisted on; I am persuaded Sir, that you will not be disposed to construe any of the foregoing remarks into a disrespect for the head, or for any of the Departments of the Government, than which, nothing can be more remote from the sentiments of my heart. With great respect [&c.]

John Shaw

LIEUTENANT DANIEL S. DEXTER TO CAPTAIN JOHN SHAW

U.S. Gun Vessel *No 162*, August 23, 1812.

Sir,

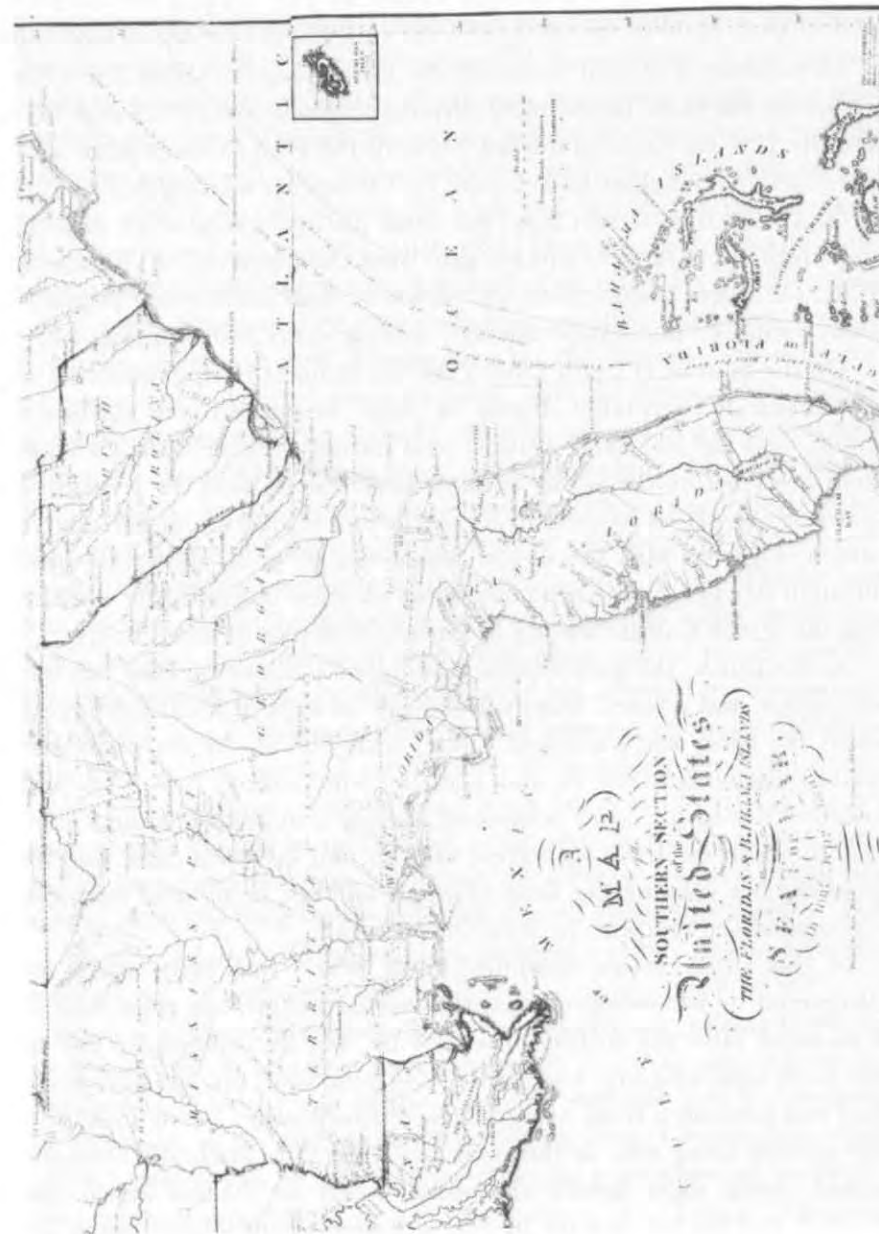
In pursuance of your order of the 2nd instant, I sailed from the Balize on the 15th, in company with Gun Vessels *Nos 27, 66 and 163*. On the 17th we came to anchor between the Free Mason's Keys, and the North Chandellies Islands, the N. Changelies bearing N.N.E.

On the 19th got under way, but came too again soon after, expecting, from appearances, a heavy gale from the Eastward. At 5 o'Clock P.M. the storm commenced, for which we had made every preparation, letting go our second anchor, striking yards and topmast, &c.

On the 20th at 1/2 past One, P.M. the tempest having increased to an almost indiscrible degree of fury, we parted one starboard cable, and lost our large Cutter; at 3 parted the starboard Cable & kept away before the wind, until we had time to bind the remaining parts of our cables to the two six pounders, and get them overboard; which, together with the kedg, which was let go at the same time, brought her up. At the time of parting our best bower Cable, we also lost our green Cutter, leaving us entirely destitute of small boats.

At 8 o'Clock, the gale still continuing with unabated fury, we lost our kedg and hauser, from which time we kept gradually dragging until 10, when the starboard Cable, with one of the six pounders, parted again; between 12 and one, the wind shifted to S.S.W. and shortly after to S.E. and continued to blow a most tremendous gale, before which we drove with great velocity; our larboard cable and six pounder not keeping her head to wind; and not being able from the violence of the tempest; to show the least sail.

In this situation we continued until nearly day light, when we discovered by her swinging, that the larboard cable was gone; and in a moment after she struck, broadside on, but by running up one of the head sails instantly, and putting the helm hard up, she payed off, and was prevented from being knocked down on her beam ends; and the ground being soft, as the swell raised her, she gradually chopped round, until right before the wind, when we hauled down the foresail and let her remain in that situation till day light; when we found she had worked herself so firmly into the Bank, that, though the water fell and left us high and dry by ten o'Clock, she still stood out upon her keel, not having received the smallest damage in her hull. From where we are ashore, Cat Island bears N and by E. distant



3 1/2 Leagues. I have sounded with Mr [Midn. Thomas S.] Cunningham's Boat, and find 8 feet water, only one Cable's length astern; and am under the impression that the vessel may be got off without much difficulty, provided anchors and cables &c with a vessel to tighten her was sent to me soon.

I send this by Mr Cunningham's small boat, which he sent over from Cat Island. He informs me that he parted both cables shortly after I did, and slung his two six pounders, by which he rode till day light, when seeing land directly under his lee, having lost one of his cables and guns, and the other not being sufficient to keep him off shore, he was obliged to cut it away; and stood in under his jibb and reefed trysail for Cat Island, when he came too with several pieces of kentlege slung to a hauser, the gale having abated. He represents his vessel to be in a very crippled condition, having carried away all his running rigging; &c.

This gale has been one of the most violent I have ever experienced in this Climate, and I am apprehensive has done more damage than we are at present aware of. Gun Vessel *No 27* was seen yesterday standing in for Ship Island; but I am fearful *No 66* is lost, not having seen nor heard any thing of her. Some vessel is ashore on the Freeman's Keys or Chandalies Islands, as we have heard guns very distinctly from that quarter yesterday and the day before. Several vestiges of wrecks have drifted ashore near us, which proves that the damage has been extensive. I have the honor to be [&c.]

(Signed) Dan^l S. Dexter

Commodore Shaw Bay St. Louis

Copy, DNA, RG45, Daniel Dexter Letterbook, pp. 16-18. In Dexter's hand.

LIEUTENANT DANIEL S. DEXTER TO CAPTAIN JOHN SHAW

U.S. Gun Vessel *No 162*, 4th Sept. 1812.

Sir,

Your letter of the 31st ultimo has been received, and for the intimation it contains of your intention to confer on me the command of the 20 gun ship you are fitting out in new Orleans, I have to return you my grateful acknowledgments. For these several days past I have expected

the pleasure of seeing you at this place; but, concluding that your visit might have been prevented by business of more importance, I have deemed it proper to give you a detail of the measures I have taken to get this vessel off, and the prospect I still have of being able to effect it.

Since the date of my last letter by Mr Cunningham, I have used every exertion, and put in practice every method in my power, to effect that so wished for object; but, as yet, without success. A trench has been dug from her stern down to the water's edge; the earth all taken out from underneath her except what is barely necessary to keep her erect, and impty water casks lashed under her bottom to assist in raising her; all the anchors I could procure have been carried out; a kind of capstone or crab has been made, of considerable power, and other strong purchases rigged; and with the assistance of the crews of the two Gun Vessels here, we have, every high tide for these 8 or 10 days past, made an attempt to start her, but without effect. We hove home the *Siren's* stream anchor, and the one sent me from the Bay; took them out again, and backed one of them with the Small bower anchor of *No 156*, and the other with a kedge and several pieces of kentledge, and at last, parted the *Siren's* Cable, without moving her.

I fear all of our efforts will be vain, until the next spring tides, unless we should be favoured with a strong wind from the Southward and Eastward, for eight or ten hours, which would without doubt raise the water so that we could heave her off with ease. We have, now, at high water, 3 1/2 feet water forward and aft, in the trench we have dug, though the tide does not rise as high now, by a foot and a half, as it did at the time I wrote the last. That foot and a half, would at this time, with the assistance of the water casks, raise her so that we could heave her off with very little difficulty.

