

DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF

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THE PARAGUAY EXPEDITION

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## FOREWORD

The United States Navy grew from inauspicious origins in the late eighteenth century and throughout its early history functioned as the seaborne arm of national security, although with little support publicly or politically. Past interpretations have emphasized the periodic constraints placed on the service by Congress and various Presidents, allegedly the result of antebellum suspicion and distrust of a standing army and navy. When it came to funding and political support the U.S. Navy was a frequent loser, as can be seen by the service's small enlisted ranks and confused building programs. The old Navy might be described most accurately as a maritime militia. It never succeeded as a strategic deterrent. The concept of a citizen militia may have held some validity for the Army, but the requirements of the Navy were invariably more complex and attempting a militia type approach with the Navy possessed only marginal practical application.

The first years of the Navy were characterized by crusade-like efforts to expand the fleet, only to have the attempt countered by the suspension of funding, often at a critical juncture. In 1793, for example, Congress authorized the construction of six heavy frigates to counter the depredations of the Barbary Pirates off the coast of North Africa. Before any of the new ships were launched, Congress waffled and ordered work on all vessels to cease. Several months later, the order was modified to allow the completion of the three most advanced vessels; the other ships were to be abandoned on the building stocks. A timely crisis with France prompted a third revision of the original



legislation and all six warships were subsequently launched and commissioned. Over the next fifty years this pattern was often repeated. The forty-five year era separating the War of 1812 from the Civil War witnessed the greatest westward advancement of the boundaries of the United States. During this same era, the maritime boundaries of American commerce literally advanced around the world. Oddly the annual appropriations for the Navy Department remained stagnant or declined. To be sure, the manifestations of the Navy's many shortcomings find their origin in vacillating political support; but in addition, the politicized nature and organization of the Navy Department with its civilian Secretary hindered long range improvement plans and the general effectiveness of the fleet.

As originally organized in 1798, the Navy Department had as its chief, the Secretary, appointed by the President. The Secretary administered naval programs aligned with the philosophy of each President's national program. Unfortunately nurturing the programs to maturity often conflicted with the best interests of the service. Assisting the Secretary in the early years were one or two overworked clerks, and this "bureaucracy" managed naval affairs. After the outbreak of the War of 1812, the needs of the fleet far outstripped the resources of the Navy Department. Rather belatedly, Congress authorized an administrative reorganization of the Department to match the operational tempo of the war, which had just ended. The vulnerability of the United States to blockade had created an undeniable justification for a larger fleet and more efficient administrative organization.

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In its new form the Department retained the Secretary and the clerical staff. Added to the administrative level of the Navy Department was a Board of Navy Commissioners composed of three "Post Captains," confirmed by the Senate after Presidential appointment. Although the Board was granted authority to coordinate fleet logistics, procure supplies and propose the establishment of of naval yards and dry docks, real authority remained with the Secretary; this was frequently demonstrated as individual Secretaries personally continued the administration of these matters. In addition, the Board's appointment became as political as that of the Secretary, and this reality tainted the otherwise progressive reorganization. The overall improvement in management effected by the establishment of the Board helped alleviate some of the operational hindrances, allowing for the well managed deployment of small "show the flag" squadrons. The effectiveness of these squadrons is open for debate, although the evidence supports the contention that their existence assisted the mercantile expansion of the United States. However, the critical problems caused by perennial underfunding disrupted the postwar programs of expansion and improvement of the fleet.

In April, 1816 Congress authorized a major shipbuilding program in an effort to reduce America's vulnerability to blockade caused by the small size of the fleet. Although the Navy was conceived originally as a coast defense/commerce raiding force, a new strategy was developed that would seek to actively break the blockade rather than merely defend American harbors with shore batteries and gunboats. Historically, nations adopting the active, blockade breaking strategy have not fared well either when attacking or when attacked, as the

French discovered during the Napoleonic wars. During the 1830's, as the ultimate expression of this strategy, the United States built the largest sailing ship-of-the-line in the world. This vessel, the 120-gun U.S.S. Pennsylvania, would have been a match for any single ship in any navy, yet the irony of her great size was that she was but one unit of a fleet fundamentally designed as a commerce raiding force.

At the heart of the new blockade breaking strategy was a shipbuilding program, the likes of which the United States had never before attempted. At its commencement the program showed considerable promise. Six seventy-four gun ships-of-the-line and nine forty-four gun frigates were proposed. Strategic thought had the ships-of-the-line breaking the potential blockade, with frigates released to prey on the enemy's commerce. Augmenting the big ships was a proposed force of ten versatile sloops-of-war. Unfortunately there existed in the authorizing legislation a clause which eventually negated the promise of strong fleet. The Act of 1816, as it was called, sought the gradual increase and improvement of the Navy. It, however, allowed the President to cause those ships under construction to be housed over on the stocks and placed in a state of preservation until a need arose for their service. As the years passed this option became the norm with Presidents such as Andrew Jackson. The Navy was relegated to such a low priority in national affairs that at the end of his term, Jackson indicated that his policies regarding the Navy had been a mistake.

Combined with general mismanagement, these factors undermined the quality of the Navy in ways that directly affected the Paraguay Expedition many years later. The thirty odd years preceding the

expedition should have been enough time to see some effort and planning to correct the problem areas, but the record indicates that important changes were not made. Apparently they were overlooked in what might be described as administrative neglect and ineptitude.

Surveys of American naval history for the period 1815-60 are few in number, uniform in depth of presentation and somewhat similar in conclusion. In addition, all are much, much too brief. The interpretations of Captain Dudley Knox, Harold and Margaret Sprout and other naval historians are thematically similar and can be outlined as follows. Commencing with the background of the administrative reorganization of 1815, and the Increase Act of 1816, the surveys lightly trace the administrative, technological and operational history of the service. The administrative discussions focus on the era of the Board of Navy Commissioners and the Bureau system which followed. The contributions of outstanding Secretaries of the Navy highlight this topic as does social reform, which addresses the gradual abolition of spirit rations and flogging, sailor's assistance, the infamous "Somers" mutiny, and the institution of professional training of the officer corps. On the subject area of technology, topics consist of prototypes or experimental ships such as Robert Fulton's steam battery; the advent of steam propulsion, development of Stockton and Dahlgren shell guns; the Ericsson screw propeller; and the scientific pursuits of the Navy, which commonly review the Charles Wilkes Exploring Expedition and Matthew Fontaine Maury's contribution to the Naval Observatory. Operational review covers squadron deployment, punitive expeditions,

the Mexican War (very briefly), and Commodore Perry's Japan Expedition. Minor discussion is given to suppression of the piracy and the slave trade. Although there were scores of other endeavors by the Navy during this era, they are, as a rule, given only the most superficial coverage.

These commonly used themes review the main activities of the U.S. Navy from the War of 1812 to the Civil War. As mentioned, the surveys are all too brief and provide the barest hint of the scope of information available in research of the service in the antebellum period. There are many good biographies of significant officers serving in the Navy, but the biographies are myopic in their review of those aspects of the Navy that were unrelated to the "great man" under discussion. Topical articles are numerous and address a wide spectrum of activities of the antebellum Navy. The articles can be found in naval history quarterlies and other journals which help fill the information gap on topics. Their collective shortcoming is found in the universal lack of linkage between closely related topics, let alone in any contribution to overall understanding of broad subject area of naval history. A scholarly assessment of any event or aspect of the Navy requires the researcher to examine the body of articles and surveys in addition to the largely unarranged primary source material in order to obtain an accurate assessment of the antebellum Navy. It is for these reasons that there is a critical need of a thorough history of the Navy in the early national period.

## INTRODUCTION

With the coming of peace in 1815, the populace of the United States returned to the national pursuit of settling their vast country and developing a commercial empire. In an effort to protect a burgeoning foreign trade, the Navy was called upon to answer challenges to freedom on the seas, first from the Barbary Pirates of Algiers and shortly thereafter from pirates in the West Indies. The Algerians were promptly brought to terms, after which the U.S. Navy maintained a continuous vigil in the Mediterranean in the form of the Mediterranean Squadron. Although detachments of vessels had been called "squadrons" prior to 1815, these had been organized on an ad hoc basis to carry out a specific mission. As the Mediterranean Squadron began a regular patrol, it became the first of eight squadrons established prior to the Civil War.

In 1819, Congress responded to an outbreak of piracy in the Caribbean by passing a bill to punish the crime of piracy. Three years later the West Indies Squadron was organized to eradicate the menace. The effort eventually met with success but, as with other early endeavors of the Navy, only after a trial and error learning period. Over the next three decades six additional squadrons were organized and deployed to protect commerce, as details for special duty, or in response to an emergency.

After the establishment of the West Indies Squadron in 1822, the

next squadrons organized, in order of their deployment, were the Pacific Squadron, Brazil Squadron, East India Squadron, Home Squadron, African Squadron and the short lived Eastern Squadron. These units of the fleet possessed features common to all, but at the same time each carried out unique missions reflected in the history of their operations.

On two separate occasions the East India Squadron leveled native villages near Quallah Batu, Sumatra, after attacks on American merchant ships in which crew members were tortured and killed. Several years later in July, 1846, Commodore Biddle commanded the squadron during the earliest official attempt at diplomatic contact with the Japanese government, preceding the Perry Expedition of 1853.

The African Squadron, established in 1843, was given the special task of suppressing the slave trade. Nearly twenty years of grueling patrol produced measurable progress in the endeavor, but in this instance, American politics provided both help and hindrance according to the vagaries of popular sentiment. It might be said that the national spirit was lacking in this program, as evidenced by the assignment of a few large sailing ships to the patrol. These vessels were not adequate for a task which required steamships, and in the early years the effort was, on the whole, unsuccessful. In all fairness it must be admitted that the British, partners in the fight against the slave trade, accepted the greatest share of responsibility and achieved the highest success. The advent of the Civil War effectively ended the slave trade in the form that it had existed for more than two hundred



years.

The Eastern Squadron was organized in 1853 in response to a flare-up in the longstanding fisheries dispute between the United States and British Canada in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Sent as squadron commander and chief envoy was Commodore W.B. Shubrick. His skillful handling of the delicate issues in contention made the dispute appear to be blown out of proportion, even to the chief antagonists.

After the settlement the Eastern Squadron was deactivated. While this mission was in progress, the famous Perry Expedition was en route to Japan. The dramatic conclusion to this operation is well remembered to this day. During the return voyage to the United States, one of the vessels of the expedition, the U.S.S. Mississippi, made a timely arrival at Montevideo to replenish ship's store and also hear of an incident on the Paraná river at the border of Paraguay. Five years later a drastically enlarged Brazil Squadron numbering nineteen warships and support vessels would sail to the Río de la Plata in response to the incident. The following is an historical study of the Paraguay Expedition of the United States Navy's Brazil Squadron.

## THE WATER WITCH INCIDENT

On the morning of February 1, 1855, the crew of the U.S.S. Water Witch cast off the lines of their ship from the dock at Corrientes, Argentina, to resume a hydrographic survey of the Paraná<sup>1</sup> river in South America.<sup>1</sup> In this latitude and region of the southern hemisphere it was late summer, hot, and as might be expected, the water level in the muddy river was low. The pilot on board was Argentine, and throughout the morning was very busy guiding the side wheel steamer up the unpredictable Paraná<sup>1</sup>, a river known for shifting channels. The crew of the Water Witch was also busy, carrying on the normal routines associated with working the ship as they steamed upriver toward the confluence of the Paraguay and Paraná<sup>1</sup> rivers.

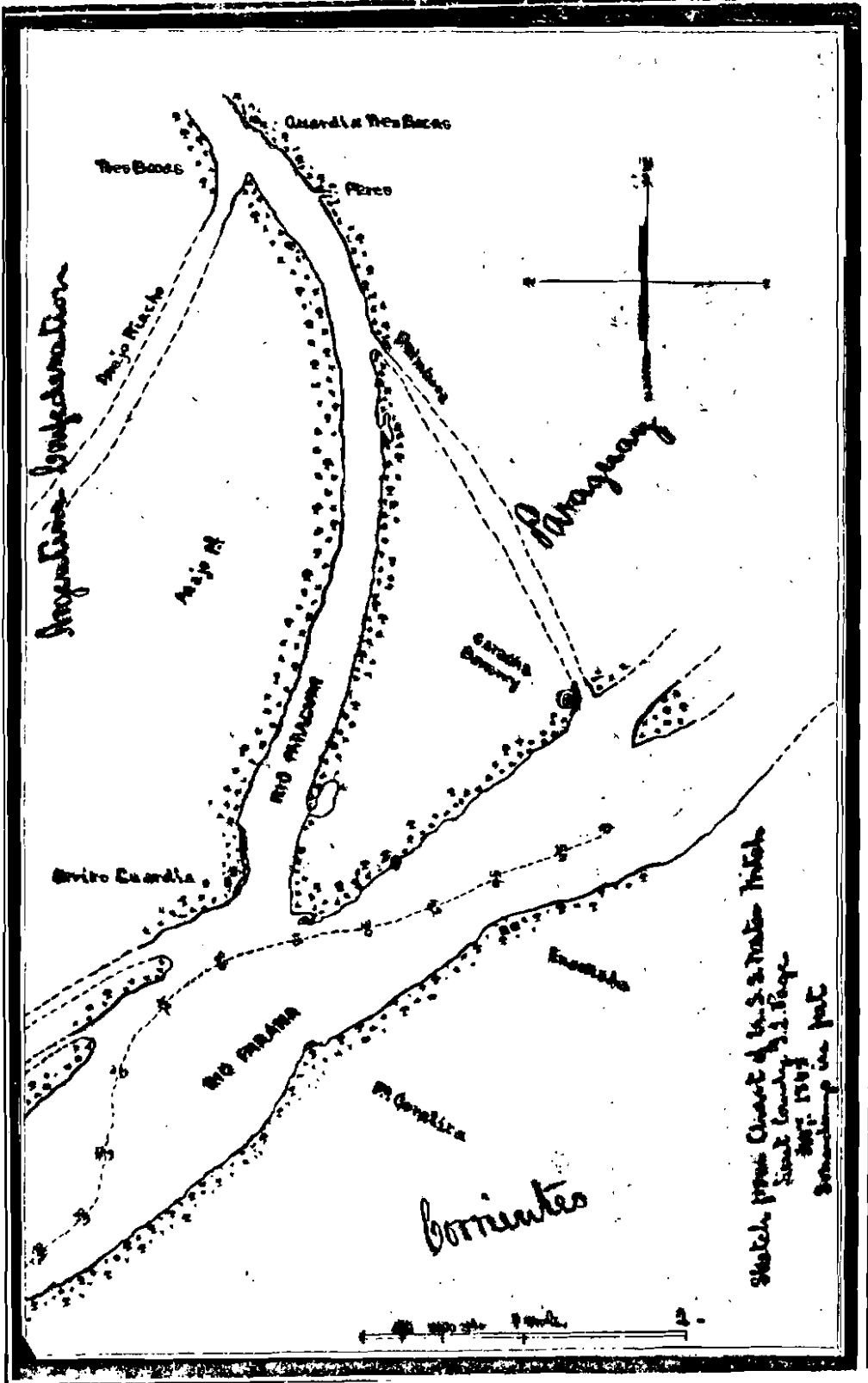
Once above the mouth of the Paraguay river the Paraná<sup>1</sup> became the eastern border of the Republic of Paraguay, a country situated in the interior of South America. As the Water Witch steamed up the Paraná<sup>1</sup> it soon approached an island dividing the main channel. Known locally as Isla Grande, this low, scrub-covered mud bank presented a considerable navigation obstacle, at which the Water Witch's temporary commander Lieutenant William N. Jeffers ordered the helmsman to set a course to take the ship up the right channel which passed on the Argentine side of the river. The bow swung over to the right but within minutes after entering the narrow course the steamer struck bottom, halting its passage. Jeffers sent the pilot out in a small boat to test the river's depth along the island's length. He returned shortly to report that the channel was only shallower ahead. With the approach of

midday, Jeffers grew increasingly anxious to to get underway and on up the river.

