

The Naval War of 1812: A Documentary History

**Volume I
1812
Part 4 of 7**

**Naval Historical Center
Department of the Navy
Washington, 1985**

Electronically published by
American Naval Records Society
Bolton Landing, New York
2011

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- August 17th Schr *Adeline* of London, 10 Men, bound from Hayti to London, laden with Coffee, ordered for the U. States
- August 25th Schr *Betsey* of Marblehead, from Naples, laden with Brandy, recaptured from the *Gurrierre*, who had ordered her for Halifax, 4 men & a Midshipman (prize master). ordered her for the U. States

Jn^o Rodgers

DS, DNA, RG45, CL, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 2.

Chapter Three

The Northern Lakes Theater: June–December 1812

Although Canada loomed large among the military objectives of the Madison administration at the beginning of the War of 1812, nothing had been done to prepare naval forces for action on the borders of the United States and Canada. From Lakes Superior and Huron to Erie and Ontario, the United States possessed but one commissioned warship, the 16-gun brig, Oneida, based at Sackets Harbor, New York. Farther east, Lake Champlain held a position that was exceedingly important from a strategic perspective. No land campaign around or beyond these lakes could succeed without first achieving naval superiority. Without population centers or local industries that could support an extensive campaign, invasion forces lacking command of the lakes would find their communications and supply lines severed. For both the United States and Great Britain, the logistical side of the lakes campaigns posed an unending series of problems.

Initial British victories and resistance all along the Canadian frontier blighted American dreams of an easy conquest of the lakes and control of the St. Lawrence River. The American Generals Hull, Van Rensselaer, and Dearborn attacked the British and their Indian allies at Detroit, Niagara, and Montreal, respectively, during the summer and autumn of 1812. Hull and his army were captured, Van Rensselaer was defeated after some gains, and Dearborn returned to winter quarters at Plattsburg after desultory skirmishes. In the 1813 campaign season, efforts were renewed with somewhat more success, partly because naval preparations had gone forward.

The documents presented in the following section portray the early weakness and the gradual buildup of American naval forces on Lakes Ontario, Erie, and Champlain. The bulk of the action took place on Lake Ontario during the period under consideration; the proportion of documents selected reflects that fact. For the Navy Department,

whose main attention had been drawn to the Atlantic Theater, the war on the lakes was at first a matter of small concern, but as the magnitude of the northern land operations grew, so too did the amount of time, effort, and resources which the navy devoted to winning control of the northern lakes.

The Provincial Marine of Canada

The few warships that sailed under the British flag on the Great Lakes during the first year of the War of 1812 were manned not by the officers and men of the British Navy, but rather by the Canadian Provincial Marine. This agency has been described by a Canadian military historian as "little more than a transportation service under the Quartermaster-General branch of the Army."¹ Before the war began, the naval officers in charge were elderly, the vessels were largely in need of repair, and they lacked effective armament. Although the document which follows is dated 7 December 1811, it describes with fair accuracy the condition of the ships and stations of the Provincial Marine in June 1812. There had been little change during the six months that intervened before the declaration of war.

1. W. A. B. Douglas, *Gunfire on the Lakes: The Naval War of 1812-1814 on the Great Lakes and Lake Champlain* (Ottawa, 1977), p. 4. See also Douglas's "The Anatomy of Naval Incompetence: The Provincial Marine of Upper Canada before 1813," *Ontario History* 71, no. 1 (Mar. 1979): 3-26.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL A. H. PYE,
DEPUTY QUARTERMASTER GENERAL, TO
GOVERNOR-GENERAL GEORGE PREVOST

REPORT ON THE PROVINCIAL MARINE OF THE CANADAS

The superintendence of the Provincial Marine forms an extensive branch of the Quarter Master Generals department in the Canadas. During the American war it was much more extensive than at present; there being a Naval force on Lake Champlain, of which nothing remains at present except the hulk of a vessel called the *Royal Ed-*

ward which is of no service whatever except furnishing an excuse for pensioning an old seaman who receives pay for the nominal charge of her. The Establishments on Lakes Erie & Ontario, however, are still of consequence; each being under the Superintendence of an Officer of the Quarter Master Generals department, who have their residence at Amherstburgh & Kingston where the Docks Yards are at present situated. The business on which the vessels are employed in time of peace is the transporting Troops & Government stores to the several posts in the Upper Province, & the nature of that business seems to point out the expediency of their being of a shallow draft & small, especially those that are to go to St. Josephs altho' the exigency of the times & the attempt on the part of the Americans to produce Vessels of great strength & dimensions obliged us to adopt a similar measure, which at times is attended with much inconvenience. For the *Queen Charlotte* on Lake Erie calculated to carry 16, 24 Pound Carronades & the *Royal George* on Lake Ontario calculated for 20, 32 pound Carronades tho' built as shallow as possible as to their draft of Water are however not sufficiently so to answer the intention, with the evident disadvantage of deficiency in the point of stowage & inability of working upon a wind. It would therefore be evidently expedient unless there was an ennemy of equal or superior force to be dreaded to have the service carried on by schooners from 120 to 160 Tons burthen built on the corvette plan & calculated when armed to carry from 10 to 14 Guns & not to exceed nine & half feet draft of water. Vessels of that class would answer both the purposes of Transport or War having more capacity for their size than the larger Vessels in the former qualification & in the latter being almost equal to them from the superior ease in manoeuvring & their small draft of water; particularly in the confined & shallow situations they would be most likely to be employed in. Those on Lake Erie particularly whose services are called for occasionally on the River St. Clair & the Lakes Huron & Michigan. Besides which they could be better managed by such men as are usually attached to them, the larger vessels necessarily requiring a proportion of able seamen.

The force at present on the Lakes is as follows.

ON LAKE ERIE

The Ship *Cambden*. Declared by a board of survey to be incapable of going to sea & even unfit to lodge the seamen during the winter.

The Ship *Queen Charlotte*. Quite new, but merely calculated for the service of Lake Erie itself, from her great draft of water.

The Schooner *General Hunter*. The only real serviceable vessel on the Lake, is falling fast into decay.

I would therefore venture to point out the expediency of immediately laying down a schooner to prevent the communication by the river St. Clair from being cut off.

ON LAKE ONTARIO

The Snow *Duke of Kent*. Now solely used in Winter as a barrack for the seamen & incapable of repair.

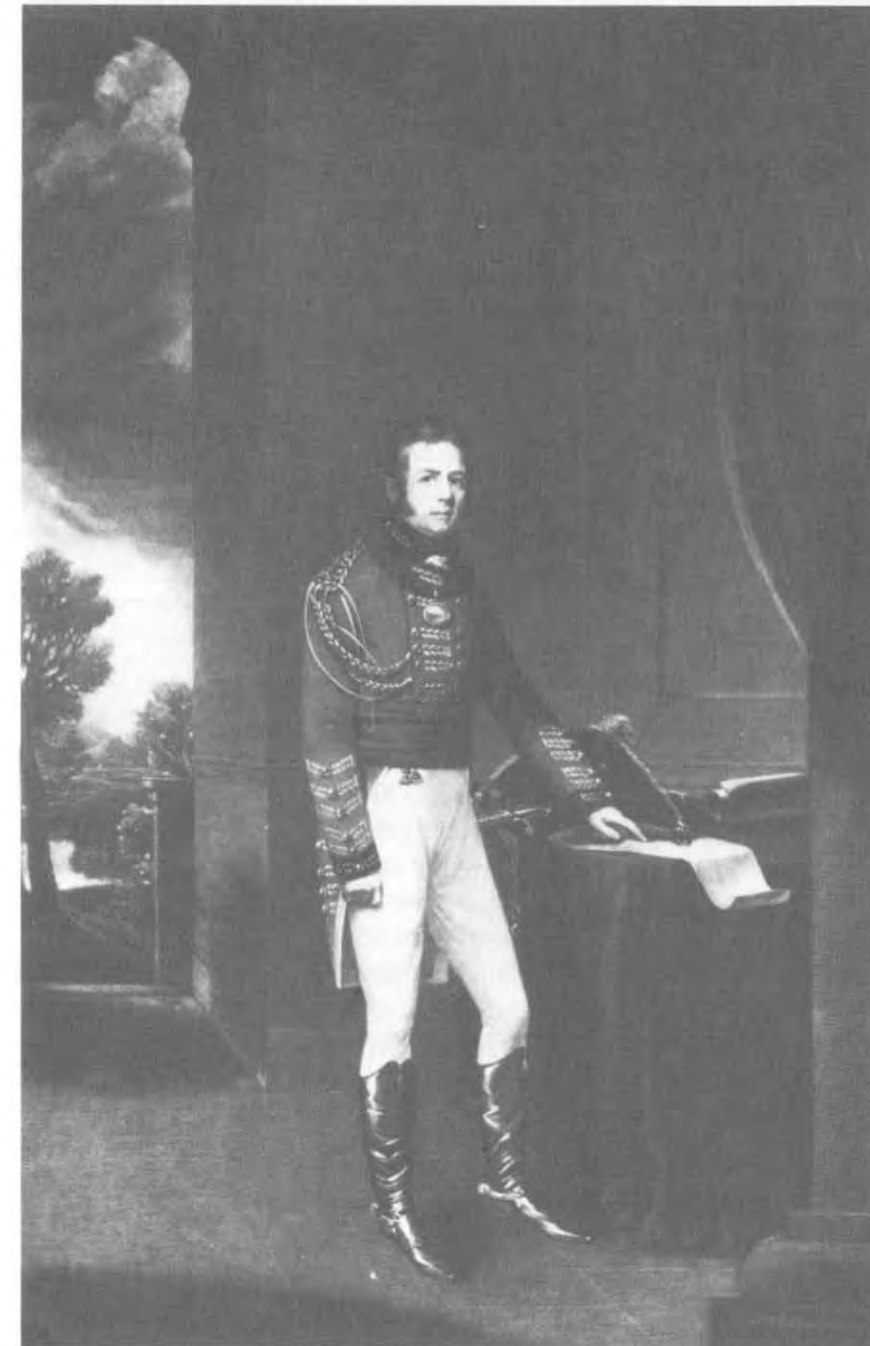
The Ship *Earl of Moira*. Requiring a thorough repair.

The Ship *Royal George*. New, but attended with the inconvenience of too great draft of water.

The Schooner *Duke of Gloucester*. The most useful vessel on the lake will shortly require to be replaced especially if the Civil Government do not procure a vessel for their service she being at present in their employ.

The Dock Yards at Amherstburgh & Kingston have each a Master Builder with establishments perfectly adequate to the purposes of Building, repairing, & laying up the vessels; but the latter in the event of a War is so near the enemy's country, so open to attack & difficult to defend without an expence beyond the required object & a force beyond what could be spared, that it has been considered a matter of expediency to remove the Naval establishment altogether from Kingston to some more safe & convenient place & York the capital of Upper Canada has been generally thought to combine in a greater degree than any other spot the desired qualities of convenience & safety. As to the particular situation in which the Naval establishment should, there, be placed, there are of course various opinions; but I am strongly against its being either on Gibraltar point or the spit connecting with it; & the spot pointed out to Genl. [John Graves] Simcoe by the late Captain [William] Baker, & approved by the former certainly appears the most advisable in every point of view, excepting what regards the marsh behind it.

Having said thus much on the removal of the establishment, I think it right to mention a subject nearly connected with its very existence. From experience we know that the average time of a Vessels duration on the Lakes may be averaged at eight years, & tho' many plans have been devised for preserving & seasoning timber a reference to facts would prove that of the quantity laid in for some



Lieutenant General Sir George Prevost, British Army

Years back, the far greater proportion has decayed in the experiment & consequently been lost. I have witnessed even *boards* that with every external appearance of being sound were on examination defective within, & tho' much enquiry was made & many plans have been proposed & tried, it has been generally necessary to build the vessels with green timber. On the *Moira* however an experiment was made which tho' attended with all possible success, was not repeated because attended with a trifling additional expense & that was, filling up the whole space between the sheathing with salt.

When at Kingston, I had occasion to unsheath her in part on account of some necessary repairs & on examination found the timbers as perfectly sound & free from decay as the day they were first put in. Vessels however that are built of red cedar have been found to last longer than those built of oak & it would be but little more expence & trouble to procure as much of that kind of timber as the service might require.

I have before mentioned that the superintendence of the marine on the lakes was vested in two Officers of the Quarter Master General's Department. I hope I shall not be thought as stepping beyond the rules of discretion if I venture to represent for the consideration of His Excellency The Commander of the Forces, the difference of emolument that exists with regard to those Officers whose situation is attended with arduous duty & heavy responsibility, when compared with that of the Officers of the same rank in the department whose duties are only occasional & almost without any responsibility whatever.

The remaining part of the marine establishment in charge of the Quarter Master General's department consists in an armed Schooner for the service of the river below Quebec Six Gun Boats & the Batteaux used for the Transport of Troops & Goods to & from the Upper Province.

The Schooner *St. Lawrence* is calculated to carry 10 Guns & if properly armed with twelve pound carronades & furnished with a british crew, would be a formidable vessel of her class, & the Gun Boats when altered according to the plan proposed will be fully competent for any service for which they may be required.

In the above I have endeavoured to lay before His Excellency the Commander of the Forces all that I consider worthy of notice concerning the Provincial Marine of these two Provinces. Should it be

found deficient I hope it will be attributed to my fear of obtruding my own particular opinions, where my own knowledge & the best intelligence I could procure should be my sole guides.

A H Pye
DY. QMG:

Quebec, Decr 7th 1811.

Public Archives of Canada, C373, p. 29, as cited in William Wood, ed., *Select British Documents of the Canadian War of 1812* (Toronto, 1920; reprint ed., New York, 1968), 1: 240-44.

Embargo Patrol on Lake Ontario

On Lakes Erie and Ontario, as on the high seas, the United States Navy was engaged in enforcing the embargo laws during the period April-June 1812. The U.S. naval force on Lake Ontario was very weak. It consisted of one 16-gun brig, manned by an understrength crew and only a few marines.¹ Her commanding officer was Lieutenant Melancthon T. Woolsey, who was the senior naval officer on the lakes until Captain Isaac Chauncey superseded him in September 1812. Woolsey sent frequent reports to Secretary Hamilton, who wrote few and brief communications in return. With an interval of approximately 7 to 10 days required for transmittal of letters, three weeks or more were required for an exchange of correspondence. Woolsey's base was at Sackets Harbor where a small fort watched over a protected harbor; frequently, however, he sailed in a southwesterly direction to the mouths of the Oswego and Genesee Rivers to pick up supplies and men sent up from New York City. In the letter that follows, Woolsey describes his capture of the Canadian schooner Lord Nelson (later renamed Scourge) for its violation of the embargo laws.

1. The marine commandant had noticed this deficiency and had given orders for a strengthening of the ship's marine detachment, as "Oneida is near to the probable scene of action." See Wharton to John Hall, 10 May 1812, pp. 108-109.

LIEUTENANT MELANCTHON T. WOOLSEY TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

U.S. Brig *Oneida*
Sackets Harbour Roads
June 9th 1812

Sir

I have the honor to inform you that I sailed on the 3th Instant on a Cruise to the Westward—On the 4th (off Pultney Ville) discovered three sail to windward apparently standing in for Genesee River—gave chase to them, but night coming on and the weather being too hazey to run in for the mouth of the river hawld off shore for the night under short sail—At day light on the 5th discovered two schooners (supposed to be two of the three we had chased the day before) standing in for the land—At 7 P.M. we brought to one of the Schooners which proved to be the *Lord Nelson* from Prescott (a port opposite Ogdensburgh on the St Lawrence) said to be bound to Newark in Canada, she had no papers on board other than a loose Journal and a bill of lading of a part of her Cargo, but no Register, licence or clearance, Wether it was intended to smuggle her Cargo on our shores, or wether she was hovering along our shores to take on board property for the Canada market in violation of the Embargo law I was not able to determine—But appearances were such as to warrant a suspicion of an intention to smuggle both ways—I accordingly took her Crew out and sent her with my gunner on board as Prize Master to this port After dispatching her I stood off shore in chase of the other Schooner which the Master of the *Lord Nelson* informed me was the *Mary Hatt*, also a British schooner, but finding that she had crossed the Line—I hove up for this port in order to lay up the Prize and make my report to the Department All the proofs which I can collect respecting her voyage I will transmit without delay to the District Attorney

I have to report to you Sir the desertion of one of my Ordinary Seamen by the Name of Long who made his escape from sick quarters a few hours before I sailed on my last cruise—Attempts to apprehend him have been ineffectual—If the weather will permit I shall sail on another cruise tomorrow. I have the honor to be [&c.]

Melⁿ T. Woolsey

Lake Champlain in 1812

With the Battle of Lake Champlain more than two years away and the enemy expected to attack in other locations, Lake Champlain was a backwater of naval activity at the beginning of the war. U.S. Navy vessels amounted to two dilapidated gunboats grounded near Vergennes, Vermont. This inconsiderable force was under the command of Lieutenant Sidney Smith. Once the war began, however, agitation by local residents and the actions of the New York and Vermont congressional delegations served to stimulate a strengthening of the Lake Champlain naval forces, particularly after the British began ship-building activity in the most northerly reaches of the lake. The following letter from Lieutenant Smith reveals the lack of preparedness that prevailed.

LIEUTENANT SIDNEY SMITH TO SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Bason Harbour
June 16th 1812

Sir

The rumours of inevitable war are continually circulating in this quarter.—and these as well as information I have received (from a Gentleman direct from Washington) that orders have been issued for fitting out all the Gun boats) have induced me to suspect that my Orders have miscarried—The irregularity of the mails on Lake Champlain is so great that the last Letter I had the honor to receive from the Navy Department did not come to hand in nearly three months after its date—Although according to the establishment of the mail I should have received it in seven days from Washington. At Vergenes in Vermont is the nearest Post Office to this place—Letters directed to that place would more probably come direct, as the local name of "Bason Harbour" is but little known. Sir I have the Honor to be [&c.]

Sidney Smith

An Offer of Vessels for the Navy

The need for additional warships on Lake Ontario was no secret. The advent of war on the lakes rendered commercial vessels of little or no value; therefore it was not only patriotic but shrewd to offer these ships for sale to the navy. The following document contains such an offer.

DAVID PARISH TO SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Philadelphia
the 21 June 1812

Sir

The Change which has just taken place in our political Situation rendering it probable that Government will feel desirous of adopting immediate measures to carry on offensive maritime Operations on the Waters of the St Lawrence, I am induced to trouble you with these Lines to state, that having some years ago caused to be built; for commercial purposes, three very fine fast sailing Schooners, of the burthen of about Sixty Tons each, which navigate that river & Lake Ontario, they are at the Service of Government if it Should be thought advisable to purchase them.

These Vessells are at Ogdensburgh a place situated just above the rapids of the St Lawrence, 60 Miles below Kingston in upper Canada, where they may be examined & their Value fixed on, between the Agent that may be charged with this Commission by Government & myself, as I intend setting out for that part of the Country in ten days. I am with high Regard [&c.]

David Parish¹

LS, DNA, RG45, MLR, 1812, Vol. 4, No. 122.

1. Parish was a wealthy land speculator who had bought 200,000 acres of land along the St. Lawrence River in 1808. He had moved to Ogdensburg in 1811 where he invested "hundreds of thousands of dollars [in] turnpikes, iron forges, and wharves." See David M. Ellis, et al., *A Short History of New York State* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1957), pp. 157-58.

War News Reaches Sackets Harbor

Lieutenant Woolsey heard the first confirmed report of war six days after the declaration. In the following letter, Woolsey informs Secretary Hamilton of the status of men at his disposal, who though enthusiastic had little seagoing experience. He shows a clear concern for the safety of American merchant vessels on the lake and in the St. Lawrence River, a theme that will reappear in later reports.

LIEUTENANT MELANCTHON T. WOOLSEY TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

U.S. Brig *Oneida*
Sackets Harbor Roads June 26th 1812

Sir

I have the honor to inform you that I was off Oswego on the 24th when I first heard of war having been proclaimed by the President of the United States. The Report appeared so well authenticated that I immediately bore up for this place in order to advise the Military of it and fill up my compliment. On my arrival here last night Colonel Bellinger handed me his official dispatches from his Excellency the Governor of this state¹ and as there was no longer any doubt of the actual existence of a war, I applied to Genl [Jacob] Brown, commanding this Brigade who permitted me to beat up for volunteers. And it is with great satisfaction I have the honor to inform you that I have just had twenty six hardy fellows join me with Lieutenant Daniel Stanton of the Militia at their head. I intend incorporating the Volunteers with my Marines and give Lt Stanton command of the whole. I would observe Sir that the volunteers are engaged only for one Cruise or until they shall be demanded by the Colonel. The *Royal George* is now at Kingston I believe waiting for a full crew, said to be now on their way up the River St Lawrence-The *Earl of Moira* lately repaired it is said is nearly ready for sea as is also the new Schooner *Prince Regent* lately launched at York.

As soon as the weather will permit I shall be off in quest of the Enemy. My Officers and Men are in good spirits. There is besides the *Lord Nelson* another prize Schooner here which by my advise is now

landing her Cargo in order to be ready to run their Military equipments & Crew should you deem it proper Sir order them into the service. A number of our Merchant Vessels on the other side of the Lake I fear are detained. I have the honor [&c.]

Melⁿ T. Woolsey

ALS, DNA, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 2, No. 63.

1. Adjutant General William Paulding, Jr., to Lieutenant Colonel Christopher P. Bellinger, 23 June 1812, conveyed official word of the state of war. The dispatch is printed in State of New York, *Public Papers of Daniel D. Tompkins, Governor of New York, 1807-1817. Military*. 3 Vols. (New York and Albany, 1898-1902), I: 355.

Lieutenant Woolsey's Reports-I

Virtually the only primary source for information about the U.S. Navy's activities on Lake Erie during July and August 1812, is the correspondence of Lieutenant Woolsey with the secretary of the navy. This was a decidedly one-sided exchange, for the secretary was much more concerned with his oceangoing navy at this early stage. During July 1812, Woolsey gathered the forces under his command, taking men from wherever he could find them. He focused his efforts on safeguarding American merchant ships that were bottled up in American ports on the American side of the St. Lawrence River. In doing this, Woolsey hoped he could deprive the enemy of their use and strengthen his own command by converting some of them to warships.

