The Naval War of 1812: A Documentary History

Volume I
1812
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Chapter Three

The Northern Lakes Theater:
June-December 1812

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

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

The documents presented in the following section portray the early weakness and the gradual buildup of American naval forces on Lakes Ontario, Erie, and Champlain. The bulk of the action took place on Lake Ontario during the period under consideration; the proportion of documents selected reflects that fact. For the Navy Department,
whose main attention had been drawn to the Atlantic Theater, the war on the lakes was at first a matter of small concern, but as the magnitude of the northern land operations grew, so too did the amount of time, effort, and resources which the navy devoted to winning control of the northern lakes.

The Provincial Marine of Canada

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

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

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

The force at present on the Lakes is as follows.

On Lake Erie

The Ship Cambden. Declared by a board of survey to be incapable of going to sea & even unfit to lodge the seamen during the winter. The Ship Queen Charlotte. Quite new, but merely calculated for the service of Lake Erie itself, from her great draft of water.

RE PORT ON 11-1£ PR OVINC I AL MARINE

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

REPORT ON THE PROVINCIAL MARINE OF THE CANADAS.
The Schooner General Hunter. The only real serviceable vessel on the Lake, is falling fast into decay.
I would therefore venture to point out the expediency of immediately laying down a schooner to prevent the communication by the river St. Clair from being cut off.

**ON LAKE ONTARIO**

The Snow Duke of Kent. Now solely used in Winter as a barrack for the seamen & incapable of repair.
The Ship Earl of Moira. Requiring a thorough repair.
The Ship Royal George. New, but attended with the inconvenience of too great draft of water.
The Schooner Duke of Gloucester. The most useful vessel on the lake will shortly require to be replaced especially if the Civil Government do not procure a vessel for their service she being at present in their employ.

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

Having said thus much on the removal of the establishment, I think it right to mention a subject nearly connected with its very existence. From experience we know that the average time of a Vessels duration on the Lakes may be averaged at eight years, & tho' many plans have been devised for preserving & seasoning timber a reference to facts would prove that of the quantity laid in for some
Years back, the far greater proportion has decayed in the experien-
tment & consequently been lost. I have witnessed even boards that
with every external appearance of being sound were on examination
defective within, & tho' much enquiry was made & many plans have
been proposed & tried, it has been generally necessary to build the
vessels with green timber. - On the Moira however an experiment was
made which tho' attended with all possible success, was not repeated
because attended with a trifling additional expense & that was, filling
up the whole space between the sheathing with salt.

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

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

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

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

In the above I have endeavoured to lay before His Excellency the
Commander of the Forces all that I consider worthy of notice con-
cerning the Provincial Marine of these two Provinces. Should it be
found deficient I hope it will be attributed to my fear of obtruding
my own particular opinions, where my own knowledge & the best in-
telligence I could procure should be my sole guides.

A H Pye

Public Archives of Canada, C373, p. 29, as cited in William Wood, ed.,
Select British Documents of the Canadian War of 1812 (Toronto: 1920;

Embargo Patrol on Lake Ontario

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

1 The marine commandant had noticed this deficiency and had given orders for a
strengthening of the ship's marine detachment, as "Oneida is near to the probable scene of ac-
Sir

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

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

Mel T. Woolsey

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

DAVID PARISH TO SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Philadelphia
the 21 June 1812

Sir

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

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

David Parish

1. Parish was a wealthy land speculator who had bought 200,000 acres of land along the St. Lawrence River in 1808. He had moved to Ogdensburg in 1811 where he incurred "hundreds of thousands of dollars [in] turnpikes, iron forges, and wharves." See David M. Ellis, et al., *A Short History of New York State* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1957), pp. 137-58.

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War News Reaches Sackets Harbor

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

LEETENANT MELANCHTHON T. WOOLSEY TO SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

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

Sir

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

As soon as the weather will permit I shall be off in quest of the Enemy. My Officers and Men are in good spirits. There is besides the Lord Nelson another prize Schooner here which by my advise is now
landed her cargo in order to be ready to run their military equipment & crew should you deem it proper Sir order them into the service. A number of our merchant vessels on the other side of the lake I fear are detained. I have the honor [etc.]

Melancthon T. Woolsey


Lieutenant Woolsey’s Reports—I

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

Lieutenant Melancthon T. Woolsey
To
Secretary of the Navy

U.S. Brig Oneida
Off Oswego June 28th 1812

Sir

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

JUNE-DECEMBER 1812

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

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

Melancthon T. Woolsey


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

Secretary of the Navy
To
Lieutenant Melancthon T. Woolsey

Lt. M.T. Woolsey
Sackets Harbor, NY

Nav: Dep’t

2d July 1812

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

P. Hamilton

Copy, DNA. RG45. SNL, Vol. 10, p. 85.
Sir NORTHERN LAKES THEATER

LIEUTENANT MELANTHON T. WOOLSEY TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

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

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

Mel T. Woolsey

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

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

Governor Tompkins's Concerns

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

Dr Sir

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

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

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

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

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

Signed, Daniel D. Tompkins

John Bullus Esquire.

Copy, DNA, RG45, AF 7, 1812.

Lieutenant Woolsey's Reports–II

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

LIEUTENANT MELANCTON T. WOOLSEY TO SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

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

Sir

I have the honor to inform you that on the 19th Instant at day break five sail of the enemy consisting of the Royal George & Earl of Moira ships, Prince Regent (I believe) the Duke of Gloucester and one other schooner were discovered in the offing beating up for this
Harbour—About six am. I got under way and stood off and on in hopes of having an opportunity of singling out my antagonist—which however was frustrated by the enemies concentrating and taking such a position as completely to cut off my retreat Lakeward—About eight o’Clock the wind having hawled so far to the Northward as that the enemy could lay their course into the Bay the Royal George, Earl of Moira and Prince Regent stood in in a line ahead under a press of sail. As I had not sea room or wind enough to work to advantage and in order to prevent the enemy from bringing me between two fires I ran close in shore near the mouth of the Harbour and let go my stream anchor with a spring upon the cable dismounted all the starboard guns and had them mounted on the Battery nearly ready for their reception. I gave orders to Lieutenant Wells as soon as our guns could reach the enemy to commence a fire which should be a signal for me to return on board. In the mean time I took charge of the thirty pounder mounted on the Carline with which at the distance of one and a half mile we hulled the Royal George three or four times—and effectually broke up their intended attack—from the confusion which appeared at one time on board the Royal George I am induced to believe that some serious damage must have been done by our shot.