As the right channel was being tested, a canoe had put out from the shore; it stopped some distance away, apparently to observe the American naval vessel grounded on the mudbank. When the pilot returned on board, Jeffers decided to attempt the other channel, even after the pilot expressed his doubts concerning the water level there.

Reversing the paddle wheels failed to free the Water Witch from the mud. Jeffers detailed some of the crew to transfer a kedge anchor into one of the ship's boats and drop it a short distance astern. Other crew members were then able to winch the ship off the mudbank and drift her back into the main channel. By this maneuver Jeffers brought the Water Witch across the river under the lower tip of Isla Grande and near the canoe, which was manned by a Paraguayan army officer and two Indians. The officer had come out from a small fortified battery called Itapirú, commanding the left channel about a half a mile distant, to deliver a copy of a decree signed by President Carlos Antonio López, the dictator of Paraguay, which prohibited foreign warships on Paraguayan rivers. After examining the document, Jeffers declined to it on the grounds that it was written in Spanish and that he could not read it.<sup>2</sup> Not bothering to ascertain its contents or its meaning, Jeffers sent the Paraguayans away and ordered the helmsman to set a course upriver.

The time was now past one o'clock as the helmsman steadied the Water Witch on a course up the left channel and past Itapirú. At the approach of the American ship, the soldiers garrisoning the fort could



be seen manning the battery's six large cannon. In reaction to this, Jeffers ordered the ship's company to their battle stations, the three small howitzers loaded and pivoted into firing position. With its paddle wheels churning the muddy waters, the Water Witch surged upstream and within range of the guns of Itapirú.

Watching the Americans from the breastworks of the fort, the commandant of Itapirú was taken aback by the bold approach of the Water Witch and found himself confronting a situation offering limited flexibility in dealing with the presence of the American naval vessel. The Water Witch showed no indication of halting, and this was likely confirmed by the report of the officer sent out to the ship earlier. If the commandant were to allow the ship to pass, there was a real possibility that President López might react with characteristic savagery and have everyone in the garrison beheaded. The commandant acted decisively. On his order three blank shots were fired and taking a speaking trumpet in hand, he attempted to hail the Water Witch. Either not hearing the hail or ignoring it, Jeffers ordered his helmsman to stay steady on his course.

It is highly improbable that Jeffers was oblivious to the commandant's attempt to communicate with him. As an officer he would have known that customary procedure and courtesy involved reporting one's presence to the authorities when entering the territory of another country. Instead, Jeffers chose to ignore the custom while his crew laughed and jeered the Paraguayans manning the battery. The ship was by now passing under the muzzles of the six menacing cannon. From Itapirú another cannon fired. This time the gun was loaded, the shot



struck the pilot house, and Jeffers finally realized that his decision to ignore the Paraguayans had trapped the Water Witch in a situation that could have and should have been avoided.

It may never be known if the commandant of Itapirú actually intended for that first shot to strike the Water Witch. He stated later that the shot was intended as a warning shot, aimed to pass across the bow of the steamer.<sup>3</sup> If he had intended to hit the ship it is likely that all guns of the fort would have fired in salvo to increase the chance of quickly disabling the vessel. But the first shot may also have been a ranging shot to coordinate the aim of the other guns. Irrespective of the Paraguayan's true intent, the Water Witch responded with return fire and the battle commenced. For the next twenty minutes Jeffers and his crew fought for their lives.

That first shot fired from Itapirú could not have been aimed with more accuracy. It destroyed the helm and mortally injured Samuel Chaney, the helmsman. The Argentine pilot, unnerved by the cannon shot hitting the ship and seeing the helmsman dying, fled to the safety of the lower deck; Jeffers ran from bow to stern trying to direct the fire of the three small howitzers. In the meantime the Water Witch lost her course, swinging broadside to the current as the crew attempted to rig an emergency tiller aft. With great difficulty the steamer was brought back under control while shot from the fort repeatedly struck and hulled the ship. The Water Witch steamed slowly on up the river and out of range. Without the pilot they could not go far, so Jeffers sent men to find him. They found him hiding below and dragged him back on deck. Still unnerved and nearly hysterical, the

pilot repeatedly exclaimed that "there was no water and that the Water Witch would be aground in a moment."<sup>4</sup>

The pilot was partially correct. The channel was too narrow to turn around in, and the damage to the port paddle wheel forced Jeffers to reconsider the wisdom of continuing upriver. Jeffers decided to return to Corrientes and report. New orders were issued to back the Water Witch downstream and past Itapirú once again. The battle resumed as the steamship again came into range. Finally the Americans reached safety out of gunshot range below Itapirú and anchored their battered ship. Emergency repairs were effected as Jeffers considered the situation. Within the hour Samuel Chaney died, leaving the crew in a black mood for blood and vengeance. Initially, Jeffers thought to attack the Paraguayan shipping on the river, but as a Paraguayan war steamer, larger and more powerful than the Water Witch was observed firing up its boilers, he prudently decided to return to Corrientes and report to his commanding officer, Lieutenant Thomas Jefferson Page. The Paraguayan warship followed the Water Witch downstream for a time but did not proceed beyond Paraguayan territory. The battle between Itapirú and the U.S.S. Water Witch had lasted less than an hour and was never given a name. All the same an American sailor had died.

A month later the Brazil Squadron of the United States Navy sailed into the Brazilian port of Rio de Janeiro. The despatches delivered to its Commodore, William D. Salter, aboard the frigate U.S.S. Savannah, probably did little to improve his disposition; the news of the incident on the Paraná possibly sent the Commodore into a rage. From



Montevideo had come the reports containing the bald account of the action prepared by Lieutenant Page, commander of the Water Witch, and an enclosed report prepared by Lieutenant Jeffers, containing a self-righteous explanation of the details. Now the attendant complications produced by Jeffers' actions were Salter's responsibility, by virtue of him being the senior naval officer of command in the South Atlantic sector. The Water Witch, said Page, was attacked trying to pass a Paraguayan fort while in the rightful exercise of orders he had issued.<sup>5</sup> The report also stressed the entirely "unprovoked" nature of the attack. Commodore Salter might not have given the event much attention had not one of the Navy's ships been damaged and worse yet an American sailor killed. The ridiculous excuse offered by Jeffers about not being able to read the Paraguayan officer's message was reprehensible, since their Argentine pilot could easily have translated it. Secondly, Jeffers should have stopped the Water Witch when the blank shots were fired. An obvious order to halt had been ignored with a resulting loss of life. In closing his report Page expressed thinly veiled exasperation at not finding the Commodore and the squadron at Montevideo after the attack. One can presume how most commanding officers would receive such a report from a subordinate.

For the record, Lieutenant Thomas Jefferson Page was the commander of the U.S.S. Water Witch, Lieutenant Jeffers the executive officer. On Page's orders Jeffers had taken the Water Witch up the Paraná river and, subsequently, into the clash at Itapirú on the first of February. Page had remained in Corrientes to assemble the great volume of data already collected in the survey of the Paraná. Finding himself in a

situation many naval officers have feared more than death itself—responsibility for a calamity he had no control over—Page attempted in his report to redeem his honor and that of Jeffers by planning a punitive strike on Itapirú. Commodore Salter probably understood the motivation for this and Page's emotions at having his ship in battle and not being aboard to defend her. The Commodore could also consider with contempt Page's irresponsible contribution to the incident, because the factors which produced it could have been avoided. Now, as if additional impulsive action would help matters, Page sought the use of the Brazil Squadron's twelve-gun brig and sloop-of-war to attack Paraguay and "avenge the insult to the flag." Salter must have understood that Jeffers had only followed Page's vague and poorly considered orders to ascend the Paraná and continue the survey; however, in trying to fight his way past Itapirú, Jeffers had exhibited very questionable judgement. The impulse to relieve both officers of their command pending the findings of a court of inquiry may have crossed the Commodore's mind, but he took no such action. Still, the Water Witch incident now required some manner of response; but an ill-considered reaction could easily compound the injury already done to the American position and interests in the area. At this point Salter's subsequent actions had to be considered with utmost care.

It is very likely that the Commodore considered all of these points in his evaluation of the attack on the Water Witch. His subsequent actions provide evidence of his assessment of the incident. Lieutenant Page's impulsive plan of towing two deep draft warships a thousand miles up the Paraná river with the Water Witch was likely to

fail with both ships running aground and possibly being permanently entombed in a coffin of mud piled around their hulls by the river's current. The Commodore rejected Page's plan as ill-considered and reckless. Instead he sent the sloop-of-war, the U.S.S. Germantown, to Montevideo to ascertain and observe the situation in the region of the Río de la Plata. Salter intended to follow shortly in the flagship, the U.S.S. Savannah, after meeting with the American minister in Rio de Janeiro and forwarding additional despatches to the United States. The despatches sent by Salter transmitted his decision to hasten to Montevideo and await orders sent out by the Navy or State Department.<sup>6</sup> The force available to him did not include the twelve-gun brig as that ship had sailed independently for the United States several weeks earlier, and would be many months in returning. In choosing only to maintain a naval presence in the Platine region, Salter invited the inevitable criticism of Lieutenant Page and of the American newspapers when they heard of his decision not to counter-attack. However, the Commodore could show ample evidence that his decision was both wise and prudent.

#### Notes

1. Commodore William D. Salter to Secretary of the Navy James C. Dobbin, March 17, 1855. Letters Received by the Secretary of the Navy from Commanding Officers of Squadrons. RG 45 Naval Records Collection of the Office of Naval Records and Library, National Archives (Hereafter cited as Squadron Letters, Brazil Squadron; NA).
2. Clare V. McKanna, "The Water Witch Incident," American Neptune, vol. XXXI (January, 1970), p. 15 (Hereafter cited as McKanna).
3. McKanna, p. 15. This explanation was contained in a report submitted by Wenceslás Robles, Commander in chief-ad-interim of the Paraguayan Army to President Carlos Antonio López of Paraguay,

February 2, 1855.

4. Report of Lieutenant William N. Jeffers to Lieutenant Thomas Jefferson Page, February 2, 1855. Letters from Officers Commanding Expeditions, ("Exploring Expedition Letters"), Subseries 8. Letters from Lieutenant Thomas Jefferson Page (Flagship Water Witch), Commanding an Expedition to Survey the Río de la Plata and Paraguay Rivers, January, 1853 - August, 1856. RG 45 Naval Records Collection of the Office of Naval Records and Library, National Archives (Hereafter cited as Page Letters; NA).
5. Lieutenant Page to Secretary of the Navy Dobbin, February 5, 1855. Page Letters; NA. Page's orders were merely instructions to continue the survey on the Paraná river above its confluence with the Paraguay. The orders did not address any contingencies such as dealing with the potential reaction of the Paraguayans, even though they had issued the decree forbidding the presence of foreign warships on the rivers claimed by their country. Since the Water Witch was the only ship that could be described as a "foreign warship" in the region, it would seem logical that Page would have taken appropriate precautions.
6. Salter to Dobbin, March 17, 1855. Page Letters; NA.

## THE ORIGINS OF ANIMOSITY

The fatal incident involving fort Itapirú and the Water Witch was not a spontaneous event; it occurred as a result of an alarming deterioration in relations between the United States and Paraguay. The dispute resulting from the attack found part of its origin in the earlier activities of the Water Witch and her commander. The Water Witch incident agitated a festering disagreement existing between the United States and Paraguay which, in less than six months, had transformed a series of minor diplomatic altercations into a full-fledged dispute almost leading to war. Ironically, the basis of the dispute was not manifest in a conflict of national philosophies, but resulted from the mutual antagonism of a handful of key personalities, most of whom were American.

Under normal conditions the U.S. ambassador would have borne initial responsibility for untangling diplomatic snags and containing incidents before a more serious breach in relations developed. Unfortunately, the United States had no ambassador assigned to Paraguay at the time of the Water Witch incident, and for that there was a simple explanation: The United States and Paraguay had not yet established diplomatic relations.

For years Paraguay had been closed to the outside world much as Japan had been prior to Commodore Perry's expedition to the island empire in 1853. The reasons for Paraguay's self-imposed isolation were varied but essentially the same as Japan's: a fear that their country

would be exploited by larger and more powerful nations. In Paraguay's case this fear was not directed at the United States, but rather at the Brazilian Empire.

In a brief period of contact with the United States, the government of Paraguay under the rule of dictator Carlos Antonio López had allowed a dialogue to commence with the United States that, had it been allowed to mature normally, would have begun the process leading to full diplomatic relations. In early 1853, a group of Rhode Island entrepreneurs formed the Paraguayan Navigation Company, and negotiated a franchise allowing the establishment of several manufacturing enterprises in Paraguay. Managing the company at the Paraguayan end was a young businessman named Edward A. Hopkins. Hopkins was no stranger to Paraguay, having been sent as special agent in 1845, by then Secretary of State James Buchanan, to investigate the possibilities for commercial concessions.<sup>1</sup> In addition to his new duties as commercial agent, Hopkins also secured appointment as the United States consul in Paraguay, a lucrative post containing great potential influence in the future relations of Paraguay and the United States. As consul, Hopkins was authorized to act in a quasi-diplomatic capacity in assisting American citizens in Paraguay and act as the chief representative of the United States.

In each of these capacities Hopkins was to fail, and eventually become more liability than asset for Paraguayan Navigation and the State Department. All accounts of Hopkin's personal characteristics are in virtually unanimous agreement. He was said to have possessed a remarkable degree of bad judgement, egotism and presumptuousness, which

was coupled to a lively imagination he resorted to when reality became too cumbersome.<sup>2</sup> The Rhode Island company selected the wrong man to send out in the field to act as the sole manager for their enterprise. The anticipated fortunes never materialized and in less than a year Paraguay seized the remaining company assets and abrogated its franchise.

At the time of Hopkin's arrival in Paraguay the U.S. State Department and the Paraguayan foreign ministry had recently completed nearly two years of treaty negotiations preliminary to establishing full diplomatic relations. A treaty of friendship, navigation and commerce had been exchanged in March, 1853, and was in the process of ratification in Washington. While under review, an unforeseen problem developed which delayed ratification by the United States. When the treaty was brought to Washington in the summer of 1853, the legal analysis by the State Department identified several clauses in the text of the document which did not conform to the style rules of the Department of State relating to diplomatic matters.<sup>3</sup> A total of thirty minor changes were made to correct the treaty, but by the time these were effected the original time limit for ratification had expired.<sup>4</sup> A full year elapsed while the treaty was sent back to Paraguay for approval, and then returned to the United States to be ratified a second time. The passage of so much time was chiefly a result of the length of sailing time between Washington and Ascunción. By the time Lieutenant Page received the corrected draft of the treaty in October, 1854, for delivery to Ascunción, relations had significantly deteriorated since the document had last left Paraguay.