LIEUTENANT MELANCTHON T. WOOLSEY TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

U.S. Brig *Oneida*
off Oswego June 28th 1812

Sir

I am now standing in for the town with the Schooner *Julia* under my convoy after dismissing her I intend standing over to the Northern shore on a cruise.

I have engaged the *Julia* as a Gun Boat and will mount the long thirty pounder on her-I have just now written to Mr Forman¹ to cast a supply of shot for that Gun-also a supply of shot for three guns (I believe six pounder) now at Oswego.

I should not take the liberty of making any engagements of this Nature Sir without first consulting you-did I not really believe it absolutely necessary to bring all our resources in this quarter into action as soon as possible. I have the honor to be [&c.]

Melⁿ T. Woolsey

ALS, DNA, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 2, No. 72.

1. Joshua Forman was agent for and possibly part owner of Nicholas Mickle's furnace at Onondaga Hollow (now Onondaga Valley).

SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON TO
LIEUTENANT MELANCTHON T. WOOLSEY

Lt. M T Woolsey
Sackets harbor, NY

Nav: Depm't
2d July 1812

If in Your opinion, You can, without exposing Yourself to imminent danger from a Superior force, You will, upon the requisition of the quarter general, or of the commanding Military officer, at, or near the lakes, You will afford convoy, as far as Niagara to certain Military Stores, intended for Detroit, & the posts west of it, at the falls of Oswego

P. Hamilton

Copy, DNA, RG45, SNL, Vol. 10, p. 85.

LIEUTENANT MELANCTHON T. WOOLSEY TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Off Sackets Harbour
U.S. Brig *Oneida*
July 4th 1812

Sir

Your Circular of the 19th June I have just this moment received. I shall in consequence of the last paragraph run in here the next mail day to receive your further Orders-I have just run off this place to take on board some supplies and in the course of one hour I shall be off again on another cruise-The *Royal George* twenty two guns and *Earl of Moira* of fourteen guns are now nearly ready for service and moored off Kingston Some suppose that all their Naval resources will be directed to these two ships and that they will be kept at Kingston for the purpose of defending that place-but I have no doubt but that an attempt will be made by them on the *Oneida*-I shall watch them narrowly and report to you my proceeding-All our Merchantmen except three are down the river St Lawrence-two schooners have been taken and burned by the enemy-How the others will fare God only knows. I am now fitting out the schooner *Julia* as a Gun Boat to carry the thirty two pounder originally intended for the *Oneida*-and the Schooner *Lord Nelson* is fitting for six guns these are the only guns on the Lake-I have written to Captain Chauncey to send me thirty six pounders which I contemplate mounting on the vessels now down the river-And the two vessels above named as soon as they can be equipped I intend dispatching to convoy the blockaded vessels up-Lieut Stanton whom I mentioned in my last letter I find to be a young gentleman of birth and education and possesses so much patriotism and such a zeal for the service that Sir I make bold to ask for him the appointment of acting Lieutenant of Marines.

I hope Sir you will excuse the liberty I take in recommending to you an Officer and appointing (which I have done) two Masters Mates and a Master to take charge of the vessels fitting out but Sir I know it to be for the good of the Service and the whole northern part of this State particularly on the frontier depend on Naval protection. For the recruiting Service Sir I shall want Money-as much as you will please to remit me. I have the honor to be [&c.]

Mel^d T. Woolsey

P.S. The whole amount of Ordnance that I can muster is one Thirty two and Three six pounders.

ALS, DNA, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 2, No. 82.

Governor Tompkins's Concerns

Governor Daniel D. Tompkins of New York was one of the most active governors in support of the war effort.¹ His state was the scene of much military maneuvering and fighting from Niagara to Sackets Harbor, the banks of the St. Lawrence and eastward to Lake Champlain. He was intelligent, perceptive, and quick to grasp the essence of the military situation. In the following letter, he shows that he had sound information concerning the status of forces on both sides. Addressing Navy Agent John Bullus in New York City, Tompkins could not fail to realize that his letter would be forwarded to the secretary of the navy.

1. See *State of New York*, Public Papers of Daniel D. Tompkins. Military, Vol. 1.

NAVY AGENT JOHN BULLUS TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

New York July 16 1812

Sir,

I have the honor to enclose you a Copy of a Letter which I received this morning from his Excellency Governor Tompkins. As the Governor may expect a reply to his Communication, as well to satisfy himself, as the Inhabitants & Officers of the Frontiers on our Northern Waters, In order that I may know the disposition of the Department, and put him in possession of the information required, I shall wait until I shall have the honor of hearing from you on the subject. I have [&c.]

John Bullus

LS, DNA, RG45, AF 7, 1812.

[Enclosure]

(Copy)

Albany July 13th 1812

Dr Sir

I find the arrangements of the Navy Department for our Northern Waters are complained of by the Inhabitants and Officers of the Frontiers. A person was here about ten days since from Lake Champlain to get some Oakum &c for the two Gun Boats there. They were then in Bason Harbour, one of them partly sunk in the Water, and the seams of both of them so open as almost to admit the hand; and I understand from Plattsburgh that no orders to put them in repair were received untill sometime after War was declared.

Those two Gun Boats manned and equiped in season would have given us Command of the Lake; and ought to have been in readiness to have retained that Command; but the British are repairing with great industry a Vessel at St Johns which will probably render our Gun Boats, by the time they are repaired, manned and equipped, useless or nearly so.

Lieut Woolsey wants men and also Ordnance to equip Schooners and Sloops belonging to Ogdensburgh, and other places on the American Side of Lake Ontario, which Schooners and Sloops will otherwise not only be useless but may and must fall into the hands of the British and Strengthen their Lake force which is already three fold of ours. After the Declaration of War Woolsey Came into Sacketts Harbor and twenty eight of our Militia Volunteered as Marines and went on board determined to give him the utmost assistance in their power.

It is known to the Government that the British have Superiority of Naval Force on Lakes Ontario and Erie. The military Stores destined for Detroit &c have consequently been stopped at Oswego and cannot get further with Safety till we open a secure passage for them. The Government is also apprised that the only regular Troops of the Enemy are on the frontier of this State in strong garrisons well supplied and that those regular troops are to be assisted by Indians and Militia. Under such circumstances unless the Navigation of the Lakes be maintained and our Frontiers immediately supplied with every thing necessary for offensive operations, and unless regular Troops and military Stores be sent towards Canada immediately & possession be taken of Montreal &c, Settlements of Several hundred Miles extent will be abandoned, the Spirit of a brave yeomanry be broken

down and the Government and administration be condemned as inefficient or insincere with respect to the Conquest of Canada.

I mention to you as the representative of the Navy Department in this State the above matters of complaint in relation to the Lake forces; and request that immediate measures may be taken to furnish Woolsey with the requisite Sailors, Marines, Ordnance & Armed Schooners or Sloops to enable him to retain the Command of Lake Ontario, or at least our Shore of it. -I am [&c.]

Signed, Daniel D. Tompkins

John Bullus Esquire,

Copy, DNA, RG45, AF 7, 1812.

Lieutenant Woolsey's Reports-II

At the end of July, Lieutenant Woolsey launched an attack against two British warships in the St. Lawrence River. He sent Midshipman Henry Wells in the schooner Julia, armed with a long 32-pounder and two 6-pounders, against the sloop of war Earl of Moira and the schooner Duke of Gloucester which were off Ogdensburg. The following letters show the buildup and aftermath of this event which was the principal action during Woolsey's command of the navy at Sackets Harbor.

LIEUTENANT MELANCTHON T. WOOLSEY TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

U. S. Brig *Oneida*
Sackets Harbour July 21st 1812

Sir

I have the honor to inform you that on the 19th Instant at day break five sail of the enemy consisting of the *Royal George* & *Earl of Moira* ships, *Prince Regent* (I believe) the *Duke of Gloucester* and one other schooner were discovered in the offing beating up for this

Harbour—About six am. I got under way and stood off and on in hopes of having an opportunity of singling out my antagonist—which however was frustrated by the enemies concentrating and taking such a position as completely to cut off my retreat Lakeward—About eight o'clock the wind having hawled so far to the Northward as that the enemy could lay their course into the Bay the *Royal George*, *Earl of Moira* and *Prince Regent* stood in in a line ahead under a press of sail—As I had not sea room or wind enough to work to advantage and in order to prevent the enemy from bringing me between two fires I ran close in shore near the mouth of the Harbour and let go my stream anchor with a spring upon the cable dismounted all the star-board guns and had them mounted on the Battery (nearly ready for their reception). I gave orders to Lieutenant Wells as soon as our guns could reach the enemy to commence a fire which should be a signal for me to return on board. In the mean time I took charge of the thirty pounder mounted on the Carline with which at the distance of one and a half mile we hulled the *Royal George* three or four times—and effectually broke up their intended attack—from the confusion which appeared at one time on board the *Royal George* I am induced to believe that some serious damage must have been done by our shot

I have no doubt but that another attack is contemplated and that they are only waiting for a more favourable wind for the purpose—We are going on pretty rapidly with the works—one thirty two pounder, nine twenty fours three sixes and two nines are already mounted—I have written to Capt'n Chauncey for thirty six pounders. Twenty guns I hear are on their way—as soon as they are received—I intend withdrawing the large gun—to mount her on the *Julia*—put six guns on the *Julia* and six on the *Niagara*—and the remainder on the battery until some of the vessels can be got up the River—In the mean time I must exert my utmost to complete the works already commenced—Captain [Herman] Camp of the Artillery is an officer of worth and one from whom I can depend upon every assistance. I have the honor to be [&c.]

Melⁿ T. Woolsey

P.S. Two thirty two pound shot thrown on shore by the *Royal George* we have got.

ALS, DNA, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 2, No. 100.

LIEUTENANT MELANCTHON T. WOOLSEY TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

U.S. Brig *Oneida*
Sackets Harbour July 28th 1812

Sir

I have had the honor to receive your letter of the 11th As soon as I shall receive a draft from the Department I will agreeably to your request Sir give the volunteers five dollars each but only to those of them who remained on board and actually volunteered on the morning of the 19th Instant when the enemy was in sight and a prospect of a sharp action—Since the affair of the 19th I have had no intelligence from Kingston till yesterday when a Mr Smith and his family Refugees from that place arrived here. Mr Smith says that he was on board the *Royal George* a few days since but did not perceive that any injury had been done her—that she did not return from the expedition with the rest of the Squadron but remained at anchor to the westward long enough to repair—She now lies off Kingston—The *Earl of Moira* and *Duke of Gloucester* are down the river opposite Ogdensburgh (one of our ports) I am now dismounting the thirty six pounder from the Cavalier¹ in order to mount it on the *Julia* together with two six pounders—I intend sending the *Julia* down the river under the command of Lieutenant Wells in order if possible to destroy those vessels or to cripple them so that they can be of no use to the enemy this season—If this object so desirable can be effected there will then be a possibility of obtaining the ascendancy on this Lake.

I hope Sir you will excuse my asking so much at your hands but Sir the service here really requires another active Lieutenant—Mr Wells is a fine fellow and I would not wish him ranked. Respectfully [&c.]

Melⁿ T. Woolsey

P.S. The expedition above mentioned is a profound secret.

ALS, DNA, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 2, No. 113.

1. Cavalier: a raised work within a fortification, higher than the rest, used to command all the adjacent works and the surrounding country.

LIEUTENANT MELANCTHON T. WOOLSEY TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

U.S. Brig *Oneida*
Sackets Harbour August 3d 1812

Sir

I have the honor to inform you that on the 30th Ultimo I dispatched Lieutenant Wells in the Gun boat *Julia* down the St Lawrence in order if possible to capture, destroy or cripple the British Sloop of war *Earl of Moira* and schooner *Duke of Gloucester*. The *Julia's* crew consisted of—Lieut Wells commander, Mr. Dixon¹ acting Master—Mr [William] Vaughan (a citizen of this place) masters mate—Mr Nicole (a volunteer Midshipman) Midshipman and aid to Lieut Wells, a number of Volunteer citizens, before the mast—Captain [Gould] Benedict, Lieutenant [Naaman] Goodsel and Ensign— and their whole company of Riflemen (about thirty in number) making in the whole upwards of fifty men—The *Julia* has the long thirty two pounder and two six pounder mounted on her. On the 31st I received a letter from Mr Wells dated at 5 o'clock A M of that day. He was then standing in for the mouth of the river with the *Royal George* in chase of him. He soon however gave up the chase and ran off this Harbour. My starboard guns being mounted on the Batteries it was impossible to meet her but I have them now all on board and shall sail with the first wind on a cruise. I this morning received a dispatch from Lieutenant Wells a copy of which together with my orders to him I do myself the honor to inclose. I hope the expedition will be so far successful as—to enable us ultimately to become masters of the Lake. I should Sir feel confident of success had I the officer to which a vessel of the rate of the *Oneida* is entitled. It is Sir a fact that I am now about to sail without a single Officer that has seen any service in the Navy—Not one of my midshipmen have ever been at sea—against a greatly superior force. I have the honor to be [&c.]

Melⁿ T. Woolsey

ALS, DNA, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 2, No. 138. Endorsed: "order Lts [William] Burroughs [Thomas] Brown & 2s. masters to join Woolsey imm."

1. Samuel Dixon had been in the employ of David Parish as captain of the schooner *Collector*. See Franklin B. Hough, *History of St. Lawrence and Franklin Counties, New York* (Albany, 1853; reprint ed., Baltimore, 1970), p. 622.

[Enclosure]

U.S. Brig *Oneida*
Sackets Harbour July 30th 1812

Sir

You will proceed with the Gun Boat *Julia* to Ogdensburgh and as far as in your power lies contribute to the capture and destruction of the British vessels of War stationed off Prescott. For this purpose you will (as there is a great disparity of force) take a Station wide from the Village of Ogdensburgh and a tolerably long range for the thirty two pounder. There is no doubt of the bravery of those placed under your command suffer not a consciousness of this truth to lead you into any rash measures. I doubt not but powerful aid will be rendered you by Major General [Stephen] Van Renselaer to whom an express has been sent this morning. Should you be successful in this important enterprise you will give the necessary orders Either for securing the vessels at Ogdensburgh or bringing them up the River If they can possibly be brought up we are masters of the Lake. In passing down the River you will keep your men as much as possible concealed also cover the great Gun in order to prevent as much as possible an alarm on the Canada Shore You will probably meet with opposition at the Narrows if so (and you can possibly effect it) force your passage down. In passing Cape Vincent you will be hailed by a boat stationed there to give You what information they may possess at that Place, the watch word is Woolsey. Sir you will I am confident do credit to your Station whatever the result may be recollect your presence is indispensably necessary onboard the *Oneida* You will therefore hire or press horses and return with all possible dispatch to this place. Your Obedient Servant

(signed) Melancthon T. Woolsey

Lieut Henry Wells

P.S. Mr. Dixon is P.T. [pro tempore] your Sailing Master and Mr Vaughan your fighting Captain. Capt. Benedict Lieut. Goodsel and Ensign— are Marine Officers Mr Nichols Midshipman and Aid.

Copy, DNA, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 2, No. 124.

[Enclosure]

Off Ogdensburgh August 1st 1812
5 A.M.

Sir

Yeasturday about 3 P.M. we discoverd the *Earl of Moira* and *Duke of Gloucester* off Elizabeth Town we immediately attacked them but being powerfully seconded by 8 or 10 Guns on shore and upwards of twenty Batteaux full of troops we were not able to accomplish our object, as long as light continued we kept our Guns aplaying but fearing we might be overpowered by the Batteaux bording us and have thought propper to Cruse here and expect to attack them again tomorrow. we have received but little injury nobody wounded Yours Respectfully

(signed) Henry Wells

[To Melancthon T. Woolsey]

Copy, DNA, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 2, No. 123a.

LIEUTENANT MELANCTHON T. WOOLSEY TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

U.S. Brig *Oneida*
Sackets Harbour August 8th 1812

Sir

In my last letter of the 3d Instant I had the honor to inform you that the Gunboat *Julia* had been sent down the St Lawrence on a secret expedition. I now do myself the honor to inclose to you Lieutenant Wells's offical statement, as also a very circumstantial account of the action between the *Julia* and the *Earl of Moira*, *Duke of Gloucester* and a battery-gun by Judge [Nathan] Ford of Ogdensburgh to Major General [Stephen] Van Renssilaer [*Rensselaer*]. Although the object for which the *Julia* was dispatched was not attain'd I am happy it was undertaken as it in my opinion reflects much honor on the character of a young officer for whom I have a sincere regard-and has been the means of effectually protecting the village of Ogdensburgh and all our

merchant vessels laying at that place. Lieutenant Wells returnd to this place on the 5th. Together with the two papers before mentioned I have the honor to inclose to you my orders to Mr Vaughan and Mr Dixon-the former a gentleman who has ever since the keel of this vessel was laid evinced the most friendly disposition to the establishment and rendered many services for which I have not had it in my power to reward him-He has a large family and left them indisposed to serve in the *Julia* down the river. I think if he could be honored with the rank of Master to serve only on this Lake he would be of eminent service in the present contest-I make this application Sir without his knowledge-Three deserters have just arriv'd from Kingston who inform me that the *Duke* and *Earl* have returned to Kingston and that they are concentrating their Naval forces at that place in order to make another attack here. It is much to be lamented Sir that we have not sufficient means of defence. The works on shore are finished and ready to receive thirty six pieces of heavy Ordnance-We have only at present two long twelves, two nines and two sixes-with these guns and the *Oneida* we are obliged to defend ourselves against an exasperated and brave enemy of at least four times our force. To save time I applied a long while since to Captain Chauncey for Guns-but have not yet had an answer Application has been made to Governor Tompkins by the Military commander on this station but we hear of no guns being on the way. I have the honor to be [&c.]

Melⁿ T. Woolsey

ALS, DNA, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 2, No. 142.

[Enclosure]

Sackets Harbour
August 4th 1812

Sir

Agreeably to your orders of July 30th I proceeded down the St Lawrence in the Gun Boat *Julia*. At 4 P.M. July 31st I discovered one of the Enemies Boats rowing up the River with 2 officers & Six men ordering them to Come too & firing one Musket ahead they attempted to make thier escape I ordered the riflemen to fire in to her whether any were killed can not be ascertained. At 1/4 past 4 we discovered 2 vessels lying off the high Rocks 1/4 of a mile below Elizabeth Town or Brock Ville-at 1/2 past 4 we anchored 1 1/2 Miles

from the Enemy, when the *Earl of Moira* Bro't her Broadside to bear upon us & fired 3 Guns which fell short finding ourselves within reach of the Musketry from the Enemies shore we weighed and Stood nearer to the American Shore, within 1 1/4 Miles of the Enemy & comenced a fire from the 32 Pounder and one of the 6 Pounders which was immediately Returned from both Vessels & a Battery of 5 or 6 Guns on Shore at 1/2 past 5 we discovered several Boats towing the Schooner inside of the Ship up towards the Town & some also towing the Ship-during this time there was an intermission of the enemies fire for about 15 Minutes apparently increasing their Battery. Finding our six pounder fell short I directed that to cease the Enemy now commenced a severe fire from both vessels & Battery assisted by 2 Mortars The Battery appeared to have 8 or 10 Guns mounted 18 & 9 Pounders the distance from the Enemy at this time must have been short of a mile During the hottest of the fire the Ship appeared to have taken fire in her mizen rigging The firing was continued till dark when, finding we could not point our Gun with precision as the vessels were concealed in their own Smoke and judging it imprudent to Lie there over night on account of being boarded from the Enemies boats of which I could precieve a great number we made the best of our way to Ogdensburgh at which place we arrived at 3 A.M. August 1st Capt [Noadiah] Hubbard who volunteered from Cape Vincent with a Company of Militia was of great service in towing us down the River Several of the Enemies Shot struck the *Julia* but did no essential injury-The injury done to the Enemy can not be ascertained but must have been considerable as Carpenters were hard at work all the night and a greater part of the next day. Respectfully [&c.]

(Signed) Henry Wells

Melancthon T. Woolsey Esqr
Commanding U.S. Brig *Oneida*

Copy, DNA, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 2, No. 142.

[Enclosure]

U.S. Brig *Oneida*
Sackets Harbr August 5th 1812

Dear Sir

Your two letters, one by Lieut Wells, the other by Mr Dodd I have had the pleasure to receive. The mouth of the River is blockaded by

the *Royal George*, *Prince Regent* and one other vessel-of course it will be madness to attempt getting the *Julia* and the other vessels into the Lake-You will therefore consider yourself as commander of the *Julia* for the present. Mr Dixon will have orders to return immediately to this place, with all the men on board the *Julia* attached to the *Oneida*. The volunteers belonging to this place (I mean Citizens) may return to their homes. Genl [Jacob] Brown will give orders to Colo [Thomas] Benedict to furnish you with as many men as are necessary to man the *Julia* You will keep her moored at the mouth of the Oswegachie river within reach of our musketry, in order to protect the village and vessels

I do not wish any of the Merchant vessels fitted for service until I can have positive assurance that guns will be sent on for that purpose. Your &ca

M. T. Woolsey

Mr William Vaughan
Commg U.S. Gunboat *Julia*

Copy, DNA, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 2, No. 142.

[Enclosure]

Copy

U.S. Brig *Oneida*
Sackets Harbour August 5th 1812

Sir

On receipt hereof you will repair without delay to this place and bring with you, all the men attached to the Brig. For your expences on the road you will take duplicate receipts. Yours &ca

Melⁿ T. Woolsey

Mr Samuel Dixon
Masters mate U.S. Navy
Ogdensburgh

Copy, DNA, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 2, No. 142.