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

[&c.]

Mel T. Woolsey

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

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

NORTHERN LAKES THEATER

LIEUTENANT MELANCTHON T. WOOLSEY TO SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

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

Sir

I have the honor to inform you that on the 30th Ultimo I dispatched Lieutenant Wells in the Gun boat Julia down the St Lawrence in order if possible to capture, destroy or cripple the British Sloop of war Earl of Moira and schooner Duke of Gloucester. The Julia's crew consisted of - Lieut Wells commander, Mr. Dixon acting Master - Mr [William] Vaughan (a citizen of this place) masters mate - Mr Nicole (a volunteer Midshipman) Midshipman and aid to Lieut Wells, a number of Volunteer citizens, before the mast - Captain [Gould] Benedict, Lieutenant [Naaman] Goodsel and Ensign - and their whole company of Riflemen (about thirty in number) making in the whole upwards of fifty men. The Julia has the long thirty two pounder and two six pounder mounted on her.

On the 31st I receivd a letter from Mr Wells dated at 5 o'Clock A M of that day. He was then standing in for the mouth of the river with the Royal George in chase of him. He soon however gave up the chase and ran off this Harbour. My starboard guns being mounted on the Batteries it was impossible to meet her but I have them now all on board and shall sail with the first wind on a cruise. I this morning receivd a dispatch from Lieutenant Wells a copy of which together with my orders to him I do myself the honor to inclose. I hope the expedition will be so successful as to enable us ultimately to become masters of the Lake. I should Sir feel confident of success had I the officer to which a vessel of the rate of the Oneida is entitled. It is Sir a fact that I am now about to sail without a single Officer that has seen any service in the Navy. Not one of my midshipmen have ever been at sea against a greatly superior force. I have the honor to be [&c.]

Mel[ancthon] T. Woolsey


Sir

Off Ogdensburgh August 1st 1812
5 A.M.

Yesterday about 3 P.M. we discovered the Earl of Moira and Duke of Gloucester off Elizabeth Town. We immediately attacked them but being powerfully seconded by 8 or 10 guns on shore and upwards of twenty Batteaux full of troops we were not able to accomplish our object. As long as light continued we kept our guns aplaying but fearing we might be overpowered by the Batteaux bordering us and have thought proper to cruise here and expect to attack them again tomorrow. We have received but little injury. Nobody wounded.

Yours respectfully

(signed) Henry Wells

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

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

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

the Royal George. Prince Regent and one other vessel - of course it will be madness to attempt getting the Julia and the other vessels into the Lake - You will therefore consider yourself as commander of the Julia for the present. Mr Dixon will have orders to return immediately to this place, with all the men on board the Julia attached to the Oneida. The volunteers belonging to this place (I mean Citizens) may return to their homes. Genl [Jacob] Brown will give orders to Colo [Thomas] Benedict to furnish you with as many men as are necessary to man the Julia You will keep her moored at the mouth of the Oswegachie river within reach of our musketry, in order to protect the village and vessels I do not wish any of the Merchant vessels fitted for service until I can have positive assurance that guns will be sent on for that purpose. Your &ca

Mr William Vaughan
Commg U.S. Gunboat Julia

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

[Enclosure]

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

Mr Samuel Dixon
Masters mate U.S. Navy
Ogdensburgh

Copy, DNA, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 2, No. 142.
[Enclosure]

Ogdensburgh
August 2d 1812

Dear Sir

The day I parted with you at the Lake I returned to Morris Town where I remained until five o'clock in the Evening and found the Earl of Moira and the Duke of Gloucester Lying in the same position they were the morning you left Colo. [David] Fords. From the circumstance of My being present you will expect a circumstantial account of the Engagement which took place between the Julia Commanded by Lieut. Wells & the two British vessels; and I assure you I regretted Exceedingly you missed this pleasant sight. The next day I wrote you a very hasty letter by the post & directed the Carrier to put it in to the post office at Harrisburgh. For fear that letter should not get to hand as Earley as you expected I take the liberty of repeating it. You will observe me to be a little short of the result of this brilliant affair. Respectfully &

(Signed) N. Ford

Majr Generl Van Rensellaer

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

1. John Lovett (1743-1818), Albany, N.Y., lawyer, was aide and military secretary to Major General Van Rensselaer.
2. Nathan Ford (1765-1829) was the first judge of St. Lawrence County, an active Federalist, and agent at Ogdensburg for iron manufacturer and land promoter Samuel Ogden. See Hough, History of St. Lawrence and Franklin Counties, pp. 389, 393.

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

(Signed) N. Ford2
Lt. M. T. Woolsey esqr
Sackets harbour

21 August 1812

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

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

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

P. Hamilton

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

Woolsey Reports General Hull's Defeat

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

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

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

Lieutenant Melancthon T. Woolsey to
Secretary of the Navy Hamilton

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

Sir

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

I have dinated the Mail to write the foregoing. I have the honor

Mel[1] T. Woolsey

Money I is absolutely necessary


Lake Champlain Unguarded

By the end of August, there was still no naval force on Lake
Champlain ready to protect American interests. In the following letter
a resident of Plattsburgh, New York, comments on the fact and suggests that since the gunboats were not ready, other vessels were available.

* Benjamin Moore to Secretary of the Navy Hamilton

Plattsburgh
Augt 29th 1812

Sir

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

Benj. Moore

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

Isaac Chauncey Ordered to the Lakes

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

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

SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON TO COMMODORE ISAAC CHAUNCEY

Confidential & official
Isaac Chauncey Esq
Commanding naval officer
New York

31 Augt 1812

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

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

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

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

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

1 Captain
2 Lieutenants
3 Serjeants
2 Corporals
2 music & 50 privates, which whether acting on shore or on board vessel, is to be subject to your orders.