The *Flying-fish* Schooner, (a fisherman) from Bayou St Johns, came in here last night from Britain [*Breton*] Island, which she left the night before last. The crew of her inform me that the day before yesterday, they saw a cutter and a very large Barge, full of armed men, in a small bay at Britain Island. That as soon as they saw the *flying fish*, they all made for their boats, and the fisherman, supposing them to be Englishmen, made the best of their way back to this place. They saw no large vessel in the offing, to which the boats could have belonged.

I should have dispatched one of the Gun Vessels here in pursuit of them, had not the wind came out from the Eastward; and wanting the assistance of the Crews to improve the first favourable oppor-

tunity of heaving off, I was induced to delay it, at least for a few days. I have the honor [&c.]

(Signed) Dan^l S. Dexter

Com. John Shaw,
Comdg. Naval Officer, New Orleans.

Copy, DNA, RG45, Daniel Dexter Letterbook, pp. 18-19. In Dexter's hand.

SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON TO CAPTAIN JOHN SHAW

John Shaw Esqr
Comg Naval Officer: N Orleans

Nav: Dep'mt
25 Sep. 1812

We have not heard from You, since the 17. ulto Letters however have been received from new orleans which state, that the public vessels & gunboats, on that station, have sustained the most serious injury, by a Tornado on the 19. & 20th: & the object of this letter, is, to authorise You to make every necessary provision to supply the place of any boats, that may have been lost, & to defend the Water passes to new orleans.

A competent force, must be provided, without delay. If the gunboats can be repaired, let it be done without delay; If they cannot be repaired, You are authorised to purchase suitable vessels, if in Your power, & fit them up: for carrying guns-& in fitting them You will use all the good materials of the gunboats to save expense. If the gunboats cannot be repaired, & You cannot purchase vessels to answer the purpose, Your next, & only alternative will be I presume, to build-But this I apprehend You will not be able to do in time: under these circumstances, & considering your great distance from the seat of Government, You will consult with general Wilkinson & the Navy Agent, & either repair the Boats, or purchase or build others, as may be in Your power, & as the good of the Service may suggest the object being to provide an adequate defence with every possible expedition & on the best possible terms. You may, should it be judged absolutely necessary, fit up, or procure twenty boats, calculated to carry, one to two guns each. If such boats could be hired, at a reasonable rate, & valued by distinterested competent judges, & the United States to pay for them,

at such valuation, in the event of their being destroyed, or captured by the Enemy. it would be, a more desirable arrangement than any other exception that of repairing the boats should they be worthy of repair: but it is hoped, that a less number than 20 Boats will be sufficient with the two Blockships, which You were authorised to procure by my letter dated a few days since.¹

for P Hamilton
Chas: W Goldsborough

Copy, DNA, RG45, SNL, Vol. 10, p. 164.

1. See Hamilton to Shaw, 5 Sept. 1812, DNA, RG45, SNL, Vol. 10, p. 141.

The Marines at New Orleans

A relatively small detachment of marines was on duty at New Orleans under the command of Major Daniel Carmick, who served on this station throughout the war and saw action in the Battle of New Orleans during December 1814—January 1815. The following documents include two from Lieutenant Colonel Commandant Franklin Wharton to Major Carmick, and three from Carmick to the commandant which concern matters typical of Marine Corps interest at that time. They were concerned about the need for more recruits, the need for improved disciplinary measures, and the ordering of winter uniforms. There was an expressed desire for action against the Spanish at Mobile and Pensacola to preclude the British seizure of those places, and considerable concern over Brigadier General Wilkinson's ordering marines to duty with the army. This concern was perfectly stated in Wharton's letter of 1 October 1812: "We have rights which ought to be known & established to make the Corps what it ought to be, one thing is most certain, we cannot belong at the same time to the departments of War & Navy."

LIEUTENANT COLONEL COMMANDANT FRANKLIN WHARTON, U.S.M.C.,
TO MAJOR DANIEL CARMICK, U.S.M.C.

Circular

H.Q. of the Marine Corps,
Washington, June 21st 1812

Sir!

The recruiting Service for the Corps having greatly decreased, if not altogether ceased, from the Inducements by the recruiting officers of the Army, it has been found expedient to offer a Bounty to those who will in future Join us, you are in consequence thereof authorized to allow for each able bodied Man, regularly pass'd by a Surgeon, the Sum of Twenty Dollars, Ten of which he will receive at Inlistment & the balance, Ten, at his being reported at H:Quarters, fit for duty, or, in case he should not be there Sent, at the time he is so reported by the officer Inlisting, or Commanding him at the posts. I am respectfully, [&c.]

Franklin Wharton

P:S. That Imposition may be no longer practised by desertion I deem it proper that the Recruit Should know of a Deserter here under sentence of Death which will assuredly follow Capitol Cases Since the Corporal punishments has by Law been done away.

Major Daniel Carmick,
Commandg Marines,
New Orleans.

Copy, DNA, RG127, CMC, Letters Sent.

MAJOR DANIEL CARMICK, U.S.M.C., TO
LIEUTENANT COLONEL COMMANDANT FRANKLIN WHARTON, U.S.M.C.

New Orleans 20th July 1812

Lieut. Colo. Wharton

Sir,

I am in receipt of your letters of the 16th & 21st June, the latter authorising a Bounty of twenty dollars to be paid to the Recruit, the in-

ducement held out here by the recruiting officer of the Army are still so much more advantageous that I cannot promise myself much success, Inlisting for Eighteen months only, will no doubt obtain men but should the War last longer it will be a destructive measure for the Government indeed they can hardly be disciplined in that time, The officer recruiting here has secured what men we can expect down this year, as the sickly season is commencing all those who could, have made their escape, I hope the vessels on board of which is the Clothing may arrive safe which is very doubtful, the situation of our Port is such that a single vessel of War can blockade the mouth of the River.

I would recommend the clothing being sent by the way of the Ohio during the continuance of the War & beg leave to suggest the necessity of sending the Winter clothing to Pittsburgh in time, that it may be shipped for this place before the Navigation is impeded by the Ice. The Commissions have been received & accepted of by the Young creoles.

We are anxiously waiting for orders to take Mobile & Pensacola, should the English get possession of the Port of the latter place, we will not be able to dispossess them, the advantage to them & the disadvantage to us is incalculable, my voice would be to attack it immediately, but the Genl will in future be cautious how he exceeds orders which is not to be wondered at, when we recollect the prosecution he has undergone for a like act.

Accept Sir my thanks for the papers you were so polite as to send me.
Yours Respectfully

Dan Carmick

ALS, DNA, RG127, CMC, Letters Received.

MAJOR DANIEL CARMICK, U.S.M.C., TO
FIRST LIEUTENANT SAMUEL MILLER, U.S.M.C.

Lieut. Samuel Miller New Orleans 6th July [August] 1812
Adj. M. Corps

Sir,

I have received your letter transmitting the order which prohibits the infliction of Corporeal punishment by Stripes of Lashes, it is Sincerely to be wished that our Government may succeed in disciplining our Soldiers without resorting to that degrading mode of punishment, no

nation but the French ever have & they Substitute Death in its place, which we have not done, It appears that it is left to the discretion of Commandg. Officers & Courts Martial to invent modes of Punishment which may degrade the Soldier perhaps more than inflicting Stripes. In this Country I discover that when I confine men they very frequently commit Suicide, or become so debilitated that their constitutions are very much impaired as well as their minds. I am at a loss to know what kind of Punishment to adopt. Perhaps the new Levies are such good Patriots they will require none, but I am doubtful whether we can get along with the old ones without some kind of punishment.

The Commissions you forwarded came to hand by last Mail.

I transmit the Muster Roll of the Marines for the month of June.

The Brig *Enterprise* is in the River I expect Genl Wilkinson will be in town to day. Yours respectfully

Dan Carmick

ALS, DNA, RG127, CMC, Letters Received. 1st Lieutenant Samuel Miller was acting commandant of the marines in Wharton's absence.

MAJOR DANIEL CARMICK, U.S.M.C., TO
LIEUTENANT COLONEL COMMANDANT FRANKLIN WHARTON, U.S.M.C.

New Orleans 31st Aug. 1812

Lieut. Colo. Wharton

Sir,

Since I last wrote you we have heard of the fate of the flotilla.

One Gun boat lost & two up in the Weeds. The Brig *Syren* is safe who had been chased into the Pass of Christian by a British Frigate but two men have been lost one Seaman and one Corpl of Marines, two more marines have floated up out of the Shear hulk *Etna*.

Be pleased to inform me in your next whether I am to pay the new appointed officers here from the date of their Commissions or from the date of their acceptance thereof.

I find myself at present some what singularly situated with respect to my standing with the army & beg leave to ask your opinion on the subject, Whether I am to consider myself subject to the orders of any officer of the army superior in Rank, who may happen to be on this station, or whether it is at my own discretion to accept of a Command

that may be offered me, without violating your orders. It appears there is a misunderstanding between Como Shaw & Genl Wilkinson on that subject the former will not acknowledge himself subject to the orders of the latter. The authority the Genl has produced from the Secy of War appears to me to give him full command of both Army & Navy, but the letter to Como Shaw from the Secy of the Navy directs that he shall cooperate only, my situation is different, altho I am in the Navy, I am Subject to do duty on shore with the Army, but there has heretofore been a particular order to that effect from our Secretary.