[Enclosure]

Ogdensburgh
August 2d 1812

Dear Sir

The day I parted with you at the Lake I returned to Morris Town where I remained untill five oclock in the Evening and found the *Earl of Moira* and the *Duke of Gloucester* Lying in the same position they were the morning you left Colo [David] Fords From the circumstance of My being present you will expect a circumstansial account of the Engagement which took place between the *Julia* Commanded by Lieut Wells & the two British vessels-and I assure you I regreted Exceedingly you missed this pleasant sight-The next day I wrote you a verry hasty letter by the post & directed the Carrier to put it in to the post office at Harrisburgh For fear that letter should not get to hand as Earley as your anxiety to know the result necessarily will be-I take the liberty of addressing this by an express which goes this evening The *Julia* has one 32 pounder & 2 Sixes the force of the British you are acquainted with-The *Julia* hove in sight about 5 Oclock & fell down within 1 1/2 miles of the British vessels at which time it fell perfectly calm at 1/2 past 5 the two vessels opened a heavy fire uppon the *Julia* for 1 1/2 hours which was returned with great Spirit by Lieut. Wells. The *Duke & Earl* was then taken in tow & got up to Brock Vill at which place a land Battery with a number of Guns had been got ready to play uppon the *Julia*-this change of situation placed the *Duke & Earl* (as well as the land Battery) within a little better than 3/4 of a mile of the *Julia* A severe & animated fire was now opened by the Vessels as well as the Battery uppon the *Julia*-The bravery of Lieut. Wells was by no means daunted in this unequal contest he returned the fire with redoubled animation for 3/4 of an hour a little after sunset Lieut Wells towed the vessel around the South side of a small Island under cover of which he Escaped thier fire for a short time he however remained nolonger behind the Island than the time it took to row past it which was 15 minutes during this time the fire ceased as soon as he passed the Island the fire commenced with great activity & continued untill the dusk of the Evening obscured the object which was not untill 1/2 after 8 oclock at which time Lieut Wells with the assistance of volunteers from the Shore had towed down the American side & got out of the reach of the Enemies Guns when the firing ceased & by 3 oclock the following morning the *Julia* was safly anchored in the harbour of Ogdensburgh without the loss of a single man or any damage

whatever The distance the British Vessels were from Shore, to gether with the Smoke made it impossible for me to determine with certainty what Effect the *Julias* fire had uppon the Enemy altho I am satisfied they were hit a number of times as the *Julia* passed the village of Morristown a number of 18 pound Shot passed through the village but fortunately with out Injury-Two of the Shot have been found The superior skill manifested on the occasion reflects credit uppon Lieut Wells & his Brave Crew-That Lieut Well should sustain a fire for at least 3 hours from 2 vessels of each superior force aided by a land Battery & Effect his escape can not fail to reflect the highest possible honor-The two vessels remained at their moorings till to day altho the wind has been fair for comeing down the river They moved their stations to day and anchored in the Middle of the river you will have the goodness to Excuse the haste of this letter I have had but a few minutes. I am verry sorry to hear of your indisposition I hope it will be of short duration be pleased to make my complements to the Cole. tell him he left us only ten hours to Soon You will also have the Goodness to make my compliments to Mr Lovit¹ tell him we shall suffer for want of him I want his genius to give that lively discription of this Briliant affair it deserves. Respectfully &c

(Signed) N. Ford²

Majr Generl Van Rensselaer

Copy, DNA, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 2, No. 142.

1. John Lovett (1761-1818), Albany, N.Y., lawyer, was aide and military secretary to Major General Van Rensselaer.

2. Nathan Ford (1763-1829) was the first judge of St. Lawrence County, an active Federalist, and agent at Ogdensburg for iron manufacturer and land promoter Samuel Ogden. See Hough, *History of St. Lawrence and Franklin Counties*, pp. 589, 593.

SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON TO
LIEUTENANT MELANCTHON T. WOOLSEY

Lt. M. T. Woolsey esqr
Sackets harbour

Nav: Depm't
21 August 1812

I have received Yours of the 8 inst. I have the pleasure to say, that Your conduct & that of the officers & men under Your command is highly approved by the President.

You will receive herewith a warrant as a sailing Master in the navy, for Wm Vaughan.

I have ordered Capt. Chauncey at N York, to ship to You twenty thirty two pound caronades; they are now, I presume, on their way.

P. Hamilton

Copy, DNA, RG45, SNL, Vol. 10, p. 131.

Woolsey Reports General Hull's Defeat

For American armies, the summer of 1812 was a period of defeat and humiliation. Their anticipated simultaneous attack at several places along the Canadian frontier never took place. Instead, Major General Sir Isaac Brock acted swiftly upon hearing of the declaration of war and ordered the seizure of the U.S. Army post on Michilimackinac Island in northern Lake Huron. This was carried out with surprise and success on 17 July. At Detroit, where an American army under Brigadier General William Hull had invaded Canadian territory across the Detroit River, there was a fatal delay. Fearing that he had become outnumbered, Hull fell back to Detroit where, on 16 August, he surrendered his entire force. Major General Stephen Van Rensselaer made no aggressive moves at Niagara, preferring to wait for reinforcements, while on 8 August, at Albany, the unready Major General Henry Dearborn agreed to a cease-fire from Niagara to Montreal that lasted almost a month.

Lieutenant Woolsey received the news of Hull's surrender three days before it reached Washington by a different route. He relayed word of it to the secretary of the navy by means of the following letter and

added that the several schooners he had sought to rescue at Ogdensburg were on their way up the St. Lawrence. Their safe passage was made possible by the cease-fire, under the terms of which military personnel and supplies were allowed to move unmolested.

LIEUTENANT MELANCTHON T. WOOLSEY TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

U.S. Brig *Oneida*
Sackets Harbour Augt 25th 1812

Sir

It is with much regret that I inform you that news has arrived here to day that Govr Hull is defeated I have just this moment receid pr. express from Ogdensburgh a confirmation of the above intelligence-Salutes, illuminations &c at Prescott on the receipt of this disagreeable news officilly from Genl Brock The Merchant vessels are on their way up the River. If they arrive in safety-I want guns, and in fact every thing necessary for the military equipment of eight vessels to mount on an average eight guns and some heavy ordnance for their protection at this place in case we should be obliged to retreat. Our Batteries are now ready to recive Thirty Heavy Pieces The Battery carriages had better be made in New York. If Sir my requests are granted soon I promise you the Mastery on this Lake and the consequent reduction of Upper Canada.

I have ditened the Mail to write the foregoing. I have the honor [&c.]

Melⁿ T. Woolsey

Money I is absolutely necessary

LS, DNA, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 2, No. 180.

Lake Champlain Unguarded

By the end of August, there was still no naval force on Lake Champlain ready to protect American interests. In the following letter

a resident of Plattsburgh, New York, comments on the fact and suggests that since the gunboats were not ready, other vessels were available.

BENJAMIN MOORE TO SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Plattsburgh
Augt 29th 1812

Sir

From the Multiplicity of business attending your Office, I Expect it must have Escaped your Notice, that there is two Gun Boats, belonging to the United States, upon Lake Champlain, Under the Charge & Care of Lieut Sidney Smith, of the Navy, and which has not yet been Ordered into Service, which circumstance is & has been for some time very mortifying to many of the friends of the administration and the well wishers of our Common Country and more Especially those that feel & Know their Exposed Situation to our Enemy. A large Number of Boats are already built others building & others purchased or about to be for our immediate use. I am Sir Your very [&c.]

Benj. Moore

LS, DNA, RG45, MLR, 1812, Vol. 6, No. 65.

Isaac Chauncey Ordered to the Lakes

Secretary Hamilton's most important decision regarding warfare on the Great Lakes in 1812 was the appointment of Captain Isaac Chauncey as commander of U.S. naval forces on Lakes Ontario and Erie. He was a seasoned and well-regarded officer, a steady if not brilliant man, who had administrative as well as seagoing skills. The major task facing Chauncey was the creation of two separate fleets which could challenge those being built and assembled by the British. Lieutenant Woolsey had held his own in the first months of war, but an officer of much greater experience and authority was needed to deal with the multiple problems of ship construction, supply, and naval strategy in the face of a growing enemy fleet.

At the time of his appointment, Chauncey was commandant of the New York Navy Yard and the gunboats assigned to New York. After his receipt of the following letter, it took almost a month for Chauncey to make his arrangements to ship ordnance, munitions, and supplies of all types to the lakes. He also arranged for a large number of skilled carpenters and shipwrights, as well as seamen, to accompany him on the journey north. Grouped with this letter are Chauncey's reply and one containing further instructions from Secretary Hamilton.

SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON TO
COMMODORE ISAAC CHAUNCEY

Confidential & official
Isaac Chauncey Esq
Commanding naval officer
New York

Navy Depart
31 Augt 1812

The season has arrived, when your Country requires your active Services. The President of the United States has determined to obtain command of the Lakes Ontario & Erie, with the least possible delay-and the execution of this highly important object is committed to you.

With respect to the means to be employed, you will consider yourself unrestrained, minor interests must yield to the greater. The object must be accomplished; and all the means which you may judge essential, must be employed.

In addition to the public vessels now on the Lakes-you are at liberty to purchase, hire or build, in your discretion, such others and of such form & armament, as may in your opinion be necessary: to take from the yard under your command, from the *John Adams*, and from the gunboats, cannon, carriages, shot, powder, small arms and every other munition of war: to make requisitions upon the Navy Agent at New York for every deficiency: to order upon this Service any of the officers or the men of the *John Adams* or on the New York station, or in or near New York, to whom special service may not be assigned: to appoint a Surgeon, Surgeon's mates, and such masters and inferior officers as you may judge expedient & necessary: to open rendezvous for entering additional men if necessary; and in

short to do every necessary act to carry into effect the object of these instructions.

I would not wish you to order any officer upon this Service, Senior to Lieut Woolsey; and in drawing men & supplies from the gunboats, you will consider those destined for Eastport as excepted-it being important, that they should be dispatched to their destination, as early as may be practicable.

Col Wharton will order under your command a detachment of Marines to consist of

- 1 Captain
- 2 Lieutenants
- 3 Serjeants
- 2 Corporals
- 2 music & 50 privates, which whether acting on shore

or on board vessel, is to be subject to your orders.

All the necessary Officers, Seamen, Marines, cannon, ball, powder, small arms of every description, provisions, Slops, warm clothing, watch coats, surgical instruments, medicine, hospital stores: cordage, canvas, &c &c you will cause to be transported with all the expedition in your power to Sacketts harbour on the Lake Ontario and to Buffaloe at the bottom of the Lake Erie, in such proportions as you may judge necessary for each place. At these two points, namely Sacketts harbour & Buffaloe your operations must be simultaneous-let the work of preparation go on at both places at one & the same time. Chosing one of the ports for your own residence, while preparing, dispatch an officer in whom you can confide, to the other, with orders to use every exertion, to execute the trust with every possible dispatch.

Not knowing the state of the Enemy's force I will not suggest to you, the number of men which may be necessary; but you will not take with you, or send, less than 200 to Sacketts harbour & 100 to Buffaloe, independently of officers and marines.

You will further consider yourself authorized to send from New York, such ship carpenters, caulkers, riggers, Sailmakers &c as may be required to enable you to bring into speedy & active operation all the means that you may judge expedient to employ. I recommend to you & authorize you, to appoint any gentleman, in whose honor, capacity & fidelity you can confide-to act as your confidential clerk. You may rate him a chaplain. His pay will be 40\$ pr month & 2 rations per day.



Secretary of the Navy Paul Hamilton

You will cooperate with the american army in that quarter. As one means of enabling you to do this with most effect, you will establish a cipher, by which when necessary, you will correspond with the commanding officer, and should it be found practicable & expedient, you may establish with the army a telegraphic communication-by which means you may be able to ascertain their movements and to communicate your own, with celerity and Secrecy.

It will be proper to keep your destination as secret as possible. The officer who may be charged with the transportation of the men &c must be enjoined not to communicate to any one this delicate point. In transporting the men &c you may use the gunboats if you judge it expedient & necessary.

The propriety of opening an immediate correspondence with Lieut Woolsey, now at Sacketts harbour, will readily occur to you. You will thus be able to ascertain the precise condition of our naval armament in that quarter, and can accordingly provide for its wants. Inform Lieut Woolsey that his being superseded, arises from no want of confidence in him, that on the contrary his conduct has in all respects, been highly approved, and that if the sphere of command had not been extended, no officer would be appointed over him. In the post, you may assign to Lt Woolsey, you will have reference to the honorable Services he has rendered, and to the respectful opinion entertained of his merits.

It will indeed be well for you to send to Lt Woolsey by express, a copy of this letter, and you will accordingly do so, with such instructions as you may judge necessary. He may immediately commence at Sacketts harbour such operations as may be adviseable.

As soon as you may think proper, you will order an officer, in whom you can confide, to take charge of the Yard in your absence; and such officer will from time to time, report to you his proceedings.

Prior to your proceeding on this service, additional orders will be necessary, and will be transmitted.

In conferring upon you this appointment, and this unlimited authority to provide the requisite means to carry into effect the object of these instructions: you will find evidence of the very high confidence placed by your government in your capacity, discretion, valor & vigour. I am with great respect [&c.]

Copy, DNA, RG45, CNA, Vol. 1, pp. 325-27. Unsigned letters preceding and following are endorsed "for Paul Hamilton C.W. Goldsborough."

COMMODORE ISAAC CHAUNCEY TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Navy Yard Newyork
3d Sepr 1812

Sir;

I was this day honored with your letter of the 31st ulto appointing me to the Command of the Lakes Ontario and Erie. This flattering mark of confidence I accept with pleasure, and shall enter upon the duties of this Command (or any other call of my Country) with alacrity.

I have already commenced the work of preparation. Forty Ship-Carpenters will leave here on Saturday in the Steam-Boat for Sacketts' Harbour: others will follow in a few days.

I have written to Lieut Woolsey by Express to make me a return of the Force of the Enemy as far as practicable to obtain it, and also what Vessels can be purchased on the Lakes that we can convert into Gunboats or Vessels of War. I have also directed him to prepare quarters for the men as the Season is advancing that will require their being sheltered in that northern Climate.

I shall send forward the munitions of war as fast as possible, but shall keep the most of the men here until I am ready to proceed myself. I have the honor to be [&c.]

Isaac Chauncey

ALS, DNA, RG45, CL, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 14

SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON TO
COMMODORE ISAAC CHAUNCEY

Isaac Chauncey Esq.
Commandg naval officer
New York

Navy Depart
4 Sepr 1812

confidential

In the letter of instructions transmitted to you, under date the 31st ulto, you were required to send to Sacketts harbour not less than 200 men, and to Buffaloe not less than 100. Altho you are not restricted to any number in either case, but have full authority to send to both as many, as you may judge expedient & necessary; yet from the terms used, you might infer, that it is our impression, that Buffaloe will not require as many men as Sacketts harbor-or that it is a place of subordinate importance. The contrary is the fact. Buffaloe is a point of at least as much importance as Sacketts harbor, and our opinion is, that it will require a force equally extensive.

One of the objects then of this communication is, to remove from your mind any impression that you may have received, as to Buffaloe being considered as a place of inferior importance to Sacketts harbor, and to leave you entirely at liberty, to employ such number of men and such other means, as you may judge necessary to enable you, to accomplish the object of your instructions. To enable you to form a satisfactory opinion as to the requisite means, you ought to know the precise extent of the enemy's force on those waters. This information can be afforded by Genl Dearborn, now at Albany with whom you will immediately open a correspondence, stating to him generally & confidentially the nature of your instructions, and requesting from him the information suggested, and any other in his possession, that may tend to facilitate your operations.

It is known that the enemy have on lake Erie the *Queen Charlotte*-an armed Schooner-and the brig *Adams*, the latter of which has lately been given up to them by the capitulation of Detroit; and near the lake Erie will probably commence our most serious operations in the first instance. At Buffaloe it is understood that there is a fortification, which will afford protection to your artificers while working; but you must have a respectable detachment of marines, both at Buffaloe & at Sacketts harbour-and I have accordingly this day directed Col Wharton to furnish you an additional Detachment of the same extent as the one ordered on the 31st ulto. I am [&c.]

for Paul Hamilton
C. W. Goldsborough

Copy, DNA, RG45, CNA, Vol. 1, p. 328.

Marines for the Lakes

If additional ships were to be acquired and built on the lakes, then more marines would be essential to complete their crews. Secretary Hamilton lost no time in communicating the department's needs to the commandant of the Marine Corps. He in turn informed Captain John Hall, officer in charge of marines at New York, to make the necessary arrangements. The letter which follows makes quite clear the requirement that these marines be completely equipped before departing for their station, for there were no sources of resupply on the frontier. The letter is couched in guarded language, as is seen in the lack of a mention of the destination for these marines. This was in accord with the secretary's desire for secrecy. The only clue to their destination is the reference to Commodore Chauncey.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL COMMANDANT FRANKLIN WHARTON, U.S.M.C.,
TO CAPTAIN JOHN HALL, U.S.M.C.

H.Q. of the Marine Corps
Washington, Sepr 1st 1812

Sir!

On receipt of this you will form a very select detachment from your whole Command, to consist of Three Sergeants, two Corporals, & Fifty privates, & which when formed you will by constant Drill & Exercise endeavour to make perfect for immediate Service, under an Officer who will be ordered to command it-it is very probable that the Guard of the *Adams* may be so changed as to admit of its being debarked, in that case Lieut [Charles] Hanna will be considered as one of the Subalterns to be attached to it, of which he can be informed-Should this take place the Selection may be made from it also.

You must immediately hold ready for delivery 50 Stand of Arms, & Accoutrements-& 50 Suits of Clothing to the Officer, who is to receive this detachment, & which are to be viewed as extra-that being given to him by you to be fully clothed, & equipt for the field. Should any Armes or Accutrements want repair, have them immediately put in complete Order, & should you be deficient in any Articles to execute this order to its extent, report to me instantly that I may take

the proper Steps to obtain them. to lay before me perfectly the State of your Stores, by return of Mail furnish me with a Return of all the Arms, &c &c, with Clothing &c you have.

Capt Chauncey, who is acquainted with the Intentions of the Government in regard to this Command, must be consulted: you will therefore shew to him these Instructions, & obtain from him some Knowledge about the Guard of the *Adams*—in short the Command which you are here ordered to form, must be as far as possible perfect in every thing I am respectfully [&c.]

F. Wharton,
Lt. Col. Commt,
M. Corps

Capt. John Hall,
Commandg. Marines,
New York.

Copy, DNA, RG127, CMC, Letters Sent.

Woolsey Informed of His Relief

Although Secretary Hamilton had already ordered Captain Chauncey to transmit word of his succession to command to Lieutenant Woolsey, the secretary took the trouble to inform Woolsey directly. The letters that follow include this communication and Woolsey's response to the news that he had been replaced by a senior officer.

SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON TO
LIEUTENANT MELANCTHON T. WOOLSEY

Lt. M. T. Woolsey
Comg at Sackets harbor
N York

Nav: Depm't
5 Sep: 1812

confidential

I have received Yours of the 25 ult. On the 19 ulto I remitted You 4000\$ which no doubt, You have received before this.

Guns & every other Munion of war, will be sent on with all practicable dispatch.

In a short time, you may expect Capt Chauncey on the Lakes, mean time he will correspond with You, & You will be making every preparatory arrangment, to obtain the Mastery of the Lakes Ontario & Erie—Capt Chaunceys authority as to the requisite means is unlimited.

P. Hamilton

Copy, DNA, RG45, SNL, Vol. 10, p. 143.

LIEUTENANT MELANCTHON T. WOOLSEY TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

U.S. Brig *Oneida*
Sackets Harbour September 5th 1812

Sir

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 19th ultimo also a remittance from the Treasury of four thousand dollars, in pursuance of your warrant No 2667.

It is with pleasure I inform you that all our Merchant vessels have succeeded in getting up out of the River. we can now muster eight or nine fine schooners—two of them can carry two thirty two pounders, one two twenty fours and the rest will average eight light guns each say nines and sixes. I am respectfully [&c.]

Melⁿ T. Woolsey

ALS, DNA, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 17.

LIEUTENANT MELANCTHON T. WOOLSEY TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

U.S. Brig *Oneida*
Sackets Harbour Sept. 7th 1812

Sir

Captn Chauncey has forwarded pr express to His Excellly Govr Tompkins & he to me a Copy of your letter of the 31st ult. together

with his instructions. I assure you Sir I fill highly gratified in being superceeded by an Officer with whom I have seen much service—and for whose person and talents I have a sincere veneration. The delicacy you feel at superceding me and the manner you are pleased to express yourself of my past conduct Sir let me assure you I feel much flattered with.

The British Squadron have all gone up the Lake I was a half hour since preparing to pursue them in hopes of singling out one I was almost driven by desperation to this attempt—But I now conceive it of more importance than ever to preserve the Brig—For this purpose I am now warping into the Harbour and will mount my Gun on the Fort—I have not time to say any thing more at present, as the Express is hurrying me. Your obnt Servt [&c.]

Melⁿ T. Woolsey

ALS, DNA, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 25.

Daniel Dobbins in Washington

An event of major importance for the navy's presence on Lake Erie was the arrival in Washington of Daniel Dobbins, a master lake mariner and shipwright who was thoroughly familiar with Lakes Erie and Ontario, the shipping that normally plied these waters, and the strength of the British lakes fleet.¹ Dobbins's knowledge was immediately tapped and this information was forwarded to Commodore Chauncey as naval intelligence. The secretary appointed Dobbins sailing master, requested that Commodore Tingey provide Dobbins with the dimensions of a 40 ton gunboat, and ordered Dobbins to depart for Presque Isle (now Erie), Pennsylvania, where he would contract for the building of four gunboats. The contract was to be subject to the approval of Commodore Chauncey. The mood in Washington must have been one of urgency, for all these decisions were made within the brief period of five days, as shown in the following documents.