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

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

You will further consider yourself authorized to send from New York, such ship carpenters, caulkers, riggers, Sailmakers &c as may be required to enable you to bring into speedy & active operation all the means that you may judge expedient to employ. I recommend to you & authorize you, to appoint any gentleman, in whose honor, capacity & fidelity you can confide—to act as your confidential clerk. You may rate him a chaplain. His pay will be 40$ pr month & 2 rations per day.
You will cooperate with the American army in that quarter. As one means of enabling you to do this with most effect, you will establish a cipher, by which when necessary, you will correspond with the commanding officer, and should it be found practicable & expedient, you may establish with the army a telegraphic communication by which means you may be able to ascertain their movements and to communicate your own, with celerity and secrecy.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Isaac Chauncey

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

JUNE-DECEMBER 1812

Copy, DNA, RG45, CNA, Vol. 1, pp. 325-37. Unsigned letters preceding and following are endorsed "for Paul Hamilton C.W. Goldsborough."

COMMODORE ISAAC CHAUNCEY TO SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Navy Yard New York
5d Septr 1812

Sir:

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

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

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

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

Isaac Chauncey

SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON TO COMMODORE ISAAC CHAUNCEY

Isaac Chauncey Esq.
Commanding naval officer
New York

Navy Depart
4 Septr 1812

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

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

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

for Paul Hamilton
C. W. Goldsborough

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

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

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

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

Copy, DNA, RG127, CMC, Letters Sent.

Woolsey Informed of His Relief

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

SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON TO
LIEUTENANT MELANCTHON T. WOOLSEY

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

Nav: Dep't
5 Sep 1812
confidential

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

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Guns & every other Munition of war, will be sent on with all practicable dispatch.
In a short time, you may expect Capt Chauncey on the Lakes, mean time he will correspond with You, & You will be making every preparatory arrangement, to obtain the Mastery of the Lakes Ontario & Erie-Capt Chaunceys authority as to the requisite means is unlimited.

P. Hamilton

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

LIEUTENANT MELANCTHON T. WOOLSEY TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

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

Sir
I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 19th ultimo also a remittance from the Treasury of four thousand dollars, in pursuance of your warrant No 2657.
It is with pleasure I inform you that all our Merchant vessels have succeeded in getting up out of the River. we can now muster eight or nine fine schooners—two of them can carry two thirty two pounders, one two twenty fours and the rest will average eight light guns each say nines and sixes. I am respectfully [&c.]

Meln T. Woolsey


LIEUTENANT MELANCTHON T. WOOLSEY TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

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

Sir
Captn Chauncey has forwarded pr express to His Excellly Govr Tompkins & he to me a Copy of your letter of the 31st ult. together
with his instructions. I assure you Sir I fill highly gratified in being
superceded by an Officer with whom I have seen much service and
for whose person and talents I have a sincere veneration. The
delicacy you feel at superceding me and the manner you are pleased
to express yourself of my past conduct Sir let me assure you I feel
much flattered with.

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

Mel T. Woolsey


Daniel Dobbins in Washington

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

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

for Paul Hamilton
C W Goldsborough


SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON TO
COMMODORE ISAAC CHAUNCEY

confidential

Isaac Chauncey Esq
coming naval officer
New York

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

Queen Charlotte of 20 guns 18 pdr
Adams 16 18
Schr Lady proud [Lady Prevost] 12 9
Brig Hunter 8 6 or 9
Schr Nancy 120 tons
Brig Caledonia 90 *
Schr Mary 100 *
Schr Salina 75 *
Sloop Friends good will 50
Sloop 50
Schr Chipeway 50
Schr Elen 60
& a small vessel requiring repairs. name not recollected.

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

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

for Paul Hamilton
C W Goldsborough


SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON TO
COMMODORE THOMAS TINGEY

Commre Tingeey
N Yard, Washn
15 Sept 1812

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

for Paul Hamilton
C W Goldsborough


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

You will probably find Black Rock a better place to build, than Buffalo—it is about 5 miles from Buffalo—and the road is good. Messrs Porter Barton & Co. Jasper Barish, and Erastus Granger own an abundance of timber in the neighbourhood of Buffalo & Black Rock. I am told that you may get in that neighbourhood from 40 to 50 labourers.

Should you find it expedient. You can set up one or more vessels at Presque Isle, which is about 50 miles distant from Buffalo. Before you will receive this letter you will I hope have received minute information from Lt Woolsey, in relation to the Lake Ontario.

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

for Paul Hamilton
C W: Goldsborough

Mr Daniel Dobbins  
Navy Depart  
15 Sept 1812

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

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

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

For Paul Hamilton  
C: W: Goldsborough

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

Commodore Chauncey’s Preparations

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

COMMODORE ISAAC CHAUNCEY TO SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

New York
24 Sept 1812

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

Isaac Chauncey


[Enclosure]
Lt Elliott to Comr Chauncey dated Buffalo Sepr 14. 1812.

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

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

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

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

COMMODORE ISAAC CHAUNCEY TO SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Navy Yd New York
24 Sepr 1812

Sir

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

Isaac Chauncey

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


JUNE-DECEMBER 1812

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

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

Isaac Chauncey

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

Abstract.

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

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

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

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

5th Forty Carpenters set off for the Lakes.

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

Sep 8th Opened correspondence with Genl Dearborn & Govr Tompkins

10th Eighty five Carpenters set off for the Lakes.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sept 24 Ordd lieul [John] Pettigrew of the John Adams to proceed with the detachment under his command to Gennessee River

25th The Marines sailed for Albany.

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

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

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

James Lynch to Secretary of the Navy Hamilton

Rome Sept. 25th 1812

Sir,

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

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

The Oneida Iron Manufag Co. by
James Lynch

Lt Thos. Macdonough

Portland Maine

Navy: Dep: 28th Sept. 1812.

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

Secretary of the Navy Hamilton to Lieutenant Thomas Macdonough

Lt Thos. Macdonough

Navy: Dep: 28th Sept. 1812.