I must inform you that I have been on all the Councils of War that the Genl has convened & that he has given me several orders which I have obeyed, the last was to assume the Command of the Garrison here, during his & major [William] M Rea's absence, who have gone (in the Steam boat) with a reinforcement for Plaquemine, & to throw up a redoubt at the Balize, under the existing state of things, I am embarrassed how to act, I was yesterday by the arrival of a senior officer relieved from the Command of the Garrison, & now wish to proceed to the Pass of Christian with the marines; to fulfill your orders, by doing which I may disobey the orders of Genl Wilkinson if he considers me under his command.

I am very desirous of having a Command in the line Should the land forces have any thing to do here, which I can only obtain through Genl Wilkinson & then it is necessary I should throw a Detachment of marines into that service to entitle me thereto.

By a late Act of Congress I observe that all officers [in the] Army are allowed the Pay, rations & clothing [allowance] in lieu of taking a Servant from the [Army] be pleased to inform me if that indulgence extends to our Corps, and what number of Servants are allowed to each officer. Yours Respectfully

Dan Carmick

ALS, DNA, RG127, CMC, Letters Received.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL COMMANDANT FRANKLIN WHARTON, U.S.M.C.,
TO MAJOR DANIEL CARMICK, U.S.M.C.

H.Q. of the Marine Corps
Washington Octr 1st 1812

Sir!

I have the pleasure of acknowledging the receipt of your Letters under dates 24th & 31st Inst. The delay occasioned by the stopping of the vessel, in which your overalls, &c &c were sent to you has been as unfortunate, as it was unforceen, from some cause she put into Carolina, & it was not ascertained by us until after your letter was handed. I hope however by this time you have received the Articles, as I find by a letter from Majr General [Thomas] Pinckney to the Secretary of War, that the Stores were reshipped on the 14th of this Month for New Orleans, in the Pilot Boat, *Lelia Ann* should it happen otherwise you must purchase the overalls on the best terms; in the course of a few days Brankets [*blankets*], Woollen overalls &c &c, will leave Philada for Pittsburgh, & I expect be with you in time.

You have really experienced a most calamitous time in the late Tornado, menaced as you were by Insurrection: it is to be viewed as a matter of congratulation that so few lives were lost, the early discovery of the latter may I suppose account for it in some respects, as the time & situation of the Inhabitants would much have encreased the opportunity to perpetrate the Acts intended by the Negroes, it is rather singular that among the Military should be found any of the Insurgents, or rather Abettors of them. I can reconcile it only by a supposition that he was put there to neutralize the Soldiery, if found guilty, the Law I hope will do Justice to your Soldier, & not less to the Citizens.

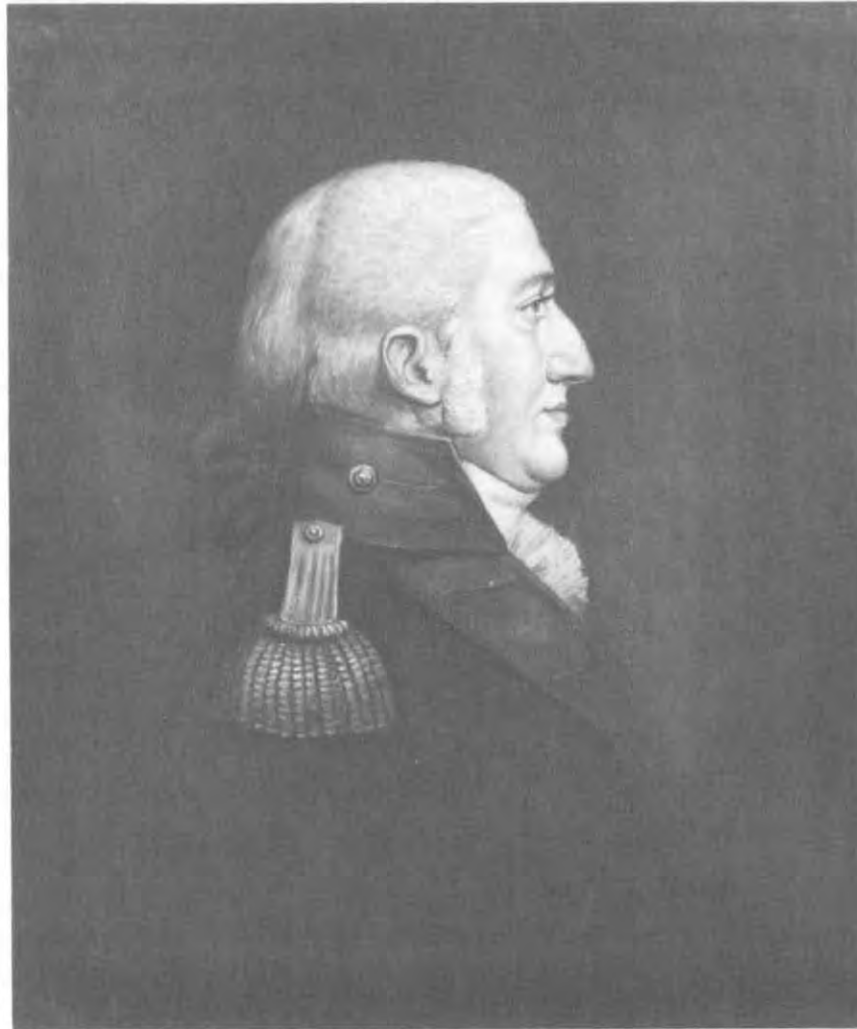
Your Barracks are partially distroyed, & you recommend the building of New, & the putting them in an other place. I should be happy if were in my mower [*power*] to sanction the proposals, but I have it not, & the Honourable, the Secretary of the Navy is absent. I must therefore merely recommend to you their repair on the best terms, until we can have permanent Quarters erected, which I have reason to think will be Soon, & perhaps the Number of Marines with you on the Station, for whom you say employment could be found.

Your report of the return of the *Syren* was very acceptable at the office, as she was thought to be lost from her being missing. The officers with you to receive pay, will draw it from the day of their acceptance;

& in reply to your enquiry about Waiters I will inform You, that in conversation with our Accountant he has no doubt as to the propriety of our receiving the same emoluments from the late Law of Congress, which the officers of the Army may be entitled to, under this opinion I shall certainly draw from my Waiters. The President of the U. States has directed the following Regulations for the Army, Viz.

Major Generals	6	Waiters
Brigadier-Generals	4	do
Colonels	3	do
Lieut. Collonels	2	do
Majors	2	do
Hospital Surgeons	2	do
All other commissioned Officers	each 1	do

I feel some reluctance in answering that part of your Letter which regards doing duty under Army officers, apprehensive that it may appear to Genl Wilkinson, who was, I know very desirous of your services, that I wish to withhold them from Him, I trust however that he will not impute to me motives so contrary to me, but will only look at the situation I am placed in & judge accordingly, but to it, in a conversation had with the department, to which we belong, I am led to believe that all our officers detached from this for Naval Services, either by Sea, or Land, must consider themselves undoubtedly call'd on to obey the orders of the Naval Commander on the Station, or at Sea-it is however to be also understood, that this will not preclude them from aiding, & assisting the Army operations, when it can be done without Injury to such Naval Services, on a consultation had with, & approval of, the Naval Commander, to whom I have alluded. You will remember all the difficulties had on the points heretofore, & you may depend they have encreased lately, instead of being reduced. I will yet believe that some perfect System will be adopted to the Satisfaction of all parties of the Navy. Much is looked for from Congress this Winter, & I think we have a right to expect something for the Corps. The point in dispute must be closed for the good of the Service, or, I know not what will become of us, we have rights which ought to be known & established to make the Corps what it ought to be, one thing is most certain, we cannot belong, at the same time, to the departments of War, & Navy, we were created for the first, & cannot, I conceive, be under the other in anyone way, except by the immediate order of the President of the U. States. I can have no doubt but you will be able to aid General Wilkinson without any departure from your Marine Duties, & I



Lieutenant Colonel Commandant Franklin Wharton, U.S.M.C.

presume the Naval officer on the Station will not raise any difficulties to prevent it. I am very Respectfully [&c.]

F. Wharton

Major Daniel Carmick.
Commandg Marines, New Orleans.

Copy, DNA, RG127, CMC, Letters Sent.

Rebuilding the Naval Force

Following the August 19th hurricane, Captain Shaw pressed hard to raise sunken vessels and to launch those that had been stranded by the storm tide. In early October, Secretary Hamilton sent Shaw direct orders to cooperate with Brigadier General Wilkinson despite Shaw's previously voiced distaste for working under a senior army commander, and Wilkinson, in particular. The general was not an easy man to accommodate. He constantly made demands upon naval resources and tried to replace some of Shaw's appointees with those favorable to himself. The result was a continuing expression of discontent in the reports received by the Navy Department and a precipitous decline in morale among officers under Shaw's command. The documents in the next section begin with Hamilton's endorsement of the need to take orders from Wilkinson, followed by two reports from Shaw on the navy's recovery from hurricane damage. His comments concerning Wilkinson indicate a reluctant compliance with the secretary's orders.

SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON TO CAPTAIN JOHN SHAW

Capt Jno Shaw
New Orleans

Nav: Dep't
12 Octo: 1812

The public good requires, that I should direct You, to attend to the orders of Brigadier Genl Wilkinson, or the Commanding officer of the army near New Orleans—in the disposition of the vessels under Your

Command, the details however of Your command will not be interfered with.

This order does not proceed from any want of confidence in You, but with the indispensable of having but one head to direct our operations on distant Stations.

P. Hamilton

Copy, DNA, RG45, SNL, Vol. 10, p. 174.

CAPTAIN JOHN SHAW TO SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

New Orleans Octr 27th 1812

Sir

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letters of the 5th and 25th ult. to which due attention shall be given.

Public duty called me in the early part of this month to Tchifoncta, at which place Gun Vessels *No 5 & 24*, were repairing; and from thence I had to proceed to join the few Gun Vessels stationed at and near to the Bay St Louis, for the purpose of making arrangements for the recovery of two 24 pounder Cannons, and a quantity of cannon-shot, thrown overboard from *Nos 162 & 23*, in the time of the hurricane; as also, for getting off and repairing, *No 25*, driven ashore at the same time, at the Bay St Louis. I do assure you, Sir, that no time has been lost since the gale, in getting repaired and fitted for active service, our disabled vessels; the only one of which that will be completely lost to the public, is Gun Vessel *No 23*; which was, as formerly mentioned, driven out, into an extensive swamp or marsh, at least three miles from the sea-shore. The list, herewith enclosed, exhibits the real situation of the whole force under my command; and I most sincerely regret that the *Enterprise* has been ordered from this station, her services being much wanted here; as, in co-operation with the *Siren*, she could not fail of greatly annoying the Commerce of the Enemy in the Gulph of Mexico, and taking many of the Jamaica ships, on their passage round the West end of Cuba, for Europe.

The Ship, *Remittance*, formerly mentioned as having been purchased into the service, and which is now called the *Louisiana*, will very shortly be ready to receive a crew; but it appears to me, Sir, a moral impossibility that a sufficient number of seamen can be pro-

cured here to man her, as there are not actually, so many in the place. A Rendezvous has been kept constantly open, ever since December last, and we are now offering a bounty of ten dollars, which will probably have to be doubled. Carpenters are not to be got at present, on any terms, to cross to the Bay St Louis to work on the Block Ship contemplated to built in that quarter for the defence of the Rigolets &c; but if she were even now ready, from the causes just mentioned, it would be found impracticable to man her: I do earnestly solicit therefore, that 200 able seamen may be entered in some of the Atlantic Ports, and sent here on board of as many as six fast sailing schooners, such as I have on a former occasion described; and suggested to be, even in a time of peace, almost indispensable for the support of the Revenue laws. Our whole coast Westwardly of the Balize, is at this moment, infested with pirates and smugglers, who appear to have arrayed themselves, with a determination of opposing the laws of our country by force; and of setting at defiance, all the means afforded us of punishing them. The number and description of vessels I have mentioned, each mounting 6 or 8 eighteen pounder canonades, together with a long 18 pounder on a circle amidships, would enable us to clear the coast, effectually of this Marine Banditti, and greatly to annoy the British Commerce, carried on with the Spanish Provinces, through the Mexican Gulph.

The article of Gun powder is so scarce with us, as, that the necessary supply for the Sloop of War, *Louisiana*, will take almost the whole of what we have in our Magazine; Hence a necessity for an ample supply to be forwarded as early as possible. The pistols which we have now in store, are all, nearly worn out in the service, of which article, we are in want of, at least, 150 pair, and of Ship's sabres, about 300. We are much in want here, of commissioned Lieutenants, great embarrassment being experienced, for want of a larger number, in convening Courts Martial. If it be correct, as we have understood, that Mr Thomas ap Catesby Jones has been promoted to a Lieutenant; may I request that the Honorable Secretary, will be pleased to forward to him, his commission. Since my arrival on this Station, our Navy arsenal has been deficient of a Master Ship-Carpenter: Will you be so good as to authorize me to appoint one, as in a state of War, such a person is greatly needed, and indeed, we cannot, at present, do well without one. The return of sick now in the Navy-Hospital, does not exceed 56;

which is a considerable reduction since my last. With much respect, I have the honor to be [&c.]

John Shaw

ALS, DNA, RG45, CL, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 147.

[Enclosure]

A List Exhibiting the Number, actual Condition, and present distribution of the armed vessels under my Command, on the New Orleans Station.

The Brig *Siren*, will shortly sail, having 140 men on board, 52 of whom, have recently been drafted from the Gun vessels

The Brig *Viper*, is ready for Service, but is deficient, by 30, in her Compliment of Men, having but 60 on board.

The Brig *Enterprise*, is afloat again, is just completed in her repairs, will haul out into the stream, in from, 6 to 8 days, but is 20 men short
Gun Vessels *No 156 & 163* are on Convoy of military stores, bound for Fort Stoddart.

Gun Vessels *No 65, 162, 22, 27*, are now between the Bay St Louis, Cat Island, & the Rigolets

Gun Vessel *No 66*, is ordered into Tchifoncta to repair

Gun Vessel *No 5 & 24* are under repairs at Tchifoncta

Gun Vessels *No 64 & 25*, are still on shore, the former, at fort St Johns, and the latter at the Bay St Louis
and

Gun Vessel *No 23* is entirely lost, to the service

New Orleans

Novr 2nd 1812

John Shaw

DS, DNA, RG45, CL, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 147. Last three lines are in Shaw's hand.

CAPTAIN JOHN SHAW TO SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

New Orleans Novr 9. 1812.

Sir,

Agreeably to your direction I have now the honor of transmitting to you a copy of the letter from the Navy-Department; dated, 25th September last, on the subject of the defence of New Orleans &c.

My last communication to the Honorable Secretary truly exhibits, what was at that time the real state and condition of the Naval forces attached to this station; since which but little change has taken place. The Brigs *Enterprise* and *Viper*, so far as relates to repairs, are in complete readiness for sea; but their movements, will, I apprehend, be greatly impeded, by the scarcity of seamen. The ship *Louisiana* will be ready to receive a crew in the course of a month; and as I am ready at a loss to know how men are to be procured; instructions from the Honorable Secretary on the subject, is respectfully solicited. As the terms of service of forty or fifty men, belonging to the Brig *Siren*, will expire in about for months, -and as we cannot possibly calculate on entering others to supply their places here; would it not be advisable for her to be ordered round for that purpose, either to St Mary's, or to Charleston.

Our Gun Vessels will ere long, at the expense of much time and labor, be in pretty good condition for service: I intend that *Nos 22 & 25*, formerly condemned as unfit for service, shall be repaired as soon as time may permit. The block Ship cannot, in my opinion, be laid down before next Spring; as I should find it impossible, at this time, to prevail on 20 Carpenters in this City to cross the lakes, were I to offer them three dollars per day each, and a ration.

This station will cause the Navy-Department immense sums of money; the General is, however, as I presume, in the command of it; and I hope I may be permitted to express my most profound repugnance and regret at finding myself to be one of his subalterns; feelings, Sir, excited by the respect which I cherish for myself and my officers. The only consequences to be anticipated, are, general confusion - arrests - Courts Martial &c - Soldiers and sailors, having never yet agreed in the same mess. The Generals requisitions on me some time since for work to be performed by the Navy could not be accomplished by 500 Carpenters in 6 months. Much of the Army expenses, here, is now to be saddled on the Navy. However, as it has been thought proper to place a post Captain, and a Squadron of the Navy under his orders, I have nothing further to do than to obey them, complying with all

demands of whatever nature, which he may make on me. Should additional Boats be wanted for service - the only mode by which they are to be obtained, is by purchase, as an attempt to build can by no means answer. I shall recommend to the Navy Agent, the purchase, at present, of two small vessels for the Lake service. Sir, I have the honor to be [&c.]

John Shaw

ALS, DNA, RG45, CL, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 172.

Please, Get Me Out of Here!

Ambitious young naval officers soon developed a distaste for duty on the New Orleans station. Yet many discovered that once assigned there, it was almost impossible to obtain new orders. If they proved themselves highly competent, it was unlikely that Captain Shaw would want to dispense with their services, but if they were less than outstanding, the Navy Department had no need for them elsewhere. While there were two lucky ones who escaped (Johnston Blakeley and Joseph Bainbridge), most others did not. Under the risks of duty in a disease-prone environment,¹ burdened by torpid heat, and limited by the essentially defensive posture of naval operations, these men saw their chances for brilliant careers fading away. The requirement for duty in small, shallow-draft vessels did not appeal to men craving blue water and tall ships. They knew that the laurels of this war would be won by those manning the swift-sailing, more powerful ships of the frigate navy in the Atlantic. There lay the future promotions, prize money, and fame required for a climb to the top of the small American navy. The following letters portray mounting dissatisfaction among junior naval officers on the station.²

1. For a detailed discussion of diseases on the New Orleans station and the medical practices of the time, see two letters of Surgeon Lewis Heermann to the secretary of the navy dated 20 Mar. and 23 May 1812, DNA, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 1, Nos. 129 and 275.