1. See Max Rosenberg, *The Building of Perry's Fleet on Lake Erie, 1812-1813* (Harrisburg, 1968).

SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON TO DANIEL DOBBINS

Mr Dobbins
at Mr Oneal's

Navy Depart
11 Sept 1812

I have just understood from Col Monroe, that you are in possession of minute information relatively to the force of the Enemy, on the Lakes Erie & Ontario; and that you know of a number of vessels, which may be immediately engaged for our Service.

Will you, Sir, have the goodness, to afford to me, all the information in your possession, upon these interesting points—and as early, as may be in your power?

for Paul Hamilton
C: W: Goldsborough

Copy, DNA, RG45, MLS, Vol. 11, p. 144.

SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON TO COMMODORE ISAAC CHAUNCEY

Confidential
Isaac Chauncey Esq
commg naval officer
New York

Navy Department
11 Sept 1812

As heretofore advised—we must have possession of the Lakes Ontario & Erie this fall. Of the two lakes, if either is to be considered as the greatest object, it is lake Erie—but your preparatory arrangements for both must go on at the same time. You will have a number of vessels to build, and the timber is yet to be cut. We hope, that in twenty days from the time of your arrival at Sackett's Harbour & at Buffaloe, your vessels will be ready to act. You will have to build of green timber; but it is a case of necessity, and cannot be avoided. Employ artificers & men enough in every Department, and send them on without delay. At each of the places mentioned, there ought now to be an active and intelligent officer.

If our enemy should be apprized of our intentions he will immediately commence building, which would render the conquest

more difficult. Every possible despatch, and every Secrecy must be observed. At all event, be the cost what it may, we must have possession of the Lakes this fall.

for Paul Hamilton
C W Goldsborough

Copy, DNA, RG45, CNA, Vol. 1, pp. 331-32.

SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON TO
COMMODORE ISAAC CHAUNCEY

confidential

Isaac Chauncey Esq
commg. naval officer
New York

Navy Depart
11 Sept: 1812

On the Lake Erie, it is understood, that the ennemy have the following vessels

	<i>Queen Charlotte</i>	of 20 guns	18 pdrs
	<i>Adams</i>	16	18
	Schr <i>Lady proud</i> [<i>Lady Prevost</i>]	12	9
	Brig <i>Hunter</i>	8	6 or 9
Merchant vessels	Schr <i>Nancy</i>	120 tons	
	Brig <i>Caledonia</i>	90 "	
	Schr <i>Mary</i>	100 "	
	Schr <i>Salina</i>	75 "	
	Sloop <i>Friends good will</i>	50	
	Sloop	50	
	Schr <i>Chippeway</i>	50	
	Schr <i>Elen</i>	60	
	& a small vessel requiring repairs, name not recollected.		

There is on the Lake, at Black rock, belonging to american Citizens, the following vessels-which you no doubt may immediately hire, or buy viz

Sloop <i>New Contractor</i>	}	each 65 tons belonging
Schr <i>Amelia</i>		to Porter Barton & Co.

Schr *Catharine* (new) 75 tons Townsend Brownson or
Brunson & Co.
Schr *Ohio* do 70 " ownership in dispute
Schr *Zepha* 50 Lonslow Carter of Cheveland, Ohio
Schr *Commencement* (small) Peter H. Colt.

You will probably find Black Rock a better place to build, than Buffaloe-it is about 3 miles from Buffaloe-and the road is good.

Messrs Porter Barton & Co.-Jasper Barish, and Erastus Granger own an abundance of timber in the neighbourhood of Buffaloe & Black Rock. I am told that you may get in that neighbourhood from 40 to 50 laborers.

Should you find it expedient, You can set up one or more vessels at Presque Isle, which is about 90 miles distant from Buffaloe.

Before you will receive this letter you will I hope have received minute information from Lt Woolsey, in relation to the Lake Ontario.

Pray, let not one moment be lost. with great respect.

for Paul Hamilton
C: W: Goldsborough

Copy, DNA, RG45, CNA, Vol. 1, pp. 332-33.

SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON TO
COMMODORE THOMAS TINGEY

Commre Tingey
N Yard, Washn

Navy Depart
15 Sept: 1812

Be pleased to give to the bearer, Mr Daniel Dobbins, the dimensions of a small gunboat, of about 40 tons, calculated to carry one long 24 pd iron cannon-and give him also the dimensions of the requisite timbers. It is very important that Mr Dobbins should have this information in the course of this day:-as he intends leaving this tomorrow on a service of great importance.

for Paul Hamilton
C: W: Goldsborough

Copy, DNA, RG45, CNA, Vol. 1, p. 336.

SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON TO DANIEL DOBBINS

Mr Daniel Dobbins
present

Navy Depart
15 Sept 1812

You will proceed without delay to Presque Isle, on the Lake Erie, and there contract for, on the best terms in your power, all the requisite timbers & other materials for building four Gun-boats-agreeably to the dimensions, which you will receive from Commre Tingey; and if in your power you will contract for the building of those boats, but such contract must be submitted to Commre Chauncey, or the officer that may be appointed by him to command the naval forces on the Lake Erie.

Immediately on your arrival, or as soon after, as may be practicable, you will communicate to Commre Chauncey, or to the officer that may be appointed by him to command on the Lake Erie, who will be stationed at or near Buffaloe, or Black Rock, the arrangements, which may be made by you to carry into effect the objects of these instructions-and you will govern yourself in your future proceedings by such Instructions, as you may thenceforth receive from Commre Chauncey or such commanding officer.

To enable you to comply with the engagements you may make, you can draw on this Department for any sum not exceeding Two thousand dollars. Copies of all contracts you may make, you will transmit to this Department.

For Paul Hamilton
C: W: Goldsborough

Copy, DNA, RG45, MLS, Vol. 11, p. 147.

SAILING MASTER DANIEL DOBBINS TO COMMODORE ISAAC CHAUNCEY

Sir

I have the honour to transmit to you (the inclosed) a Coppy of My instructions from the Secretary of the Navy¹ and assure you Sir that I Stand Ready to execute any order that you May be pleased to Issue I have Made arrangements for the timber and Iron work. Steel for axes I have been obliged to Send to Meadville for as there was not any at this

place that is good for any thing. I intend going to Pittsburgh soon for the purpose of procuring Rigging and Cables, anchors I believe I Can get likewise the Riging can be got there Cheaper and that is good. be pleased to let Me hear from you at you arival so that I May Regulate my future Proceeding by you instructions. I have been oblided to hire the Men by the day and Shall be oblided to hire the hands the Same way. any farther arrangements that I May Make I will inform you of I am with Respect yours

Daniel Dobbins
Master U S Navy

Eri Sept 28th² 1812

Copy, NBuHi, Daniel Dobbins Papers.

1. See Dobbins's warrant as sailing master, signed and dated 16 Sept. 1812 by Hamilton, in NBuHi, Dobbins Papers.

2. "30th" is written in smaller lettering above this date.

Commodore Chauncey's Preparations

During three weeks of feverish activity, Isaac Chauncey demonstrated his ability for mobilizing men and war materiel. He had assumed the responsibility for sending all the necessary personnel, both military and civilian, to build and man ships on Lakes Ontario and Erie. Having procured all available supplies and contracted for the rest to follow, Chauncey sent several groups of talented artificers ahead with the seamen and marines to accompany him. He also dispatched Lieutenant Jesse D. Elliott to consult with Major General Stephen Van Rensselaer, who commanded U.S. troops on the Niagara frontier, as to the proper location for establishing bases and building ships on the lakes. It had already been decided to send a large complement to Sackets Harbor, by way of Oswego. Others were to be based at the mouth of the Genesee River, deemed a favorable location for ship-building. The rest would continue to Buffalo and the Niagara River, where, it was thought, a base could be established at Black Rock. Secretary Hamilton had hoped that Chauncey's departure and plans could be kept secret, but that was not to be. The following documents consist

of Commodore Chauncey's letters to the secretary accompanied by an extract from his journal detailing his actions since receiving orders for his new command.

COMMODORE ISAAC CHAUNCEY TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Newyork
24 Sept 1812

I this day rec'd a letter from lieut Elliott by Express, a Copy of which I enclose together with the copy of a letter from Major Genl Van Rensselaer to lieut Elliott recommending him to proceed to Genessee River to which place I shall order some of the officers and men. I shall not however lose sight of Lake Erie to which place I have ordered the officers and Crew of the *John Adams*, and as soon as I have visited Sacketts' Harbor and Genessee River I shall proceed to Black-Rock, and if practicable to destroy the Enemy's force on that Lake this Fall, it shall be done. I have the honor [&c.]

Isaac Chauncey

LS, DNA, RG45, CL, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 77.

[Enclosure]

Lt Elliott to Comre Chauncey dated
Buffaloe Sepr 14. 1812.

I have with all possible dispatch repaired to the Head Qrs of Gen. Van Rensselaer. As regards my expedition he is entirely uninformed. He has not the most distant idea of the navigation of Lake Erie or any of its' resources. By his advice I have consulted with General [Peter B.] Porter who is perfectly acquainted with every part of the Lake. He is employed by the public to build many boats which are intended for the Troops when invading Canada. He has at the general expence agreed to build me 4 of the description named in your letter and have them ready in a few days. I have contracted for a sufficient quantity of Plank to deck and bottom 2 Ships of 300 Tons: have ex-

amined all the situations on Lake Erie; cannot get one that will answer our purpose. Those that have shelters have not a sufficient depth of water and those with water cannot be defended from the enemy and the violence of the weather. In extending my view to Niagara river I find that, immediately in its mouth, receiving its water from Lake Erie, we can be handsomely situated as regards building, fitting out, and erecting Barracks and Magazin. I enclose you a Sketch of the river Niagara where you will observe that about 3 miles on our side we have an Island carrying in from the Lake only 5 feet water and on the north side 12 feet at all times. When a strong southerly wind 14. One difficulty attending the getting our Vessels through the Rapids where the water runs about 4 Knots and being obliged to get by a strong Battery. Gen. Van Rensselaer has informed me that he would remove that difficulty by getting possession of the Battery. The roads are good with the exception of about 13 miles which is intolerably bad. Provisions are plenty. The British have a force of considerable moment. One Ship of 20 guns, 10 feet water badly manned: one brig of 14 guns: one brig of 10 guns and 2 Schooners of 10 guns: some other vessels unarmed say 4 in all. We have only 6: a Brig of 90 Tons; the others are Schooners of from 40 to 80 Tons; all good Vessels and in the intended place for a navy Yard. As those Vessels would not be sufficiently formidable to contend with the Enemy at present, Genl Van Rensselaer has thought it advisable to direct our attention to Lake Ontario which he says is of all importance at this moment: Suspend the fitting of small vessels on Erie, go on with the Barracks & Magazin and collect the Timber for Building. During the Armistice our Vessels became very much dispersed only a few of them at Sacketts' Harbor. Three were chased into the Genessee river and one into Oswego: they are not very distant from this. He has satisfied me of the necessity of our attentions being directed to these 4 Vessels: his letter to me I enclose a copy of for your perusal. The carpenters have not arrived. I have by the Express ordered them to Genessee Falls: I will set out in the morning myself: shall get on altering the Vessels until I have your further Commands. Should arming these Vessels meet your approbation, the ordnance had better immediately come on to that place together with the officers and men. our movements at this place will go on in the mean time as if attended to myself. Our movements as regards the Boats will be perfectly Secret: The alterations to the Vessels as well as building will be immediately in the Sight of the Enemy: the river is so

narrow that the Soldiers are shooting at each other across. Ordnance for this place had better come on when the Snow is on the ground and then in Sleds. it will not be possible to get it in waggons. Direct your letter to me at Genessee Falls. I have &c.

Copy, DNA, RG45, CL, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 77.

1. On the Genesee River at site of present-day Rochester, N.Y.

COMMODORE ISAAC CHAUNCEY TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Navy Yd New york
24 Sepr 1812

Sir

As the place of my destination has been announced in the Publick papers, you may suppose that I have been imprudent in communicating it to my friends. In justice to my own character I assure you upon my honor that I have never communicated the subject to but five persons—to wit—The Governor, Lt Woolsey, The Master-Carpenter, The Navy agent, and Mr [Samuel] Anderson, neither of which I am Confident has told it to a second person. The Subject was first published in a Philadelphia paper, (the Democratic Press) and copied into the Newyork papers.¹ I have the honor to be [&c.]

Isaac Chauncey

LS, DNA, RG45, CL, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 73.

1. *New-York Evening Post*, 23 Sept., announced Chauncey's new command.

COMMODORE ISAAC CHAUNCEY TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Newyork
Sept. 26. 1812. Saturday

Sir

I have the honor of enclosing you an abstract from my Journal which will give you an idea of the disposition of men, ordnance, and Stores intended for the Lakes and now on the way. I shall positively leave here in the Steam Boat to day and regret that my stay has been prolonged beyond the time that I first fixed, but I trust not to the detriment of the

publick service as by staying I have hastened the departure of the men and stores, and I shall now arrive on the Station before any of the Stores can be transported there. I trust however that you will not think I have been idle when you take into view that I received my orders on the 3rd instant only, and since that time I have sent from this place 140 Carpenters, about 700 Sailors and Marines (every man of which I am proud to say are volunteers) and more than 100 pieces of Cannon the greater part of which are of a large Calibre, with muskets, Shot, carriages &c &c compleat, and the Carriages have nearly all been made & the Shot cast since that time: nay, I may say that nearly every article that has been sent forward, has been made. I owe much, however, to the great exertions of Mr Anderson whose zeal for the publick service appears never to flag. In fact, I have found him so extremely useful and necessary to me that I have determined to take him with me for a few months as my private Secretary. Mr. [James R.] Wilson (the purser on this Station) will attend to Mr Anderson's business in his absence. This arrangement I hope will meet with your approbation.

After I arrive at Sacketts' Harbor I shall be better able to give you a more distinct view of my plans and prospects. After making my arrangements there, I shall proceed to Genessee river, and from thence to Buffaloe, from both of which places I will write you as to our prospects against the enemy this Fall. If however, we should not succeed this Fall, we shall require 44-32 pounders, Carronades to be sent to Black-Rock this winter to enable us to open the campaign with effect in the Spring. I should therefore recommend that those guns be cast immediately and sent on to this place. I have the honor to be [&c.]

Isaac Chauncey

LS, DNA, RG45, CL, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 79.

Abstract.

Recd from the Honorable The Secretary of the Navy Instructions to assume command of the naval force on the Lakes Erie & Ontario, and to use every exertion to obtain command of them this fall. Authority given to me to build, purchase, or hire vessels for that object, to appoint officers; to employ the officers or men of the *John Adams*, or of the Newyork station; to purchase Stores of every description or to take them from the *John Adams* or gun boats; in short, to use all the means which I might judge essential, to accomplish the wishes of the Government.

Engaged Mr [Henry] Eckford to proceed with Carpenters to the Lakes.

Wrote to lieut Woolsey at Sacketts' Harbor by Express to give me a report of our naval force and that of the enemy on the Lakes; to inform me what merchant Vessels fit for our purpose could be obtained, and what force wd make us superior: to prepare quarters for 400 men: to build a magazin for the powder: to select a spot for building a Vessel of 300 Tons and a few gun boats: left him at liberty to purchase Vessels if any would answer our purposes, and directed him in such case to commence their equipment immediately.

Gave orders for casting shot, making up grape & cannister shot, making carriages, trucks, circles, spindles, rammers and Spunges, Ladles & Worms, Cylinders &c, for purchasing Slops, and the medicines, and Hospital Stores necessary for the Expedition, the navy Store furnishing but very few Stores of any kind.

Directed Capt [Joseph] Tarbell of the *John Adams* to land his detachment of Marines at the Navy Yard, to be under the command of Capt [John] Hall; and requested Capt Hall to have them drilled and put in the best order for actual service at an hours notice.

5th Forty Carpenters set off for the Lakes.

7th Ordered lieut Jesse D Elliott to proceed to the Head Quarters of Genl Van Rensselaer at or near Buffaloe and consult with him as to the best Site to build, repair, and fit for service such Vessels or Boats as may be required to obtain command of Lake Erie: gave him permission to purchase and to commence their equipment immediately: directed him to have timber sawed for plank for decks and bottoms for 2 Ships of 300 Tons each consulting with Mr Eckford: to build 6 boats 40 feet by 10 feet wide: to have quarters prepared for 300 men: a temporary magazin built: to learn the force of the enemy on Lake Erie, and their general Rendezvous, & to transmit to me general information upon roads, sites for building, provisions &c-

Sep 8th Opened correspondence with Genl Dearborn & Govr Tompkins

10th Eighty five Carpenters set off for the Lakes.

11th Recd answer from lieut Woolsey and communicated contents to the Secretary of the Navy.

18th Sent 100 men exclusive of Officers: 14 heavy guns, with carriages, shot, muskets, pistols, powder &c &c for Sacketts' Harbor

21st Sent 6-18 pdrs—2-9s: 8-12s: 22-32 pdrs, carronades: 10-18 pdrs carronades, with slides, carriages &c &c to compleat the armament at Sacketts' Harbor for 350 men. Sent off to same place 230 Sailors.

22 Twenty Carpenters sett off for the Lakes.

" Ninety Sailors set off for Buffaloe.

23d Sent to Buffaloe 4-32 pdrs—2-18s:—5-12s: 10-6s: 2-12 pdr Carronades, with Shot &c &c, also some Slops: the medicines and Hospital Stores: muskets-pistols, pikes &c

24th Sent to Buffaloe 4-24 pdrs—5-12s: 10-4s: with shot, powder &c &c

Received by Express a letter from lieut Elliott and sent a copy of it to the Honorable The Secretary.

In answer same day directed him by Express, to proceed in altering the Vessels in Genessee he mentioned as fit for our purposes.

In consequence of the information communicated by lieut Elliott directed The Storekeeper to change the destination of 2-24 pdrs—10-6 pdrs—10-4 pdrs with everything necessary for them, with muskets, pistols &c for 100 men, from Buffaloe to Genessee River.

Directed Capt [Richard] Smith commanding the detachment of Marines to proceed, and keep them together until his arrival at Rome, there to divide them, placing one half under command of lieut [Charles] Hanna with orders to proceed to Genessee River: with orders to proceed himself to Sacketts' Harbor.

Sept 24 Ordd lieut [John] Pettigrew of the *John Adams* to proceed with the detachment under his command to Genessee River

25th The Marines sailed for Albany.

Sent on Slops, medicines, & hospital Stores for Sacketts' Harbor.

26th Set off Sacketts' Harbor leaving orders for capt Ludlow to forward the Sails, rigging, blocks, anchors, cables &c &c to be prepared and fitted, to Sacketts' Harbor, for a Brig and 3 gun boats: also, sails, rigging, blocks &c for 3 gun boats to be sent to Genessee River.

A Local Source of Iron

Although much of northwestern New York was a wilderness in 1812, there were settlements along the river road from Albany to Buffalo that could offer manufactures to the navy. The following letter presents an offer to supply forged iron, an essential item in ship construction, fitting out, and naval armament. It is possible that the commencement of warfare on and around the lakes stimulated the business of such firms.

JAMES LYNCH TO SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Rome Sept 25th 1812

Sir,

Being informed that there will probably be occasion for a considerable quantity of Iron ballest & cannon Shot for the navy on Lake Ontario; we take the liberty of suggesting to you that we have a furnace near this Village in full operation & calculated to supply a large quantity at Short notice upon terms as reasonable perhaps more so than any other furnace except Mr [Joshua] Forman's at Onondago, which being situated upon the navigation as well as ours is upon equal terms. We can deliver Shot at Sacketts harbor or Oswego as may be required.

We have addressed ourselves upon this subject to Captn Chauncey & have not as yet recd an answer. If there should be any department to which it more peculiarly belongs we would esteem it a favor to be informed by you, & will be glad to receive any Communication which you may please to make thro Captn Chauncey or otherwise.¹ & are Sir, [&c.]

The Oneida Iron Manufag Co. by
James Lynch

LS, DNA, RG45, MLR, 1812, Vol. 51, No. 142.

1. Secretary Hamilton responded favorably to this inquiry. On 11 Dec. he ordered Navy Agent John Bullus to make a contract with Lynch "on the best terms in your power." See Hamilton to Bullus, 11 Dec. 1812, DNA, RG45, MLS, Vol. 11, p. 170.

Lieutenant Macdonough Ordered to Lake Champlain

The paucity of communications from Lieutenant Sidney Smith on Lake Champlain, in addition to reports of inactivity, stimulated Secretary Hamilton to send a more experienced and energetic officer to take command. On this lake, as on Lake Erie, there was virtually no naval presence. The fleet had to be built from the keel up, and it was to be a long and arduous process, as Lake Champlain evidently had a lower priority in its demands for naval resources than either Lakes Ontario or Erie. The following letter rescued Thomas Macdonough from the obscurity of commanding gunboats at Portland, Maine, and placed him in a position that would demand his utmost talents.

SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON TO
LIEUTENANT THOMAS MACDONOUGH

Lt Thos. Macdonough
Portland Maine

Navy: Dep:
28th Sept. 1812.

The President of the United States, has selected You, to command the vessels, on Lake Champlain. & You are required to proceed to that Lake, & assume the Command accordingly, without a moments delay-Comre Bainbridge, or Capt: Hull, will appoint an officer, to take Your place at Portland during Your absence; but, You are not to wait the arrival of such officer at Portland.

You will therefore, immediately, on rect of this letter, proceed to Lake Champlain, & make every arrangement necessary-Six vessels, have been purchased, by the War Departmt & there are two gunboats, built by the Navy Department, on the Lake; the whole of which, is to be under Your direction & command.

On Your arrival, You will communicate with Genl Dearborn, or the Commanding Genl who will afford You, every requisite assistance: & with whom You are to co-operate with the force under Your Command.

The two gunboats, are at or near, Bason harbour, under the command of Lt Smith.

I directed Comre Chauncey, to send thirty able seamen, to the Lake & Lieut: Smith to prepare the boats, for immediate service.¹ They are, it is hoped, at this time, preparing these boats & it is believed, that the six vessels purchased by the War Department, have also been preparing—Your presence however, is essentially, & immediately necessary—Should you find any deficiency of Cannon Arms &c—Genl Dearborn having command of the different military arsenals can give the necessary orders to supply such deficiency.