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

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

On Your arrival, You will communicate with Genl Dearborn, or the Commanding Genl who will afford You, every requisite assistance: & with whom You are to co-operate with the force under Your Command.
The two gunboats, are at or near, Bason harbour, under the command of Lt Smith.

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

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

P. Hamilton

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


A Difference of Opinion

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

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

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

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

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

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

The following letters convey Macdonough's impatience and determination to gain control of the situation.

**Lieutenant Thomas Macdonough to Secretary of the Navy Hamilton**

Portland Octr 4th 1812

Sir,

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

T. Macdonough

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

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JUNE-DECEMBER 1812

**Lieutenant Thomas Macdonough to Secretary of the Navy Hamilton**

White Hall Lake Champlain

Octr 14th 1812

Sir,

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

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

T. Macdonough

Sir,

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

The men which you directed Capt Chauncey to send me, have, I suspect gone to the westward, as I have heard nothing of them, no men are to be got here, I have written to Capt Hull at New York, on the subject of the men observing they might have gone on westward, & that he might anticipate directions from you, to send men on here. These sloops will require at least twenty men each, the gun boats, will require twelve, for their proper management. I have appointed Messrs Reid & Hart, of this place acq. Navy Agent from whom I receive supplies of money & provisions, as I require.1 I have the honor to be [&c.]

T. Macdonough

ALS, DNA, RG45. BC. 1812, Vol. 5, No. 124.

Capture of the Brigs Detroit and Caledonia

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

I have the honor to inform you that on the morning of the 8th Inst two British Vessels which I was informed were his Britannic Majesties Brig Detroit late the U.S. Brig Adams and the Brig Hunter mounting 14 Guns, but which afterwards proved to be the Brig Caledonia both said to be well armed and manned came down the Lake and Anchored under the protection of Fort Erie. Having been on the lines for some time and in a measure inactively employed I determined to make an attack and if possible get possession of them, a strong inducement to this attempt arose from a conviction that with those two Vessels added to those which I have purchased and am fitting out I should be able to meet the remainder of the British force on the upper Lakes save an arms and Genl Smith was so good on my request as immediately to attack and if possible get possession of them, a strong inducement to this attempt arose from a conviction that with those two Vessels added to those which I have purchased and am fitting out I should be able to meet the remainder of the British force on the upper Lakes save an important service to perform.

On the morning of their arrival I heard that our Seamen were but a short distance from this place and immediately dispatched an express to the Officers directing them to use all possible dispatch in getting the men to this place, as I had important service to perform. On their arrival which was about 12 oclock I discovered that they had only 20 pistols and neither Cutlasses or Battle Axes. But on application to Gens Smith [Alexander Smyth] and [Amos] Hall of the Regulars and Malitia I was supplied with a few arms and Genl Smith was so good on my request as immediately to detach fifty men from the Regulars armed with Muskets. By 4 oclock in the afternoon I had my men selected and stationed in two Boats which I had previously prepared for the purpose. With those Boats 50 Men in each and under circumstances very disadvantageous, my men having scarcely had time to refresh themselves after a fatiguing march of 500 miles I put off from the Mouth of Buffaloe Creeke at one oclock the following morning and at 3, I was alongside the Vessels. In the space of about ten minutes I had the prisoners all secured the Topsails sheeted home and the Vessels under way. Unfortunately the wind was not sufficiently strong to get me up against a rapid current into the Lake where I had understood another Armed Vessel lay at Anchor and I was obliged to run down the River by the Forts under a heavy fire of Round Grape and Canister from a number of pieces of heavy Ordnance and several pieces of flying artillery was compelled to anchor.

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

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

With sentiments of Respect [&c.]

Jesse D. Elliott

ALS, RG45, BC, 1812, Vol. 5, No. 93.

1. The enclosed list has not been found. Elliott's diagram of the action is filed with the letter. See illustration on p. 598. To Commodore Chauncey, his immediate superior. Lieutenant Elliott sent a similar but briefer report. See Elliott to Chauncey, 8 Oct. 1812, DNA, RG45, CL, 1812, Vol. 5, No. 127a.

MAJOR GENERAL SIR ISAAC BROCK TO
GOVERNOR GENERAL SIR GEORGE PREVOST

Fort George
October 11th 1812

Sir,

I had scarcely closed my dispatch to Your Excellency of the 9th when I was suddenly called away to Fort Erie in consequence of a bold, and I regret to say, successful attack by the enemy on His Majesty's Brig Detroit, and the private Brig Caledonia, which had both arrived the
preceding day from Amherstburg. It appears, by every account I have been able to collect, that a little before day a number of boats full of men dropped down the current unobserved, boarded both vessels at the same moment, and cutting their Cables were proceeding with them to the American Shore. When Major [Adam] Ormsby, who witnessed the transaction, directed the Batteries to open on them, and soon compelled the enemy to abandon the Detroit, which grounded about the center of Squaw Island a little more than a Mile below Black Rock. She was then boarded by a party of the 49th Regiment, but as no Anchor remained, and being otherwise unprovided with every means by which she could be hauled off, the officer, after throwing her guns over board, and sustaining a smart fire of musketry, decided to quit her. A private, who is accused of getting drunk, and a prisoner of war, who was unable from his wounds to escape with about twenty brought by the Detroit from Amherstburg, remained however behind, whom it was necessary to remove before the vessel could be destroyed. A party of the Provincial Cavalry offered their Services. Being unfortunately wounded as he was getting onboard, and falling back in the boat, a confusion arose, during which the boat drifted from the vessel, leaving two of the 41st, who had previously ascended onboard. In the mean time the Caledonia was secured by the Enemy, and a cargo of furs belonging to the South West Company landed. The Batteries on both sides were warmly engaged the whole of the day, but I am happy to say no mischief was sustained by the enemy’s fire. I reached the spot soon after sun set and intended to have renewed the attempt to secure the Detroit, which had anchored a short time before, I had every prospect of accomplishing, but before the necessary arrangements could be made, the vessel was anchored, and in a few minutes she was seen in flames. This event is particularly unfortunate, and may reduce us to incalculable distress. The enemy is gaining a naval Superiority on both Lakes which if they accomplish I do not see how we can retain the Country. Three vessels are fitting out for war on the other side of Squaw Island which I would have attempted to destroy but for Your Excellency’s repeated instructions to forbear. The manner our guns were served yesterday point out the necessity of an increase, if possible, of Artillery Men to our present small number of regulars. The Militia evinced a good spirit, but fired without much effect. The enemy however, must have lost some men, and it is only wonderful that in a contest of a whole day no life was lost on our side. The fire of the enemy was incessant, but badly directed till the close of the day, when it began to improve. Lieut [Charles Frédéric] Rolette who Commanded the Detroit had, and I believe deservedly, the character of a brave attentive officer. His vessel must, however, have been surprized, an easy operation where she lay at anchor, and I have reason to suspect that this consideration was not sufficiently attended to by the officers Commanding on board and on shore. We have not only sustained a heavy loss in the vessel, but likewise in the cargo, which consisted of four twelves, a large quantity of shot, and about two hundred muskets, all of which were intended for Kingston and Prescott. The only consolation remaining is that she escaped the enemy, whose conduct after his first essay, did not entitle him to so rich a prize. The enemy has brought some boats over land from Slusher to the Niagara River, and made an attempt last night to carry off the guard over the store at Queenston. I shall refrain as long as possible, under Your Excellency’s positive injunctions, from every hostile act, although sensible that each day’s delay gives him an advantage. I have the honor [&c.]

