

REPORT
OF
THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY.

NAVY DEPARTMENT,
November 30, 1838.

SIR: In the performance of a duty annually devolving on this department, I submit the following report:

The squadron employed in the Mediterranean during the past year under Commodore Jesse D. Elliott, consisted of two frigates, a sloop of war, and a schooner. These vessels, with the exception of the sloop of war, having returned home either for repairs or in consequence of the terms of service of their crews having expired, will be replaced by a ship of the line, a frigate of equal force, and a despatch brig or schooner. The whole will be under the orders of Commodore Isaac Hull.

Although some of the causes which originally dictated the policy of employing a portion of our navy in the Mediterranean have in a great measure ceased, still it is believed that as a school of discipline under experienced officers, as a means of exhibiting a portion of our naval force in contact and comparison with that of the principal maritime states of Europe, and for the purpose of affording countenance and protection to our commerce, a perseverance in this policy will equally contribute to the good of the service and the honor of the United States.

The squadron now in the Pacific, under Commodore Henry E. Ballard, comprises one ship of the line, two sloops of war, and two schooners.

These last requiring extensive repairs, have been ordered home the ensuing spring, or as soon after as the public interests will admit, and the ship of the line may also be expected to return about the same time, as the terms of service of most of her crew will then be about expiring.

The unsettled and precarious relations subsisting between the South American States bordering on the Pacific, in my opinion render it essential to the protection of our commerce that at least an equal force should be maintained in that quarter. Accordingly, measures will be taken to replace the vessels ordered home by others not less efficient for that service.

The force operating on the coast of Brazil, under Commodore John B. Nicolson, consists of one razee, one sloop of war, and one brig. No change is at present contemplated. The present force is deemed adequate to the protection of our commerce in that quarter, and it is believed that no reduction would be consistent with the attainment of that object.

At the date of the last report of the Secretary of the Navy, the squadron employed on the West Indian station and in the Gulf of Mexico, under Commodore Alexander J. Dallas, consisted of one frigate, five sloops of war, and one small vessel. The frigate and one of the sloops having recently returned to Boston for repairs, it is contemplated to send another frigate and to increase the number of sloops of war on that station to seven.

The force will then be composed of one frigate, seven sloops of war, and one small-vessel.

As the blockade of the Mexican ports by the French squadron continues to be strictly enforced, and as indications of a revolutionary spirit have lately been exhibited at Tampico, it is believed that under existing circumstances, as well as in view of future contingencies, no reduction of the proposed force can be prudently made.

A frigate and sloop of war which, as stated in the last annual report of the Secretary of the Navy, were then preparing for a cruise in the Indian seas, under Commodore George C. Read, sailed from Norfolk on the 6th of May last. By the latest advices from Commodore Read, dated the 28th of July, he had reached Rio de Janeiro, from whence he was to depart the next day. Having reason to believe it would conduce to the protection and safety of our citizens and commerce in these remote regions, I have directed these vessels to visit the Sandwich and Society islands on their way home.

That the officers employed on these various services have performed their duties with equal activity, vigilance, and prudence, is sufficiently evidenced by the fact, that notwithstanding the wars and revolutions which still agitate so great a portion of the South American States bordering on the Pacific, and the long protracted blockade of the ports of Mexico and of Buenos Ayres, the persons and property of citizens of the United States have in no case which has come to the knowledge of this department sustained outrage or wrong; while, on the other hand, nothing has occurred throughout the whole of our intercourse or interposition, to distrust the relations of peace between us and the parties in collision with each other.

The exploring expedition, on the resignation of Commodore Thomas ap Catesby Jones, in consequence of ill health, was placed under the command of Lieutenant Charles Wilkes, with some modification of force; and finally sailed from Norfolk on the 19th of August. It now consists of the sloops of war Vincennes and Peacock, the store ship Relief, the brig Porpoise, and the pilot boat schooners Sea-Gull and Flying-Fish. Letters from Lieutenant Wilkes announce the safe arrival of these vessels at Madeira, with the exception of the Relief, which vessel was ordered by him to proceed direct for Rio de Janeiro. It will appear from the estimates for 1839, that the annual expense of the expedition, under its present organization, will be very considerably less than that required for it as originally contemplated.

A number of scientific gentlemen, who had accepted appointments in the expedition, under an impression that their services would be required, and their emoluments continued during the period anticipated for the completion of its objects, were not included in this new arrangement. They have asked to be remunerated for their sacrifices and disappointments, and I now submit the propriety as well as justice of their claim.