You may draw upon me for all necessary monies, until You can procure some suitable person to act as agent—Finding such a person, You can appoint him temporarily, & then procure Your supplies of provisioning money &c by requisition on him—& he will draw on the Department.

P. Hamilton

Copy, DNA, RG45, SNL, Vol. 10, p. 165.

1. See Hamilton to Chauncey, 14 Sept. 1812, DNA, RG45, CNA, Vol. 1, p. 335; and Hamilton to Smith, 14 Sept. 1812, DNA, RG45, SNL, Vol. 10, p. 152.

A Difference of Opinion

Lieutenant Jesse D. Elliott, having conferred with various authorities, was quick to form opinions as to where ships should be built on Lake Erie. In the following communication, he expressed firm doubts that vessels could be successfully built, launched, and brought into the lake from Presque Isle. In this case, Elliott was informing someone who knew more about that place than he did. In 1813, Dobbins became the principal builder of gunboats and larger warships, successfully launched at Presque Isle, aided by the brothers Adam and Noah Brown and Henry Eckford from New York City.

LIEUTENANT JESSE D. ELLIOTT TO SAILING MASTER DANIEL DOBBINS

Buffalo Octo 2nd 1812

Sir,

Your Letter of 30th Ult directed to Como Chancey or the Commanding officer on Lake Erie I have received together with its enclosed, a coppie of your instructions from the Hon. the Secretary of the Navy; each of which together with a coppie of this letter I have enclosed to him for his consideration It appears to me utterly impossible to build Gun Boats at Presquise their is not a sufficient depth of water on the Bar to get them into the Lake, should their be water the place is at all times open to the attacks of the Enemy and in all probability when ready for action will ultimately fall into the hands of the Enemy and be of great annoyance to our force building and repairing at this place. From a slight acquaintance I have with our side of Lake Erie and with what information I have obtained from persons who have long navigated the Lake I am under an impression Lake Erie has not a single Harbor calculated to fit out a Naval expedition and the only one convenient I am at present at, which is between Squaw Island and the Main immediately in the Mouth of Niagara River. I have no further communication to make on the subject probably in a few days I shall be in possession of Como Chancys impressions when you shall again hear from me With sentiments of respect &c

Mr Daniel Dobbins
Erie

J. D. Elliott

ALS, NBuHi, Dobbins Papers.

SAILING MASTER DANIEL DOBBINS TO LIEUTENANT JESSE D. ELLIOTT

Sir

I Receved yours of the 2d inst and with Respect to this Place being unfit to build gun boats is a Mistaken Idea as there is a Sufficient of water to let them into the lake and not enough to let any force of the enemy in to destroy them it being Completely Sirounded on the sides by the land I have Made My arangements according to My instruc-

tions for the purpose of Providing the timber and Materials for them I believe I have as perfect a knowledge of the lake as any other person on it and I believe you would agree with Me if you were here—
Eri Octr 11th 1812

to J. D. Elliott
Commanding the Navy
on the lake at
buffaloe

Copy, NBuHi, Dobbins Papers.

Samuel Anderson's Task

The physical difficulties of transporting cannon, ordnance stores, and other supplies intended for the lakes may be appreciated by reading the following document. Its author, Naval Storekeeper Samuel Anderson, was Commodore Chauncey's confidential clerk, and he had apparently been asked to take charge of sending supplies after Chauncey's departure from Albany. Anderson's letter to Secretary Hamilton offers a rare description of how cargo was transported by riverboat, cart, and sled to the different naval bases in northwestern New York State.

SAMUEL T. ANDERSON TO SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Schenectady Thursday
8 Oct 1812

Sir,

I have the honor to inform you that I arrived at Albany on Sunday last, under orders of which you are apprized, and under others more particular, to attend at that place to the further distribution of the Stores to the Stations for which they are destined. But as the Stores are all thrown here, I left Albany for this place, and shall remain here and be at Albany occasionally, until I accomplish, as far as can be done by any means within compass, the end for which my orders have been given.

Immediately upon my arrival at Albany I waited upon Genl Dearborn to learn the place where the vessels mentioned in Lt Elliotts letter to Commodore Chauncey were. He informed me that they had certainly got into Oswego. From this place to Oswego is 200 miles, all of water carriage for Boats carrying from 3 to 7 Tons according to the depth of water in the Mohawk between Utica & Rome where the only obstruction of consequence is found. To Oswego then, by this water carriage, I shall order the Guns and Stores which were at first intended to be sent to Genessee River for these Vessels. To Oswego also I shall order all the guns and heavy Stores which are intended for Sacketts' Harbor, to which place they must be conveyed from Oswego, by water in Small Boats that can hug the Shore, or the Vessels building at Sacketts' Harbor must escape to Oswego for their Armament. One or the other of these plans must be embraced if speedy operations are intended, for to convey by land, from this place to Sacketts' Harbor, at this season of the year, by any mode that can be adopted for this occasion, a piece of ordnance larger than a 9 pdr is an impossibility.

Turning your attention to Lake Erie, we ascend the Mohawk to its source where it is joined to Wood Creek by a Canal now in use: from Wood Creek we pass into the Oneida Lake, and thence into the Onondaga River: from the Onondaga into the Seneca River, and following its course, cross the Cayuga and stop at the Seneca Falls. Here is the extreme point of our water Carriage in that direction, and we are still 114 miles from Black Rock. The length of time which it will require to arrive at the Seneca Falls; the badness of the Roads from that point to Black Rock, the advanced Season, the necessity of making the greatest exertion to Ontario, all combine to destroy any hope of getting our cannon to any point on Lake Erie in time for operations this Fall. I shall nevertheless, push every thing forward as far as possible that they may reach Black Rock within two weeks after the roads become passable for our heavy Stores by the fall of Snow.

Upon my arrival here I found that but one Cannon had been sent on, and that the business of forwarding the stores was much retarded by the absence of the Contractor and the great body of the Boatmen who are employed. Notwithstanding these hindrances and many difficulties arising out of the novelty of our undertaking, I am sanguine that I shall be able to send forward within 10 days from this, unless prevented by the lowness of the water in the Mohawk, such Cannon & such Stores as may yet put it within our power, to contest this Fall, the command of lake Ontario with the Enemy.

The result of my efforts I hope to communicate to you in another letter before I leave this place for the Lakes. I am respectfully [&c.]

Sam^l T. Anderson

ALS, DNA, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 91.

Macdonough Arrives at Lake Champlain

Responding to the secretary of the navy's orders, Lieutenant Thomas Macdonough traveled from Portland, Maine, to Whitehall, New York, at the southern end of Lake Champlain. Upon arrival, he was confronted by several problems. The vessels he was to command were far from ready, the men supposedly sent from New York City had not arrived, and the best ships on the lake had been commandeered by the War Department. It would take some time to unravel this snarl. The following letters convey Macdonough's impatience and determination to gain control of the situation.

LIEUTENANT THOMAS MACDONOUGH TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Portland Octr 4th 1812

Sir,

In compliance with your orders of the 28th Septr 1812, I shall set out for Lake Champlain tomorrow morning, and I shall follow the other directions contained in your letter. I have the honor to be [&c.]

T. Macdonough

ALS, DNA, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 83.

LIEUTENANT THOMAS MACDONOUGH TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

White Hall Lake Champlain
Octr 14th 1812

Sir,

I arrived here yesterday from Platsburgh, & after having a conversation with Genl [Joseph] Bloomfield. at present I meet with every requisite assistance in the equipment of the vessells by the War department, one of the Sloops purchased by that dept is in a forward state the others have not yet been touched but I have carpenters to commence with two of them to morrow. the remaining three are it is said old and unfit for service. I have not yet examined them, should they prove worth fitting out I shall begin with them also imediately. I shall want officers to command these vessells. I think old Midshipmen or Sailing Masters would be the officers for that service & the sooner they are here the more the service will be benefited by it. The men that Capt Chauncey was directed to send on, have not yet come. I have heard nothing of them, & I want them here about the rigging that I can remove the vessells from this place before the Ice Makes. no seamen are to be procured here and it is absolutely necessary that all these vessells have a Navy officer, to command them. I shall sail one myself I have not yet found a suitable person to appoint agent. a man has offered his services here & I expect to give him the temporary appointment.

I find a Mr Billings here in charge of one of the vesells purchaced by the War dept acting under Genl Dearborns orders. he has directly refused to place that vessell under my direction untill so ordered by Genl Dearborn. I have written & sent that part of my orders which relate to taking charge of the vessells on the Lake to Genl Dearborn, requesting him to arrange the business with Mr Billings. Should you think it proper to order any officers on, I shall want them imediately. I have the honor to be [&c.]

T. Macdonough

ALS, DNA, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 107.

LIEUTENANT THOMAS MACDONOUGH TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

White hall Lake Champlain
Otr 26th 1812

Sir,

I have the honor to acquaint you with the State of the Naval force on this Lake. Two of the Sloops will leave this in a few days mounting each six, six pounders and one eighteen, the other four are under the direction of the War dept. One of which, the *President*, has gone down the Lake. She mounts 6 eighteen pounders and two twelves, being much the largest and best vessell on the Lake, the other three under the directions of the War dept are too old to carry guns, and, are employed, transporting troops &c. I am fastening over the two Gun Boats to mount each a twelve pounder, they will be ready in eight or ten, days. The difficulty of getting proper workmen, & materials, causes the delay. Genl Dearborn has retained the Sloop *President*, he replied to a copy of my orders from you, which I sent him. "The *President* which has been fitted by Mr Billings, is by me considered as exclusivly attached to the War dept and to the Army under my Command, and cannot at present be delivered over to the Navy dept." It is the intention of Genl Dearborn to continue this Mr Billings, from some unaccountable cause, in the command of this vessell, in opposition to the wishes & opinions (as to the propriety of it) of Genl Bloomfield, & all the principall, officers, of the army here, agreeably to my orders from You, I consider it an assumption of my command, and you will readily perceive the difficulty such a strange division will make, I have no hesitation in saying this man is not a suitable person to have the command he holds. he is subject to no Martial law, neither can I at present regulate a single movement of the vessel in aid, or cooperation, with the Army, I am strangely deprived of more than half the force in having this vessel in the hands of those, that know not, what to do with her. Such a strange arrangement as this, having a Citizen to command the principal vessell on an expedition cannot but, be attended with fatal consequences.

The men which you directed Capt Chauncey to send me, have, I suspect gone to the Westward, as I have heard nothing of them no men are to be got here, I have written to Capt Hull at New York, on

the subject of the Men observing they might have gone on Westward, & that he might anticipate directions from you, to send men on here. These sloops will require at least twenty men each, the Gun Boats, will require twelve, for their proper management.

I have appointed Messrs Reid & Hart, of this place acg. Navy Agent from whom I receive supplies of Money & Provisions, as I require.¹ I have the honor to be [&c.]

T. Macdonough

ALS, DNA, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 124.

1. For a statement of specific arrangements for a transfer of funds to Macdonough, see Reid & Hart to Hamilton, 16 Nov. 1812, DNA, RG45, MLR, 1812, Vol. 52, No. 58.

Capture of the Brigs *Detroit* and *Caledonia*

Lieutenant Jesse D. Elliott won the first naval battle on Lake Erie on 8 October, when he captured two British brigs that were part of the slender force belonging to the Provincial Marine. The event established Elliott as a man of singular courage and initiative. He mobilized a mixed force of sailors and soldiers and embarked them in two barges with 50 men in each. Approaching the two ships by stealth in the darkest hours of the night, he seized them both. Later, one had to be destroyed, but he had deprived the British of two valuable vessels at a critical time. Elliott went on to become one of the navy's most controversial officers. He participated in the Battle of Lake Erie, but engaged in an unbecoming quarrel with Commodore Perry after victory was achieved. He took Captain James Barron's side in the fatal quarrel that took Commodore Decatur's life on the Bladensburg dueling ground. A maverick officer, he went on to a relatively successful career despite his unpopularity among his peers. The following letters are Elliott's after-action report sent to the secretary of the navy and Major General Brock's report of the incident to Governor General Prevost.

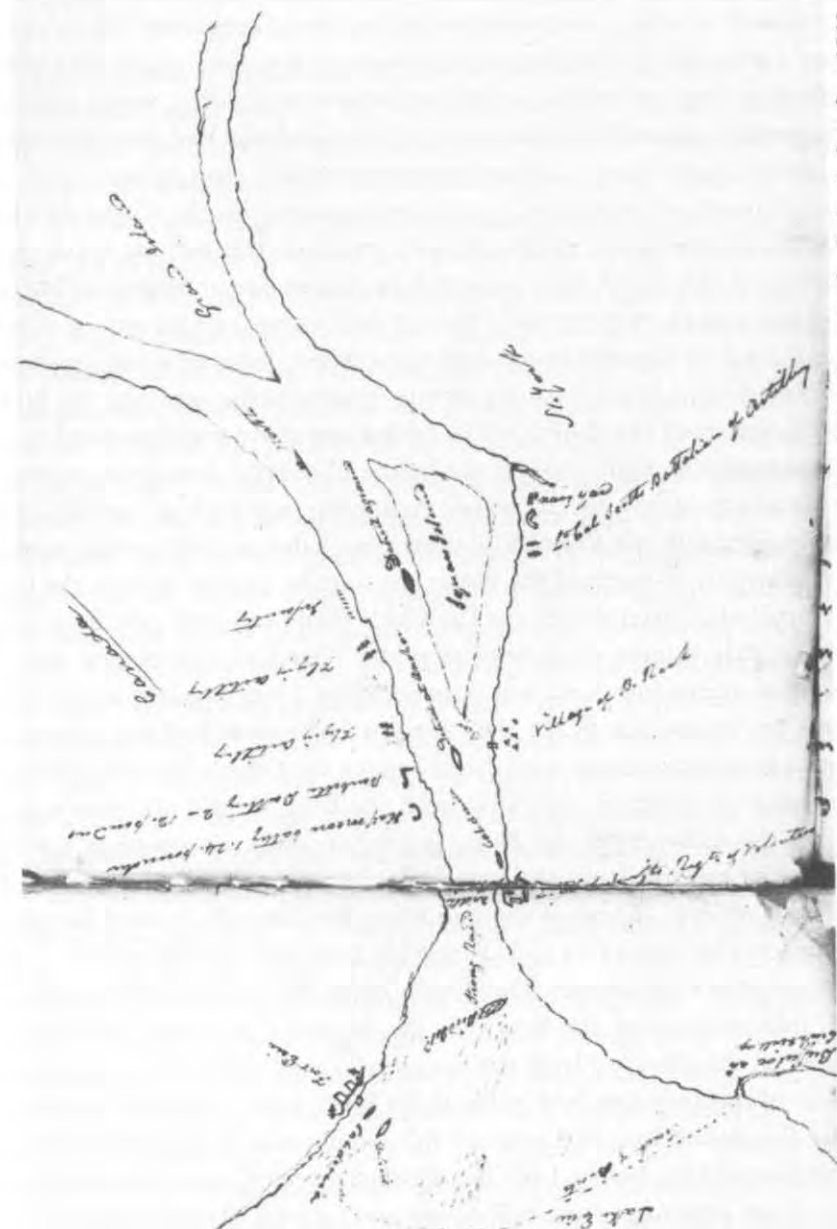
LIEUTENANT JESSE D. ELLIOTT TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Black Rock Octr 9th 1812

Sir

I have the honor to inform you that on the morning of the 8th Inst two British Vessels which I was informed were his Britanic Majesties Brig *Detroit* late the U.S. Brig *Adams* and the Brig *Hunter* mounting 14 Guns, but which afterwards proved to be the Brig *Caledonia* both said to be well armed and manned came down the Lake and Anchored under the protection of Fort Erie. Having been on the lines for some time and in a measure inactively employed I determined to make an attack and if possible get possession of them, a strong inducement to this attempt arose from a conviction that with those two Vessels added to those which I have purchased and am fitting out I should be able to meet the remainder of the British force on the upper Lakes save an incalculable expence and labour to the government. On the morning of their arrivil I heard that our Seamen were but a short distince from this place and immediately dispatched an express to the Officers directing them to use all possible dispatch in getting the men to this place, as I had important service to perform. On their arrivil which was about 12 oclock, I discovered that they had only 20 pistols and neither Cutlasses or Battle Axes. But on application to Genls Smith [Alexander Smyth] and [Amos] Hall of the Regulars and Malitia I was supplied with a few arms and Genl Smith was so good on my request as immediately to detach fifty men from the Regulars armed with Muskuts. By 4 oclock in the afternoon I had my men selected and stationed in two Boats which I had previously prepared for the purpose. With those Boats 50 Men in each and under circumstances very disadvantageous, my men having scarcely had time to refresh themselves after a fatiguing march of 500 miles I put off from the Mouth of Buffaloe Creeke at one oclock the following morning and at 3, I was alongside the Vessels. In the space of about ten minutes I had the prisoners all secured the Top-sails sheeted home and the Vessels under way. Unfortunately the wind was not sufficiently strong to get me up against a rappid current into the Lake where I had understood another Armed Vessel lay at Anchor and I was obliged to run down the River by the Forts under a heavy fire of Round Grape and Canister from a number of pieces of heavy Ordinance and several pieces of flying artillery was compelled to anchor

at a distince of about 400 yards from two of their Batteries. after the discharge of the first Gun which was from the flying Artillery, I hailed the shore and observed to the officer, that if another gun was fired I would bring the Prisoners on deck, and expose them to the same fate we should all share, but notwithstanding they disregarded the caution they continued a constant and destructive fire, one single moments reflection determined me to not to commit an act that would subject me to the imputation of barbarity. The *Caledonia* had been beached in as safe a position as the circumstances would admit of under one of our Battery's at Black Rock. I now brought all the Guns on the *Detroit* on one side next the Enemy stationed the men at them and directed a fire which was continued as long as our ammunition lasted and circumstances permitted. During this contest I endeavoured to get the *Detroit* on our side by sending a line (their being no wind) on shore with all the line I could muster but the current being so strong the Boat could not reach the shore, I then hailed our shore and requested that warps would be made fast on the land and sent on board the attempt to do which again proved useless. As the fire was such as would in all probability sink the Vessel in a short time I determined to drift down the River out of reach of the Battery and make a stand against the flying artillery. I accordingly cut the Cable made sail with very light airs and at that instant discovered that the Pilot had abandoned me. I dropped astern for about ten minutes when I was brought up on our shore on Squaw Island. got the boarding boat ready had the prisoners put in and sent on shore with directions for the Officer to return for me and what property we could get from the Brig. He did not return owing to the difficulty in the Boats getting on shore. Discovering a sciff under the counter I put the four remaining prisoners in the Boat and with my officers I went on shore to bring the Boat off. I asked for protection to the Brig of Lt Col [Winfield] Scott who readily gave it. At this moment I discovered a boat with about 40 soldiers from the British side making for the Brig they got on board but were soon compelled to abandon her with the loss of nearly all their men during the whole of this morning both sides of the River kept up alternately a constant fire on the Brig and so much injured her that it was impossible to have floated her. Before I left her she had received twelve shot of large size in her bends her sails in Ribbons and rigging all cut to pieces. To my officers and men I feel under great obligation. To Capt. [Nathan] Towson & Lt [Isaac] Roach of the 2n Regiment of Artilery Ensign Prestman [William Presman] of the Infantry to Captain Chapin Mr



Lieutenant Elliott's Diagram of the Attack on Detroit and Caledonia on Lake Erie, 8 October 1812

John McComb Messers John Tower Thos Davis Peter Overstock & James Sloan resident gentlemen of Buffaloe, for their Soldier & Sailor like conduct In a word Sir every man fought as if with their hearts animated only by the interest and honor of their Country.

The Prisoners I have turned over to the Military the *Detroit* mounted Six 6 pound long Guns A Comd Lt Lt Marines a Boatswn & Gunner and fifty six men, about 30 American Prisoners on board Musquets Pistols Cullasses and battle Axes. In Boarding her I lost one man one officer wounded Mr John C Cummings Actg Midshipman a Bayonet through the leg, his conduct was correct and deserves the notice of the Department. The *Caledonia* mounted 2 small guns Blunderbusses Pistols Musquets Cullasses and Boarding Pikes 12 men including officers 10 Prisoners on board. The Boat Boarding her Commanded by Sailing Master Geo Watts performed his duty in a masterly stile but one man killed and 4 wounded badly, I am afraid mortally. I enclose you a list of the Officers and Men engaged in the enterprise and also a view of the Lake and River in the different situations of Attack.¹ In a day or two I shall forward the names of the Prisoners. The *Caledonia* belongs to the N W Company loaded with Furs worth I understand 200,000 Dls. With sentiments of Respect [&c.]

Jesse D. Elliott

ALS, DNA, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 93.

1. The enclosed list has not been found; Elliott's diagram of the action is filed with the letter. See illustration on p. 330. To Commodore Chauncey, his immediate superior, Lieutenant Elliott sent a similar but briefer report. See Elliott to Chauncey, 8 Oct. 1812, DNA, RG45, CL, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 127a.

MAJOR GENERAL SIR ISAAC BROCK TO
GOVERNOR GENERAL SIR GEORGE PREVOST

Fort George
October 11t 1812

Sir,

I had scarcely closed my dispatch to Your Excellency of the 9th when I was suddenly called away to Fort Erie in consequence of a bold, and I regret to say, successful attack by the enemy on His Majesty's Brig *Detroit*, and the private Brig *Caledonia*, which had both arrived the

preceding day from Amherstburg. It appears, by every account I have been able to collect, that a little before day a number of boats full of men dropped down the current unobserved, boarded both vessels at the same moment, and cutting their Cables were proceeding with them to the American Shore, when Major [Adam] Ormsby, who witnessed the transaction, directed the Batteries to open on them, and soon compelled the enemy to abandoned the *Detroit*, which grounded about the center of Squaw Island a little more than a Mile below Black Rock. She was then boarded by a party of the 49th Regiment, but as no Anchor remained, and being otherwise unprovided with every means by which she could be hauled off, the officer, after throwing her guns over board, and sustaining a smart fire of musketry, decided to quit her—A private, who is accused of getting drunk, and a prisoner of war, who was unable from his wounds to escape with about twenty brought by the *Detroit* from Amherstburg, remained however behind.—whom it was necessary to remove before the vessel could be destroyed, and Cornet [John] Pell Major, of the Provincial Cavalry offered his Service, Being unfortunately wounded as he was getting onboard, and falling back in the boat, a confusion arose, during which the boat drifted from the vessel, leaving two of the 41st, who had previously ascended, onboard. In the mean time the *Caledonia* was secured by the Enemy, and a cargo of furs belonging to the South West Company landed.