Isaac Brock

M.G.


1. This was the last official report General Brock wrote before his death in the Battle of Queenston Heights on 19 Oct. 1812.
Chauncey's Arrival at Sackets Harbor

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

Commodore Isaac Chauncey to Secretary of the Navy Hamilton

Sacket's Harbor Oct. 8, 1812

Sir,

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

I found the Oneida in good order, and completely prepared for service. Lt Woolsey has purchased, by my orders, the Schooners Genessee Packet, Lord Nelson, Collector, Experiment, and Julia, all of which are at this harbor, and now preparing for service. I intend to put upon these vessels, one or two heavy guns, as the vessels may be able to bear them. If the guns and stores arrive in time, these vessels as well as those at Oswego, will be ready to proceed on service by the first of November: in which case I shall seek the enemy on the lake, and if not to be found there I will look for him within his own waters. I am, however, apprehensive, that owing to the badness of the roads and the lowness of the water in the Mohawk, that the guns and stores will not arrive in time, for us to do anything decisive against the enemy this fall. No exertions on my part shall be wanting to accomplish the wishes of the government before the winter sets in.

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

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

Isaac Chauncey


“To Obtain Command of this Lake”

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

By truly herculean efforts, starting first on Lake Ontario, Chauncey asserted himself. He created a small fleet despite numerous difficulties, pursued the enemy's ships to their homeport at Kingston, and maintained a blockade, effectively preventing the movement of valuable
troops and supplies from the St. Lawrence to Niagara. By the end of November when ice formed and blizzards blew, Chauncey had obtained control of Lake Ontario. This disheartened the British who devoted their efforts to the building of a fleet to contest control when navigation reopened in the spring of 1813. American efforts on Lake Erie were far behind those on Ontario, and the British retained control with a few vessels of the Provincial Marine, despite Lieutenant Elliott’s daring seizure of Caledonia and Detroit. The following group of documents consists of a series of reports which Chauncey sent to Secretary Hamilton recording his obstacles, progress, hopes and fears.

Commodore Isaac Chauncey to Secretary of the Navy Hamilton

Oswego 21st Oct 1812

Sir,

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

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

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

Commodore Isaac Chauncey to Secretary of the Navy Hamilton

Oswego 22d Oct. 1812

Sir,

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

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

Isaac Chauncey


COMMODORE ISAAC CHAUNCEY TO SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Sackett's harbor Tuesday 27 Oct. 1812.

Sir,

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

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

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

Isaac Chauncey

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

JUNE-DECEMBER 1812

Sackett's Harbor

4 Nov 1812

Sir,

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

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

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


COMMODORE ISAAC CHAUNCEY TO SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Sackets' Harbor
5th Novr 1812

Sir,

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

Isaac Chauncey

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

Schooner        Original name       Present name
Charles & Ann   Governor Tompkins  Hamilton
* Diana          *                             *
* Fair American  *                             *
* Ontario        *                             *
* Gennessee Packet  *                      *
* Experiment     *                             *
* Collector      *                             *
* Lord Nelson    *                             *
* Julia          *                             *


1. On 19 Nov., Secretary Hamilton gave his approval of these names and of the naming of the corvette Madison which was nearing completion at Sackets Harbor. See Hamilton to Chauncey, 19 Nov. 1812, DNA, RG45, SNL, Vol. 10, p. 286.
I shall proceed for my Station this Evening or tomorrow morning with the following Vessels, to wit, Brig Oneida, and Schooners Hamilton, Governor Tompkins, Conquest, Growler, Julia, and Pert, mounting altogether 60 guns of different Calibres and 430 men including Marines. With this Force, I hope to give a good account of the Enemy although he is more than double our force in guns and men. His consists of the following Vessels as nearly as I can ascertain, to wit, The Ship Royal George 26 guns, 260 men; Ship Earl of Moira 18 guns 200 men; Schooners Prince Regent 18 guns 150 men; Duke of Gloucester 14 guns 80 men; Toronto 14 guns 80 men, Governor Simcoe 12 guns 70 men; Seneca 4 guns 40 men: making a grand Total of 108 guns and 890 men.  

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

Isaac Chauncey  

Commodore Isaac Chauncey to Secretary of the Navy Hamilton  

Sackets' Harbor  
15th Novr 1812  

Sir,  

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

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

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

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

The Royal George must have received very considerable injury in her Hull and in men, as the gun vessels with a long 32 pounder were
seen to strike her almost every Shot, and it was observed that she was re-inforced with Troops four different times during the Action.