2. For another example, see the letters of Midshipman Thomas ap Catesby Jones to Hamilton, 28 Nov. 1811, DNA, RG45, BC, 1811, Vol. 2, No. 262, and 25 Sept. 1812, DNA, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 67.

MIDSHIPMAN THOMAS T. WEBB TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

United States Gun Vessel No. 5
New Orleans Septbr the 17th 1812.

Sir

After being on furlough for nearly fourteen Months, and all that Time in the Merchant Service I was ordered by Commodore Shaw to join Gun Vessel No. 5, on this Station; And being fully convinced, that by Remaining onboard of a Gun Vessel I shall not have it in my power of obtaining those honors, that I so earnestly desire. I therefore beg leave to Request that you will order me on board, one of the crusing Vessels on the Northern Station.

Previous to the Attainment to my suit for a furlough I served my Country upwards of two Years, and since that time the labor's of a Seaman in a Merchant Ship has been a pleasure to me, by obtaining that Knowledge of Seaman-ship, which is Requisite to capasitate me for any Service, that you, or my Country may require. I should not have made this Request, if I thought that my Service's were in great demand on this Station, but as they can be dispensed with, without any detriment to the Vessels here; I trust to your will to change my situation. I have the honor to be with the highest Respect [&c.]

Tho^s: T. Webb

ALS, DNA, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 56. Endorsed: "Spoken well of by Lt [William] Carter Jr. P.H."

LIEUTENANT DANIEL S. DEXTER TO CAPTAIN JOHN SHAW

U.S. Gun Vessel, No 162,
Bay St Louis, 10th Nov. 1812.

Sir,

Being authentically informed that the Brig *Enterprize* is to proceed to the Atlantic States, as soon as She is ready for sea, I feel it a duty I owe myself, as an officer, to request your permission to leave this station, and take a passage in her to Washington.

My having been six years in this Country, (a long service on one station); a prospect I have of being able to obtain a more honorable and

advantageous situation, and there being no other command for me here than a Gun Boat, are circumstances sufficiently weighty, in my opinion, to induce me to hope that my request will be attended to.

Nothing of importance has transpired here, since the date of my last letter, except the accident which happened to the *Siren*, of which you have doubtless heard, ere this. I have the honor to be [&c.]

(Signed) Dan^l S. Dexter

Commodore Shaw.

Copy, DNA, RG45, Daniel Dexter Letterbook, p. 30. In Dexter's hand.

LIEUTENANT DANIEL T. PATTERSON TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

New Orleans Novr 10th 1812

Sir

I do myself the honour to address you, on a subject which is to me of the greatest moment, which has engaged my most unremitting attention for years past and is still received by me with encreased Anxiety, viz my promotion in the Navy, in which I have served for nearly fourteen years, without having ever enjoyed a Furlough.

The cause of my obtruding myself upon your attention at this moment; Arises from having read a paragraph in the National Intelligencer of the 6th Ult. announcing that the President had conferred upon Lieut. Charles Morris' late 1st of the Frigate *Constitution*, the rank of Captain in the Navy of the United States, for the Gallantry displayed by him, in the Action between the U.S. Frigate *Constitution*, and his Britannic Majesty's Frigate *Guerriere*, which terminated so gloriously for our Flag. Lieut. Morris was as you know a junior Lieut. to me; that he is an Officer of great merit, and a very Gallant, Valuable one, I admit; for since I have known him I have admired, and ever done justice to his Merits, but in the Action for which he has been promoted over me, I cannot discover from the Official letters of Captain Hull, that he particularly distinguished himself by any Special Act of Gallantry. On the Contrary, Captain Hull, after speaking of the Able Manner in which he was aided by Lieut. Morris goes on to say, that if he was to particularize any one Officer he should be doing injustice to

the Others; inferring from that, that each Officer acquitted himself equally well, how then with deference permit me to ask, is he entitled, for his conduct in this Action, to be advanced over a Senior Officer.

I have ever been and still continue, a strong advocate for rewarding superior Merit, and for advancing an Officer for performing any signal Act of Gallantry, whereby he distinguishes himself Above his Brother Officers in the same Contest, over the heads of those who may be Senior to him in his Own Grade, or even over those of a Grade superior to him; and had the *Guerriere* been taken by Boarding, and Lieut Morris have headed the Boarders, or had Captain Hull been Unfortunatly Killed, or wounded so severely as to have Obliged him to leave the Deck, and Lieut Morris have fought the Ship Afterwards, and the result been as glorious as it has terminated, then I should have advocated his promotion, and I believe there are few Officers in the Service who were Senior to him, who would have been more pleased, at his advancement, or more readily acknowledged the justice of it than I, but neither of these cases Exist. Feeling highly Ambitious, as I do to rise to the highest grade of my profession, and Anxious for an oppetunity to signalyze myself, which I have probably been deprived of by being compelled contrary to my wishes, to remain on this inactive forlorn Station, for permit me to recall to your remembrance, the application I made to the Department, to leave this Station dated the 7th of Feby. 1811, to which you did me the honor to reply immediately Stating that "Special considerations forbid your granting my request at that time, but that when Capt Shaw should think my Services could be dispensed with he might Order me to Washington and you would acquiesce in the Order." this altho. unknown to you, was tantamount to a positive refusal of my request; as Captain Shaw, I knew would never permit me to leave this Station, unless by a positive Order from you.

After taking a dispassionate view of Lieut. Morris's Merits and particularly the part he bore so honourably to himself and Country in the Action before Alluded to, and the Manner in which I have served since my first entrance into the Navy, and my being Kept on a Station, where no opportunity could be afforded me, to distinguish myself for want of proper vessels, and none permitted me elsewhere, I cannot but feel that the Promotion of Lieut Morris over me is a hardship, and one of such a Nature as to cause me severe Mortification; I should not have troubled you on this subject, but that I feel my case as peculiarly hard,

when contrasted with that of Other Officers on More Active Stations; With great Respect I have the Honour to be [&c.]

Danl. T. Patterson

ALS, DNA, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 150.

1. Lieutenant Charles Morris's promotion over the heads of equally experienced and more senior officers raised a storm of protest. For further documentation, see pp. 516-23.

LIEUTENANT JOHNSTON BLAKELEY TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

U.S Brig *Enterprize*, Balize, mouth of
the river Mississippi 29th Novr 1812

Sir

I had the honour to receive your orders of 30th August;¹ but as we were at that time on shore and it was uncertain when we should get afloat; all of which I suppose you were kept informed of by Capt Shaw; I did not think it necessary to answer, until I could do so with certainty.

I have now to report to you, we are thus far in obedience to your orders, and expect to leave this tomorrow. Permit me to express to you, how grateful I feel for your attention to my application and how rejoiced I am to be relieved from a station where I have experienced nothing, but delay, disappointment and disaster. I have the honour to be [&c.]

J. Blakeley

ALS, DNA, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 191.

1. Hamilton to Blakeley, 30 Aug. 1812, DNA, RG45, SNL, Vol. 10, p. 137, ordered *Enterprize* to the St. Marys Station.

LIEUTENANT DANIEL S. DEXTER TO CHARLES W. GOLDSBOROUGH

U.S. Ship *Louisiana*,
New Orleans, Decr 28, 1812

Sir,

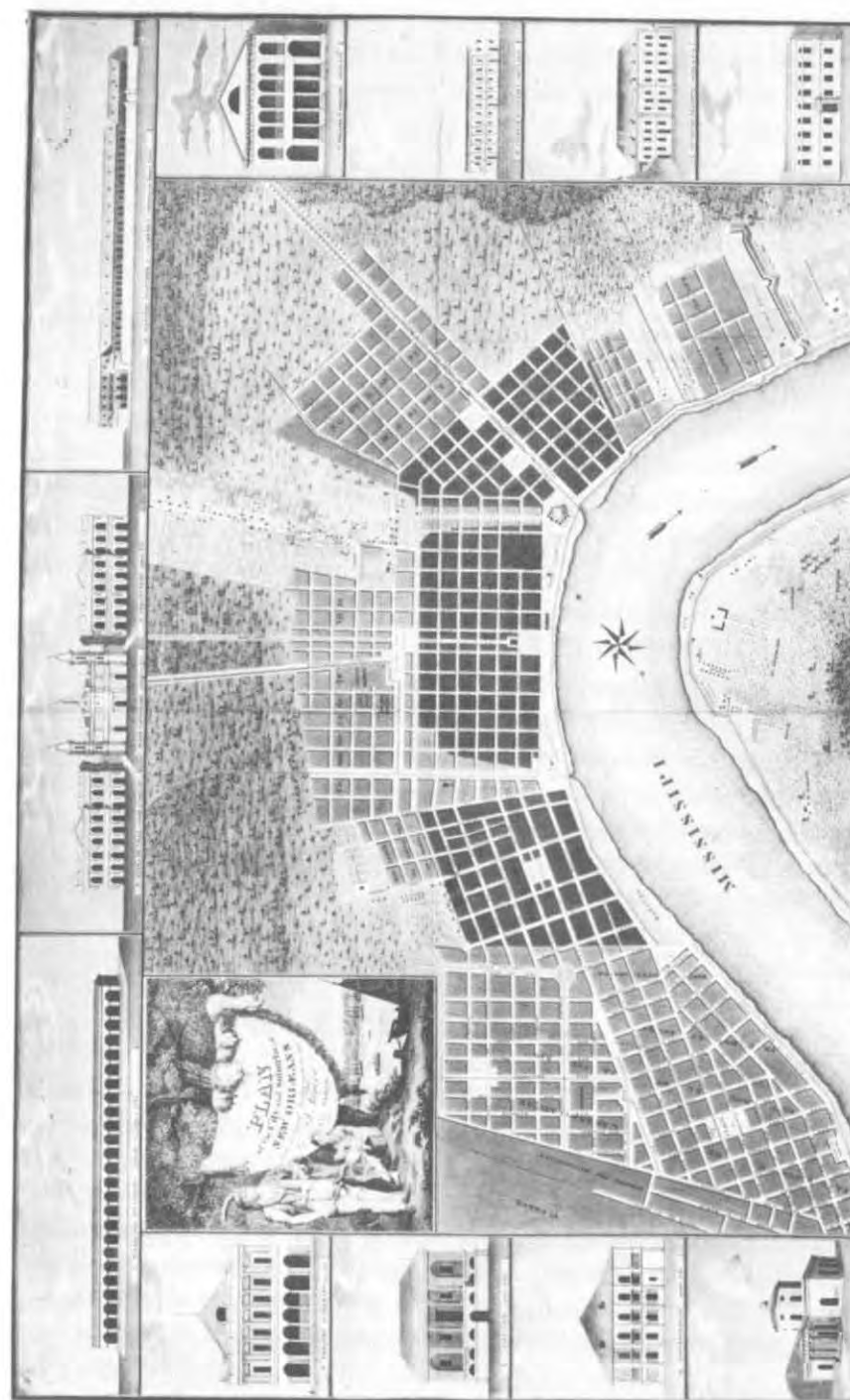
I have the honor to solicit the influence of your intercession with the Secretary of the Navy, to obtain perforce my removal from this Station; and I feel Conscious that the reasons I shall advance, and which induce me to urge this request, ought, and, I hope will, induce him to grant it.