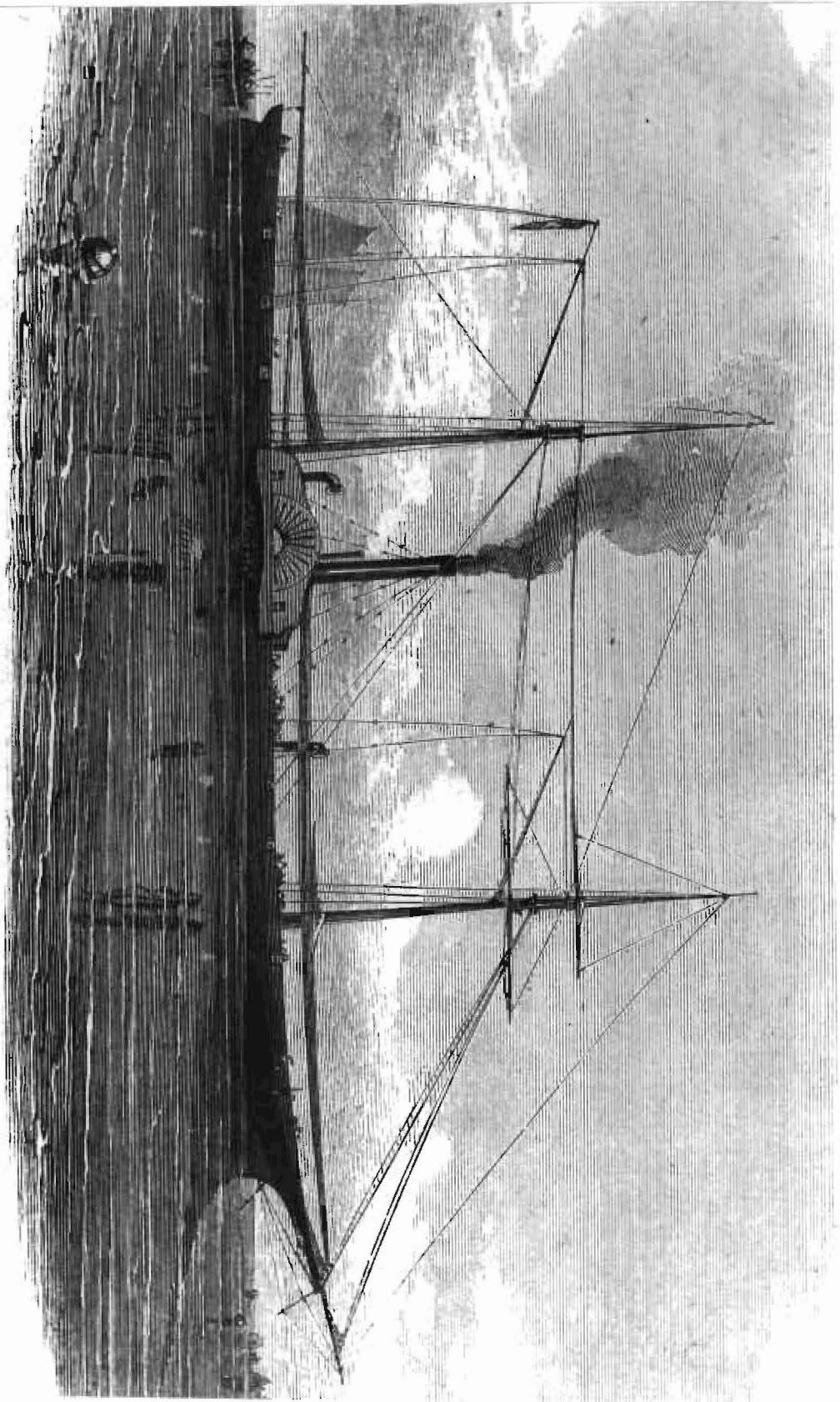
The U.S.S. Water Witch under the command of Lieutenant Page had been operating on Platine rivers since the spring of 1853. Built in 1851, she was a one hundred and fifty foot long sidewheel gunboat, designed and commissioned for the exploratory mission that was subsequently undertaken. Her armament was light and for defensive use against attacks by primitive Indians. The draft of the vessel was also light, which allowed the steamer to explore up shallow channels of less than thirteen feet in depth.<sup>5</sup> The Water Witch was commissioned and sent to explore and survey the tributaries of the Río de la Plata in February, 1853. The expedition was similar in scope to other peacetime exploratory projects undertaken by the Navy, including the Wilkes Expedition to Antarctica in 1836. The officially stated objective of the expedition was the promotion and enhancement of nautical and geophysical science; commercial, political and military intelligence were unstated objectives.<sup>6</sup> The expedition accomplished its objectives with varying degrees of success, and controversy perhaps inevitably was included in the cost.

Surveys of the lower reaches of the La Plata estuary were completed during the summer of 1853, and in the early fall Lieutenant Page took the Water Witch up to the Paraguayan capital at Ascunción to obtain permission to continue the exploration on Paraguayan waterways. Upon arrival, the Water Witch and crew received a warm official welcome and permission, granted by President López, to survey the Paraguay river up to, but not beyond Paraguay's common border with Brazil. López had a sound reason for making this request of Page.

The Water Witch was considered a foreign warship. According to



THE WATER WITCH.





MAP II

international law as applicable at that date, in cases where a navigable river flowed through adjacent countries, the river was considered international and thus open to navigation by any country. As a corollary, this point of law generally applied to the naval vessels of other nations. As long as Paraguay had kept itself isolated, no precedent for international right of passage of warships on the Paraguay and Paraná rivers was ever established. If the Water Witch were to set such a precedent, Brazil might claim the same right for its naval vessels.<sup>7</sup> López was fearful of Brazilian expansion and did not wish to endanger the security of Paraguay by risking the issue with the American gunboat. Weeks later, after ascending the Paraguay river, the Water Witch reached the Brazilian border. Even though President López requested that he not do so, Lieutenant Page took the Water Witch on up river to Corumbá, Brazil.

When word of the American excursion into Brazilian territory reached Ascunción, López was understandably disturbed and most probably felt personally insulted by Page's betrayal of his trust. After a short stay at Corumbá, the Water Witch returned to Ascunción where Page was received with solemn courtesy by the Paraguayan officials. However, the permission granted earlier for exploration was not revoked and operations continued routinely throughout the spring and summer of 1854. It was unfortunate that following on the heels of Page's blundering impropriety, unforeseen personal problems emerged between Edward Hopkins and President López which placed the future relations of Paraguay and the United States in grave jeopardy. Page involved himself at peril to his mission, and did not possess the necessary imagination or good professional judgement to disarm the

impending confrontation when it erupted.

Hopkins, as American consul, derived a significant degree of diplomatic advantage for his business activities in Paraguay by virtue of his position. One privilege he enjoyed and foolishly misused was easy access to President López. In August, 1854, Clement Hopkins, the Consul's brother, was apparently assaulted or roughed up by a Paraguayan soldier. When Edward Hopkins received word of this event, he rode to the President's palace and literally burst into López's office demanding that the soldier be punished and that an apology be issued in the name of Paraguay, reportedly gesticulating all the while with a riding crop.<sup>8</sup> The reaction of López, as might be expected, was not that of a gracious host; yet he did agree to punish the soldier. However, López offered no cooperation on the question of a national apology. In turn, Hopkins refused to let the incident rest and became involved in a heated personal dispute with López that resulted in the revocation of his diplomatic authority in September.

At this point Lieutenant Page became involved, after hearing reports of the recent events. Page brought the Water Witch to Ascunción, and placed the ship at the disposal of Hopkins and the Paraguayan Navigation Company's personnel. After offering transport to Corrientes, Page sought to obtain the necessary passports from the foreign ministry. He was refused. In another blundering display of poor judgement, Page entangled himself in his own dispute with the Paraguayan foreign minister, José Falcón. The issue raised by Page concerned his personal refusal to translate into Spanish the formal request for passports, a courtesy entirely within his power. Page, in



turn, went to President López and delivered what may have been a barely veiled threat, explaining to López that his duty obliged him to protect the rights of American citizens wherever he should meet them.<sup>9</sup> With this, Page delivered the coup-de-grace to the President's tolerance for the activities of Hopkins and the Water Witch. It probably came as no shock to López to learn that the guns of the Water Witch were trained on the Presidential palace and appeared to be loaded as the Americans prepared to depart on September 29, 1854.

The Water Witch left Ascunción, López, and Paraguay behind with Lieutenant Page nonchalantly preparing to resume the expedition's task of exploration and survey, but within four days of their departure the government of Paraguay issued the decree forbidding passage to all foreign warships on the rivers of Paraguay. Obviously directed at the U.S.S. Water Witch, the effect of this decree became fatally apparent four months later when Page, distracted by a new undertaking with a little steamer built to explore the smaller tributaries of the Río de la Plata, ordered his executive officer to take the Water Witch up the Paraná river past the guns at Itapirú.<sup>10</sup>

#### Notes

1. Thomas O. Fleckima, "Settlement of the Paraguayan-American Controversy of 1859: A Reappraisal," The Americas, vol. XXV (1968), p. 54 (Hereafter cited as Fleckima).
2. Fleckima, p. 52.
3. New York Times, October 12, 1858.
4. A Treaty of Friendship, Commerce and Navigation Between the United States of America and the Republic of Paraguay, February 4, 1859. RG 11 General Records of the United States Government. Treaty series 272. The changes applied to the original Treaty of

1853 resulted chiefly from carelessness on the part of the first American negotiator (John S. Pendleton) in allowing inaccurate reference to the United States of America as the United States of North America, and minor additional clausal errors which contributed to a six year delay in ratification.

5. U.S., Department of Defense, Navy Department, Office of Chief of Naval Operations, Naval History Division, Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships, vol. VII, Water Witch, (Washington, : GPO, 1959). The Water Witch has often been confused with another ship of the expedition named U.S.S. Pilcomayo, and with other ships in the United States Navy bearing the name of Water Witch. There have been in fact three warships commissioned in the U.S. Navy under that name. The first, built in 1844 was condemned in 1845, its power plant being installed in a new vessel of the same name. This new ship remained in service until 1851, at which time the power plant was installed in a gunboat of new design, 150 feet in length and with a draft of nine feet. The belief that all of the ships named Water Witch were one and the same is a misconception in that each ship was of unique design, length and tonnage.
6. Clare V. McKanna, "The Water Witch Incident," American Neptune, vol. XXXI (January, 1970), p. 15 (Hereafter cited as McKanna).
7. The Brazilians did in fact send a large squadron of their naval river steamers up the Paraná shortly after the attack on the Water Witch.
8. McKanna, p. 12.
9. Lieutenant Thomas J. Page to Secretary of the Navy James C. Dobbin, September 29, 1854. Letters from Officers Commanding Expeditions, ("Exploring Expedition Letters"), Subseries 8. Letters from Lieutenant Thomas Jefferson Page (Flagship Water Witch), Commanding an Expedition to Survey the Río de la Plata and Paraguay Rivers, January, 1853 - August, 1856. RG 45 Naval Records Collection of the Office of Naval Records and Library, National Archives (Hereafter cited as Page Letters; NA). Of interest is the admission by Page of his personal disdain and apparent lack of sympathy for Hopkins & Company. Page defends his involvement in the Hopkins affair, informing the Secretary that any action taken was done in accordance with his duties as a naval officer.
10. Page to Dobbin, February 5, 1855. Page Letters; NA.

## THE UNITED STATES RESPONDS

A little more than two months after Lieutenant Jeffers had his awful moment of truth, the early, unofficial reports of the incident on the Paraná reached the United States. The newspapers, hungry as always for sensational stories, made what they could out of "this insult to the flag", but lacking a strong reaction by the President or the State Department, had little to report.<sup>1</sup> Speculation replaced tangible news, so that in the weeks that passed the story was largely forgotten. Most likely, the President and Navy Secretary chose to await a complete report transmitted by Commodore Salter, Hopkins and other American officials which might yield first-hand information on what influence or responsibility American personnel had in the incident. When official reports arrived nearly three months after the incident it would not have been difficult to perceive how the actions of Page and Hopkins had in fact seriously compromised the American position in Paraguay. It was readily apparent that Hopkins' personal conduct was not that of an responsible diplomat and Page, for his part, had misused the naval force under his command.

Page and Hopkins had rendered themselves impotent in their official capacities, and in light of the situation responsibility passed to the State Department and the President. Fortunately the officials in Washington were considerably more cognizant of the potential complications of a hasty reaction and sought to defuse the incident before a more serious confrontation developed. The request of Lieutenant Page for a punitive attack against Paraguay was immediately



rejected as not conducive to the restoration of normal relations or stabilizing the deteriorating situation. On the other hand, there would have been an awareness of the possible ramifications of ignoring the attack. The dispute was not likely to fade away, especially as the Paraguayans held the United States at fault. In addition, the failure to answer the challenge to national honor may also have been mistaken as a sign of weakness, not only by Paraguay, but also by Paraguay's neighbors and the rest of the world. Two important nations figured prominently in this capacity: Great Britain and France. Their governments had a strong interest in the politics of the Platine region and closely monitored such international matters.<sup>2</sup> This was motivated in part by the possibility of some future contingency in which, for example, knowledge of the willingness and manner of response by the United States to such an attack could be of strategic or commercial value.

Nearly two years passed before the United States chose to respond, through an initiative directed by Secretary of State William Marcy, to the difficulties with Paraguay. The content of the instructions Marcy issued to Richard Fitzpatrick, appointed as envoy to Ascunción in late 1856 make it appear very likely that he held Hopkins, Page and Jeffers responsible for the dispute. Fitzpatrick's instructions held ratification of the Treaty of 1853 as the primary objective; the issue of the attack on the Water Witch and the claim of the Paraguay Navigation Company were raised as secondary questions to determine Paraguayan (López's) receptivity. The insertion of the claim of Paraguayan Navigation occurred after a Senator from the State of Rhode Island pressured the State Department into doing so.<sup>3</sup>

The Fitzpatrick mission to Paraguay met with little success. López instructed his foreign minister to insist that the United States apologize for the Water Witch affair and disavow the Company's claim, and to inform Fitzpatrick that ratification of the treaty was contingent upon these conditions being honored.<sup>4</sup> Fitzpatrick, having no authority to approve these conditions, was thus forced to return to the United States and merely report his assessment of the situation. With this development President Pierce and the Cabinet appeared very reluctant to act aggressively on the matter, apparently preferring to let the incoming Buchanan administration handle the dispute in their own way.