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

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

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

Isaac Chauncey


¹ For the view of a Canadian historian, see C. P. Starkey’s “Commodore Chauncey’s Attack on Kingston Harbour, Nov. 10, 1812,” Canadian Historical Review 52 (June 1971): 126-58.
and he left here this morning together with all the other Prisoners except one belonging to each of the Vessels whom I detained as evidence in their condemnation. Capt Brock has pledged his word of honor to return to this place immediately should you disapprove of my having granted him his Parole. We learned from the people who came in the nage that in our attack upon the Royal George on the 10th inst we did her much injury: that 4 Shot passed through her between wind and water, and that when she slipped and hauled on shore she was in a sinking condition, with both pumps going. 3 of her guns dismounted, her fore and main rigging cut away, several men killed and wounded, and the ship very much injured in other respects. Many of the Shot that passed through the ship, went into the town and injured many houses. The Simcoe that we chased into the harbor the next day, was so much shattered that she sank before she got to the Wharf, and is believed to be rendered useless, at least for this year.

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

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

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

I trust Sir that you will allow I have not been idle since I received the honor of your appointment to this station, particularly when you take into view the difficulties I had to encounter in creating a force sufficiently strong to command this lake this fall, and I should certainly have destroyed the principal naval force of the enemy but from the circumstance of a squall which enabled him to take shelter under the guns of his fortifications. If however Col [Alexander] Macomb who is now on his march arrives before the severe weather sets in, I will again attack him in his present position, and shall have no doubt of complete success.

I herewith enclose a list of the killed and wounded and a statement of the damage sustained by the squadron: also a list of prizes and prisoners taken from the enemy. I have the honor to be

Isaac Chauncey

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


[Enclosure]

Return of prizes taken by the squadron under the command of commodore Isaac Chauncey.

Schr Two Brothers Burned
   " Mary Hatt Brought in
Sloop Elizabeth "

Saml T Anderson
Secretary to the Commanding Officer of the U.S. Naval forces on the lakes
Sackets Harbor
17 Nov 1812

Return of British prisoners made by the squadron under the command of commodore Isaac Chauncey

James Brock Capt. in the 49th regt
George Miller Master
Mumey "
Joseph Dorent Seaman
Return of the Killed & Wounded in the Squadron under the Command of Commodore Isaac Chauncey in his attack upon the Royal George and the Batteries at Kingston on the 10th Novr 1812.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vessels Names</th>
<th>Names of the killed</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Names of the wounded</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oneida</td>
<td>Thos Garret</td>
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<td>Sean D. [David] Webber</td>
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<td>QG</td>
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<td>Jno White</td>
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<td>Wm Baker</td>
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<td>G Tompkins</td>
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<td>Hamilton</td>
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<td>Pert</td>
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<td>Rt Arundel</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sg Master By the bursting of the gun was afterwards knocked overboard &amp; drowned</td>
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<td>E. [Eleazer] H. Massey</td>
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<td>J. Johnson</td>
<td>O.S.</td>
<td>slightly</td>
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N.B. all the vessels had a few Shot through their Sails.

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

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

Isaac Chauncey


Sir,

COMMODORE ISAAC CHAUNCEY TO SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Sackets' Harbor 22 Novr 1812

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

From the advanced season of the year I think that any expedition by water would be attended with much difficulty and great danger of the loss of our little naval force, and of consequence, of the ascendancy that we have obtained on this Lake. Moreover, I have it from the best authority that the Enemy has collected a force at Kingston of upwards of 3,000 men, amongst which are 1,000 Regulars of the 49th and Glengary Regiments.

At Prescott, (opposite to Ogdensburg) the Enemy have about 1,000 Militia and from 9 to 12 pieces of cannon. That place we could take and bring off the guns, but I think it very questionable whether

JUNE-DECEMBER 1812

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

Isaac Chauncey


COMMODORE ISAAC CHAUNCEY TO SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Sackets' Harbor 26th Novr 1812

Sir,

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

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

Isaac Chauncey


1. The first commanding officer of this ship was Lieutenant Jesse D. Elliott.
Perry Offers His Services

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

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

Newport Nov 28th 1812

Sir

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

O. H. Perry

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

1. Secretary of the Navy William Jones appointed Perry to the command of Lake Erie after the personal intervention of Commodore Chauncey on Perry’s behalf. See Chauncey to Jones, 21 Jan. 1813, DNA, RG45, CL, 1813, Vol. 1, No. 28; and Jones to Perry, 5 Feb. 1813, DNA, RG45, M1, Vol. 10, p. 240.

Lieutenant Angus in Charge at Black Rock

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

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

LIEUTENANT SAMUEL ANGUS TO SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Black Rock on the River Niagara 1st Decr 1812

Sir,

I enclose you a copy of a letter from Gen. Smyth according to the purport of the letter Captn. [William] King of the U. States Infantry arrived about 12 O’Clock. I had ten Boats manned by Sevene Seamen, got them Embarked and left the Navy Yard about 2 A.M. I had previous to my leaving the Yard, divided my boats in 4 Divisions the 1st Commanded by Lieut Wragg, 2d by Sailing Master John K. Carter,
3rd Sailing Master George Watts, 4th Sailing Master Alexander Sisson, Myself leading in Boat No 1 commanded by Midshipman Dudley, Boat No 2 commanded by Lieut Wragg, Boat No 3 Midshipman Holdup, and the other Officers commanding, Divisions in succession, having ordered them to keep as close to me as possible I had not got more than three fourths of the way across, before the British discovered us, and opened a severe fire from two Field Pieces and a sharp and well directed fire of Musquetry from about two hundred & fifty men finding the boats were dropping fast and our men getting wounded, determined me to make a desperate push with the 1st Division. I immediately jumped in the water desiring my Officers and Sailors to follow me, In which I was not only Gallantly but desperately assisted, by the Gallant and Intrepid Lieut Wragg and Midshipman James A. Dudley, volunteer Swartout and about twenty one of my brave officers and men. I ordered them to charge with their Pikes, they rushed up the Hill and routed the enemy in all directions, spiked the field Pieces, and run the Casson in the Water I was immediately after landing joined by the truly brave Holdup who behaved himself like a Gallant and valuable Officer, and by Captn King of the Infantry with twenty Soldiers who behaved well finding our numbers so small the enemy rallied, and commenced a fire which induced me to order the Barrack & Barn to be fired. Mr Watts and Midshipn Graham had by this time landed, and Watts the Gallant and brave Watts in leading what few Men he could collect, was shot and shortly after landed by going beyond my depth in the water. I found that landed did wonders leading what men they could collect charged and routed the enemy in all directions from five to ten times their number. Captn King who had filed off to the left with his soldiers and four of my men spiked their Guns in two Batteries and was taken Prisoner with two of my Men the other two returned. I beg leave to mention that S. M. Carter, Sisson and Midshipn Brailsford were wounded in the boats, and I am sure that could they have landed they would have done their duty, out of ten Boats that Started the part of four crews amounting in all to about thirty five Seamen and about forty or fifty soldiers only landed, annexed is a list of the Officers and Men that landed with me in the two first boats No 1 & 2 and those officers who afterwards joined me.