In the first place, Sir, permit me to remind you that I have already remained six successive years in this place, subject to all the local as well as natural disadvantages of the station and climate, without any alteration in my rank, and very little in my Commands. This long service, only, on the same station, should, I conceive, entitle me to claim a change of it as my right.

But, Sir, this is not all; I cannot forbear expressing my disapprobation of the imbecile measures pursued by those in whom the direction of our Naval affairs here, is vested; while our Atlantic Coast is daily witnessing the gallant exploits of my brother officers, I cannot but exclaim against the rigour of my destiny, which obliges me still to remain here only to see and participate in a torpid, unmanly, and I had almost said, a disgraceful state of inactivity, under the controul [of] a naval officer, in whose inattention and cautious timidity, I cannot, in justice to myself acquiesce; and who is himself, in fact, ruled by the arrogant and capricious humour of a Military officer, quite unversed in Naval affairs. You may, perhaps, consider my remarks severe, but I think they are not unjust or unmerited.

I some time since accepted the command of a sloop of War fitting out here, called the *Louisiana*, under impression that she was to be made a cruising vessel; but I am now convinced by her armament, (sixteen 24 pounders on her gun deck) that she is to remain stationary in the river; this circumstance makes me doubly anxious to leave a station, where I must either be cooped up in the Lakes in a Gun boat, or in the river in a block Ship.

My having applied twice before this to the Secretary for a removal (though, from their remaining unanswered perhaps my applications were never received)¹ and the reliance I have on your influence, induces me to hope soon to experience the satisfaction of receiving an order to leave this station.



We have no news here, except the arrival of a public Spanish armed Brig, and three other Vessels, from Vera Cruiz, for Flour; the inhabitants of which place are almost in a state of starvation. I have the honor to be [&c.]

(Signed) Dan^l S. Dexter.

Chas. W. Goldsborough, Esq.

Copy, DNA, RG45, Daniel Dexter Letterbook, pp. 44-45. In Dexter's hand.

1. Recipient's copies not found.

Bad Luck for Joseph Bainbridge

The choicest command on the New Orleans station was the brig Siren. She was relatively well-armed, though undermanned, and had escaped major damage during the August hurricane. Secretary Hamilton picked a relatively senior lieutenant to command her. He was the younger brother of Constitution's commanding officer, Commodore William Bainbridge. Joseph Bainbridge had served in the Quasi-War with France and the Barbary Wars. Indeed, he had been one of the volunteers in the Intrepid's burning of the frigate Philadelphia in Tripoli Harbor. Destined for a respectable though not brilliant naval career, Joseph Bainbridge was overshadowed by his more famous brother. It was typical of his luck to be engaged in a three month overland journey from Philadelphia to New Orleans when the War of 1812 began. When he arrived, exhausted after his arduous journey, Lieutenant Bainbridge assumed command of Siren, but was soon embarrassed by her running aground in Mississippi Sound. This was an inauspicious beginning for the future commander of the sloop Frolic. The following documents portray Bainbridge's plight and his state of mind after the grounding incident. His report includes comments on Lieutenant Charles Morris's promotion, the desirability of sailing Siren north for refitting, and Brigadier General Wilkinson's authority. In an accompanying document, Bainbridge's officers provided a sympathetic testimonial to his seamanship.

LIEUTENANT JOSEPH BAINBRIDGE TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

U.S. Brig *Siren* Decr 5th 1812
Off Pass Christian

Sir,

I have the honor of writing you for the first time since my leaving Washington, but hope the circumstances I shall hereafter mention, will explain the cause of your not hearing from me sooner.

In your orders of the 9th May 1812, you gave me permission to go as far as Boston, to see my brother, but I did not get farther than New York, where I remained two weeks, and returned to Philadelphia in order to proceed to New Orleans agreeably to your orders, when I arrived at Philadelphia I found no vessel going to Orleans, in consequence of the War, it was therefore necessary for me to go to Pittsburgh, and proceed down the rivers Ohio and Mississippi to Orleans. I arrived at Pittsburgh the 28th of June, and in consequence of the difficulty of procuring boats did not leave it until the 10th of July, and after a long and tedious passage of fifty days, a part of the way in an open Skiff and a Kentucky flatt, arrived at Natchez extremely indisposed, this however did not abate my anxiety of getting to Orleans, and after remaining three days left that place and arrived at Orleans the sixth Septer but so ill that I was carried to my bed, and was confined until a few days before my arrival on board this vessel the 7th of Novr. After my arrival on board I had great difficulties to encounter to get the vessel to Sea, she being then short of men, and having to transfer a great many who were English Subjects. I also found her deficient in many articles, which were indispensibly necessary for a vessel of war, bound on a Cruize, and particularly a Launch, which is almost as absolutely necessary as the Main Mast to a Ship.

The place in which she lays and the distance from Orleans, present many impediments in procuring supplies, some very considerable delay therefore followed.

On the 4th Ulto. I sailed, and in beating down the coast near Horn Island in order to get an offing, on the following day; I struck on a Shoal not laid down in any chart that I have on board, and after exerting every means in my power to get the Vessel off with my two small boats having no Launch I was obliged to adopt the unpleasant alternative of throwing overboard nine of my twenty four pound Caronades and part of my Shot-I should not have sailed without a

Launch, but my zeal for the honor of the service made me prefer that inconvenience to the disgrace of remaining so long inactive, as she has lain a considerable time at her anchors. I sent some of my officers and men to search for the Guns, but their exertions have proved fruitless, as they perhaps were buried in quick sand, the coast is very liable to changes as has been witnessed since the late gale of the 19th August, since which time, that and many other shoals have been discovered, that were never known before, or mentioned in the charts.¹

But conscious of my own rectitude, I flatter myself Sir, that you will also think my conduct blameless, after fully considering the circumstances.

I take the liberty of enclosing you some letters received from my officers, which will more fully illustrate the facts relating to that unlucky accident, and will prove to you that I do not stand alone in my opinion of my own rectitude.

I beg leave very respectfully Sir, to touch on an event, which to me is a source of much uneasiness—Viz—The Promotion of Lt Morris, much as I appreciate the merit of that valuable officer, and no one can more highly esteem his qualifications as an Officer and a man, than I do, I nevertheless cannot without pain, view his elevation above myself, particularly when I reflect that fourteen years of my life, the full half of it, have been devoted to the Service of my country, and that any officer should have obtained that, by a fortuitous combination of circumstances, which I have long and so hardly struggled to earn, and I hope not without some little claim, namely promotion or preferment in my profession, the only bounty which an officer can claim or hope, from the patronage of his Government.

It is with the utmost regret Sir, that I mention to you my sentiments on this subject, in doing which, I hope I shall not incur your censure, as I am sure your sentiments would be similar on a similar occasion.

I beg leave to suggest to you the propriety of ordering the *Siren* to the Northward, as she is much in want of repairs, having never had any since she was built which is now ten or twelve years, except some very trivial and partial ones—whatever might be necessary, could not be done here but at a double expence, if at all—she is also too large for the station, as she draws too much water, and in bad weather can make no harbour but the Balize, which is very difficult of access, and with a head wind or foggy weather it is impossible to enter it—we have no harbour on the coast but Mobile bay, and it would be impossible to beat into that, —nor could we even beat into Pensacola with a head wind. I

have received orders from Commodore Shaw to go to the Mississippi to heave out the vessel, and examine her bottom, and tho' I am not apprehensive that she has received any injury as she makes no water, I nevertheless think it adviseable as her bottom has become very full of barnacles, which have very much injured her sailing, that she should be hove out.