After the election of James Buchanan in 1856, the Paraguay question was left alone for yet another year. During this interlude, the new Secretary of State, Lewis Cass, became familiar with the main issues and points of the dispute and presented his recommendations to the President. In his annual message to Congress in December of 1857, President Buchanan emphasized the importance of asserting American honor in the Platine region and of settling the dispute.<sup>5</sup> Congress responded by generously voting funds in the amount of five million dollars and authority to use force in pressing the claims of the United States.<sup>6</sup> The funds approved by Congress were directed chiefly to the Department of the Navy for the organization of a battle squadron for potential use against Paraguay. All contingencies had to be budgeted from this appropriation, which produced an interesting challenge for the Navy Department.

President Buchanan had appointed Isaac Toucey Secretary of the

Navy. The Department he administered was a service crippled by ridiculously small annual appropriations, a handicap reflected in miniscule manpower, and few operational warships, with rare opportunities for training. In its physical form, the U.S. Navy was barely able to confront a nation as militarily insignificant as Paraguay - especially as that country possessed no seacoast. Most of the ships in the American Navy were designed for deep water operation. The large steam sloops, steam frigates, and sailing frigates and sloops of the fleet were incapable of ascending most rivers. Of the four classes of ships just identified, only the smallest sloops-of war and the two-masted brigs were capable of ascending the Paraná, and only if towed by steam powered craft. The decision to sail to a land-locked country and enforce a blockade would require the Navy to outfit its virtually non-existent riverine gunboats.

In 1857 the United States owned seven warships capable of ascending rivers of less than twenty feet in depth under their own power. Of these ships it appears that only two were capable of ascending the Paraná river with its numerous sand bars, snags, shoals and shifting channels; and one of these two ships was the Water Witch. The only other warship available for such duty was the steamer U.S.S. Fulton. If the United States seemed hesitant in answering the attack on the Water Witch with force, the lack of shallow draft steamships may provide a partial explanation.

In the brief history of the American republic, the U.S. Navy had acquired painfully little experience in protracted naval operations. The Navy Department was able to draw upon the past experience of its

officers and operational procedures from the Barbary Wars and the relatively recent Mexican War. Oddly, the combined experience gained in these conflicts had given the Navy some useful training for what might arise in Paraguay. During the Barbary Wars squadrons had operated at great distances from the United States and their sources of supplies, orders, replacements and other forms of logistic support. Years later during the Mexican War (and operating much closer to the United States), the Navy acquired significant experience with large scale logistics involved in the use of steam warships in battle and blockade situations. However, the capability of the Navy would be tested far beyond any experience acquired previously when it undertook the expedition to Paraguay, if only in the area of long range communication. This was especially significant when considering the remarkably unprepared status of the Navy's equipment and personnel.

#### Notes

1. New York Times, April 12, 1855.
2. Commodore William D. Salter to Secretary of the Navy James C. Dobbin, March 17, 1855. Letters Received by the Secretary of the Navy from Commanding Officers of Squadrons. RG 45 Naval Records Collection of the Office of Naval Records and Library, National Archives (Hereafter cited as Squadron Letters, Brazil Squadron; NA). In a despatch numbered 78, Commodore Salter enclosed a communication from James A. Peden, U.S. Minister to Buenos Aires, on the subject of a report of the Water Witch incident carried in the February 10, 1855 issue of the British Packet, an English language newspaper published in Buenos Aires. A copy of the article in the aforementioned newspaper was enclosed with Peden's communication.
3. Thomas O. Fleckima, "Settlement of the Paraguayan-American Controversy of 1859: A Reappraisal," The Americas, vol. XXV (1968), p. 54 (Hereafter cited as Fleckima). The claim of the Paraguay Navigation Company amounted to approximately 500,000 dollars, and restitution of the property seized by the Paraguayan government.

4. New York Times, March 30, 1857. This article reprints the verbatim text of several communications between Secretary of State William Marcy, Richard Fitzpatrick and Nicholas Vázquez, Foreign Minister of Paraguay.
5. Fleckima, p. 51.
6. U.S., Statutes at Large, vol. XI, "Resolutions", June 2, 1858, number 15, p. 370.

## A COMMANDER IS CHOSEN

William Branford Shubrick was considered by his peers to be the best naval diplomat in the service.<sup>1</sup> Such consideration would have included a great many capable officers, among them Matthew Calbraith Perry. This honor did not result from a single overwhelming or spectacular achievement, but was rather an acknowledgement of his many years of outstanding performance in numerous military and diplomatic missions in the service of his country. His naval career spanned more than six decades. It witnessed the growth of the United States from a seaboard nation to a major world commercial power and, most important to him personally, saw great change in the nature of the navy in which he served. Unlike many of his colleagues, he possessed a flexibility allowing him to adapt to a changing Navy, a personal characteristic which aided him in his highly successful career. "Branford", as his close friends knew him, and his older brother John Templer Shubrick, entered the Navy in 1806 as midshipmen. The Shubrick family distinguished itself by eventually providing several more family members to the Navy, though none achieved the stature attained by Branford and John.

Branford and John were born to a South Carolina plantation owner named Thomas Shubrick, whose home was located not far from the city of Charleston on Bull's Island.<sup>2</sup> During the American Revolution, the elder Shubrick held the rank of colonel and served under General Nathanael Greene in the desperate campaigns leading to the surrender of Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown. After the war, Colonel Shubrick settled back

into plantation life to prosper and raise a large family. Of his many sons, some made careers in the Army while at least four served in the Navy.

Branford's older brother John was destined to experience an extraordinary but tragically abbreviated naval career which placed him at the scene of the most memorable naval engagements during the War of 1812.<sup>3</sup> Immediately after the end of the war, John sailed with the squadron sent to Algiers to suppress renewed piracy. After successfully forcing peace on the Algerians, John Shubrick was given a copy of the recently obtained treaty, with orders to carry it to the United States. His ship, the brig-of-war U.S.S. Epervier was seen to pass Gibraltar, but somewhere in the Atlantic the ship and all aboard vanished.<sup>4</sup>

As mentioned, William Branford's career began in 1806 when he signed on as midshipman aboard the sloop-of-war U.S.S. Wasp.<sup>5</sup> His commanding officers on this vessel were Master Commandant John Smith and, later, Captain James Lawrence, who would one day be renowned for uttering the inspirational dying words, "Don't Give Up The Ship." While assigned to the Wasp young Shubrick formed a lifelong friendship with another midshipman from his home region of South Carolina. This friend was James Fenimore Cooper, who would in later years become a famous author.<sup>6</sup>

During the War of 1812, the shipboard experiences of Branford proved to be nearly as eventful as those of his brother. At the outset he was assigned to the U.S.S. Hornet and witnessed the thrilling chase of H.M.S. Belvidera by the U.S.S. President. Promoted to Lieutenant in 1813 and transferred to the U.S.S. Constellation in Chesapeake Bay,

Shubrick participated in a daring gunboat attack against elements of the British blockading squadron, when three frigates led by H.M.S. Junon made an incursion into the bay. Shubrick, in command of one of the gunboats, pressed home his attack with such vigor that he attracted the attention of his commander, Captain Charles Stewart. Shubrick broke off the attack only after he received a special signal ordering him to assist a disabled gunboat. This he did without losing any men. Two days later he defended Craney Island from a British advance. As a commander of a shore battery located there, his zeal and bravery once again attracted the attention of his superiors.<sup>7</sup>

The Constellation never succeeded in breaking the the British blockade and escaping into the Atlantic. Restless, Branford asked for a transfer, hoping to see action on the high seas. He secured such assignment as Third Lieutenant aboard the U.S.S. Constitution.<sup>8</sup> The transfer placed him at the scene of the victorious encounter over H.M.S. Cyane and H.M.S. Levant.<sup>9</sup> This battle, actually fought after the the signing of the Treaty of Ghent, proved to be the last major naval engagement of the war.

With the cessation of hostilities, the United States Navy resumed its peacetime posture and pursuits and over the next fifteen years Shubrick found the opportunity to work in a variety of capacities as a naval officer. Signing aboard the ship-of-the-line U.S.S. Washington, the young Lieutenant made the routine two year cruise to the Mediterranean which had almost become a tradition for Navy personnel. In 1829, after promotion to the rank of Commander, Shubrick was given the honor of bringing the remains of Oliver Hazard Perry, hero of the



Battle of Lake Erie, back from the West Indies. By 1831 he had attained the rank of Captain, and for several years served as post commandant of numerous navy yards.<sup>10</sup> Another assignment he held in this period was that of a navy ordnance officer. With the attainment of professional maturity, Captain Shubrick's personal integrity, exceptional ability and judgment came to be associated with his reputation. At the age of forty-nine he received his first promotion to flag rank when appointed to the command of the West Indies Squadron.

Six years later the United States was at war with Mexico. Shubrick was appointed commander of the Pacific Squadron, then blockading the west coast of Mexico. He arrived to supercede Commodore Robert F. Stockton as commander of the Pacific Squadron. Shortly, thereafter Commodore James Biddle, in command of the East Indies Squadron, arrived off Monterey, California, with special confidential instructions and assumed command of the Pacific theater. Shubrick willingly stepped aside and functioned as second-in-command until Biddle asked for relief from his command. With the departure of Biddle, Shubrick assumed total responsibility for the naval campaign in that theater of the war, consolidating the position of the United States in California after the capitulation of the Mexican authorities. His accomplishments as commander of the Pacific Squadron, and the leadership and direction he provided to the war effort, were both significant and a further testament to his abilities.<sup>11</sup>

The next ten years found Shubrick alternately assigned to ordnance duty and supervision of navy yards. In addition, he was appointed to a new position which afforded him a measure of honor when he gained



PLATE IV

appointment as first chairman of the newly established Lighthouse Board. Later he undertook a special mission to the Gulf of St. Lawrence to settle a fisheries dispute with Canada. The points of contention were resolved so amicably that it was difficult for many to believe that a problem had previously existed. In large measure, it was Shubrick's personality and graciousness that achieved the successful settlement. In 1858, on the eve of the Paraguay Expedition, Commodore Shubrick was a highly respected sixty-eight year old flag officer at the zenith of his career. When Shubrick was called upon to command the Brazil Squadron, soon to embark on the Paraguay Expedition, Navy Secretary Isaac Toucey selected the most qualified and capable officer in the ranks of the Navy.

#### Notes

1. K. Jack Bauer, "The Navy in the Age of Manifest Destiny: Some Suggestions for Sources and Research," Versatile Guardian, Research in Naval History, vol. XIV National Archives Conferences, ed. by Richard von Doenhoff (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1979), p. 164.
2. Susan Fenimore Cooper, "Rear Admiral William Branford Shubrick," Harpers, August, 1878, p. 400 (Hereafter cited as Cooper).
3. Lieutenant John Shubrick's first cruise found him aboard the U.S.S. Chesapeake at the time of the infamous attack on that vessel by the H.M.S. Leopard on June 22, 1807. In the course of the subsequent war with Great Britain (1812-15), the young Lieutenant was present at major actions aboard the U.S.S. Constitution against H.M.S. Guerriere and H.M.S. Java. Later as an officer aboard the U.S.S. Hornet, he fought in the desperate ship to ship duel in which he and his comrades defeated H.M.S. Peacock in eleven minutes! In late 1814 he was aboard the U.S.S. President when that ship's captain, Stephen Decatur, attempted to break out of the blockaded port of New York. The ship ran aground leaving harbor, damaging the keel and drastically affecting the frigate's sailing qualities. Several hours later the President encountered the British blockading squadron. The Americans fought a gallant running battle through the night against five British frigates in a blinding snowstorm. Finally forced to surrender, the President fell as a prize to the

British, but not before making a wreck of the fifty-gun H.M.S. Endymion. Shubrick was taken to Bermuda, but repatriated within a month after the signing of the Treaty of Ghent. His record of gallantry during the war earned him three medals from Congress and a sword from his native State of Georgia. After returning to the United States he sailed once again with Decatur in the new U.S.S. Guerriere, bound for Algiers to settle the piracy issue. His death marked the end of one of the most remarkable naval careers of the old Navy.

4. Cooper, p. 401.
5. Alan Westcott, "William Branford Shubrick," Dictionary of American Biography, vol IX, ed. by Dumas Malone (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1935), p. 136.
6. Cooper, p. 402.
7. Cooper, p. 402.
8. In the early years of the Navy officers were ranked in a way similar to the system used in the British Navy. Lieutenants, for example, were ranked according to seniority aboard each respective vessel. The First Lieutenant was the executive officer and second-in-command. The Second Lieutenant was next in the chain of command, followed by Third Lieutenant, and so on until the vessel possessed the necessary complement of officers required for the size of the crew or operation of the ship.
9. Cooper, p. 403.
10. "William B. Shubrick," General Register of the United States Navy and Marine Corps, (Washington, DC: Thomas H.S. Hamersly, 1882) p. 647.
11. The best account of Shubrick's shipboard experiences during the Mexican War is found in K. Jack Bauer's Surfboats and Horse Marines, (Annapolis: U.S. Naval Institute, 1969). Detailed attention is devoted to Shubrick's occupation of Baja California and several Pacific coast towns in which the Commodore's foresight, diplomacy and good judgement, coupled with bold decision making allowed for the striking success of the United States in the Pacific theater.