The act of Congress, approved 22d December, 1837, authorized the President of the United States to employ the public vessels in cruising along the Atlantic coast during the winter season, for the purpose of affording relief to merchantmen in distress. Under this law, the sloop of war Erie, the brigs Pioneer and Consort, the schooner Active, and the steam ship Fulton were occasionally employed with beneficial results. Owing to the want of proper vessels at the disposal of this department, after supplying the necessities of foreign stations, the steam ship Fulton is the only one now available for this service.

To aid in making the general survey of the coast of the United States, Lieutenants Gedney and Blake, with other naval officers, were, on the application of the Secretary of the Treasury, placed under his directions, and such other assistance afforded as circumstances permitted.

The survey of the southern coast, from Tybee Bar to Hunting island, May river, as directed by the act of Congress of March 3d, 1837, has been completed by Lieutenant Wilkes, a copy of whose report will be communicated to Congress early in the approaching session. The surveys of the harbors of Beaufort and Wilmington, North Carolina, provided for by the same act, will be commenced forthwith by Lieutenant Glynn, of the navy; and it is expected will be completed in time to be communicated to Congress previous to its adjournment.

The delay in carrying this act into execution has arisen from a want of proper vessels for that service, which will now be performed in a steam vessel, loaned by the War Department. The attention of Lieutenant Glynn will also be directed to an examination of the coast between the mouths of the Mississippi and Sabine rivers, as directed by the act of 7th July, 1838.

Under the provisions of the act of Congress of the 28th June last, and the supplementary act of the 9th of July following, authorizing the appointment of three competent persons to test the various inventions which might be presented to their notice for the improvement and safety of steam boilers, a board has been designated by the President, to make the requisite examinations and experiments, and, it is presumed, will report the results at the opening of the ensuing session of Congress.

In conformity with the provisions of the act of 7th July, 1838, making appropriations for light-houses, light-boats, beacon-lights, and buoys, the coasts of the Atlantic and of the Great Lakes were divided into eight districts, and an officer of the navy appointed to each, with orders to report to the Secretary of the Treasury, for the purpose of carrying out the views of Congress, under his directions.

The instructions of the President for establishing lines of despatch vessels, to run during the continuance of the blockade of the Mexican ports, by a French squadron, between New York and Vera Cruz, and New Orleans and Tampico, at stated and regular periods, have been carried into effect. The United States brig Consort, Lieutenant William H. Gardner, sailed from New York the 1st of November, and the revenue cutter Woodbury, loaned by the Treasury Department, it is presumed is now on her way to Tampico, under the command of Lieutenant John S. Nicholas, of the navy. This arrangement, it is believed, will be highly beneficial to the commercial community, by affording not only the means of communication, but of transporting their funds to the United States.

The state of the navy pension fund is as follows:

The number of invalid pensioners is	-	440	
The annual sum required to pay them is	-	-	\$33,496 23
The number of widow pensioners is	-	302	
The annual sum required to pay them is	-	-	55,716 00
The number of minor children pensioners is	-	105	
The annual sum required to pay them is	-	-	13,908 00

Whole number of pensioners is - - 847

And the whole annual amount required to pay them is - \$103,120 23

The amount of stocks owned by the navy pension fund on the 3d of March, 1837, was	-	-	-	\$1,115,329 53
Do. 1st of October, 1838	-	-	-	390,832 25
Difference	-	-	-	<u>724,497 28</u>

Which was sold, and the proceeds of the sale, with the interest and dividend of the capital, were applied to the payment of pensions and arrears of pensions. Of the balance of stock, \$390,832 25, owned by the fund 1st of October, 1838, the nominal amount of \$97,469 16, has been directed to be sold to meet payments on the 1st of January, 1839, so that the actual capital of the fund for the year 1839 will be only \$293,363 09.

It will thus be seen, that under the operation of successive pension laws, each widening and extending the stream of public munificence, this fund is rapidly decreasing; insomuch that in the course of a very few years large appropriations will be required to redeem the faith of Congress pledged for its support.

Privateer pension fund.—The number of privateer pensioners is thirty-six. The annual amount required to pay them is \$2,862. No payments were made to these pensioners during the past year, as the privateer pension fund had been exhausted. This fund, it will be perceived, failed in 1836, and, consequently, no payments have been made since that time. The subject was brought to the notice of the President in former reports from this department, and I have only to add that as, in conformity with the law establishing and appropriating this fund, the certificates of pensions were granted during life, it would appear that the nation stands pledged to furnish the means of fulfilling the obligation.