2 Jos. Wragg  Liet  Wounded
Geo Watts  Sailing M  Killed
1 Jas A Dudley  Midn
Thos Holdup  *  Wounded
2 Wm Mervin  [Mercer]  *  Do
John H. Graham,  *  Do
Wm Walker  *
1 Volunteer Swartout
2 John Campbell  Boatsn  Wounded
1 Caleb Heydon  Carpenter
1 Thos Hodings  Qr Master who bore my flag and behaved most gallantly was mortally wounded but preserved the flag and died in a few hours
1 Joseph Cutter  Boatsn Mate  Taken prisoner
1 John Rack  Do  Wounded
1 James Gray
1 Giles Barnes
1 Jno Clark
1 Wm Anderson
1 John Hackleton  Wounded
1 S. J. Hornwall  Wounded
2 Robt Burges
2 Charles Young  Wounded
2 James Lee  Killed
2 Jas Smith
2 Jonah Webster
2 Hugh Campbell
I took prisoner Lieut Charles King Commanding Officer of the Royal Artillery, he was badly wounded and behaved most Gallantly, he remains under my charge and I shall wait your orders what to do with him, their was eight or ten prisoners taken by our Sailors and Soldiers who Genl Smyth has in charge. On the next day we commenced firing from my Batteries, which I erected since my arrival and completely drove them from the opposite shore. My Men and the brave Dudley, volunteered their services to cross the army over, Genl Smyth made a false movement kept his men embarked all day and disembarked them in the evening, for no evident reason, as the opposite shore was destitute of both Guns and Men (As an instance three of my Men crossed the River at 11 A.M. loaded their boat with different articles among them a quantity of Carpenters tools and set fire to a number of Buildings and Safely returned) it surprised me but he is best acquainted with his own reasons. I have not been able to do anything with the Vessels purchased on this Lake by Lieut Elliot for all the Carpenters that were employed left here during the firing in taking the Adams and Cadillacia and they would not return.

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

I feel fully satisfied that You will pay due regard to the conduct of my brave Officers and Men. Mr Swartout will be able from his intelligence to give every information relative to our different movements on that evening. The enemy have lost a great number, my men were armed with Pikes, Cutlasses and Boarding axes.

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

Saml Angus


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

[Enclosure]

27th Novr 1812
Sir,

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

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

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

(Sd) Alexr Smyth
Brig Genl

(A A true Copy)

Lieu Angus

JUNE DECEMBER 1812

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

Sam\^l Angus Lieut.

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


Chauncey's Squadron in Winter Quarters

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

COMMODORE ISAAC CHAUNCEY TO
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAMILTON

Sackets' Harbor
1 Decr 1812.

Sir,

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

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Dear Sir,

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

Daniel Dobbins

Copy. NBuHi . Dobbins Papers.

1. This document does not include the name of the addressee. However, Dobbins mentions in a subsequent letter to Secretary Hamilton that he has yet to receive instructions from Lieutenant Angus commanding at Black Rock. See Dobbins to Hamilton, 12 Decr. 1812, NBuHi, Dobbins Papers, p. 369 below.
days lay up all the vessels for the winter and proceed immediately to Buffalo and Presqu' Isle on Lake Erie to make my arrangements for opening the Campaign with vigor in the Spring. I shall make it my business to see the commanding General at Buffalo, in order to arrange a plan of co-operation against the enemy in the spring, and on my return I will visit Major Genl Dearborn for the same purpose.

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

Viewing the immense importance of the command of this Lake to the Enemy, no one can doubt but that he will make a desperate effort to regain the ascendency that he has lost, and really the accomplishment of that object is not a difficult Task to an Enterprizing officer. closed up as we shall be within about 30 miles of Kingston where the enemy can, (and most likely will) collect a force of from 3 to 4,000 men for the express purpose of destroying our naval ascendency on this Lake, he can, with great ease (after this month) cross from Kingston to Long or Grand Island on the Ice, from thence to Gravelly Point, go along the Shore to Chaumont Bay, across that Bay to this Harbor in about 12 hours as all their Troops are exercised to attack, that he may make a despera,e effort should succeed in ob'aining possession of 'he Harbor in about 12 hours as all their Troops are exercised to attack .

Moreover, in my humble opinion, the preservation of our Naval Force during the winter months, and how many of them will expire the latter part of this month. I presume that an additional force of 500 to 1000 regular Troops would ensure protection to this place. I am now building Block-Houses in conjunction with Col Macomb to guard against a Surprize.

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

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

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

Isaac Chauncy


[Enclosure]

(Copy)

Sacket's Harbor

30 Nov 1812

Sir,

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

The Vessels themselves with their Crews are adequate to their own protection against musketry but should the enemy collect a force of 2
or 3,000 men at Kingston (which he can easily do) he could march here on the ice in 12 hours, take possession of our own guns and turn them upon the Vessels and of course destroy them. Having accomplished that object he would return before a sufficient force could be collected to oppose him.

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

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

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

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

The Troops collected here this winter can be sent with great facility to any point that you may require them in the Spring by the Vessels. I shall leave this in a few days for Buffalo and Presqu’Ile on Lake Erie for the purpose of making my arrangements for the next Spring’s operations. Upon my return I intend paying my respects to your Excellency for the purpose of arranging a plan of cooperation with the Army next Spring and Summer. I have the honor to be [&c.]