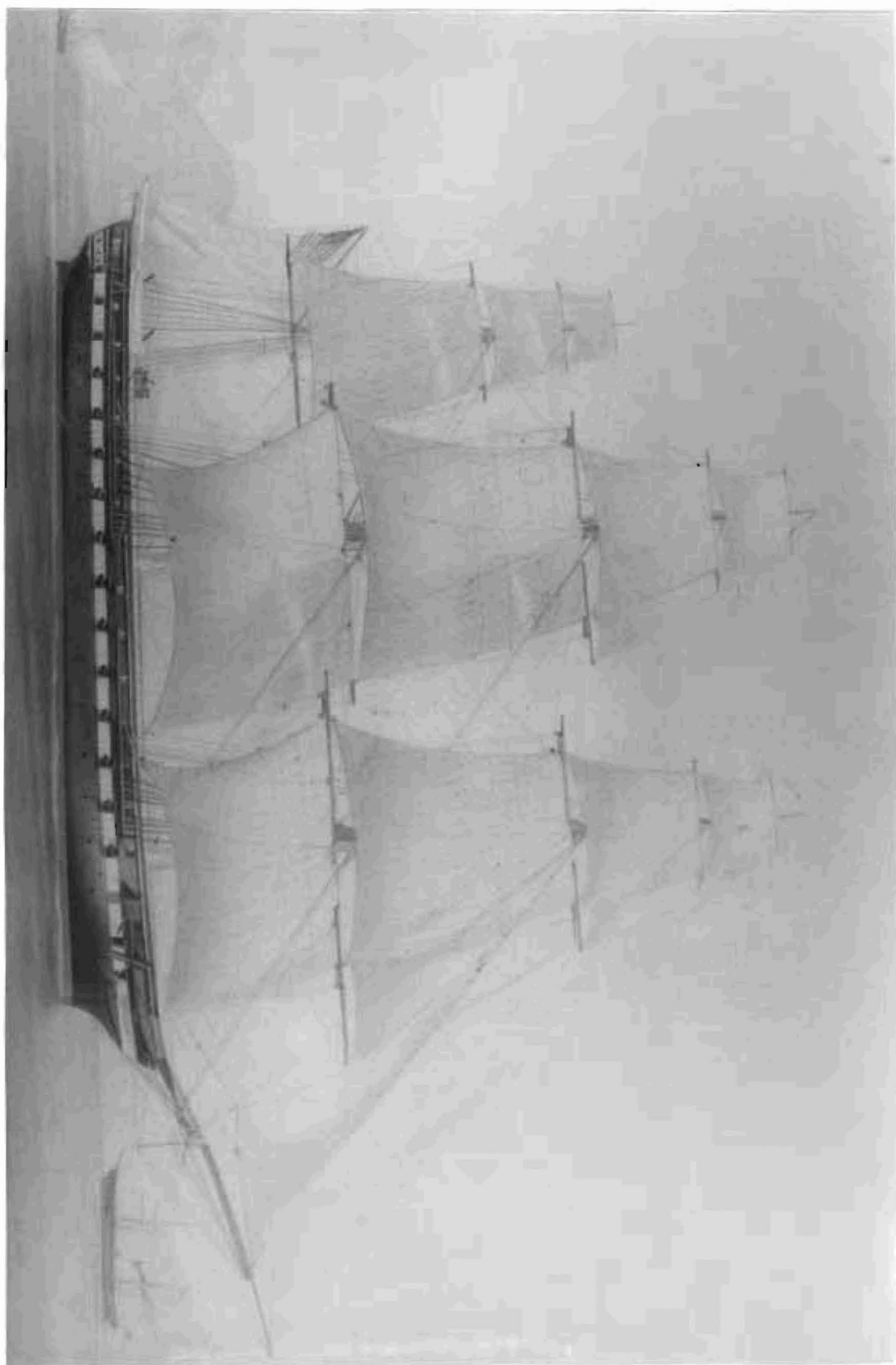
## A FLAGSHIP IS SELECTED

Early in the year 1823, as the future Commodore Shubrick was climbing the ladder of seniority, work commenced on a new heavy warship in the New York Navy Yard. The ship was authorized under an 1816 general appropriation to expand and improve the United States Navy.<sup>1</sup> The nation's experience during the War of 1812 demonstrated the importance of a strong navy in addition to an army. Several classes of warships were built under the provisions of the appropriation and the ship laid down in 1823 was a frigate, a type of ship already forming the backbone of the fleet. Although the United States was in the process of building the more heavily armed ships-of-the-line, the frigates built by American shipwrights were very nearly equivalent to ships-of-the-line in European navies and significantly more versatile. Several factors influenced this emphasis on a fleet composed chiefly of frigates.

First, and most important, frigates cost much less to build and normally required about half the complement of a ship-of-the-line to operate, an extremely important consideration for the petite and economy conscious American Navy. Secondly, this class of warship was ideal for peacetime patrol and in wartime was the supreme commerce raider. As a rule they could overwhelm anything smaller (and sometimes larger) and outsail any more powerful. The Navy received very commendable service out of the frigates; the accomplishments of the United States, the President and the Constitution bear ample testament to this.

The frigate started in 1823 was later commissioned as the U.S.S. Sabine.<sup>2</sup> Displacing 1,726 tons and 208 feet in length, this huge frigate's hull showed ports for a battery of seventy guns. The Sabine represented the culmination of the art of sailing warship design, incorporating elements of structural strength, speed, durability, weatherliness and fighting prowess surpassing all other vessels of her type. The Sabine was one of a class of nine warships authorized after the War of 1812. In basic design, all were lineal descendants of the frigates Constitution and President.

Work commenced on all ships at about the same time, but after the basic hulls were complete most were subsequently housed over. This was done as a measure to preserve the vessels until such time as their service was needed. The Navy finished individual ships over a great many years. Though the Sabine was laid down in 1823, she sat on the stocks in the New York Navy Yard for more than thirty years, for it was not until 1855 that the Navy needed a new frigate to replace some older vessel. In completing the Sabine, her builders incorporated structural alterations in the ship's stern and increased the frigate's length by some twenty feet.<sup>3</sup> This deviation from the Sabine's original design resulted from advances in naval architecture and allowed for a stronger and more heavily armed ship. It was not until 1855 that the Navy needed a new frigate to replace some older vessel. Designed for deep water duty, the Sabine joined a fleet in metamorphosis. Steam powered warships had largely come to dominate naval strategy and in that same year of 1855, six new steam powered screw frigates were readied for launch.<sup>4</sup> Yet, this seventy-gun sailing warship was selected as the flagship of the Paraguay Expedition, and with good reason.



Two factors justified the Sabine's selection. First, the several hundred men brought out on such a ship would be available for double duty on land or on smaller vessels engaged in the potential blockade. They need not be highly trained in the technical sense as seaman; the duties of most were connected with the ship's ordnance. Their chief value was found in their potential use as ground forces in landing operations. It was merely coincidental that this same class of heavy warship possessed far greater self-sufficiency than many other contemporary ships in the fleet, including the steam-sloops and steam-frigates. In addition to the great number of personnel that could be transported to the crisis zone, the Sabine's large size made possible the transport of equally large supplies of equipment and ordnance. In this respect the Sabine benefited from not being a steam warship, by virtue of not having a significant part of her hull occupied with boilers and machinery. Secondly, a sailing frigate would not consume enormous and expensive quantities of fuel in operation, a significant factor when considered in conjunction with the requirements of the shallow draft steamships the Navy had to procure for the expedition to Paraguay.

#### Notes

1. U.S., Statutes at Large, vol. VI, "An Act for the Gradual Increase of the Navy of the United States," April 29, 1816, chapter 138, p. 125.
2. U.S., Department of Defense, Navy Department, Office of Chief of Naval Operations, Naval History Division, Dictionary of American Fighting Ships, vol. V, Sabine, (Washington, DC: GPO, 1959), p. 215. Some confusion surrounds the actual onset of construction on the Sabine. Although the frigate was ordered laid down in 1822, work did not actually commence on the ship until 1823. Built on the basic model of the U.S.S. Brandywine, the Sabine and another



sister ship, the U.S.S. Santee were the last sailing frigates added to the Navy.

3. Howard I. Chapelle, The History of the American Sailing Navy, (New York: Bonanza Books, 1949), p. 466.
4. Geoffrey Smith, "An Uncertain Passage: The Bureaus Run the Navy, 1842-1861," In Peace and War, Interpretations of American Naval History, 1775-1978, ed. by Kenneth J. Hagan (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1978), p. 101.

## THE COMMODORE DEPARTS

Commodore William Branford Shubrick was stationed in Washington, DC, when he received orders appointing him to the command of the enlarged Brazil Squadron detailed to the Paraguay Expedition.<sup>1</sup> The signature of Isaac Toucey, Secretary of the Navy, endorsed the orders and it was to him that Shubrick returned the routine acknowledgment of receipt. The orders received by Shubrick on September 9, 1858, set into motion the departure of the Commodore from his home in Washington, and a temporary leave from his duties as chairman of the Lighthouse Board. Eleven days later Commodore Shubrick boarded the U.S.S. Sabine anchored in New York harbor and officially assumed command of the Brazil Squadron. The squadron however, had yet to assemble; its individual ships could be found scattered up and down the Atlantic seaboard. Most sailed separately, with orders to rendezvous at the Rio de la Plata. In all, the Navy detailed a total of nineteen vessels to sail with the Paraguay Expedition, including storeships, brigs, sloops-of-war, steamers and the frigates Sabine and St. Lawrence.

As flag officer and commander, Commodore Shubrick exercised overall authority governing the movements of the squadron but, according to time honored naval tradition, he was in many respects a mere passenger in that he assumed no authority in the command of the Sabine or any other ship in the squadron. A commodore or an admiral may command a fleet but to the captain went all authority in the operation of his ship. To Captain Adams, commander of the Sabine, went the responsibility of preparing the flagship for sea and the long voyage to

the southern latitudes of South America.

Preparations for departure commenced with the stowing of enormous quantities of ordnance, stores and other supplies needed for the anticipated distant and lengthy campaign. Every article had to be secured in the hold with utmost care in order not to upset the delicate balance and sailing trim of the Sabine. A shift of cargo in a heavy sea could capsize the ship and even ships stores improperly arranged could make the difference between the frigate sailing like a clipper or wallowing along like a slug. The mariner's old adage of a "taut ship" was by no means mere cliché.

Three weeks later the Sabine was ready for sea and Commodore Shubrick welcomed a most distinguished passenger aboard in the person of Judge James Bowlin. Bowlin was a special U.S. Commissioner attached to the State Department, assigned to accompany the expedition in the capacity of the diplomatic representative for the United States. The State Department was sending Bowlin as a special envoy to handle the claims of the United States; he was additionally empowered to demand the renegotiation of the Treaty of 1853 to, as was hoped, achieve an amicable settlement acceptable to the position of the United States.<sup>2</sup> His success or failure would determine any subsequent actions taken by Commodore Shubrick's Brazil Squadron. With the Commissioner and his personal secretary aboard, Shubrick issued orders to make ready for immediate departure. Just before noon on October 14, 1858, the Sabine left her anchorage in New York harbor, met the Atlantic rollers and set a course for South America.<sup>3</sup> With all the shipping present in the harbor the flagship's departure may have gone unnoticed. Relatively

little attention was devoted to the Sabine in the local press, a somewhat surprising fact, considering the potential effects of the mission to Paraguay.

As the Sabine left New York in her wake, the huge frigate methodically ticked off the leagues as she sailed south along the east coast of the United States. The crew settled into their normal routines; two men at the helm, scores aloft in the yards and rigging, ordinary seamen holystoning the decks to gleam pearly white in the sunshine and others performing the endless necessary tasks to properly run the ship. In addition there were the officers, each making sure that all work was done properly. This regimen given to the five hundred man crew of the Sabine was chiefly ordained by Navy tradition, specifically designed to limit the amount of idle time available to the crew for a variety of reasons. First, discipline was best served with the crew at work because dissent, agitation and trouble were often the result of excessive idleness. Secondly, a consistent and full day of work made for an efficient and safer ship in the normal course of sailing, and in an emergency. A disciplined and well trained crew was essential in either situation.

For a week the weather held fair as the Sabine sailed south. Then, on the twenty-second of October, the barometric pressure fell, the wind backed around to the north, and an exceedingly violent storm engulfed the ship. Throughout the day the storm grew in intensity, battering the Sabine from behind until Captain Adams attempted to bring the ship into the wind in an attempt to ride out the storm. While this maneuver was in progress, the Sabine caught a wave at the wrong angle and with the

force of the wind working against the frigate's lofty rig, was rolled on her side or in naval parlance, "on her beam ends," an attitude in which the ship could neither right itself nor maneuver. The Sabine, carried over the waves at the whim of the storm was, in mortal danger.

With heavy seas crashing across the deck, the ship and crew were violently tossed. The weight of the frigate's masts helped hold her over, and as the furled sails absorbed tons of water this weight increased to a critical point. There was little the Captain could do to alleviate the situation. Only a single drastic measure would bring the Sabine back to an even keel, but the decision to do this had to be avoided if at all possible. It required cutting away the masts, thereby crippling the ship and creating the potential for eventual disaster.

With this prospect, the Captain gambled on riding the storm out, committing himself and the ship's company to keep a precarious foothold on the wildy pitching and steeply angled deck. The deadly threat of the cargo shifting was only matched by the danger of thirty-four cannon weighing two tons each hanging above their heads, held in place only by belaying tackle. If even one broke loose it would hurtle across the deck to crash through the opposite submerged side of the ship, making a hole larger than the gun. The Sabine would sink in minutes, taking all aboard to their deaths. A danger such as this was responsible for the Navy's rigid regulations concerning the careful handling of a warship, with the special emphasis on the attention devoted to equipment, training and discipline.

For five long hours the Sabine was on her side at the mercy of the storm. During this harrowing time several ships boats were smashed; two

tillers were broken, leaving the rudder hanging free until a third, temporary jury rig was put in place; the jib boom sprung and many sails were blown away; and several forward gunports, along with the ships head, disintegrated under the onslaught of the waves.<sup>4</sup> For Commodore Shubrick, the danger may have seemed even more serious considering his long experience at sea. It was the worst storm he had ever encountered. As Commodore, he was powerless to interfere with Captain Adams' command and, like the rest of the ship's company, had to rely on the soundness of the Captain's judgement. He may also have reflected on the loss of his brother John so many years before; it had been rumored that he may have encountered a similar storm in this same area off the Atlantic Coast, disappearing without a trace in the U.S.S. Epervier.

Fortunately, the storm gradually moderated and as it did the Sabine slowly rose to an even keel once again, to regain maneuverability and forward motion. The crew began setting their ship in order, continuing on for Paraguay, but under greatly reduced sail. The damage to the rudder was so severe that the spare tiller set in place earlier could only be used as a temporary measure. The Sabine would have to put into port to make proper repairs and after careful consideration, Commodore Shubrick approved setting a course for the British Island of Bermuda to effect them. The dock facilities in Bermuda's St. George harbor were as fine as any in the United States and possessed the added advantage of being along the flagship's intended course. Within the week Bermuda loomed off the port bow. Upon arrival at St. George the Commodore, as was customary, reported to the senior British authority on the island. Captain Frederick Hutton of the Royal Navy, superintendent of the dockyard, graciously offered the use of the port facilities to repair

the Sabine.<sup>5</sup>

The ship's carpenter, armoror and crew immediately set to repairing the Sabine's damage. However, in spite of all diligent effort, the rudder could not be fixed because the main securing pins were found to be sprung. It was left, in place as it worked normally, and was considered secure enough for the remainder of the voyage. Additionally, a significant loss of copper off the bow was discovered, but as its absence would not impair the vessel's seaworthiness, no attempt was made to replace the missing plates. By November ninth, the Sabine was back at sea and after a swift voyage of thirty-nine days, the frigate made rendezvous with elements of the Brazil Squadron off Montevideo, Uruguay.

Upon arrival at Montevideo, Commodore Schurbrick assumed direct control over the Brazil Squadron and, along with command, the responsibility and headache of solving problems large and small that attend the title of commander-in-chief. Before any operations commenced or any contact made with the government of Paraguay, strategy had to be set and coordinated. Preceding this action was a review of all intelligence reports on hand, in order to accurately assess the political and military situation confronting the American squadron.

Present at the Sabine's arrival was the frigate St. Lawrence, sloop-of-war Falmouth, brigs Perry, Bainbridge and Dolphin, storeship Supply, and the steamers Fulton and Water Witch (of "Incident" fame). These ships accounted for less than half the vessels detailed to the expedition, the absent elements consisting of vitally important steamers of shallow draft, specially chartered by the Navy Department

for the mission up the Paraná river. These vessels, like the flagship, had also sailed independently, most steaming out of Philadelphia from whence they were chartered.<sup>6</sup> Of these steamships Shubrick knew little, as they had not been originally built for the Navy, and had only recently undergone rather hasty conversion for naval service. Their usefulness in this capacity had yet to be demonstrated.

Within hours of his arrival, the Commodore received reports on the condition of the squadron, intelligence concerning Paraguay and the political posture of the Platine republics. Shubrick conferred directly with Bowlín on the matter of the intelligence reports, as this impacted directly on the mission of the Commissioner. The condition of the squadron required his personal attention, two logistical problems confronted him.