The Batteries on both sides were warmly engaged the whole of the day, but I am happy to say no mischief was sustained by the enemy's fire. I reached the spot soon after sun set and intended to have renewed the attempt to secure the *Detroit*: which, assisted by the Crew of the *Lady Prevost* which had anchored a short time before, I had every prospect of accomplishing, but before the necessary arrangements could be made, the enemy boarded her, and in a few minutes she was seen in flames.

This event is particularly unfortunate, and may reduce us to incalculable distress. The enemy is making every exertion to gain a naval Superiority on both Lakes which if they accomplish I do not see how we can retain the Country. Three Vessels are fitting out for war on the other side of Squaw Island which I would have attempted to destroy but for Your Excellency's repeated instructions to forbear—now such a force is collected for their protection as will render any operation against them very hazardous.

The manner our guns were served yesterday point out the necessity of an encrease, if possible, of Artillery Men to our present small

number of regulars—The Militia evinced a good spirit, but fired without much effect—The enemy however, must have lost Some Men, and it is only wonderful that in a contest of a whole day no life was lost on our side. The fire of the enemy was incessant, but badly directed till the close of the day, when it began to improve. Lieut [Charles Frédéric] Rolette who Commanded the *Detroit* had, and I believe deservedly, the character of a brave attentive officer. His Vessel must, however, have been surprized, an easy operation where she lay at anchor, and I have reason to suspect that this consideration was not sufficiently attended to by the officers Commanding on board and on Shore.

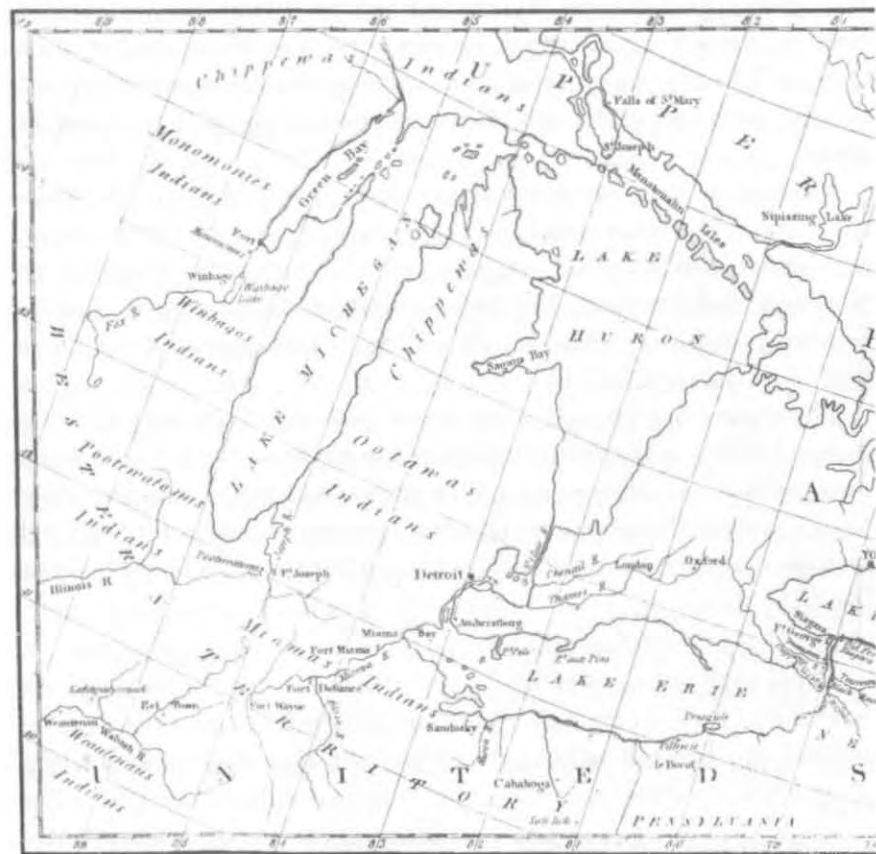
We have not only sustained a heavy loss in the Vessel, but likewise in the Cargo, which consisted of four twelves, a large quantity of shot, and about two hundred muskets, all of which were intended for Kingston and Prescott. The only consolation remaining is that she escaped the enemy, whose conduct after his first essay, did not entitle him to so rich a prize.

The enemy has brought some boats over land from Slusher to the Niagara River, and made an attempt last night to carry off the guard over the store at Queenston. I shall refrain as long as possible, under Your Excellency's positive injunctions, from every hostile act, although sensible that each day's delay gives him an advantage. I have the honor [&c.]

Isaac Brock¹
M.G.

ALS, Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, War of 1812, C677, p. 127.

1. This was the last official report General Brock wrote before his death in the Battle of Queenston Heights on 13 Oct. 1812.



Chauncey's Arrival at Sackets Harbor

Commodore Chauncey arrived at Sackets Harbor after approximately ten days travel between New York, Albany, and Oswego. The bad roads and varying depth of water in the Mohawk River were to be key factors in matters of supply, as he observed in the following letter. The secretary had ordered Chauncey to seek action with the enemy as soon as possible, so as to obtain control of the lake before winter set in, but there were doubts in Chauncey's mind that this could be done.

COMMODORE ISAAC CHAUNCEY TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Sacket's-Harbor Oct. 8. 1812

Sir,

I arrived here on the 6th instant, in company with His Excellency The Governor, through the worst roads I ever saw, particularly near this place; in consequence of which I have ordered the Stores, intended for this station to Oswego, from which place I shall send them by water: for which purpose I have this day ordered Lt Woolsey to Oswego to purchase three schooners that are now lying there, upon which I intend to mount one thirty-two-pounder, and then take on board the guns and stores for Sackets'-Harbour. I have ordered one hundred men, besides officers (who are now on the road from Albany) to proceed to Oswego, instead of this place. These men will be sufficient to man the vessels at Oswego, and to bring them here, I think, in safety.

I found the *Oneida* in good order, and completely prepared for service. Lt Woolsey has purchased, by my orders, the Schooners *Genesee-Packet*, *Lord Nelson*, *Collector*, *Experiment*, and *Julia*, all which are at this harbor, and now preparing for service. I intend to put upon these vessels, one or two heavy guns, as the vessels may be able to bear them. If the guns and stores arrive in time, these vessels as well as those at Oswego, will be ready to proceed on service by the first of November; in which case I shall seek the enemy on the lake, and if not to be found there I will look for him within his own waters. I am, however, apprehensive, that owing to the badness of the roads and the lowness of the water in the Mohawk, that the guns and stores will not

arrive in time, for us to do any thing decisive against the enemy this fall. No exertions on my part shall be wanting to accomplish the wishes of the government before the winter sets in.

We have a ship on the stocks here which will mount 24, 32 pounders (carronades) and will be ready to launch in about six weeks. I have ordered the materials for another of the same description to be prepared, which will be built this winter. As there are no merchant vessels to be procured, I have ordered, in lake Erie, the materials for two brigs (that will mount 20 guns each) to be prepared at Black-Rock; besides three gun-boats all which will be ready for service for the spring. I am told, that it is utterly impossible to transport any ordnance to Buffaloe, by land, at this time of the year; consequently, we could not arm our vessels upon lake Erie, before winter, even if they were ready.

I shall take an opportunity, in the course of a few days to write again, more in detail, upon the subject of the armament, at this place, as well as our prospect of success this fall.¹ I am [&c.]

Isaac Chauncey

LS, DNA, RG45, CL, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 106.

1. Chauncey to Hamilton, 12 Oct. 1812, DNA, RG45, CL, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 114.

"To Obtain Command of this Lake"

Military reversals for American troops in the Michigan Territory made it all the more important for United States forces to cut British communications and to interdict their supply lines which stretched from Quebec and Montreal to Kingston, York, the Niagara peninsula, and thence to Amherstburg and Detroit. This depended on American warships gaining control of Lakes Erie and Ontario at the earliest possible moment. Secretary Hamilton's orders to Commodore Chauncey stressed this goal repeatedly.

By truly herculean efforts, starting first on Lake Ontario, Chauncey asserted himself. He created a small fleet despite numerous difficulties, pursued the enemy's ships to their homeport at Kingston, and maintained a blockade, effectively preventing the movement of valuable

troops and supplies from the St. Lawrence to Niagara. By the end of November when ice formed and blizzards blew, Chauncey had obtained control of Lake Ontario. This disheartened the British who devoted their efforts to the building of a fleet to contest control when navigation reopened in the spring of 1813. American efforts on Lake Erie were far behind those on Ontario, and the British retained control with a few vessels of the Provincial Marine, despite Lieutenant Elliott's daring seizure of Caledonia and Detroit. The following group of documents consists of a series of reports which Chauncey sent to Secretary Hamilton recording his obstacles, progress, hopes and fears.

COMMODORE ISAAC CHAUNCEY TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Oswego 21st Oct 1812

Sir,

I arrived here from Sackets Harbour on the 18th Inst. where I found four fine schooners from 77 to 105 tons. one of the Schooners (the *Ontario*) belonging to Porter Barton & Co. of Buffaloe I have taken and given a receipt for and will have her value'd as soon as I arrive at the Harbour. the *Charles & Ann* I have this day purchased for \$5800 the other two I am in treaty for and expect I shall obtain them for about \$5500 each altho the Owners ask's \$6000 a piece.

These vessels are not only necessary to owne for the purpose of obtaining the Command of this Lake but we have no other means of sending our guns and stores from here to Sackets Harbour except by these vessels I therefore presume that you will think me perfectly Justifide in making the Purchass

None of our guns or stores have arrived yet. I went to the falls yesterday in hopes I should hear something of them but not a word. I cannot account for this delay. except the water in wood creek is so low that the boats cannot pass the Lake. This delay is mortifying beyond description particularly at this advanced season of the year. I trust that you will not blame me if I should not be able to accomplish the wishes of the government this fall I cannot do it without the means and I have exerted myself to the utmost to get these means forward but have been frustrated in all my endeavours. I however still hope that such parts

may arrive in time as to enable me to do something befor the winter sets in I have the honor [&c.]

Isaac Chauncey

ALS, DNA, RG45, CL, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 137.

COMMODORE ISAAC CHAUNCEY TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Oswego 22d Oct. 1812

Sir,

The foreman of the Carpenters sent to Buffaloe arrived here this Morning. They had commenced the alterations of three merchant Vessels purchased by Lt Elliott for account of the Navy Department, but the British has kept up such a constant fire with shot & shells upon the vessels and houses at Black Rock ever since the *Adams* and *Calladonia* was cut out that the Carpenters broke of and went to Betavia for safety and nothing could induce them to go back to their work. I have sent Mr Lavarah (the Foreman) back with orders to Lt [Samuel] Angus to endeavour to get the Vessels down to Tonnawanta Creek where they will be out of the reach of the fire of the Enemy and where the Carpenters can work at them. Apprehensive that all the Carpenters cannot be employed to advantage at Buffaloe I have ordered one half to Sackets Harbour where I can employ them untill I can visit Buffaloe myself which I regret to say I cannot do for some weeks yet unless I relinquish my views upon this Lake, which I do not wish to do untill the frost drives me from it.

I have information to day that seven boats have arrived at the falls with two large guns and other stores I immediately dispatched Lt Woolsey with twenty men to assist in getting them in and out of the boats and facilitating their shipment to this place where if they arrive tomorrow I shall put them onboard of the Schooner *Ontario* and proceed myself with them to Sackets Harbour and leave Lt Woolsey here to receive the other guns and stores and put them on board of the other vessels and follow me to Sackets Harbour where if they arrive by the 10th

of next month I shall proceed in search of the Enemy. I have the honor to be [&c.]

Isaac Chauncey

ALS, DNA, RG45, CL, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 138.

COMMODORE ISAAC CHAUNCEY TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Sackett's harbor Tuesday
27 Oct. 1812.

Sir,

I arrived here the day before yesterday from Oswego in the Schooner *Charles & Ann* with a full cargo of military stores amongst which are 3 long 32 pounders and one 24 together with a number of Sixes & fours and some 18 pdr Carronades. These will enable me to fit out the vessels here immediately, and I am in hopes to be able to say to you by the next mail that I am nearly ready for a cruise.

I left Lieut Woolsey at Oswego to attend to the shipment of such guns and stores as may arrive this week, and I have reason to hope that the *Diana* will leave there for this place tomorrow, and that the other two will follow by Saturday.

I have this day prepared the *Oneida* for heaving down to clean her Bottom and expect to have her ready for sea by the 30th; and I hope to have all my little Squadron ready before the 10th of November and shall use every exertion to give you some account of the Enemy's Naval Force on this Lake before the first Day of December. I have the honor to be [&c.]

Isaac Chauncey

LS, DNA, RG45, CL, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 148. Endorsed in left margin: "very pleasing P.H."

COMMODORE ISAAC CHAUNCEY TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Sacket's Harbor
4 Novr 1812

Sir,

On Monday Evening last, I was told that the Picquet Guard on Horse-Island saw about 12 o'clock a Schooner look into Henderson's harbor about 7 miles from this place. As I expected on that day the *Diana* from Oswego with guns and Stores I was apprehensive for her safety. I therefore got underway immediately with the *Oneida* and stood for Kingston, determined to cut her off if possible. The night proved very dark and rainy with Squalls. I however found myself within 6 miles of Kingston at daylight on Tuesday morning, and as the Haze cleared away we discovered the *Royal George* and 2 large Schooners lying at Anchor about 5 miles to windward of us. Immediately wore Ship to the Southward and cleared for Action, expecting every moment that the Enemy would come down upon us, and it was out of our power to avoid an action, situated as we were within 4 miles of the Canada Shore which was bearing N. W., Kingston about N. E., the Charity Shoals S.E., and the Enemy S. W., with the wind W. S. W. I therefore was obliged to keep close upon a wind to the southward and passed within 4 or 5 miles of the Enemy, and kept in sight about 4 hours. All this time he took no notice of us whatever. This is the more strange as he had at least three guns to one and four times the number of men. I can only account for such strange conduct by seeing us at daylight in the morning stretching out (as we must have appeared to him) from Kingston Harbor, he must have supposed us one of his own Vessels.

I stood to the Southward until I made Oswego and then bore up and run down along the Coast and arrived here last Evening where I found the *Diana* with a full load of guns and Stores. I immediately had her discharged and commenced the alteration to mount 10-18 pounders Carronades upon her, and hope to have her ready in 36 hours. The other two Schooners I expect tomorrow. -I have the honor [&c.]

Isaac Chauncey

N.B. The British Vessels that we passed at anchor I presume were the *Royal George* 26 guns; *Prince Regent* 18 guns; *Duke of Gloucester* 16 guns.

LS, DNA, RG45, CL, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 161.

COMMODORE ISAAC CHAUNCEY TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Sackets' Harbor
5th Novr 1812

Sir,

I have been under the necessity of altering the names of some of the Schooners purchased here which I hope you will approve of.¹ The Original names as well as the present ones are hereto annexed. I have the honor to be [&c.]

Isaac Chauncey

Original names of the
Schooners purchased for ac-
count of the N. Depmt, U.S.
on Lake Ontario

Schooner *Charles & Ann*
" *Diana*
" *Fair American*
" *Ontario*
" *Genessee packet*
" *Experiment*
" *Collector*
" *Lord Nelson*
" *Julia*

Present names of the Schooners
belong to N.D. of U. States on
Lake Ontario

Governor Tompkins
Hamilton
Fair American
Ontario
Conquest
Growler
Pert
Scourge
Julia

LS, DNA, RG45, CL, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 162.

1. On 19 Nov., Secretary Hamilton gave his approval of these names and of the naming of the corvette *Madison* which was nearing completion at Sackets Harbor. See Hamilton to Chauncey, 19 Nov. 1812, DNA, RG45, SNL, Vol. 10, p. 206.

COMMODORE ISAAC CHAUNCEY TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Sackets' Harbor
5th Novr 1812

Sir

The Ship building at this place will be launched in about three weeks. Will you be pleased to direct what her name is to be? If you had no objections I should like that *Madison* should oppose The *Royal George* and *Prince Regent*.

As I shall be obliged to leave this station for lake Erie as soon as the winter sets in, it will be proper to have a Commander for the Ship as soon as possible. She will be one of the best commands for a Master Commandant in the service: She is a Ship of nearly 600 Tons and will mount 26 guns-24-32 pd Carronades, and 2 long 9s. I have the honor to be [&c.]

Isaac Chauncey

LS, DNA, RG45, CL, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 163.

COMMODORE ISAAC CHAUNCEY TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Sackets' Harbor
6th Nov. 1812

Sir,

As I have reason to believe that The *Royal George*, *Prince Regent*, and *Duke of Gloucester*, have gone up the lake with Troops to reinforce Fort George, and as I have to believe that other Troops are waiting at Kingston for their return destined for the same post, I have determined to proceed with the force I have ready in quest of the Enemy. My present intention is, to take a position on the Canada Shore near some small Islands called the "False Ducks" where the Enemy are obliged to pass and where I will wait their return to Kingston. If I should succeed in my Enterprize (which I have but little doubt of) I shall make an attack upon Kingston for the purpose of destroying the Guns and Publick Stores at that Station.

I shall proceed for my Station this Evening or tomorrow morning with the following Vessels, to wit, Brig *Oneida*, and Schooners *Hamilton*, *Govr Tompkins*, *Conquest*, *Growler*, *Julia*, and *Pert*, mounting altogether 40 guns of different Calibres and 430 men including Marines. With this Force, I hope to give a good account of the Enemy although he is more than double our force in guns and men. His consists of the following Vessels as nearly as I can ascertain, to wit, The Ship *Royal George* 26 guns, 260 men; Ship *Earl of Moira* 18 guns 200 men; Schooners *Prince Regent* 18 guns 150 men; *Duke of Gloucester* 14 guns 80 men; *Taranto* 14 guns 80 men, *Governor Simcoe* 12 guns 70 men; *Seneca* 4 guns 40 men: making a grand Total of 108 guns and 890 men.—

The officers and men under my Command are all extremely anxious to meet the Enemy. We cannot command success but we will endeavour to deserve it.—I have the honor to be [&c.]

Isaac Chauncey

LS, DNA, RG45, CL, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 167.

COMMODORE ISAAC CHAUNCEY TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Sackets' Harbor
13th Novr 1812

Sir,

I arrived here last Evening in a gale of Wind the pilots having refused to keep the Lake. On the 8th I fell in with The *Royal George* and chased her into the Bay of Quanti where I lost sight of her in the night. In the morning of the 9th we again got sight of her lying in Kingston channel. We gave chase and followed her into the harbor of Kingston where we engaged her and the Batteries for 1 hour and 45 minutes. I had made up my mind to board her, but she was so well protected by the batteries and wind blowing directly in, it was deemed imprudent to make the attempt at that time: the pilots also refused to take charge of the vessels. Under these circumstances and it being after sundown I determined to hawl off and renew the attack the next morning. We beat up in good order under a heavy fire from The *Royal George* and Batteries to 4 mile Point where we anchored.

It blew heavy in Squalls from the Westward during the night, and there was every appearance of a gale of wind. The pilots became alarmed and I thought it most prudent to get into a place of more safety. I therefore (very reluctantly) deferred renewing the attack upon the Ship and Forts until a more favorable opportunity. at 7 a.m. on the 10th I made the signal to weigh and we beat out a very narrow channel under a very heavy press of Sail to the open Lake. at 10 we fell in with The *Governor Simcoe* running for Kingston, and chased her into the harbour. She escaped by running over a Reef of Rocks under a heavy fire from The *Governor Tompkins*, The *Hamilton*, and The *Julia* which cut her very much. all her people ran below while under the fire of these vessels. The *Hamilton* chased her into 9 feet water before she hawled off. We tacked to the Southward with an intention of returning to our Station at the Ducks but it coming on to blow very heavy, the pilots told me that it would be unsafe to keep the Lakes. I bore up for this place where I arrived last night.

In our passage through the Bay of Quanti, I discovered a Schooner at the Village of Armingstown which we took possession of, but finding that she would detain us (being then in chace of the *Royal George*) I ordered Lieut [J. S.] Macpherson to take out her sails and rigging and burn her; which he did. We also took the schooner *Mary Hatt* from Niagara at the mouth of Kingston Harbor, and took her with us to our anchorage. The next morning, finding that She could not beat through the channel with us, I ordered the Sailing Master in the *Growler* to take her under convoy and run down past Kingston, anchor in the East end of Long Island and wait for a wind to come up on the East side. I was also in hopes that The *Royal George* might be induced to follow for the purpose of retaking our prize, but her Commander was too well aware of the consequences to leave his moorings.

We lost in this affair 1 man killed and 3 slightly wounded, with a few Shot through our sails. The other vessels lost no men and received but little injury in their Hull and Sails with the exception of the *Pert*, whose gun bursted in the early part of the action and wounded her Commander (sailing master [Robert] Arundel) badly, and a midshipman and 3 men slightly. Mr Arundel who refused to quit the Deck although wounded, was knocked overboard in beating up to our anchorage and I am sorry to say was drowned.

The *Royal George* must have received very considerable injury in her Hull and in men, as the gun vessels with a long 32 pounder were

seen to strike her almost every Shot, and it was observed that she was re-inforced with Troops four different times during the Action.