<i>Navy hospital fund.</i> —The balance in the Treasury to the credit of this fund, on the 1st of October, 1837, was	-	-	-	\$94,202 36
Receipts to 1st of October, 1838	-	-	-	31,242 92
				<u>125,445 28</u>
Expenditures to 1st of October, 1838	-	-	-	1,975 00
Balance	-	-	-	<u>123,470 28</u>

The construction of a dry dock at some point in the harbor of New York has been heretofore repeatedly recommended by this department, and is every year becoming more necessary to the purposes of the navy. Whatever diversity of opinion may exist as to the most eligible site, all seem to unite in favor of the object. The two docks at Norfolk and Boston are entirely insufficient to meet the requirements of the service. Delays in repairing ships, at all times injurious, and in time of war dangerous to the interests and safety of the country, frequently occur in consequence of there being no vacant dock to receive them; and at this moment two line of battle ships are lying at New York in a decayed and rapidly decaying state, which can neither be repaired where they are, nor removed elsewhere for that purpose, without great risk and expense.

The subject of a naval academy has also been more than once presented for consideration. Such an institution is earnestly desired by the officers of the navy, and, it is believed, would greatly conduce to the benefit of the service generally. The propriety of affording young midshipmen the means and opportunities for the acquisition of that knowledge and those

sciences which are either absolutely necessary or highly useful to their profession, would seem to have been recognised by Congress in the liberal provision for teachers and professors of mathematics on board our ships of war, and at the principal navy yards. Those, however, who have had the best opportunities for observing the practical operation of this system, are of opinion that it does not answer the purposes for which it was intended, and that other and more effectual means are required. A naval academy, which should combine the acquisition of those sciences and that knowledge without which professional duties cannot be performed to the public satisfaction, with that practical experience which is, if possible, still more indispensable, would, in my opinion, add little to the expense of the present defective system, and be followed by benefits which would far more than repay the cost of such an establishment.

The attention of the President and Congress is also solicited to that part of the estimates of the Board of Navy Commissioners which contemplates the building of five brigs or schooners, the frames of which have been collected under the law for the gradual improvement of the navy, and which are required for despatch vessels, surveys, and other purposes.

It is presumed that no arguments are necessary to enforce the propriety of retaining a sufficient number of ships in commission to afford active sea service to the officers of the navy: Such service is manifestly essential to discipline, to experience, and to those habits of hardihood, without which no officer can adequately fulfil his duty. The same practical experience necessary to eminence in any other profession, is most emphatically so in that of a seaman; the self-possession and skill required to meet the exposures and dangers incident to a sea life, both in peace and in war, can only be acquired on the seas; the same consequences which result from idleness and neglect in all other conditions of life, will assuredly follow in this; and charged, as the officer is, with protecting the property, as well as defending the rights and honor, of his country, his incapacity is not less dishonorable to himself than injurious to her. Unless, however, his country affords him opportunities of acquiring this professional experience by often calling him into active service, it would be unjust to complain of his inability to perform these high duties, and it is only when he declines these opportunities that he can be fairly charged with being ignorant of what he has never been permitted to learn.

Experience has also demonstrated, that it is only by frequency of active service at sea that the otherwise unavoidable consequences of a long peace can in any degree be arrested. All other expedients will be found either entirely useless, or only partially operative; and I abstain from suggesting any material alterations in the system of the service, not only for that reason, but because my limited experience in this department has not given me sufficient confidence in my own opinions, or, perhaps, entitled them to the consideration of others.

There are other strong and imposing reasons for keeping up the present naval establishment of the United States in full vigor and activity.

The unremitting attention which, since the late war with England, and the secrets it disclosed, has been paid by the maritime powers of Europe to the improvement and perfection of their ships of war and of naval discipline, calls for awakened vigilance on our part. The position of the United States, remote as it is from the scene of European rivalry, affords no immunity from its consequences. Commerce makes neighbors of all nations;

and the conflicts of interest or ambition between any two, can scarcely fail of involving many others. Against such imminent contingencies, an adequate naval force, keeping pace with the commerce and resources of the country, well manned, and, above all, well disciplined, is our most effectual security. It is equally recommended by its comprehensive sphere of action, the facility with which it can be directed to distant and various points, and by its freedom from almost all those objections which a wise people so justly cherish towards great military establishments. In addition to these considerations, it comes recommended to the people of the United States as the best guardian of their flag, wherever it is carried by their enterprise, as well as by having so largely contributed to that fund of national reputation, which, being a common possession, constitutes one of the strongest bonds of our Union.

Respectfully submitted.

J. K. PAULDING.

To the PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.