The commander of the steamer Fulton, Lieutenant John J. Almy, submitted a report concerning the quality of coal purchased for the expedition. Apparently this coal, sent out from Barbados and Pernambuco was of such poor quality as to render it useless to the squadron. The coal had a high ash content, making it necessary to burn immense quantities to achieve only marginal boiler pressure, and under no conditions could any of the steamers make their best speed.<sup>7</sup> Arrangements for coal to replace that on hand had to be made on extended credit with local suppliers. Any additional supply sent out from the United States would be months in arriving, and as a result impair the squadron's effectiveness. For the present, Shubrick allowed preparations to continue for the squadron's ascent of the Paraná.

In addition to the deficiency of the coal, one of the storeships



supplying the Brazil Squadron had not yet arrived; carried aboard this ship was a gun carriage for an 11-inch Dahlgren shell gun. The gun itself, brought out in the storeship Supply, was useless without the carriage and was the single most important piece of artillery in the squadron.<sup>8</sup> Shubrick could not delay the advance of the squadron without losing advantage of the sudden, unexpected show of force. Yielding to this contingency, the Commodore immediately prepared to depart for the Paraguayan capital with Commissioner Bowlin.<sup>9</sup> Shubrick and Bowlin, intended to travel upriver to Ascunción and meet with Paraguayan representatives in an attempt to secure an early settlement, thereby hoping to avoid a military confrontation when the squadron assembled at Paraguay's border. The journey would allow time for coordination of squadron logistical support and possibly create the appearance that the United States was sincerely interested in avoiding war, yet pressure would be maintained by the spectre of the approaching warships. Additionally, the Commodore would secure valuable time for his officers to train the sailors in blockade and related duties.

In 1859, the estuary of the Río de la Plata was a great center of commerce, with the merchant ships of many nations calling at the seaports of Montevideo and Buenos Aires. As warship after warship arrived from the United States, local authorities, the press and the international community, (made up largely of foreign consuls and traders), found themselves caught up in the excitement and sense of urgency produced by the presence of the Brazil Squadron. Correspondents for newspapers in New York, London and other large cities in the United States and Europe sent dispatches rife with speculation about the imminent confrontation.<sup>10</sup> Most late releases indicated that a peaceful

settlement was possible, a perhaps surprising revelation given the reputation for unpredictability enjoyed by Paraguayan President López.

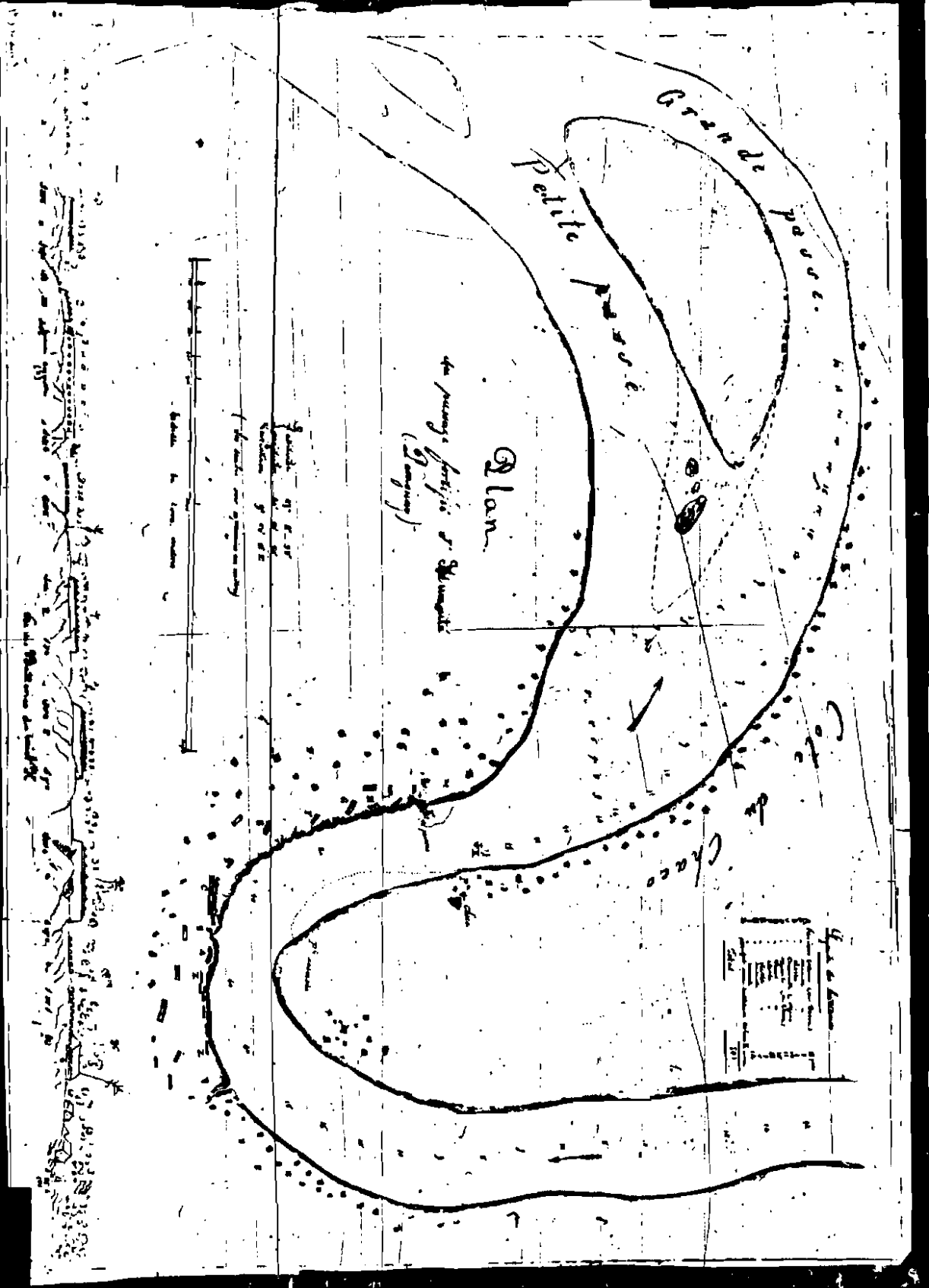
The tension brought on by the Expedition's arrival became abundantly clear when Commodore Shubrick received information that the government of Uruguay was hostile to, and very alarmed by the American naval presence. The Uruguayans were fearful of American designs and intrigue, making it necessary for Commissioner Bowlin to deliver a personal explanation of the aims and claims of the United States. The assurance that the United States and its Navy had no intention of executing a version of the infamous "Ostend Manifesto" in Paraguay satisfied the immediate concern of the Uruguayan government, which then withdrew its objection to the mission of the Paraguay Expedition.

Shubrick and the Commissioner departed shortly for Buenos Aires to procure money for the use of the squadron and, at the request of Bowlin, to confer with the governor of Buenos Aires, Dr. Albina. A vanguard of six warships sailed with Shubrick, including the little brigs Perry, Bainbridge and Dolphin, the steamships Harriet Lane, Water Witch and the Fulton (to which the Commodore transferred his flag). On New Years Day, 1859, the six ships began the ascent of the Paraná river, the first leg on the long journey upriver to Paraguay, with the steamships towing the sailing brigs.<sup>11</sup> After three days the American ships arrived at the Argentine city of Rosario and a rendezvous with a transport laden with coal. While Shubrick made arrangements for the storage of the coal, a favorable shift of wind from the south enabled the brigs to sail on upriver under canvas. On January 8th, with all arrangements complete, Shubrick steamed on for

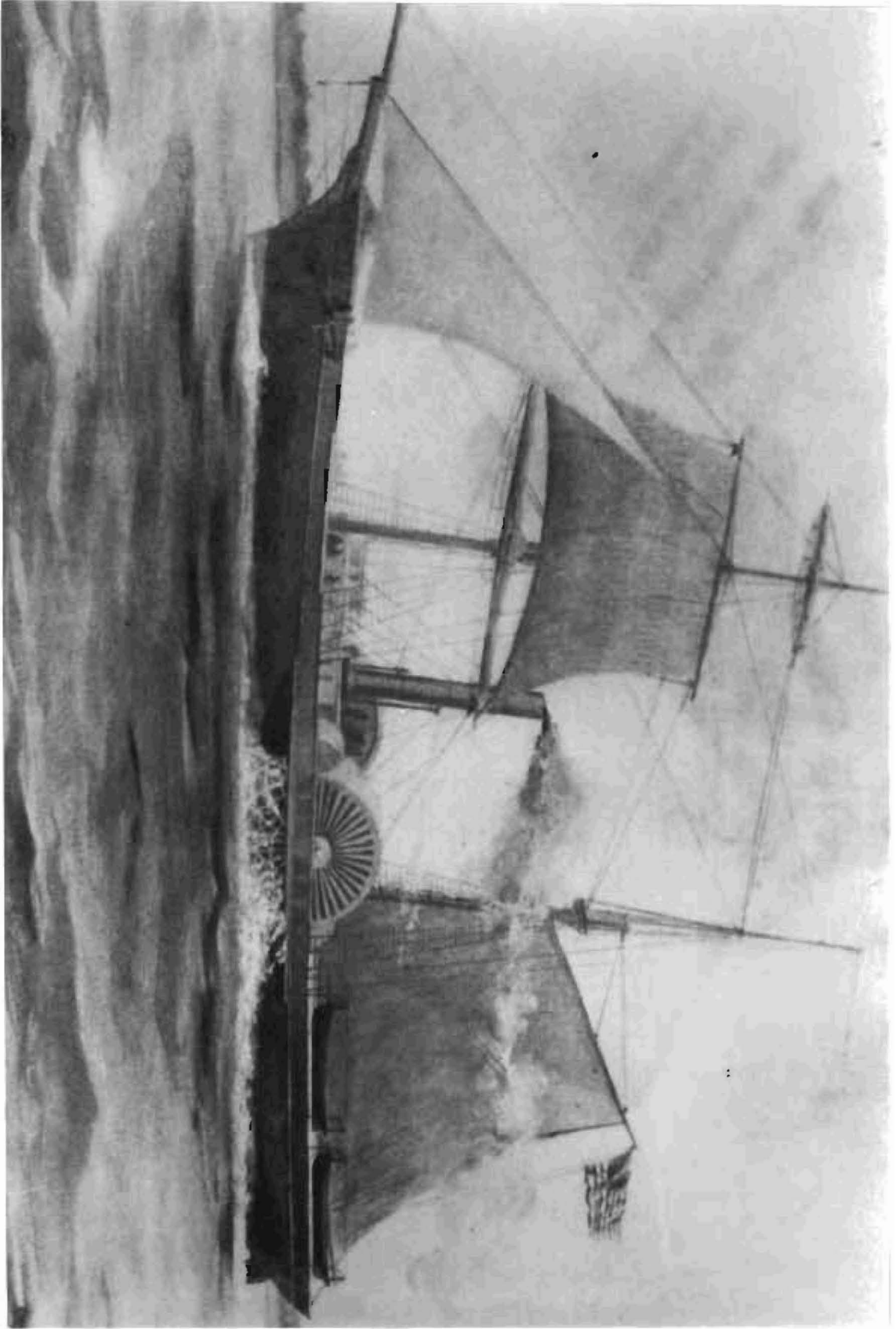
Paraguay.

Intelligence reports, so vital for strategic movement, found their way to Shubrick at regular intervals after his departure from Montevideo, thus keeping him informed of any changes in the political or military climate. Rumor had the Paraguayans preparing massive fortifications to control movement along the channels of the Paraguay and Paraná rivers. Under the direction of French engineers, multiple levels of gun emplacements were reported to have been built along each bank of the Paraguay river for several miles, while more modest gun emplacements commanded the Paraná.<sup>12</sup> In addition, a huge chain was said to extend across the Paraguay river, blocking access to all unauthorized vessels. Other intelligence indicated that the Paraguayan government sat resolved for war if necessary, with some local newspapers confirming the report, including El Seminario, the official news publication of Paraguay. Information of this kind indicated clearly the sobering effect the approach of the squadron was having on the Paraguayan government. It also revealed that Shubrick's strategy of a bold approach had marshalled the attention of all interested parties.

January 19, 1859, found the U.S.S. Fulton just below the border of Paraguay at Corrientes, Argentina. The passage upriver to this city produced a minor drama for the crew of the Fulton. The month of January is midsummer in the southern latitudes and, as was usual, the river level was low. Steaming up the Paraná, increasingly difficult in its upper reaches, was achieved only through the sustained disciplined and coordinated effort of the sailors aboard the American ships. All were nearly too large to safely navigate the channel and, not surprisingly,



MAP III



the Fulton went hard aground on the afternoon of January 11th.<sup>13</sup>

Despite all effort on the part of the Fulton's crew, the seven hundred ton hull could not be freed. Attempts to winch the ship off the mudbank proved fruitless as river silt piled up around the ship's sides. One of the Fulton's officers was ordered ashore to procure a horse and ride upriver to overtake the Harriet Lane and bring that ship back to assist the Fulton. After an all night ride, Lieutenant William H. Murdaugh caught up with the Harriet Lane, which arrived to aid the Fulton on the afternoon of January 14th.<sup>14</sup> A transfer of tow lines and the combined power plants of both vessels produced the necessary force to tug the Fulton out of its trough of mud, after which both vessels were able to resume their journey. The Fulton ran aground two more times before reaching Corrientes, but with the experience gained on January 14th, the crew was able to back the ship off under its own power.

While awaiting assistance from the Harriet Lane on January 12th, a river steamer carrying Justo José de Urquiza, the President of the Argentine Confederation, passed the stranded American flagship. Unknown to Shubrick and Bowlin, Urquiza had embarked on a personal mission of intervention in an attempt to defuse the looming crisis between the United States and Paraguay.<sup>15</sup> Urquiza had offered to help mediate the dispute at the arrival of Shubrick and Bowlin off Montevideo, but the Commissioner had politely declined, fearing that outside intervention might compromise the negotiations. After the hostile reaction of the Uruguayans, the friendly offer of assistance of Urquiza and his government may have alleviated some of the anxiety felt by the American officials.

In Paraguay, the patriotic campaign continued with news of that government's resolve to fight, if necessary. Additionally, El Seminario maintained the innocence of the government of Paraguay in the dispute, placing blame for the difficulties with consul Hopkins and the Paraguayan Navigation Company.<sup>16</sup> By restating their willingness to fight, the government of Paraguay appeared to cut off some of the avenues for a peaceful settlement. Thus, of chief concern to Shubrick as he arrived at Corrientes was the care which had to be exercised in all future actions, any of which might decide the difference between peace and war.

The role of Commissioner Bowlin, if not simple, was straightforward: achieve a settlement satisfactory to the honor and interests of the United States. However he might accomplish this depended entirely upon his own abilities as a diplomat and the receptivity of Paraguayan President Carlos López and his officials. Beyond this, Bowlin had a single figurative trump card in the form of the implied threat of the Brazil Squadron. Bowlin could depend on Shubrick's cooperation and military support.