I have great pleasure in saying that the officers and men on board of every vessel, behaved with utmost Coolness and are extremely anxious to meet the Enemy on the open Lake: and as long as I have the honor to command such officers and such men, I can have no doubts as to the result.

I think I can say with great propriety that we have now the command of The Lake and that we can transport Troops and Stores to any part of it without any risk of an attack from The Enemy. although the whole of his naval Force was not collected at Kingston, yet the force at the different Batteries would more than counter-balance the Vessels that were absent. It was thought by all the Officers in the Squadron that the Enemy had more than 30 guns mounted at Kingston and from 1000 to 1500 men. The *Royal George* protected by this force was driven into the inner harbor, under the protection of the Musquetry by The *Oneida* and 4 Small schooners fitted as gunboats, the *Governor Tompkins* not having been able to join in the Action until about Sundown owing to the lightness of the winds, and the *Pert's* gun having burst 2d or 3d Shot.¹

We are replacing all deficiencies and I shall proceed up the Lake the first wind in hopes to fall in with the *Earl Moira* and The *Prince Regent* at any rate I shall endeavour to prevent their forming a junction with The *Royal George* again this winter. I shall also visit Niagara River if practicable, in order to land some guns and Stores that I have taken on board for that purpose. If the Enemy are still in possession of Queenstown, I shall try to land them a few miles below. I shall have the honor of writing you more in detail upon this subject on my return or perhaps before I leave here if the Wind should continue ahead. I have the honor to be [&c.]

Isaac Chauncey

LS, DNA, RG45, CL, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 176.

1. For the view of a Canadian historian, see C. P. Stacey's "Commodore Chauncey's Attack on Kingston Harbour, Nov. 10, 1812," *Canadian Historical Review* 32 (June 1951): 126-38.

COMMODORE ISAAC CHAUNCEY TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Sackets Harbor
17th Novr 1812

Sir,

In my letter of the 13th I informed you that I had directed The *Growler* to convoy the *Mary Hatt* (Prize) down past Kingston and come up on the South East Side of Long-Island, and join me at the Duck Islands. This service, sailing Master [Mervine P.] Mix performed as soon as the Gale abated that obliged us to make an harbor and in his passage to the Ducks he fell in with His B. M. Ship *Earl Moira* convoying the Sloop *Elizabeth* from York to Kingston. Mr Mix in a very gallant manner bore down upon the Sloop and took possession of her within 2 miles of the *Earl Moira* and arrived here safe with his prize and gave me information of the situation that he left The *Earl Moira* in. I immediately weighed with the Squadron (although a thick Snow-Storm from the N.E.) and stood for Kingston in hopes to cut her off from that harbor. About midnight the wind changed to the N.N.W. and blew a gale. We had much difficulty in weathering the Galops and were three different times during the night very near being wrecked upon the rocks on the North side of those Islands. I however persevered in beating up for Kingston Channel and at 11 a.m. on the 14th we got sight of the Ship just entering the harbor. Finding that further pursuit would be useless the wind having changed to the N.W. and blowing a gale, with a Severe Snow-Storm, the small vessels labouring extremely, and the ice making so fast upon the Slides of our Carronades that we could not have made use of them, I thought it prudent to make a Port & accordingly made the Signal for the whole Squadron to bear up for this place where we arrived the same evening.

The *Elizabeth* is a fine Sloop and can be fitted for service. She was in Ballast bound from York to Kingston. Capt James Brock of H.B. Majesty's 49th Regt (and a near relative of the late Genl Brock) was a passenger on board of the *Elizabeth* and had in charge a part of the Baggage of his deceased relative.

Yesterday Colo [Lt. Col. John] Vincent (who commands at Kingston) sent a flag of Truce to this place requesting that Capt Brock might be permitted to return on his parole, to which I have acceded,

and he left here this morning together with all the other Prisoners except one belonging to each of the Vessels whom I detained as evidence in their condemnation. Capt Brock has pledged his word of honor to return to this place immediately should you disapprove of my having granted him his Parole. We learned from the people who came in the flag that in our attack upon the *Royal George* on the 10th inst we did her much injury: that 4 Shot passed through her between wind and water, and that when She slipped and hawled on shore she was in a sinking condition, with both pumps going, 3 of her guns dismounted, her fore and main rigging cut away, several man killed and wounded, and the Ship very much injured in other respects. Many of the Shot that passed through the Ship, went into the Town and injured many houses. The *Simcoe* that we chased into the Harbor the next day, was so much shattered that she sunk before she got to the Wharf, and is believed to be rendered useless, at least for this Year.

It is the general opinion that the Enemy will not attempt the Lake again this winter, but I am of a different opinion and think that they will repair the *Royal George*, and if they find the Coast clear, will endeavour to form a junction with their force at York. Of this I should have no objection provided they would come out and give us battle, but as I have no hopes of that, I shall endeavour to keep them separated. The *Govn Tompkins*, *Hamilton*, *Conquest*, and *Growler* are now cruising between the Ducks and Kingston in order to intercept every thing passing in and out of that Port.

I have taken on board Guns, Shot, carriages &c &c for Niagara for which place I shall sail the first fair wind in company with The *Julia*, *Pert*, *Fair American*, *Ontario*, and *Scourge*. The 3 last I have fitted since the 13th and can add the two Prizes to my little force if it was deemed necessary, but I think myself now so completely Master of this Lake that any addition to my force would be useless unless the Enemy should add to his, which I think out of his power to do this winter.

I am now prepared to transport Troops or Stores to any part of the Lake with perfect safety (except from the Elements) and I have so informed Generals Dearborn, [Richard] Dodge, and [Jacob] Brown, and that I am ready to co-operate with them in any Enterprize that may be deemed practicable, against the enemy.

I trust Sir that you will allow I have not been idle since I received the honor of your appointment to this Station, particularly when you take into view the difficulties I had to encounter in creating a force

sufficiently strong to command this Lake this Fall, and I should certainly have destroyed the principle naval force of the Enemy but from the circumstance of a Squall which enabled him to take Shelter under the guns of his Fortifications. If however Col [Alexander] Macomb who is now on his march arrives before the severe weather sets in, I will again attack him in his present position, and shall have no doubt of complete success.

I herewith enclose a list of the killed and wounded and a Statement of the damage sustained by the Squadron: also a list of Prizes and Prisoners taken from the Enemy. I have the honor to be

Isaac Chauncey

N.B. Be pleased to correct an error in the date of my communication of the 13th inst. It was the 8th we left this place, and fell in with the Enemy on the 9th and engaged him on the 10th. This error arose from my being much hurried in taking notes from journal.

LS, DNA, RG45, CL, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 183.

[Enclosure]
Return of Prizes taken by the Squadron under the Command of Com-
modore Isaac Chauncey.

Schr	Two Brothers	Burned
"	Mary Hatt	Brought in
Sloop	Elizabeth	"
Sam ^l T Anderson		
Secretary to the Commanding Officer		
of the U.S. Naval forces on the Lakes		
Sackets' Harbor		
17 Nov 1812		

Return of British Prisoners made by the Squadron under the Com-
mand of Comre Isaac Chauncey

James Brock	Capt. in the 49th Regt
George Miller	Master
Murney	"
Joseph Dourent	Seaman

Peter Bell " "
Jno Campbell " "
Wm Casteel " "
Joseph Cloukay " "
Geo Lamgley " "
Peter Tizderine Mate

Sam^l T. Anderson
Secretary to the Commanding Officer
of the U.S. Naval forces on the Lakes
Sackets' Harbor
17 Novr 1812.

Return of the Killed & Wounded in the Squadron under the Com-
mand of Commodore Isaac Chauncey in his attack upon the *Royal*
George and the Batteries at Kingston on the 10th Novr 1812.

Vessels Names	Names of the killed	rank	Names of the wounded	rank	Remarks
<i>Oneida</i>	Thos Garret	Sean	D. [David] Webber	QG	
"	—	—	Jno White	S }	slightly
"	—	—	Wm Baker	B }	
<i>G Tompkins</i>	none	—	none	—	
<i>Hamilton</i>	—	—	—	—	
<i>Pert</i>	—	—	Rt Arundel	Sg Master	By the bursting of the gun was afterwards knocked overboard & drowned
	—	—	E. [Eleazer]	Midsn	all slightly
	—	—	H. Massey		
	—	—	T Harrison	B.M.	
	—	—	J. Johnson	S.	
<i>Conquest</i>	none	—	—	—	
<i>Julia</i>	—	—	Wm Palmer	O.S.	slightly

Sam^l T Anderson

Secretary to the Commander in
Chief of the U. States Naval
forces on the Lakes
17 Novr 1812

Return of Damage sustained by the Squadron under the Command of
Commodore Isaac Chauncey in his attack upon The *Royal George* and
The Batteries at Kingston on the 10th Novr 1812

Oneida 1 gun dismantled and 1 strand of the sheet
Cable cut
Governor Tompkins none
Conquest none
Hamilton 1 gun disabled
Pert large gun burst
Julia 2 Shot in her Hull
Growler 1 Shot through her magazine

N.B. all the vessels had a few Shot through their Sails

ALS, DNA, RG45, CL, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 183.

COMMODORE ISAAC CHAUNCEY TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Sackets' harbor
21 Novr 1812

Sir,

In consequence of the appearance of an easterly wind, I weighed
with the Squadron on the 19th and proceeded from this place with the
intention of running for Presqu' Isle on the Canada Shore, for the pur-
pose of intercepting the Enemy if he should make an attempt to form a
junction with the vessels at York. It was also my intention to send a part
of the Force to Niagara river and if the armistice was still in force to
land a number of guns & stores that I had on board for that Station.
We had scarcely cleared the harbor before the wind shifted to the
Westward and encreased to a gale accompanied with a severe Snow-
Storm. The cold was so intense and the ice made so fast upon the small

vessels that I was (from motives of humanity and prudence) obliged to return to Port where we have remained ever since.

The Winter in this quarter appears to be fairly set in as it has been snowing for the last three days, and the upper part of this Bay is frozen over. In fact, this harbour was frozen quite across this morning. I however do not relinquish all hopes: we may yet have a moderate spell of weather for a few days. at any rate, I shall not return from the Lake until the Enemy has laid up his Vessels, or that I am closed in with Ice. I have the honor to be [&c.]

Isaac Chauncey

LS, DNA, RG45, CL, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 185.

COMMODORE ISAAC CHAUNCEY TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Sackets' Harbor
22 Novr 1812

Sir,

I have the satisfaction of informing you that Colo [Alexander] Macomb with a part of his Regiment (say about 400 effective men) arrived here yesterday, with orders from Major Genl Dearborn to co-operate with me in any enterprize against the enemy that may be deemed practicable. Colo Macomb has marched with uncommon expedition through roads which to an officer of less Zeal would have appeared impassable. The consequence however is that his men are so worn down with fatigue that they necessarily require some few days to recruit.

From the advanced season of the year I think that any expedition by water would be attended with much difficulty and great danger of the loss of our little naval force, and of consequence, of the ascendancy that we have obtained on this Lake. Moreover, I have it from the best authority that the Enemy has collected a force at Kingston of upwards of 3,000 men, amongst which are 1000 Regulars of the 49th and Glengary Regiments.

At Prescott, (opposite to Ogdensburgh) the Enemy have about 1000 Militia and from 9 to 12 pieces of cannon. That place we could take and bring off the guns, but I think it very questionable whether

the object of such an Enterprize is worth the risk of getting our little Fleet froze up in the St Laurence, a circumstance which might enable the Enemy to effect their destruction. at any rate I shall be governed by circumstances, and keep in view the main object of the Government (that of keeping Command of this Lake) and not risk too much for any partial advantage. I have the honor to be [&c.]

Isaac Chauncey

LS, DNA, RG45, CL, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 187.

COMMODORE ISAAC CHAUNCEY TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Sackets' Harbor
26th Novr 1812

Sir,

I have much satisfaction in informing you that the U.S. Ship "*Madison*" (so called until your pleasure is known) was launched this day without accident, amidst the acclamations of hundreds.

The *Madison* is a beautiful Corvette-built ship of the following dimensions-112 feet keel: 32 1/2 feet Beam: 11 1/2 feet Hold: 580 Tons, and will mount 24-32 pounders, carronades, and has been built in the short time of 45 days, nine weeks since the timber that she is composed of was growing in the Forrest. I trust that when fitted and manned that She will not disgrace her name or Flag.¹ I have the honor to be [&c.]

Isaac Chauncey

ALS, DNA, RG45, CL, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 192. Endorsed at foot of letter: "All highly approved. P.H."

1. The first commanding officer of this ship was Lieutenant Jesse D. Elliott.

Perry Offers His Services

Master Commandant Oliver H. Perry conveyed word in the following letter that he was available for active duty on the northern lakes. Macdonough and Chauncey were already clearly in place on Lakes Champlain and Ontario. Perry's main contender for command of Lake Erie was Lieutenant Jesse D. Elliott who had already established a reputation for himself by his actions at Black Rock, but Perry was his senior. Yet, Perry still had to wait more than two months before receiving orders to Lake Erie.

MASTER COMMANDANT OLIVER H. PERRY TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Newport Novr 28th 1812

Sir

I have requested my friend Mr Wm S. Rogers to waite on you, with a tender of my services for the Lakes. There are fifty or sixty men under my command who are remarkably strong and active, and capable of performing any service; In the hope that I should command them whenever they should meet the enemy I have taken unwearied pains in preparing them for such an event. I therefore beg Sir, as a great favor, we may be employed in some way Servicable to our Country 'and honorable to ourselves. At all events, I hope Sir, you may have some situation for me more active than my present command.¹ Very Respectfully [&c.]

O. H. Perry

ALS, DNA, RG45, MC, 1812, Vol. 1, No. 121.

1. Secretary of the Navy William Jones appointed Perry to the command of Lake Erie after the personal intervention of Commodore Chauncey on Perry's behalf. See Chauncey to Jones, 21 Jan. 1813, DNA, RG45, CL, 1813, Vol. 1, No. 28; and Jones to Perry, 5 Feb. 1813, DNA, RG45, SNL, Vol. 10, p. 240.

Lieutenant Angus in Charge at Black Rock

As was frequently the case when a senior naval officer was not present, the small naval detachment located at Black Rock on the Niagara River was placed under the army's overall command. On 16 October, Major General Van Rensselaer was relieved by Brigadier General Alexander Smyth. Despite weakened and unsteady troops, reinforced by militia unwilling to do battle on Canadian soil, Smyth planned an attack in late November against British positions opposite Black Rock.

Commodore Chauncey's need for Lieutenant Jesse D. Elliott's services on Lake Ontario left Lieutenant Samuel Angus in charge of the navy's contingent on the Niagara. On 27 November, General Smyth called upon Angus to cooperate with the army and to lead his men in a general assault across the river. The British repulsed the attack, causing severe casualties and forcing Angus and some of his men back into their boats. The first of the following documents provides details of that hard-fought action. Two succeeding letters show Sailing Master Dobbins writing Angus from Erie, Pa., in great frustration for want of instructions to proceed with his shipbuilding; and Lieutenant Angus, seeing that the navy's role on Lake Erie had been ended for the winter, writing to the Navy Department asking to be transferred to the Atlantic.

LIEUTENANT SAMUEL ANGUS TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Black Rock on the River
Niagara 1st Decr 1812

Sir,

I enclose you a copy of a letter from Gen. Smyth according to the purport of the letter Captn. [William] King of the U. States Infantry arrived about 12 O'Clock. I had ten Boats manned by Seventy Seamen, got them Embarked and left the Navy Yard about 2 A.M. I had previous to my leaving the Yard, divided my boats in 4 Divisions the 1st Commanded by Lieut Wragg, 2d by Sailing Master John K. Carter,

3rd Sailing Master George Watts, 4th Sailing Master Alexander Sisson, Myself leading in Boat No 1 commanded by Midshipman Dudley. Boat No 2 commanded by Lieut Wragg, Boat No 3 Midshipman Holdup,¹ and the other Officers commanding, Divisions in succession, having ordered them to keep as close to me as possible I had not got more than three fourths of the way across, before the British discovered us, and opened a severe fire from two Field Pieces and a sharp and well directed fire of Musquetry from about two hundred & fifty men finding the boats were dropping fast and our men getting wounded, determined me to make a desperate push with the 1st Division. I immediately jumped in the water desiring my Officers and Sailors to follow me, In which I was not only Gallantly but desperately assisted, by the Gallant and Intrepid Lieut Wragg and Midshipman Jams A. Dudley, volunteer Swartout and about twenty one of my brave officers and men. I ordered them to charge with their Pikes, they rushed up the Hill and routed the enemy in all directions, spiked the field Pieces, and run the Casson in the Water I was immediately after landing joined by the truly brave Holdup who behaved himself like a Gallant and valuable Officer, and by Captn King of the Infantry with twenty Soldiers who behaved well finding our numbers so small the enemy rallied, and commenced a fire which induced me to order the Barrack & Barn to be fired. Mr Watts and Midshipn Graham had by this time landed, and Watts the Gallant and brave Watts in leading what few Men he could collect, was shot and shortly afterwards expired, Mids. Graham a lad of eighteen while firing the House was badly wounded his conduct was truly meritorious, finding by this time, My officers and men the Gallant 24 had one half been killed or wounded and the rest dispersed in different directions, or returned to the boats and not a Sailor or Soldier near me. I called for My Officers and Men. I found myself by this time, Surrounded by the enemy. I called out for them to Surrender or they would be cut to pieces, they paused for a moment, and having by this time got near ten paces from them they fired and attempted to charge. I turned and fired my Pistol, they Stopped to load, by this time I had got to the waters edge They fired again and charged I rushed into the Water, and got into the only remaining boat which had shoved off by going beyond my depth in the water. I found Captn King of the U.S. Infantry was not on board. I should again have landed but the greater part of the men were wounded and the rest dropping fast by the Gallant and incessant fire of the enemies Musquetry, My Officers and Men

that landed did wonders leading what men they could collect charged and routed the enemy in all directions from five to ten times their number. Captn King who had filed off to the left with his soldiers and four of my men spiked their Guns in two Batteries and was taken Prisoner with two of my Men the other two returned. I beg leave to mention that S. M. Carter, Sisson and Midshipn Brailsford were wounded in the boats, and I am sure that could they have landed they would have done their duty, out of ten Boats that Started the part of four crews amounting in all to about thirty five Seamen and about forty or fifty soldiers only landed, annexed is a list of the Officers and Men that landed with me in the two first boats No 1 & 2 and those officers who afterwards joined me.

2 Jos. Wragg	Lieut	Wounded
Geo Watts	Sailing M	Killed
1 Jas A Dudley	Midn	
Thos Holdup	"	Wounded
2 Wm Mervin [<i>Mervine</i>]	"	Do
John H. Graham.	"	Do
Wm Walker	"	
1 Volunteer Swartout		
2 John Campbell	Boatsn	Wounded
1 Caleb Heydon	Carpenter	
1 Thos Hodings	Qr Master who bore my flag and behaved most gallantly was mortally wounded but preserved the flag and died in a few hours	
1 Joseph Cutter	Boatsn Mate	Taken prisoner
1 John Rack	Do	Wounded
1 James Gray		
1 Giles Barnes		Wounded
1 Jno Clark		
1 Wm Anderson		Killed
1 John Hackleton		Wounded
1 S. J. Hornwall		Wounded
2 Robt Burges		
2 Charles Young		Wounded
2 James Lee		Killed
2 Jas Smith		
2 Jonah Webster		
2 Hugh Campbell		

2 John Lympney

2 John Ford

Wounded

2 John Sterne

Wounded

I took prisoner Lieut Charles King Commanding Officer of the Royal Artillery, he was badly wounded and behaved most Gallantly, he remains under my charge and I shall wait your orders what to do with him, there was eight or ten prisoners taken by our Sailors and the Soldiers who Genl Smyth has in charge. On the next day we commenced firing from my Batteries, which I erected since my arrival and completely drove them from the opposite shore. My Men and the brave Dudley, volunteered their services to cross the army over, Genl Smyth made a false movement kept his men embarked all day and disembarked them in the evening, for no evident reason, as the opposite shore was destitute of both Guns and Men (As an instance three of my Men crossed the River at 11 A.M. loaded their boat with different articles among them a quantity of Carpenters tools and set fire to a number of Buildings and Safely returned) it surprised me but he is best acquainted with his own reasons. I have not been able to do anything with the Vessels purchased on this Lake by Lieut Elliot for all the Carpenters that were employed left here during the firing in taking the *Adams* and *Caladonia* and they would not return.

As my officers are so generally wounded I have selected Saml Swartout Esqr, Acting Aid to Genl Smyth to be the bearer of these dispatches who I wish to mention to you who volunteered his Services under my command on the evening of the 28th Ulto and who Gallantly led on with me and my officers and was in every situation where there was danger or Glory to be acquired. Joseph Roberts Surgions Mate, in the U.S. Navy volunteered his services and took one prisoner, let me particularly recommend him to your Notice. Lieut Wragg speaks handsomely of a Midshipn Mervin who was in the boat with him, who I likewise recommend to your Notice, as to the Gallt Wragg, Dudley and Holdup their conduct speaks for itself, Sailing Masters Carter & Sisson and Midshipn Brailsford, permit also to recommend to Your Notice, Mr Graham Acting Midshipn did his duty Gallantly and is worthy of Notice. Mr Heydon Carpr who was with me and in whose charge I delivered Lieut King of the Royal Artillery, Also Mr Campbell Boatsn who spiked one of the field pieces, they are both worthy of Notice, and My Gallant Petty Officers & Sailors 17 in number of boats No 1 and 2.

I feel fully satisfied that You will pay due regard to the conduct of my brave Officers and Men. Mr Swartout will be able from his intelligence to give every information relative to our different movements on that evening.

The enemy have lost a great number, my men were armed with Pikes, Cuttlases and Boarding axes.

I Enclose you Sir a list of the Killed, wounded & missing. I have the Honor to Be [&c.]

Sam^l Angus

LS, DNA, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 192.