Signed Isaac Chauncey

Major Genl Henry Dearborn

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

Mr Vaughan could not learn that the Enemy contemplated an attack upon this place this winter: on the contrary they appeared to apprehend one from us.

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

Isaac Chauncey


JUNE-DECEMBER 1812

Sir,

All the Vessels are now laid up for the Winter and completely frozen in: in fact the Bay is frozen quite across. The fleet is moored in
a line flanked by two of the Vessels which will protect them against any sudden attack of the Enemy.

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

Isaac Chauncy

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

Origins of the Lake Erie Squadron

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

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

Sir

I would have sent you long before this time copies of all the articles of agreement and the other regulations made by me but knowing the people of this country to be poor and their liability to fail I thought I would wait to see whether they would fulfill and as common in many instances have failed the papers are large that I have which is nothing but accounts and receipts and having a calculation to go down this winter myself if I can obtain liberty I thought I would take them with me the many that I have drawn for I have laid out in the following way for the purchase of the timber and getting out fit for hauling 900 dollars being 200 tons for iron 800 dollars 3 tons and a half for coal 50 Do 1000 bushel at 5 cents for tram work 160 dollars as pr apt [abstract] and rest for building a Smith shop and Smith work and building a shelter to work in in the yard a considerable sum more than the two thousand dollars which I have regular receipts for in consequence of the failure of the expedition to Canada I have commenced building on my own footing the commodore not having come to black Rock this fall or winter I have not been able to get any instructions from Mr. Angus who commands farther than to sanction an agreement made with a master builder I have not been able to make contracts for the building that could be relied on and knowing the necessity of the boats being built I have concluded to forward them as fast as possible and if you think you will pay the bills I will warrant them ready by the time the ice is out next spring that I will be faithfully laid for the other

So much interest do I feel in preparing to meet them on the lake next spring that I will be willing to give security to the United States that all the money that comes into my hands shall be faithfully laid out if they should require it. I had an idea when Mr. Angus approved of the contract made with a master builder that I would soon get orders to go on with the work but I have not heard from him since.
Winter Comes to Lake Champlain

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

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

Shelburn December 20th 1812

Sir,

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

T. Macdonough


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

The Chauncey–Angus Feud

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

This frontier is left with less protection than its importance requires from this place to Lewis Town a distance of about 24 Miles there is not a single Sentinel. there is about 300 of the 14 Regt stationed at this place the rest of the army have gone into winter Quarters 11 miles back from the river, therefore if the enemy should think proper to cross spike all the Guns and destroy all our stores, there is but little to prevent them.

I am erecting a Block House near the Vessels with a View to their protection and the stores belonging to the Navy Department, which I hope to preserve notwithstanding we are deserted by the Military, the People upon this frontier place so much more reliance upon the protection afforded to them by the Seamen than the Military, that if any circumstance should make it necessary to remove the Seamen: this part of the Frontier would be immediately deserted.

I have the Honor to be [&c.]

Isaac Chauncey


Sir

I had on the arrival of Comr Chauncey stated to him the many difficulties I had laboured under at this place since my arrival in keeping the men with in any degree of comfort and that it had been utterly impossible to keep them in that state of discipline that was practiced on board a man of war he assented to it he visited the Navy Yard paid the men some little compliments respecting the attack on the evening of the 27 Novr and left the yard apparently well satisfied yesterday morning he again visited the yard the men where exercising with their pikes and Muskets he observed as he went along that they were both Sailors & Soldiers but unfortunately one or two of the men where abusive and noisy he got in a passion and reflected on me saying that they were in a state of Disobedience and worse than privatesmen advanced towards me and looking very angry I told him respectfully that I was sensible things were not exactly what I could wish they were, but I felt satisfied that I had done my duty and ought not to be reflected on the men where dismissed. I ordered a man to be punished for Insolence to Lt Pettigrew Comr Chauncey check'd me before the men saying this was no time nor place to punish the man and would not suffer him to be punish'd in the maner I ordered. It has been with the greatest difficulty that I have got the men in any state discipline from the deranged and confused State of every thing here, I remonstrated against such treatment. He observed this is no time for paliating. I again observed that I had been the Comg officer here for some time and ought to have discretionary power which if I was not sufferd to use and that as I found my feeling where to be wound in such a manner that I must beg leave to resign the Comd here and suffered to report myself to you he spoke with much accrimony and Said he accepted my commission. I presume you mean that Sir I observed I did not mean my Commission that I merely ment the Comd of this station that I had volunteerd my services here and as I found it impossible to please him that I must again beg leave for to get from under his Comd and report my self to the Honbl Secy of the Navy he refused me that request. I then observed that I must beg leave to decline duty under his Comd he arrested me and in his writen arrest says that I refused to do duty on enemy lines when the service of every officer and man was necessary to guard against Surprize. It is very surprizeing that he should offer to accept my commission only a few hours before and then charge me with refuseing duty on enemy lines. I beg you will order me from under Comr Chaunceys comd as I am convinced that I can never do my duty under a man who was so willing to accept my commission I am still as anxious to do my duty to my beloved country as ever and have anxiously to beg that you would order me to the Sea board I have many reasons to make that request but more particularly my wounded feelings to get from under the Com of a man who in private life I shall always respect but my duty to my self as a gentleman

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and officer requires that I ought to be remooved from under his Comd.1 With the highest respect [&c.]

Saml Angus


1. Angus experienced career difficulties from this time forward. For a sympathetic account of Angus’s part in these matters, see Harold D. Langley, “Respect for Civilian Authority: The Tragic Career of Captain Angus,” American Neptune XL, no. 1 (Jan. 1980): 33-57. For Chauncy’s account of Angus’s arrest, see DNA, RG45, Cl., 1813, Vol. 2, No. 122, Chauncy to Hamilton, 28 Dec. 1812, and No. 121, Chauncy to Hamilton, 2 Apr. 1813.

Chapter Four

The Gulf Coast Theater: February–December 1812

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

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

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