All decisions concerning operations by the Brazil Squadron were the responsibility of Commodore Shubrick as the flag officer. In addition to his naval duties, he also held responsibility for delivering the Commissioner to a place of negotiation with as much dignity as possible while not provoking the Paraguayans. Without question, the negotiations would take place in Ascunción, Paraguay, so it was to that city that Shubrick would transport Bowlin. Shubrick chose to proceed to Ascunción with the Fulton alone, making Corrientes a staging area for offensive

military operations, if and when they might be necessary. Corrientes provided an excellent base for such preparations by its location just below the border of Paraguay at the confluence of the Paraguay and Paraná rivers.

During the voyage out from the United States, Commodore Shubrick submitted regular reports to the Secretary of the Navy detailing the movements of the squadron, and transmitting significant political intelligence and outlining his intentions. Most significant was his apparent determination to transport Bowlin to Ascunción and see the dispute settled at the earliest possible date.<sup>17</sup> Three weeks had now elapsed since the Fulton had entered the Parana river. At Corrientes, Shubrick delayed only long enough to make arrangements for the rest of the squadron's arrival before he and the Commissioner departed for Ascunción. The date was January 20, 1859.

#### Notes

1. Secretary of the Navy Isaac Toucey to Flag Officer William Branford Shubrick, September 8, 1858. Confidential Letters Sent (Record of Confidential Letters) vol. IV. October 20, 1857 - September 6, 1861. RG 45 Naval Records Collection of the Office of Naval Records and Library, National Archives.
2. New York Times, October 7, 1858.
3. Shubrick to Toucey, October 14, 1858. Letters Received by the Secretary of the Navy from Commanding Officers of Squadrons. RG 45 Naval Records Collection of the Office of Naval Records and Library, National Archives (Hereafter cited as Squadron Letters, Brazil Squadron; NA).
4. Report of Captain Henry A. Adams to Branford Shubrick, October 27, 1858. Squadron Letters, Brazil Squadron; NA.
5. Shubrick to Toucey, November 6, 1858. Squadron Letters, Brazil Squadron; NA.



6. U.S., Department of Defense, Navy Department, Office of Chief of Naval Operations, Naval History Division, Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships, vol. I, Atalanta, p. 69; vol. IV, M.W. Chapin, p. 175, Memphis, p. 317, Metacomet, p. 340; vol. VIII, Western Port, p. 212. (Washington, DC: GPO, 1959).
7. Engineering Officer H. Newell to Lieutenant-Commanding John S. Almy, December 4, 1858. Squadron Letters, Brazil Squadron; NA.
8. Shubrick to Toucey. December 28, 1858. Squadron Letters, Brazil Squadron; NA.
9. Shubrick to Toucey, January 4, 1859. Squadron Letters, Brazil Squadron; NA.
10. New York Times, November 27, 1858. This story carries reprints of reports published in the London Daily News and the Paris Constitutional. Of interest is the position taken by the foreign press in regard to the Paraguay Expedition. Although each expresses little sympathy for the manner in which the United States entangled itself in its quarrel with Paraguay, they do acknowledge that the attack on the Water Witch was unjustified. The newspapers viewed the Paraguay Expedition with something bordering on amusement, not unlike a child's reaction to a younger sibling's attempt to impress.
11. Shubrick to Toucey. January 4, 1859. Squadron Letters, Brazil Squadron; NA.
12. Washington Union, November 23, 1858.
13. Shubrick to Toucey, January 19, 1859. Squadron Letters, Brazil Squadron; NA.
14. Shubrick to Toucey, January 19, 1859. Squadron Letters, Brazil Squadron; NA.
15. New York Times, April 18, 1859. There was a similar effort on the part of the Uruguayan government. Apparently a Uruguayan minister secured passage aboard the U.S.S. Southern Star at Montevideo to offer his services in mediating the dispute prior to that vessels ascent of the Paraná.
16. New York Times, February 26, 1858.
17. In the majority of Commodore Shubrick's despatches, a sense of urgency underscores all of his communications to the Secretary of the Navy. One can also sense a degree of uncertainty in regard to the imminent confrontation, countered by the Commodore's committment and determination to execute the task assigned to the Brazil Squadron.

## INTERVENTION

The final leg of the journey began as Commodore Shubrick ordered Commander Almy to take the Fulton up the Paraguay river to Ascunción. The Fulton departed from Corrientes on the morning of January 21, 1859, approaching the confluence of the Paraguay river just eleven days short of four years after the Water Witch incident. As the American warship steamed past that point, the place where the incident occurred may have just been made out in the distance by those on board.

Shortly after entering the channel of the Paraguay river the Fulton approached the much talked about fortifications located at a place called Humaita, which were the subject of the earlier reports received by Shubrick. The military presence here was much larger but not many times more formidable than that at Itapirú and, to the amazement of the Americans, much of the defensive fortifications appeared to have been heavily damaged by a recent flood. As it was, there were only modest gun emplacements still intact and there was no evidence of the barrier chain.<sup>1</sup>

Shubrick had no intention of provoking the Paraguayans, although the crew was sent to battle stations as a defensive precaution. As the Fulton approached a command point, the expected hail came from shore. Shubrick issued the order to stop and an anchor let go to hold the Fulton in place while Commander Percival Drayton (aide to the Commodore) and Lieutenant William Murdaugh went ashore to officially report the arrival of the American legation and reason for their

presence in Paraguay.<sup>2</sup>

Ashore, Paraguayan soldiers were also sent to general quarters at the approach of the Fulton. They appeared in numbers according to an eyewitness, "as thick as Chinese" to the sailors aboard the American ship.<sup>3</sup> As the American officers stepped onto the jetty near the command post they were escorted to an interview with the post commandant, identified only as General Gonzalez. Commander Drayton and the General exchanged customary formalities, after which the purpose of the Fulton's presence was explained. Gonzalez made general inquiry as to who was aboard and whether the Fulton was a vessel of war.<sup>4</sup> Satisfied with the meeting, Gonzalez granted permission for the ship and company to proceed upriver for Ascunción. Drayton and Murdaugh reported back to Shubrick aboard the Fulton, after which the steamer departed, although on the orders of the Commodore, no salutes were exchanged. Shubrick did not think it proper in consideration "of the uncordial state of relations between the Government of the United States and that of Paraguay."<sup>5</sup> Four days of steaming in the oppressive heat brought the arrival of the Fulton at Ascunción, and also the moment of truth for settling the dispute.

During the next ten days the long awaited negotiations took place between Commissioner Bowlin and officials of the government of Paraguay.<sup>6</sup> James Bowlin had had considerable experience as a negotiator for the United States. While serving as U.S. Minister to Colombia in the mid-1850's, he had exhibited a very stern attitude towards that government over over an incident in the region of Colombia that is now known as Panama.<sup>7</sup> In settling the dispute with Paraguay Bowlin adopted

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more conciliatory tactics, renegotiating the problems with the Treaty of 1853, arranging a new trade convention and also successfully exacting the settlement and the apology demanded by the United States. Bowlin accomplished the diplomatic mission and opened the door to normal relations with Paraguay, but it should be noted that the ominous approach of the Brazil Squadron during the negotiations and the assistance of Commodore Shubrick made the mission of Bowlin somewhat easier.<sup>8</sup>

The officials of the American legation and the government of Paraguay celebrated the conclusion of negotiations with a ritual state dinner on behalf of the new treaty of peace, commerce and friendship. The customary toasts were exchanged by all the officials and principals involved in the new accord. Shubrick and thirty officers from the Fulton and the recently arrived Water Witch attended a reception at which the Commodore offered a twenty-one gun salute to the Republic of Paraguay on the morrow, to acknowledge the normalization and restoration of friendly relations between their two nations. The next day, February 11, 1859, the promised salute to the flag of Paraguay was fired from the American flagship, after which Paraguayan gunners ashore fired their own return salute to the flag of the United States. With the mission of Bowlin accomplished and an apparent success, the Americans prepared for their return to the United States.

As the crews of the ships made ready to depart on February 12th, a peculiar incident occurred. During the morning, President López had sent out to the ships several bales of yerba, a Paraguayan tea, as a gift to the crewmen of the Fulton and Water Witch. When news of the

gift was made known to Shubrick, he issued an order that it be immediately returned. In addition, he ordered the commanders of each respective ship to submit reports detailing the conditions under which the yerba was delivered and accepted.<sup>9</sup> The Commodore's apparently stern reaction was prompted by the restriction placed on such matters under U.S. law, which prohibited the acceptance of gifts by officials of the United States, under any circumstance, from any King, Prince or foreign State. This restriction was applicable to the enlisted personnel of the squadron.<sup>10</sup> There was no report concerning the reaction of the Paraguayans to the return of the tea, but one can speculate that they may have considered the reason offered by the Americans as rather odd.

With this matter settled, the Water Witch and the Fulton took leave of Ascunción, with the Commodore and Commissioner in possession of a satisfactory settlement to the dispute and all points of contention with the treaty corrected. As final preparations were made to depart, Commodore Shubrick transmitted reports of the settlement to Washington, and also issued a general order to the personnel of the Brazil Squadron. This order reduced the strength of the squadron to three ships and, with the addition of a personal touch, made official record of the fine discipline, good behavior and devotion to duty of the American sailors serving with the Paraguay Expedition.<sup>11</sup>

By February sixteenth, the Fulton and Water Witch had returned to Corrientes, where Commodore Shubrick found other ships of the squadron preparing to assume blockading stations on the Paraná and Paraguay rivers, and Commander Thomas J. Page training the men for military operations. In light of the settlement just achieved, all military

preparations were suspended and these elements of the squadron departed for Montevideo and the long voyage back to the United States. As they made their way downriver in the company of the Fulton, other ships of the squadron were likewise intercepted and ordered away from Paraguayan territory.<sup>12</sup>

Throughout the critical period following the arrival of the Brazil Squadron, the government of the Argentine Confederation generously extended any assistance it could offer to help resolve the dispute between Paraguay and the United States and avoid conflict. The underlying motivation of this government must surely have been to protect Argentina's commercial interests, which would certainly have suffered from the disruption caused by war. Nevertheless, Argentina's President Urquiza personally intervened on his own initiative, meeting separately with President López and Commissioner Bowlin to assist with an amicable settlement to the dispute. Although Bowlin had earlier refused his offer of mediation, Urquiza traveled to Ascunción to meet with López several days before the Commodore Shubrick arrived with Bowlin aboard the Fulton. After the settlement, Shubrick reported to the Secretary of the Navy that this meeting between the leaders probably contributed favorably to the outcome of the negotiations, and benefited all parties involved.

The involvement of such personages as Urquiza left little doubt as to the seriousness with which the increased American naval presence was taken by the Platine governments. Afterwards the tension produced by the Paraguay Expedition quickly melted away, and thereafter goodwill prevailed. President Urquiza expressed his country's friendship by

inviting Shubrick, Bowlin and the officers of the squadron to a banquet given in their honor. Shubrick accepted, and the Fulton diverted up the Uruguay river to the estate of General Uriquiza. Uriquiza wined and dined his guests with delicious fare and the customary toasts to the United States, Commissioner Bowlin, Commodore Shubrick and the Navy in which he served. He also expressed his great admiration of the disciplined conduct of the American naval officers and especially Commodore Shubrick, to whom he presented an ornate ceremonial sword. As before with the gift of yerba, Shubrick politely declined the gift, returning it to Uriquiza and apologetically explaining the legal restriction which prevented him from accepting it. Uriquiza insisted that Shubrick take the sword, and rather than appear impolite the Commodore accepted it. In his next series of despatches to the Secretary of the Navy, Shubrick reported the acceptance of the sword and stated his intention of delivering it to the Navy Department as property of the United States immediately upon his return.<sup>13</sup>

After the banquet Shubrick delayed no longer than was necessary to make preparations for the departure of the Brazil Squadron. With all official business of the expedition accomplished, Commodore Shubrick transferred his flag back to the U.S.S. Sabine and, with Commissioner Bowlin and his Secretary, sailed for the United States on March 25, 1859. In official reports prepared after sailing, the details concerning the departure of the Brazil Squadron were summarized for the Secretary of the Navy and transmitted aboard other ships bound for the United States.<sup>14</sup>

When issuing the general order that reduced the Brazil Squadron to



its normal strength, Shubrick also ordered all other vessels back to their home ports in the United States. Most sailed independently after taking aboard provisions, but one of the chartered steamers, the Metacomet, began experiencing boiler problems. An official board of survey held on the ship concluded that the steam plant and machinery were too weak for a safe voyage back to the United States. In a report dated March 29, 1859, Shubrick relayed his decision to leave the Metacomet behind and sell her.

The long voyage back to the northern hemisphere and the United States passed without incident for the fifteen returning warships. The Sabine returned to New York and sailed into the harbor below Manhattan Island early in May, arriving without fanfare. The press devoted little attention to the return of the Paraguay Expedition, nor did the President or Congress seek any political leverage from the Expedition's success. In fact, the expedition attracted only a brief review in the Secretary of the Navy's annual report.<sup>15</sup> The treaty, in the form of several copies carried home in various warships, was stored along with other similar documents in the nation's capital to be relatively forgotten in the obscurity of time. A similar obscurity befell the dedicated accomplishment of the Brazil Squadron. Commodore Shubrick returned to his post as chairman of the Light House Board, on which he served the remainder of his career.

When the Civil War broke out in March, 1861, most officers and men of the Navy remained loyal to the United States, though a few felt an obligation to stand with the Confederate cause. Shubrick, a southerner, retained his loyalty to the United States as a reserve officer on the

Navy list. Although officially retired in 1861, the Navy elevated him to the rank of Rear Admiral on the retired list in 1862. In addition, he was retained as the chairman of the Light House Board for several years after the Civil War. He died in 1874 at the age of eighty-three having, as did the Paraguay Expedition he commanded, honorably fulfilled his service to the Navy and his country.

#### Notes

1. New York Times, April 15, 1859.
2. Flag Officer William Branford Shubrick to Secretary of the Navy Isaac Toucey, January 25, 1859. Letters Received by the Secretary of the Navy from Commanding Officers of Squadrons. RG 45 Naval Records Collection of the Office of Naval Records and Library, National Archives (Hereafter cited as Squadron Letters, Brazil Squadron; NA).
3. New York Times, April 15, 1859.
4. Report of Commander Percival Drayton to Shubrick, January 21, 1859. Squadron Letters, Brazil Squadron; NA.
5. Shubrick to Toucey, January 25, 1859. Squadron Letters, Brazil Squadron; NA.
6. An account of the diplomatic aspects of the Paraguay Expedition can be found in Thomas O. Fleckima's article "Settlement of the Paraguayan-American Controversy of 1859: A Reappraisal", The Americas, vol. XXV (1968), and the news despatches in the New York Times.
7. Thomas O. Fleckima, "Settlement of the Paraguayan-American Controversy of 1859: A Reappraisal." p. 50.
8. Some sources indicate that Paraguay yielded as much to the pressure of the Platine governments as from the approach of the American battle squadron. Despatches from the New York Times correspondent in Buenos Aires under the datelines of March 31, 1859 and April 18, 1859 tend to confirm this.
9. Shubrick to Lieutenants Commanding John J. Almy of ship Fulton, and R.B. Pegram of ship Water Witch, February 11, 1859. Squadron Letters, Brazil Squadron; NA.
10. U.S., Constitution, Art. 1, sec. 9.