I shall go however without a Launch conformable to his orders.

I hope Sir, you will pardon me for mentioning one more circumstance which is mortifying I believe to every naval officer on the Station, the appointment of Genl Wilkinson to the command of the Naval forces of this station. Though friendly I feel to the General I cannot but think it mortifying that there could not have been found an officer, in the Navy whose talents would have rendered him competent to act in conjunction with the Army, instead of placing the Naval establishment under the immediate controul of an Army officer.

I have spoken to you Sir, on many points, and hope I have not trespassed too much on your patience, and I repeat I flatter myself, that you will grant me your indulgence, and not disapprove sentiments, which I feel confident your own magnanimity would suggest. Believe me Sir, with sentiments of the highest respect and esteem [&c.]

Joseph Bainbridge

LS, DNA, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 201.

1. For correspondence exchanged by those attempting to assist Bainbridge, see Dexter to Bainbridge, 9 Nov. 1812, DNA, RG45, Daniel Dexter Letterbook, p. 30; Dexter to Alexis, 13 Nov. 1812, *ibid.*, p. 32; and Dexter to Shaw, 18 Nov. 1812, *ibid.*, p. 35.

[Enclosure]

U.S. Brig *Siren* Friday 6th Novr 1812
off Cat Island

Lieut Commdt. Josef Bainbridge
Sir,

We, the undersigned, officers of the *Siren* beg leave on this occasion, to address you, we hope that though unsolicited by you so to do (for we are sensible that your own consciousness of rectitude would make you abhor the idea of asking any, much less a partial Statement from us, except befor a proper tribunal, our frank approval of your conduct, during our perilous situation of the last night, at least will not be offensive, the more especially, as it is the spontaneous effusion of our hearts

and a tribute we voluntarily give to your merits as an officer and a man.¹

As we undertake to address you and to comment it may not be improper here to make a recapitulation of the *Siren's* striking on the Shoal yesterday. We got underway yesterday, Thursday Nov 5th, the North point of Ship Island, bearing E.N.E. the South West point of Ship Island S.S.E. and the sand bluff of Cat Island W. by S. 1/2 S. and with the wind ahead continued to beat down the coast along Ship Island with the intention of Making an offing, so as to stand off to sea on a cruise, but, at about 5 oClock in the afternoon, when standing on the Starboard tack, Horn Island, then to the Northward with regular soundings of about four fathoms, it Suddenly Shoaled and before the Ship could be brought round She Struck on a Shoal, hitherto not laid down that we remember in any chart of this coast and certainly not in the charts we have on board, which are the latest and most correct. Immediately on Striking, the boats were lowered down and every exertion made by carrying out anchors to get the vessel off; we carried out in our cutter, a verry Small boat for the purpose having no launch on board, a Small Stream anchor, and after that a Kedge; carried out a Second Stream anchor, and parted a Stream Cable, and left the anchor buoy'd. After heaving out those anchors untill they nearly came home to the Vessel and finding no greater prospect of removing the Brig from her dangerous Situation and unable to carry out any large Anchors, a Sheet or a bower anchor, our little boates having been already one upset and both much injured, and the Ship beating so as to give reason every moment to expect that she would go to peices, you call'd a council of your officers to know their opinions, before you would proceed to the last resort of throwing over the guns; this necessity was painfull Sir, but nevertheless, imperious, as the vessel had already, been upward of five hours beating violintly on the reef, and was every moment if possible, getting into farther danger, from which in a Short time, all hope must have been lost of Saving her; We Said before that this last resort of throwing over Some of the guns, was the only hope left us, it was our unanimous opinion when you ask'd our advice and we were happy to find that it accorded with your own. It is verry certain, that had the vessel have been provided with a launch to carry out anchors of a larger size, the unfortunate alternative of throwing over the guns and Shot, might have been avoided and that we might have proceeded on a cruise without twenty minuets delay and

without sustaining any loss whatever, but having none nothing else could be done.

Without wishing to offend you, by bestowing on you any unmerited applause for your unremitted exertions, and Manly and Officerlike coolness, and self command during those five or Six hours, that tried every heart, permit us to advert to your exemplary conduct, since the first moment of your taking command of this vessel. We have witness'd your extreme anxiety to get your vessel to sea and the many difficulties you have had to encounter and though we regret from our hearts the occurrence of the unlucky accident, which has for a time impeded and delayed our cruise, we are yet fully sensible that no human wisdom could have foreseen or prevented it, as you Kept the deck and Watch'd the vessel, from the time we saild, until that unlucky moment. Sensible how prone men are to censure, without evidence to warrant it, and to deny applause even when just, we feel a pleasure in thus expressing to you our Sentiments, as it may heighten the delight in conscious rectitude, inasmuch, as those, whose candour dictates this testimonial, were eye witnesses on the occasion which gave rise to it.

We are willing that you use this letter as you please and can Affirm to what we have Said above before any competent tribunal should it be necessary. Believe us Sir with the deepest interest in your Welfare, Sincerely yours

Signed John Walter Gibbs Lieut.
 Otho Norris "
 Samuel Henley "
 Jonathn D. Ferris Sailing Master
 Jno Achilles Kearney Surgeon
 Robert Pottenger Purser

Copy, DNA, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 201.

1. A similar, short statement was composed by the warrant and petty officers of *Siren* and sent to Bainbridge on the following day. See Joseph Martin, Jr., et al. to Bainbridge, 7 Nov. 1812, DNA, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 3, bound between Nos. 214 and 215, though unrelated to either document.

Fitting Out *Louisiana*

Lieutenant Daniel Dexter, formerly the commander of a division of gunboats, was given command of the recently acquired Louisiana in December 1812. She had been only lightly damaged in the August hurricane and needed repairs; however, Captain Shaw intended to convert her into a cruiser to be stationed off the Balize, southeast of the delta. But General Wilkinson disagreed and thought Louisiana should be rigged as a block ship for use on the river. As we know from other letters, Lieutenant Dexter was disgusted with duty at New Orleans (see pp. 422-23 and 426-28) and wanted to command an active cruising vessel. As the following document shows, Dexter was fully engaged in readying Louisiana in compliance with Shaw's orders.

LIEUTENANT DANIEL S. DEXTER TO CAPTAIN JOHN SHAW

U.S. Ship *Louisiana*
New Orleans, 21st Decr 1812.

Sir,

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of today, and to inform you that no exertion has been or shall be wanting on my part, to get the *Louisiana* out of Dock the soonest.

There are now twenty one Carpenters at work for her, and Mr Legare informs me that his work will [be] completed in four days, at which time I shall be ready to receive my armaments, Guard of Marines, &c &c. The hammocks and bags were indented for the day after I took command, and a number of men have been employed making these ever since; they will all be ready by the time the Carpenters work is done. The rigging is in a state of forwardness; and the Boatswain and his Crew will be able to complete it in the required time. An application has already been made to Capt. Woolstoncroft, for the Elm timber, which will be procured to day. I have the honor to be [&c.]

(Signed) Dan^l S. Dexter.

Commodore John Shaw.

Copy, DNA, RG45, Daniel Dexter Letterbook, p. 43. In Dexter's hand.

The Purser's Dispute

The continuing flow of supplies and accurate record-keeping are essential elements of successful administration in any naval station or vessel. During the War of 1812, the purser was the officer obligated to carry out these tasks. It was accepted that part of his earnings would be based on commissions added to the cost of articles he sold to naval personnel on his station or ship. At New Orleans, most officers and men were attached to small vessels or served ashore in various support capacities. Their needs were to be taken care of by Purser Thomas Shields who would requisition supplies through the navy agent when necessary. Cruising vessels the size of a brig or sloop, however, were normally assigned their own pursers.

A major dispute occurred in December 1812, when Captain Shaw designated the ship Louisiana a cruising vessel rather than a stationary block ship. This meant that Purser Shields would have to lose some of his commissions to a new purser assigned to that ship. Shaw wanted to appoint the brother-in-law of Lieutenant Daniel Patterson as Louisiana's purser. When it appeared to Shields that he was about to lose the argument, he went over Shaw's head to Brigadier General Wilkinson who lost no time in opposing Shaw's interest. A considerable amount of ink and paper was consumed on this issue; it was ultimately referred to the secretary of the navy and was not resolved until later in 1813. The following documents present the circumstances of the case as it stood in December 1812.

PURSER THOMAS SHIELDS TO SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

New Orleans 21 Decr 1812

Sir,

At a Crisis like the present it is with extreem reluctance that I feel myself compell'd to appeal to your justice & liberality on a subject, that

nothing but motives of equity and the duty I owe myself, could extort from me.