1. Thomas Holdup, adopted son of Colonel Daniel Stevens, legally took the name Thomas Holdup Stevens in 1815.

[Enclosure]

27th Novr 1812

Sir,

The Service is under great obligations to you and you are entitled to an opportunity to distinguish yourself which not offering in your element you shall have one on the land.

Captn King will be with you to night with 150 men you will join him with such force of Seamen as you think proper You will together attack the enemies Batteries, Share the danger, and the honor.

He has instructions which he will communicate. When this enterprise is over I have to request that you will allow the Seamen to assist us over tomorrow. With high esteem [&c.]

(Sd) Alexr Smyth
Brig Genl(A true Copy)
Lieut Angus

Copy, DNA, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 192.

SAILING MASTER DANIEL DOBBINS TO LIEUTENANT SAMUEL ANGUS

Erie the 2d of December 1812

Dear Sir¹

I have been long anxiously waiting to hear from you but I suppose the Commodore has not yet arrived. I am going on with one boat as you wished Me but the weather has been bad and we have had a Shelter to Make to work under which I have Completed and have one of the boats Ready to Rais A Number of workmen at this Place are Soliciting Me every day to Set them at work which I do not think Myself altogether authorised to do with out your leave but if the boats is to be built this winter no time aught to be lost. I would have Sent you a draft but Mr Crosby has been so busy he has had no time to draw one. he has Drawn one to work by which looks well and I think will answer the purpose well we have made the one that is in the works fifty feet keel 17 feet beam and five feet in the hold if Commodore Chauncy Should not arrive Soon I should be extreamly glad to get Permission of you to go down to Washington this winter during the Seting of Congress to attend to the business of the vesel I lost at detroit. if you think of giving Me Such Permission I wish you would Signify it by a line to Me I am Respectfully yours

Daniel Dobbins

Copy, NBuHi, Dobbins Papers.

1. This document does not include the name of the addressee, however, Dobbins mentions in a subsequent letter to Secretary Hamilton that he has yet to receive instructions from Lieutenant Angus commanding at Black Rock. See Dobbins to Hamilton, 12 Dec. 1812, NBuHi, Dobbins Papers, p. 369 below.

LIEUTENANT SAMUEL ANGUS TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Black Rock Decr 2 1812

Sir,

As it appears Genl Smyth has abandon'd his Idea of crossing and their being no possibility of doing any thing here with our Vessels as the Sails cordage and &c &c are Destroy'd and the Carpenters all left

here let me beg you will order me to New York untill I can get employ on the Atlantic. I shall Anxiously wait your answer. With Sentiments of highest esteem I have the honor [&c.]

Sam^l Angus Lieut

P S on the night of the expedition there was but one Army officer wounded a Capt. [Mindert M.] Dox

ALS, DNA, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 197.

Chauncey's Squadron in Winter Quarters

The Lake Ontario squadron returned from its blockade of Kingston harbor when winter storms and encroaching ice made navigation all but impossible. Commodore Chauncey realized that his ships were now of little use and, in fact, had become vulnerable to an attack from Canada across the frozen lake. He arranged them as best he could and wrote urgent requests for army reinforcements at Sackets Harbor. Beyond this, Chauncey had begun to worry about the next summer's campaign and was anxious to enlarge his squadron on Lake Ontario while building one on Lake Erie. The matter of procuring food for the following year was also on his mind. In order to set plans in motion, a tour of inspection of the navy's positions and personnel on Lake Erie was essential. This journey would take him first to Black Rock and then to Erie. The four letters which follow illustrate not only Chauncey's considerable problems, but also his determination to confront them.

COMMODORE ISAAC CHAUNCEY TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTONSackets' Harbor
1 Decr 1812.

Sir,

The Season is now so far advanced and the weather has become so intensely cold that it is unsafe to navigate this Lake. I shall in a few

days lay up all the vessels for the winter and proceed immediately to Buffaloe and Presqu' Isle on Lake Erie to make my arrangements for opening the Campaign with vigor in the Spring. I shall make it my business to see the commanding General at Buffaloe, in order to arrange a plan of co-operation against the enemy in the spring, and on my return I will visit Major Genl Dearborn for the same purpose.

I think it my duty to state to you, Sir, the exposed situation of our little Naval Force during the winter months, and how important an encrease of the regular forces of the Army of the U.S. is at this post. Altho' I think the vessels with their crews are fully competent to protect themselves against any Attacks of Musketry, yet if the Enemy by any desperate effort should succeed in obtaining possession of the Forts in this Town, the vessels must fall of course they could not be moved for the ice.

Viewing the immense importance of the command of this Lake to the Enemy, no one can doubt but that he will make a desperate effort to regain the ascendancy that he has lost, and really the accomplishment of that object is not a difficult Task to an Enterprizing officer. closed up as we shall be within about 30 miles of Kingston where the enemy can, (and most likely will) collect a force of from 3 to 4,000 men for the express purpose of destroying our naval ascendancy on this Lake, he can, with great ease (after this month) cross from Kingston to Long or Grand-Island on the Ice, from thence to Gravally Point, go along the Shore to Chaumont Bay, across that Bay to this Harbor in about 12 hours as all their Troops are exercised to walk with Snow-Shoes. Now Sir suppose 2 or 3000 men cross in the way pointed out, what can save us here? Nothing but a re-inforcement of Regular Troops sufficient to repel any attack that may be made upon us, and so preserve our little Fleet from otherwise certain destruction.

It may be objected to ordering Troops to this place that they will be wanted to collect at certain points for the operations in the Spring, but in answer to that I will observe that the Troops can be transported by the vessels from this place in the Spring to any point where they may be wanted with more facility than they can march. Moreover, in my humble opinion, the preservation of our vessels (consequently of our ascendancy upon this Lake, without which we cannot conquer Canada), is of the very first importance.

The force at this post consists of about 500 regular Troops under Col Macomb and about 1000 militia, not more than 600 of which are

fit for duty and even this number is every day diminishing by desertions, discharges, and furloughs, and I believe that the Term of Service of many of them will expire the latter part of this month. I presume that an additional force of 500 to 1000 regular Troops would ensure protection to this place. I am now building Block-Houses in conjunction with Col Macomb to guard against a Surprise.

We shall require for the service on the Lakes at least 100 more marines, and if sent on immediately they can do garrison duty until the Spring. The 100 which accompanied me under Capt Smith have all been disposed of on board of the different vessels put in commission without leaving any for the *Madison* or the vessels on Lake Erie which together will require from 70 to 80 men.

I trust Sir you will not think that I have gone beyond my duty in urging the necessity of a re-inforcement of Regular Troops at this post for the protection of the Naval Force collected here. I am so anxious upon this subject that I have written to Genl Dearborn requesting him to send a Reinforcement as soon as practicable, a copy of my letter is herewith enclosed.

As I shall from necessity be frequently absent this winter I wish the officer who may command the *Madison* may be ordered on as soon as possible in order that he may Superintend her Equipment. Three Lieutenants and a Purser will also be required for the same Ship. I have the honor to be [&c.]

Isaac Chauncey

LS, DNA, RG45, CL, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 200.

[Enclosure]
(Copy)

Sackets' Harbor
30 Nov 1812

Sir,

The weather has now become so boisterous that any further operations upon the Lake would be attended with difficulty, and danger of losing some of our Vessels. I have therefore come to the determination of laying them up in the course of next Week for the winter. Our next object is to preserve them against any attack that may be made upon them by the Enemy.

The Vessels themselves with their Crews are adequate to their own protection against musketry but should the enemy collect a force of 2

or 3,000 men at Kingston (which he can easily do) he could march here on the ice in 12 hours, take possession of our own guns and turn them upon the Vessels and of course destroy them. Having accomplished that object he would return before a sufficient force could be collected to oppose him.

Viewing the immense importance that the command of this Lake is to the Enemy taken in Connection with his Intention to defend upper Canada, no one can doubt but that he will use every exertion and make any sacrifice to regain the ascendancy which he has lost, and how can he accomplish that Object so easily as to collect a force sufficient at Kingston, cross to this place, burn all our Vessels and return.

I am really alarmed Sir for the safety of our little Fleet collected here & I trust you will deem their preservation of so much importance to our future operations against Canada, as to induce you to order to this post as soon as convenient 1000 additional regular Troops: the militia will not do. The force which is now here consists of about 500 regulars and 1000 militia; not more than 600 of the latter are fit for duty.

Col Macomb is enlarging Fort Volunteer and will mount some more Ship guns upon it and will erect a Block-House. I am also building a Block-House near Fort Tompkins to guard against a Surprise by the Enemy.

Genl Brown has at Ogdensburgh about 600 militia besides Capt [Benjamin] Forsyths company of Riflemen. If that post was not considered of very great importance, Capt Forsyths' rifle Company would be a great acquisition here for the purpose of manning the Block-Houses.

The Troops collected here this winter can be sent with great facility to any point that you may require them in the Spring by the Vessels.

I shall leave this in a few days for Buffaloe and Presqu' Isle on Lake Erie for the purpose of making my arrangements for the next Spring's operations. Upon my return I intend paying my respects to your Excellency for the purpose of arranging a plan of Cooperation with the Army next Spring and Summer. I have the honor to be [&c.]

Signed Isaac Chauncey

Major Genl Henry Dearborn

Copy, DNA, RG45, CL, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 200a.

COMMODORE ISAAC CHAUNCEY TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Sackets' Harbor
8 Decr 1812

Sir,

When I arrived here, in order to secure a regular Supply of provisions to the Seamen and marines on this Station, I was under the necessity of entering into a conditional contract with Mr E. Anderson jr (the army contractor) to furnish the navy ration at 20 cents since which I find that he farms it out for 17 cents, consequently he makes 3 cents on each ration, & the presumption is that the person who furnishes the ration makes 1 or 2 cents more; there fore it would be fair to conclude that the Ration may be furnished for about 16 cents; if so, the government may as well receive the benefit as Individuals. I would, therefore, if it met with your approbation, advertise for proposals to furnish at this station good salted Beef, Pork, Bread & Whiskey—and the other component parts of a ration, for the next 6 or 12 months as you might deem most advisable: Fresh Beef can be got here for 3 or 4 cents per lb. If you should authorize me to enter into these contracts, I am persuaded that a considerable sum may be saved to the Government. At any rate I deem it my duty to make the Suggestion.¹ I have the honor [&c.]

Isaac Chauncey

LS, DNA, RG45, CL, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 209.

1. Hamilton approved of these arrangements. See Hamilton to Chauncey, 26 Dec. 1812, DNA, RG45, SNL, Vol. 10, p. 223.

COMMODORE ISAAC CHAUNCEY TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Confidential

Sackets' Harbor
9 Decr 1812.

Sir,

On the 5th inst I sent a flag of Truce over to Kingston with Mr Murney late Owner of the Sloop *Elizabeth*. My real motive in sending



Captain Isaac Chauncey, U.S.N.

this Flag over, was to gain information of the strength at that place which consists of about 600 of the 49th regiment and nearly 1000 militia: they also can call in 2000 more militia in 24 hours notice. That part of the Glengary regiment (say about 500) which was at Kingston at the time I made the attack upon *The Royal George*, finding that they could not get up the Lake by water, have marched to York by Land. The *Royal George*, *Earl Moira*, and a Schooner all loaded with Military Stores and clothing for the Army & Indians at Fort George, have made four attempts to escape from Kingston since the 20th of November but upon seeing our blockading Squadron have run back. They have now relinquished all hopes of getting up this winter and have in consequence discharged the Stores &c and laid up their Vessels. I therefore hope to have the pleasure of conducting them into Sackets' Harbor before they get another chance to get up the Lake. It is also a satisfaction to know that we have prevented The Enemy from sending to Fort George and the posts on that part of the Lake the clothing and arms that his Troops may require this winter. Mr Vaughan could not learn that the Enemy contemplated an attack upon this place this winter: on the contrary they appeared to apprehend one from us.

The information contained in this letter was obtained from an officer on board of the *Royal George* whom Mr Vaughan had known for several years and who is friendly disposed toward us: it therefore may be depended upon. We shall be prepared here at all events to give them a warm reception if they should make any attempt upon us this winter. I have the honor to be [&c.]

Isaac Chauncey

LS, DNA, RG45, CL, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 210.

COMMODORE ISAAC CHAUNCEY TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Sackets' harbor
12th Decr. 1812.

Sir,

All the Vessels are now laid up for the Winter and completely frozen in: in fact the Bay is frozen quite across. The fleet is moored in

a line flanked by two of the Vessels which will protect them against any sudden attack of the Enemy.

I shall leave here tomorrow morning for Buffaloe to make the necessary arrangements at that place for our operations upon Lake Erie next Summer. I have the honor to be [&c.]

Isaac Chauncey

LS, DNA, RG45, CL, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 211.

Origins of the Lake Erie Squadron

The key figure in the construction of what was to become "Perry's Fleet" on Lake Erie was Daniel Dobbins, a master mariner on the Great Lakes, who received a sailing master's warrant from the secretary of the navy on 16 September 1812. Secretary Hamilton at that time instructed Dobbins to make immediate preparations for four "gunboats" at Presque Isle, but he required Dobbins to report to and receive instructions from Commodore Isaac Chauncey or his appointed representative at Black Rock. As earlier documents indicate, Dobbins had difficulty commencing work. First, Lieutenant Jesse D. Elliott claimed to have a superior knowledge of conditions on Lake Erie. He refused to believe that effective warships could be built and launched at Erie (see pp. 320-22). Secondly, when Elliott departed, Dobbins could get almost no information from Lieutenant Samuel Angus.

By mid-December, Dobbins was virtually beside himself with impatience. He had the workmen and the materials, but no actual authorization to commence construction. If he began on his own responsibility, he risked incurring the wrath of the department or at least the displeasure of his immediate superiors. He could also be held financially liable. On the other hand, if work on the ships did not commence, the workmen might disperse and the ships would not be ready to contend with whatever force the British had been able to gather and build on the north side of the lake. Finally, Dobbins wrote directly to the secretary to obtain permission to proceed.

SAILING MASTER DANIEL DOBBINS TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Sir

I would have Sent you long before this time Coppies of all the articles of agreement and the other Regulations Made by me but knowing the people of this Country to be poor and their liability to fail I thought I would wait to See whether they would fulfill and as Common they in Many instances have failed the papers are large that I have which is nothing but accounts and Repts and having a Calculation to go down this winter Myself if I Can obtain liberty I thought I would take them with Me the Many that I have drawed for I have laid out in the following way for the Purchase of the timber and geting out fit for hauling 900 dollallars being 200 tons for Iron 800 dollars 3 tons and a half for Coal 50 Do 1000 bushel at 5 Cents for tram work 160 dollars as pr apt [abstract] and Rest for building a Smith Shop and Smith work and building a Shelter to work in in the yard a Considerable Sum More than the two thousand dollars which I have Regular Receipts for in Consequence of the failure of the expedition to Canada I have Commenced building on My own footing the Commodore not having Come to black Rock this fall or winter I have not been able to get any instructions from Mr Angus who Commands farther than to Sanction an agreement Made with a Master builder. I have not been able to Make Contracts for the building that Could be Relyed on and knowing the necessity of the boats being built I have Concluded to forward them as fast as possible and if you think you will pay the bills I will warrant them Ready by the time the ice is out of the lake I have two of them on the Stocks one in frames and Lately timbered up the keel laid for the other

So much interest do I feel in prepareing to meet them on the lake next Spring that I will be willing to give Security to the united States that all the Money that Comes into My hands Shall be faithfully laid out if they Should Require it. I had an Idea when Mr Angus aproved of the Contract made with a Master builder that I would soon get orders to go on with the work but I have not heard from him since

Copy, NBuHi, Dobbins Papers. In Dobbins's hand. Written on verso: "Coppay of a letter to the Secretary of the Navy Decr 12th 1812."

Winter Comes to Lake Champlain

For Lieutenant Thomas Macdonough, the advent of winter was both a curse and a blessing. As on Lake Ontario, naval reconnaissance and action came to a halt, but that only signalled the need for spring planning. In the following letter, Lake Champlain's American naval commander reveals his knowledge of the enemy's strength and building activity. He lists the force at his disposal and states his intention to be completely ready when the time for operations returns. The British squadron on Lake Champlain, though small, was in a more advanced state in December than was the American squadron.¹

1. See Roosevelt, *Naval War of 1812*, pp. 142-43.

LIEUTENANT THOMAS MACDONOUGH TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Shelburn December 20th 1812

Sir,

I have the honor to inform you that on the 12th of this month I laid up at this place in a secure harbour the U States Vessells on this Lake. The weather became so boisterous and the Ice Making thought it imprudent to keep out longer one of the sloops (the *Growler* commanded by Lt Smith) having a few days before been dismasted in a squall. Mr Loomis Sailing Master Mr Monteith [Walter *Monteath*] Midshipman and Mr [George] Beale Purser, have come on, also twenty two men from New York, I am getting every thing in readiness for the Spring and trust nothing will be wanting to co-operate with the army when it gets in motion but men, to make these Vessells as effective as they might be one hundred would be necessary-which would be but a bare compliment. The enemy has at the Isle a Noix three Gun Boats carrying ('tis said) by several persons that have seen them two twenty four pounders each, and about fifty men, three sloops of about eighty tons mounting six six pounders, and a Twenty four each with about fifty men on board each sloop, and lately I have been told they are fitting out a Schooner to mount twelve or fourteen Guns, and told also well manned, however were the Vessells that we now have armed, to be

manned, I think we should be able to cope with them. The Vessells that I now have are the

"Sloop *President* Mounting six collumbiards¹ and two long twelves-
"Sloop *Growler* with two twelves and four sixes and one long eighteen on a circle-

"Sloop *Eagle*, with six sixes and one eighteen on a circle-
And two Gun Boats carrying a long Twelve each; you will observe that the other three sloops are for Transports. I have the honor to be
[&c.]

T. Macdonough

ALS, DNA, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 227.

1. Columbiad: a heavy shell gun, combining the qualities of gun, howitzer and mortar, invented by Major George Bomford, U.S. Army. It was named after the epic poem written by Joel Barlow, Bomford's brother-in-law.

The Chauncey-Angus Feud

When Commodore Chauncey arrived at Black Rock on his western inspection tour, he was in an ill humor. American defenses were in a wretched state and naval morale was at a low ebb. The U.S. Army was stationed too distant to be of much assistance in case of attack. Since Lieutenant Angus's men were unruly, Chauncey blamed Angus, and the lieutenant, not well-disciplined himself, chose to object to the commodore's judgments. Matters soon went from bad to worse; it became evident that Chauncey had a low respect for Angus's abilities as an organizer and leader of men. After an acrimonious correspondence, Angus was eventually transferred and saw duty with the Delaware Bay gunboat flotilla. Chauncey's report on Black Rock is followed by Angus's complaints of ill-treatment by his superior.

COMMODORE ISAAC CHAUNCEY TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Black Rock 25th Decr 1812

Sir

This frontier is left with less protection than its importance requires from this place to Lewis Town a distance of about 24 Miles there is not a single Sentinel. there is about 300 of the 14 Regt stationed at this place the rest of the army have gone into winter Quarters, 11 miles back from the river, therefore if the enemy should think proper to cross, spike all the Guns and destroy all our stores, there is but little to prevent them. I am erecting a Block House near the Vessels with a View to their protection and the stores belonging to the Navy Department, which I hope to preserve notwithstanding we are deserted by the Military, the People upon this frontier place so much more reliance upon the protection afforded to them by the Seamen than the Military, that if any circumstance should make it necessary to remove the Seamen; this part of the Frontier would be immediately deserted. I have the Honor to be [&c.]

Isaac Chauncey

LS, DNA, RG45, CL, 1812, Vol. 3, No. 218.

LIEUTENANT SAMUEL ANGUS TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Black rock Decr 27. 1812

Sir

I had on the arrival of Comr Chauncey stated to him the many difficulties I had laboured under at this place since my arival in keeping the men with in any degree of comfort and that it had been utterly impossible to keep them in that state of dicipline that was praticed on board a man of war he assented to it he visited the Navy Yard paid the men some little compliments respecting the attack on the evening of the 27 Novr and left the yard apparently well satisfied yesterday morning he again visited the yard the men where excercising with their pikes and Muskets he observed as he went along that they

were both Sailors & Soldiers but unfortunately one or two of the men where abusive and noisy he got in a passion and reflected on me saying that they were in a state of D . . . d insubordination and worse than privateersmen advanced towards me and looking very angry I told him respectfully that I was sensible things were not exactly what I could wish they were, but I felt satisfied that I had done my duty and ought not to be reflected on the men where dismis'd. I ordered a man to be punished for Insolence to Lt Pettigrew Commr Chauncey check'd me before the men saying this was no time nor place to punish the man and would not suffer him to be punish'd in the maner I ordered (It has been with the greatest dificulty that I have got the men in any state dicipline from the deranged and confused State of every thing here), I remonstrated against such treatment. He obseved this is no time for paliating. I again obseved that I had been the Comg officer here for some time and ought to have discetionary power which if I was not sufferd to use and that as I found my feeling where to be wound in such a manner that I must beg leave to resign the Comd here and suffered to report myself to you he spoke with much accrimony and Said he accepted my commission. I presume you mean that Sir I obseved I did not mean my Commission that I meerly ment the Comd of this station that I had volunteerd my services here and as I found it impossible to please him that I must again beg leave for to get from under his Comd and report my self to the Honbl Secy of the Navy he refused me that request. I then observed that I must beg leave to decline duty under his Comd he arrested me and in his writen arrest says that I refused to do duty on a enemys lines when the service of every officer and man was necessary to guard against Surprize. it is very surprizeing that he should offer to accept my commission only a few hours before and then charge me with refuseing duty on enemy lines. I beg you will order me from under Comr Chaunceys comd as I am convinced that I can never do my duty under a man who was so willing to accept my commission I am still as anxious to do my duty to my beloved country as ever and have anxiously to beg that you would order me to the Sea board I have many reasons to make that request but more particularly my wouned feelings to get from under the Com of a man who in private life I shall always respect but my duty to my self as a gentleman

and officer requirs that I ought to be remooved 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