11. General Order, Given on board the United States Steamer Fulton on the fifteenth day of February, 1859, to be read at General Muster on board each vessel of the squadron. Signed by Flag Officer William Branford Shubrick. Squadron Letters, Brazil Squadron; NA.
12. Shubrick to Toucey, February 23, 1859. Squadron Letters, Brazil Squadron; NA.
13. Shubrick to Toucey, April 12, 1859. Squadron Letters, Brazil Squadron; NA.
14. Shubrick to Toucey, April 5, 1859. Squadron Letters, Brazil Squadron; NA. The duplicate sets of despatches were sent on to the United States aboard the other vessels to insure the arrival of such communications in the event of a possible loss at sea of one of the returning ships.
15. U.S., Congress, Report of the Secretary of the Navy, December, 1859, S. Doc. 2, 36th Congress, 1st Sess., 1859-60, pt. 3, p. 1135.

## IMPLICATIONS OF THE PARAGUAY EXPEDITION

In a despatch to the Secretary of the Navy dated April 10, 1859, Commodore Shubrick enclosed a report prepared by Catesby Ap R. Jones, the Brazil Squadron's ordnance officer. Jones' report addressed a critical shortage of munitions and ordnance existing in the squadron, a situation so critical that existing stocks could only have supported an estimated seven-hour bombardment. In addition, there were virtually no cartridges for the small arms and the carriage for the eleven-inch Dahlgren had still not arrived. By this date the the Paraguay Expedition was returning to the United States and it might be said, truthfully enough, that the lack of these supplies was irrelevant after the fact of the settlement. However, the Paraguay Expedition was organized with a commitment to address all contingencies and, if the negotiations had failed, would not have had any blockade or other military capability. This despatch enclosed the fifth such report of serious administrative problems since Commodore Shubrick sailed from New York. When considered in the aggregate, the reports identified a serious deficiency in the effectiveness of the squadron, and upon examination, suggest an overall failure in naval administration at the highest levels. The failures and accomplishments of the Paraguay Expedition indicate that the Expedition succeeded by virtue of tactical flexibility, good leadership and a fair amount of good fortune, but suffered from administrative incompetence and weakness in Washington. The operation was an overall success but also reveals an fundamental weakness in the American naval system as it existed prior to the Civil

War.

The most serious problems that plagued the Paraguay Expedition can be examined within the purview of the administrative divisions of the Navy Department. These subordinate administrative units were organized into five departmental bureaus at the time of the departure of the Paraguay Expedition. Responsibility for munitions and guns was with the Bureau of Ordnance and Hydrography; overseeing warship development, procurement and equipment maintenance was the Bureau of Construction and Repair; navy yards and port facilities were the responsibility of the Bureau of Navy Yards and Docks; medical matters fell within the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery; and finally, management of clothing purchases and other supplies was handled by the Bureau of Supplies and Accounts.<sup>1</sup> As originally organized in 1842, the Bureaus divided the administration of the fleet into such categories, heralding a more modern system of specialized naval management. As a replacement for the Board of Navy Commissioners, the new bureau system proved long overdue. Yet, management reorganization did not entirely correct administrative problems in ordnance, supplies and construction.

The quality of repairs conducted on vessels in service and the fitting out of new ships earned the Bureau of Construction, Equipment and Repair the ignominious title of the "Bureau of Destruction and Despair" during the Mexican-War.<sup>2</sup> Eleven years after the Mexican War, the U.S.S. Sabine rode out a hurricane in which it suffered significant damage. A disturbed Commodore Shubrick informed the Secretary of the Navy that, "if her (the Sabine's) fitting out (a reference to the substandard gun ports which had splintered, and the poorly fitted

tiller) had been as faithfully attended to as her building, the public service would not have been interrupted and hindered" at an important moment.<sup>3</sup>

Given the meager resources of the Navy, the Bureau of Construction, Equipment and Repair could do little in the way of new construction for many years after its establishment. As a result, procurement of ships for the Paraguay Expedition took the form of requisitioning steamships from the Cromwell coastal shipping line; and even though these ships never underwent the test of battle, the record of their performance on the Paraguay Expedition indicated the likelihood of their collective unsuitability as warships. Topping the list of problems was their apparent inability to mount more than a few guns, due to the weak structural strength of their hull design. The hull design also had a negative bearing on the Cromwell steamers cargo capacity and space for quartering crewmen. Another limiting factor associated with their construction was the exposed machinery and boilers behind light bulwarks that rendered the ships extremely vulnerable to damage from shellfire. The Water Witch, as will be remembered, had exhibited a significant vulnerability to solid shot when she attempted to pass Itapirú, even though the ship had been designed from the keel up as a gunboat. It is doubtful that the Cromwell steamers could have performed better. In addition, several of the chartered steamers were found to be underpowered, experiencing serious navigation problems in the strong current of the Parana<sup>1</sup> river. They were, after all, designed for operation along the Atlantic coast and not on rivers. As mentioned, the Metacomet was found to have a dangerously weak boiler, apparently overlooked when chartered, prompting a board of survey which ruled that

the vessel not risk a return voyage to the United States.

Such findings are perhaps indicative that national security in a democracy should not become overly dependent on support and materiel from the private sector. The disconcerting facts of the requisitioned steamers were commonly known, as evidenced by comments carried in articles in the New York Times while the Expedition was en route to Paraguay.<sup>4</sup>

The general unsuitability of the Cromwell steamers raises the question as to how these vessels came to be attached to the Paraguay Expedition. Responsibility is shared evenly by Congress and the Navy Department. Over the years Congress authorized naval budgets which were never adequate for the service's needs, especially in the decade preceding the Paraguay Expedition.<sup>5</sup> By this date it should have been apparent that our nation could not hope to remain completely at peace on the high seas when the experience of forty years had found the United States answering challenges to the security of its merchant trade at regular intervals, and in every conceivable capacity. This was perhaps most graphically demonstrated by the infamous Water Witch incident. Compounding the budgetary deficiency was perennial resistance to modernization by the Navy Department's Board of Navy Commissioners, which was in later years composed of aging line officers, some dating from the War of 1812, and even earlier.<sup>6</sup> Conversion to steam warships and the promotion of steam technology encountered resistance from many senior officers, and is usually attributed to a sentimental loyalty to a passing age.<sup>7</sup> As a result the United States, once a pioneer in steamship development, lost this important advantage at the time when

other countries were fervently exploiting the use and application of steam technology.<sup>8</sup> There were only a few progressive senior Captains and the collective voice of this cadre was barely heard over the din of the conservatives. With such meager resources at hand, funds could be effectively directed to only a few naval programs, specifically those that were either highly visible or most important to the public security and mercantile interests. As a result, when President Buchanan ordered the Paraguay expedition to sail in 1859, the Navy had but few operational steamships available for service.

As obviously important as the construction and equipment Bureau was to the effectiveness of the fleet, other administrative bureaus held equally important responsibilities. The officers assigned to the Paraguay Expedition found that the limitations of the chartered steamers were subsequently compounded by inexcusable supply problems apparently attributable to the incompetent management of the Bureau of Supplies and Accounts. The supply problems posed the most serious threat to the success of the Expedition in that the failure occurred unexpectedly and could not be anticipated. Correction necessarily required much effort; of paramount significance was the problem of the inferior coal sent out from Barbados and Pernambuco.

The dispute with Paraguay occurred years before overseas naval coaling depots became widely established and, as a result, shipments of coal were sent out from the United States aboard chartered coal transports, or purchased on the spot from foreign suppliers. The vital importance of reliable coal supplies was underscored by the vast distances over which shipments were often sent. This contingency was



not considered in the authorizing legislation passed by Congress, nor in the Navy Department's operational plan. Unfortunately the Bureau of Supplies jeopardized the Expedition in this important capacity.

After the Brazil Squadron's arrival off Montevideo, it was learned that the anthracite coal purchased and sent out from Barbados was of such poor quality as to prove useless to the Squadron steamships. The great distance at which the Brazil Squadron was operating from its home base precluded an emergency shipment from the United States. The enormous quantities of coal required by the boilers of the ships necessitated local storage of available supplies at strategic locations, although in yielding to the logistical situation the Brazil Squadron became dependent on the continuing goodwill of the host country allowing the storage. Anthracite was subsequently purchased locally and its storage arranged for, an expedient which surely exposed to the perceptive observer an important area of vulnerability existing in the Squadron.

Poor quality anthracite was not the only supply problem plaguing the Brazil Squadron. As indicated in Lieutenant Jones' report, the short supply of munitions on hand was critical, rendering the Squadron virtually impotent to undertake anything but the most modest offensive operation. The absence of adequate explanation on the part of the Bureau of Ordnance in regard to this mistake is significant when considering how highly important such supplies were for the Squadron's special duty. This shortcoming on the part of the Bureau of Ordnance suggests that individual bureaus in the Navy Department may have placed higher priority on immediate administrative interests than on support

to the fleet and its missions. The incompetence surrounding the shipment of the 11-inch Dahlgren and its carriage is but another example.

It was fortunate indeed that the American legation accomplished an acceptable settlement with the swiftness that they did. The serious vulnerability of the Squadron did not become known to the Paraguayans; and the military bluff of the Commodore and Commissioner was carried off with commendable skill. The Squadron was not faced with a test of its offensive power; in the event military action had become necessary, it is unlikely that the naval force could have accomplished its mission with much success.

The apparent failure of the Navy Bureaus responsible for supplying the fleet with provisions, maintenance and provisions warrants an examination of the effectiveness of administration by the higher management levels of the Navy Department. Oddly, there are few original sources with which to answer this question. Lack of suitable warships and other materiel certainly resulted in part from long experience at subsisting on starvation level budgets. Years of making do under the administrative authority of successive diversely motivated and directed Navy Secretaries aggravated an already bad problem.<sup>9</sup> The supply problems in procurement and shipping were commonly known and confirm that incompetence or mismanagement existed within the Navy Department's administrative divisions.<sup>10</sup>

In retrospect, an analysis of the Paraguay Expedition has produced seemingly contradictory interpretations of the event. On the one hand one sees a successfully executed mission accomplishing the primary

objectives sought by the United States. On the other, there is a revealing exhibition of logistical weakness, administrative incompetence at the Departmental level, and a fleet not wholly developed for the duty it was committed to undertake. Important questions emerge from further consideration of these contending viewpoints.

Can a naval mission under the authority of a diplomatic effort of the United States be criticized if its service was unnecessary after the fact of the diplomatic triumph, even if there is a significant body of circumstantial evidence suggesting that the naval force operated from a position of serious deficiency? If this is accepted, does the record of this event identify a deficiency previously unheeded or which stood uncorrected? Did serious consequences result? The aggregate answer to this is that the mission of the Brazil Squadron, although a success, can and should be criticized for its significant shortcomings. In addition, when the operation is examined carefully it reveals that the deficiencies existing in the United States Navy should have been identified and corrected.

The overall success of the Paraguay Expedition may have defused any subsequent inquiry into the disrupting problems encountered by the Brazil Squadron, even though participating officers did inform those in authority. The Squadron succeeded in its objective through capable leadership, disciplined action and attention to duty on the part of the officers and men. In addition, a satisfactory settlement was obtained. Yet one must remember that no offensive military action was undertaken. This point is of prime significance in a balanced criticism of the

Paraguay Expedition, because if there had been fighting and the Brazil Squadron had not fared well, the Expedition would have been remembered as a terrible failure and not as the diplomatic and naval success that it is recalled as to this day.

There remained unresolved a serious weakness in the naval security of the United States for several critical years after the Expedition's return. With the effectiveness of the fleet in jeopardy, the incumbent Presidential administration and Congress negligently disregarded the correction of the problem areas. Little change was made in the Departmental Bureaus nor was the budget increased to modernize or enhance the flexibility of the fleet. The deplorable performance of the fleet at the commencement of the Civil War was the consequence. It is therefore highly probable that the antebellum navy upon which the United States depended to such a significant degree for national security, was not in fact capable of deterring aggression from even the most insignificant foreign powers, nor of consistent response when challenged.

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2. Ibid.
3. Flag Officer William Branford Shubrick to Secretary of the Navy Isaac Toucey, November 1, 1858. Letters Received by the Secretary of the Navy from Commanding Officers of Squadrons. RG 45 Naval Records Collection of the Office of Naval Records and Library, National Archives.
4. New York Times, November 3, 1858.

5. U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970, Bi-Centennial Edition, pt. 2 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1975), p. 1115.
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10. New York Times, April 23, 1859.

APPENDIX

List of United States Navy ships detailed to the Paraguay Expedition

<u>Vessel Name</u>	<u>Class</u>	<u>Commanding Officer</u>
Sabine (Flagship)	Frigate	Commodore Shubrick Captain Adams
St. Lawrence	Frigate	Commodore Forrest Captain Hull
Falmouth	Sloop-of War	Commander Farrand
Preble	Sloop-of War	Commander Jenkins
Bainbridge	Brig	Lieutenant Renshaw
Dolphin	Brig	Commander Steedman
Perry	Brig	Lieutenant Tilghman
Fulton	Steamer	Lieutenant Almy
Water Witch	Steamer	Lieutenant Pegram
Atalanta	Steamer c*	Commander Case
Caledonia	Steamer c	Commander Ridgely
M.W. Chapin	Steamer c	Lieutenant Ronckondorff
Memphis	Steamer c	Commander Marchand
Metacomet	Steamer c	Lieutenant Macomb
Southern Star	Steamer c	Commander Pennock
Western Port	Steamer c	Commander Hunter
Harriet Lane (U.S. Coast Guard)	Steam Cutter	Captain Faunce USRM
Release	Storeship	Lieutenant Parker
Supply	Storeship	Lieutenant Stanley

\*Chartered Steamer

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AN ABSTRACT OF A THESIS OF

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THE PARAGUAY EXPEDITION

Abstract approved:

John J. Zimmerman

In reaction to an attack by the Republic of Paraguay on an American naval vessel, and an alarming deterioration of relations between the two countries, the United States, in 1858, sent a large squadron of warships to settle the dispute. In size, the squadron accounted for nearly twenty-five per cent of the Navy's personnel and operational vessels, and was the most ambitious fleet maneuver of its type to date.

Upon arrival at the border of Paraguay, via the Parana river, a real possibility for armed conflict existed, which was postponed for a final attempt at settling the dispute without bloodshed. This endeavor succeeded with an accompanying normalization of relations between the United States and Paraguay. The resulting settlement and treaty negotiated by Judge James Bowlin, a special U.S. Commissioner sent by the State Department, satisfied the claims of the United States which has since maintained good relations with the South American republic.

Although the Expedition successfully accomplished the mission

assigned to it, the record of the Expedition exposed a disturbing inventory of deficiency in the logistical aspect of the operation. Upon examination, the apparent weakness of the naval establishment appears to result in part from administrative incompetence in the administrative divisions of the Navy department and from negligible political and budgetary support on the part of the United States government. In conclusion, the Paraguay Expedition was successful primarily because of the able leadership of its commander, Flag Officer William Branford Shubrick, and the tactical flexibility and expertise of the participating officers and enlisted men.