When you did me the honor to assign me the appointment I now hold at this place, if I understood you correctly, it was intended for me to take charge, not only of the Accounts of the Gun Boats then in commission on the station, but also of such others as circumstances might render necessary to be added to the number, as well as all other vessels of a Stationary Character, Whose duty, at least as it regards a Purser, might be done on Shore. Under this impression Sir, the enclos'd correspondence, which I have taken the liberty of submitting to your perusal, took place between Commodore Shaw & myself, confident in my own mind that you will decide as justice & equity connected with the true interests of the Service, may dictate or require—Was I incompetent to the duty; or could I be shewn wherein the public good would be advanced by the Creation of another Purser on the Station, I would most cheerfully adopt Comder Shaw's intentions, & come into his views in this appointment, but I can see no advantage resulting from it, and much inconvenience; the Officers on this Station are in the habit of transferring frequently their men from One Vessel to another without attending to the absolute necessity of their accounts accompanying them—This Sir, is an evil I have contended against ever since my arrival here & I am only sorry to be compell'd to observe unsuccessfully; if the number of Officers of my Class are encreasd on a station where business is done in so desultory a manner, the evil I complain of will encrease in a proportionate ratio.

Confusion once admitted into Accounts are difficult & tedious to remedy in all places, but more particularly where we are removed at so great a distance from the Dept. & where the advice & opinions of the Accountant are so necessary but hard to be got. With Sentiments of the highest respect [&c.]

Tho. Shields

ALS, DNA, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 230.

[Enclosure]

(Copy)

New Orleans 10th, December 1812

Commodore John Shaw,

Sir,

In attempting to detail the reasons that influenced my observations yesterday, I beg leave to solícite your attention to the following facts,

which I hope will not be deemed irrellevant to the subject under consideration. On the 2nd March 1812, I received orders from the Hon'ble Secretary of the Navy, to repair to New Orleans, to report myself, on my arrival to the Commanding Naval Officer, and to assume the duties of purser of the Station. This, Sir, so far has been done, on my arrival here I found fifteen Gun Boats in commission, five, since that period have either been condemned or lost, and two others in a little time will experience a similar fate, to remedy this deficiency & the more effectually to secure and defend the passages to the City from an enemy, the Department have authorized you to purchase or build two or more Blockships, these vessels as they are of a Character which preclude the probability of their cruising, are consider'd as Stationary at their certain points of destination, and according to my idea on the subject, are clearly & decidedly attached to the Station. Consequently the accounts of the officers & men come under the control of my office as being Purser of the Station. I claim it Sir, on the broad basis of a right that ought not either in justice or equity to be wrested from me, under another plea I can with equal justice assert my claim, it will add to the interest of the Public Service; there is not a man in the Country who is acquainted with the method adopted by the department for keeping accounts; the supplies for the vessels could be furnished by me with more ease than to those Gun Boats who are cruising occasionally & who are sometimes at Mobile & others at Barataria—The pay & Subsistence of two or three pursers, will thereby be saved to the Government, & the duty as well & efficiently done as tho they were appointed & looking on. Interest it is true has considerable weight in producing address to you, but I beg leave to assure you, tis not the only one, I have already experienced the difficulty & confusion resulting from a collision with other purser's on the Station, at the whim & caprice of the different Officers. Your positive orders to the Contrary notwithstanding, to say nothing about the Instructions of the Secretary of the Navy, men are taken from the Gboats to the Brigs & from the Brigs transferred to the Gun Boats, without my knowledge or privity, they consequently are sent & received without any accounts going with them or even the date of entry being known, kept probably some five or Six months & then returned or reexchanged for the same men, or others. This sir, is an evil that I struggled against, ever since my arrival here & am sorry to be obliged to add unsuccessfully, near 40 men are now on my Books under those Circumstances & whither I shall ever get their accounts acknowledged is a serious doubt with me—In an increased

ratio will difficulties & confusion of this kind multiply if the number of those officers are increased and more especially as it cannot be expected that they are acquainted with the duties of their station, In addition to this Sir I have the authority of the Officer Commanding the *Louisiana* to say, that he does not require a purser, Confident in his own mind that the duty can be as well, if not better done by me than any other. From the declining number of Gun Boats & of course their crews, my situation as Purser, of this station begins to be but a secondary consideration, with me in a place as expensive as New Orleans. I am however in hopes when you come to reflect seriously on the justness of my Claims you will admit them & the more especially as those Vessels are in part intended to supply the losses of a force acknowledged to be attached to my Office. Respectfully [&c.]

Tho. Shields
Purser

Copy, DNA, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 230. In Shields's hand.

[Enclosure]
Sir,

New Orleans Decr 18th 1812.

I have the honor to acknowledge your letter of the 10th instant.

Permit me to assure you Sir, that the Sloop of War *Louisiana* cannot be considered in the light of a Block Ship, to the contrary she will have to run out and cruise agreeably to circumstances, as the nature of the case may require-The two block Ships to which you have referred, is not as yet commenced building, but so soon as I can get a gang of Carpenters to cross the Lake one of the B. Ships is intended to be commenced, this, with all other stationary vessels attached to this station cannot be other wise than their necessary supplies for their respective crews coming through you-It is extremely foreign to myself to have caused in any instance an unwarrantable expense to the Government by the erecting of supernumerary officers-and more particularly the one now in question-Knowing that an improper appointing made by me could not fail of terminating in the most serious & injurious consequences to myself.

Mr Shields must be persuaded that he has my best interest, and that at no time shall I do otherwise than to promote it-all and every vessel which may be considered as stationary for the protection of this City,

their respective Crews, will no doubt be on his muster book. Sir, With respect [&c.]

John Shaw

Thomas Shields esq.
Purser N O Station.

ALS, DNA, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 230.

[Enclosure]

(Copy)

New Orleans December 20th 1812

Commodore John Shaw,
Sir,

Your Letter of the 18th inst I had not the honor of receiving until 10 O'clock last night.-my anxiety to understand perfectly the nature of the Service in which the Ship *Louisiana* would be positively employed, induced me, subsequently to the date of your Letter, but previous to its reception, to Wait on Majr Genl Wilkinson, in order to be enabled to ascertain her real Character.-I was induced to do this Sir, the more particularly, because I have understood that the disposition of the Naval force on this Station, was under the control of & entirely at the discretion of the Comdg General. On making the application, Genl Wilkinson, unhesitatingly told me that the Ship *Louisiana*, was never consider'd by him as a Cruising Vessel, that she was a Blockship, or floting Battery, intended solely for the defence of the mouth of the river & that she was to be permanently Stationed at the Balize. Under these circumstances Sir, as a duty I owe myself, I cannot refrain from again, soliciting your attention to my Claims-Claims admitted by yourself in the Letter you did me the honor to write on the 18th inst-Should the appointment of the Gentleman intended to take the Charge of the Pursership of the *Louisiana* have progressed too far, to be now Countermanded, I have only Sir, in pursuance of a former determination to inform you that my appeal must be made to an higher tribunal, & that the Hon'ble Secretary of the Navy will decide upon the justness or

unjustness of my pretensions. With the greatest respect & Consideration [&c.]

Tho. Shields
Purser

Copy, DNA, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 230. In Shields's hand.

LIEUTENANT DANIEL T. PATTERSON TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

New Orleans Decr 22d 1812

Sir.

Captain Shaw has thought it highly necessary to Appoint a Seperate Purser, to the Ship of War called the *Louisiana*, lately purchased into the Naval Service on this Station, the Gentleman Appointed by him to fill this Station, is my Brother in law Mr Carlile Pollock.

I have therefore taken the liberty to address you on the subject, in which I feel a lively interest, in order to Solicit from you a Confirmation of the appointment, and that if confirmed by you, that you will do him the Honour to nominate him to the Senate for a Commission as a Purser in the Navy of the United States, to which Service he is extremely desirous of becoming permanently Attached: The confirmation of Mr Pollock's Appointment, will lay me under very great obligations to the Honble the Secretary of the Navy, who I hope will not deem this application presumptuous. I have the honour to be [&c.]

Dan^l T. Patterson

ALS, DNA, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 233.

Chapter Five

The Atlantic Theater: September–December 1812

During late 1812, when American naval officers became disillusioned with duty on remote stations, such as St. Marys, New Orleans, or Black Rock, they requested duty on the Atlantic. For there careers were being made, junior officers were gaining the laurels that might win them a command at sea, and there was the possibility of getting rich on prize money. Captains Hull and Porter had already won national attention, though Commodore Rodgers had fallen short, and Commodore Decatur's time was yet to come. The British blockade was still relatively porous, but there would come a time when sailors who had longed for Atlantic service would yearn for duty on the northern lakes just to escape from the frustration of being bottled up by British squadrons in Long Island Sound or off the Delaware and Virginia capes.

The promise of future victories was fulfilled in the period September–December 1812. Wasp–Frolic, United States–Macedonian, and Constitution–Java were American single-ship victories that established a soaring mood in the small American navy. But there were signs, for those who chose to read them, that this optimism might not last. The British were seizing a large number of American merchantmen and privateers, and many American seamen spent idle months on bleak Melville Island, a prison in Halifax Harbor. It was not easy to find seamen willing to sign on for a two-year naval cruise when prize money in larger shares was available in privateers. British cruisers sailed into the sounds and bays of the southeastern states with impunity. Despite these factors, it took Congress six months after the declaration of war to decide that a larger navy was necessary if the early victories at sea were to be followed up.

On land, American military defeats and failures to exploit enemy weaknesses along the Great Lakes–St. Lawrence River frontier showed the British that the United States was militarily vulnerable along