

REPORT

OF

THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY.

NAVY DEPARTMENT,
December 5, 1846.

SIR: Since the last annual report no naval force has been maintained in the Mediterranean. Under the earnest request of the Spanish authorities, the depot at Port Mahon has been broken up, and measures taken to remove the stores, and withdraw the officers in charge of them. It is proposed, in the coming year, to send a suitable force to that station.

After exchanging with the proper officer the ratifications of the treaty between the United States and China, in December last, Commodore Biddle, with the Columbus and Vincennes, the ships under his command, has visited various important points in the China seas. In the month of May, or June, he sailed for Japan, and expected to extend his cruise to Kamschatka.

There is no reason to doubt that he will render the valuable service to be expected from an officer of his experience and judgment, by making our country, its resources, and its friendly disposition towards the people inhabiting those remote regions, more favorably known. He has probably returned to Macao about this time; and in the month of January or February, the Columbus and Vincennes will commence their cruise homeward by way of the north Pacific.

On the 6th of January last, orders were sent from this department to Commodore Biddle to proceed with the Columbus to the northwest coast of America, and assume the command of the naval forces of the United States on that station. No acknowledgment of the order has been received, and there is no reason to doubt that he had left Macao before it reached that place, or that he will promptly obey it on its reaching him.

Commodore Skinner was relieved in the command of the squadron on the coast of Africa, in the month of June last, by Commodore Read. Our naval forces on that station have been actively and successfully employed in the humane duty of suppressing the slave trade. The squadron consists of the frigate United States, 44; sloop Marion, 16; brigs Dolphin and Boxer, 10 each; and store-ship Southampton, 6 guns.

The judicious measures adopted have secured to the officers and men an extraordinary degree of health in that inhospitable climate. Its effects are, however, so injurious, that the cruises have not been, and ought not to be, so long on that as on other stations. The prizes captured and condemned will contribute some thousands of dollars to the navy pension fund.

On the Brazil station, the squadron, under Commodore Rousseau, has been reduced by the return of the frigate Raritan, Captain Gregory, and of the sloop Plymouth, Commander Henry, and the detachment of the

sloop *Saratoga*, Commander Shubrick, for the Pacific. The frigate *Columbia* and brig *Bainbridge* remain on the station; and although this force is small, it has secured protection to American commerce within the limits of its operations.

The frigate *Constitution*, Captain Percival, has returned to the United States, having made a voyage around the world. The special duty assigned to Captain Percival has been satisfactorily performed.

In the Pacific ocean, the naval forces of the United States, under command of Commodore John D. Sloat, consisted, on the first of July last, of the frigate *Savannah*; sloops *Portsmouth*, *Levant*, *Warren*, and *Cyane*; schooner *Shark*, and store-ship *Erie*.

They have been reinforced by the frigate *Congress*, the sloops *Saratoga*, *Dale*, and *Preble*, and the razee *Independence*. The sloop *Levant* is on her return home; and authority has been given to send home the *Savannah* and *Warren*, the time for which the crews of these vessels enlisted having expired. Commodore W. Branford Shubrick went out in the *Independence* to relieve Commodore Sloat, under orders issued in August last.

In confidential instructions dated on the 24th of June, 1845, the Secretary of the Navy called Commodore Sloat's "attention particularly to the present aspect of the relations between this country and Mexico. It is the earnest desire of the President to pursue the policy of peace; and he is anxious that you and every part of your squadron should be assiduously careful to avoid any act of aggression. Should Mexico, however, be resolutely bent on hostilities, you will be mindful to protect the persons and interests of citizens of the United States near your station; and should you ascertain, beyond a doubt, that the Mexican government has declared war against us, you will at once employ the forces under your command to the best advantage." "The great distance of your squadron, and the difficulty of communicating with you, is the cause of issuing this order." The officer who was thus instructed observed the line of conduct prescribed to him with such intelligence and fidelity, that no complaint has ever been made of any unauthorized aggression on his part.

On the 7th of June, 1846, at Mazatlan, Commodore Sloat received satisfactory information through Mexico "that the Mexican troops, six or seven thousand strong, had, by order of the Mexican government, invaded the territory of the United States north of the Rio Grande, and had attacked the forces under General Taylor, and that the squadron of the United States was blockading the ports of Mexico on the gulf." He properly considered "these hostilities as justifying his commencing offensive operations on the west coast," and on the 8th of June sailed in the frigate *Savannah* "for the coast of California, to carry out the orders of the department of the 24th of June, 1845." He arrived at Monterey on the 2d of July, and on the 7th demanded a surrender of the place. This was evaded; and an adequate force landed from the squadron, took possession of the town, and raised the flag of the United States, without opposition or bloodshed. On the 9th, Commander Montgomery, of the sloop *Portsmouth*, under the commodore's orders, with like success, took possession of San Francisco, and that part of the country, in the name of the United States. On the 17th he sent Purser Fauntleroy with a detachment as far as the mission of St. John's, to hoist the flag of the United

States, and to recover cannon and munitions which had been buried by the enemy. On his arrival he found that the place had been captured an hour or two previously by Lieutenant Colonel Frémont, of the United States army, with whom he returned to Monterey on the 19th.

On the 15th of July the frigate Congress arrived at Monterey, and Commodore Stockton reported to Commodore Sloat for duty as a part of his squadron. On the 23d he was ordered to the command on shore; and on the 29th Commodore Sloat found his infirm health so enfeebled by his arduous duties, that he determined to avail himself of a permission which had been given him, in his discretion, to assign the command to Commodore Stockton, and sailed for Panama on his return home. After encountering much peril and hardship, this gallant and meritorious officer arrived at the seat of government early in November last.

On the 25th of July the Cyane, Captain Mervine, sailed from Monterey, with Lieutenant Colonel Frémont and a small volunteer force on board, for San Diego, to intercept the retreat of the Mexican general, Castro. A few days after, Commodore Stockton sailed in the Congress frigate for San Pedro, and, with a detachment from his squadron of three hundred and sixty men, marched to the enemy's camp. It was found that the camp was broken up, and the Mexicans, under Governor Pico and General Castro, had retreated so precipitately, that Lieutenant Colonel Frémont was disappointed in intercepting him. On the 13th, Commodore Stockton was joined by this gallant officer, and marched a distance of thirty miles from the sea, and entered, without opposition, Ciudad de los Angeles, the capital of the Californias; and on the 22d of August the flag of the United States was flying at every commanding position, and California was in the undisputed military possession of the United States. The conduct of the officers and men of the squadron in these important operations has been characterized by activity, courage, and steady discipline, and entitles them to the thanks of the department. Efficient aid was rendered by Lieutenant Colonel Frémont and the volunteers under his command. In his hands, Commodore Stockton informs the department, he will leave the military government when he shall leave California, in the further execution of his orders.

In the novel situation in which both the commanders of our naval forces have been placed, without instructions to regulate them in the detail of their conduct, they have adopted measures to preserve social order, and maintain our authority, and to withhold from the enemy any advantages from the conquered territory, which are believed to be warranted by the laws of war.

The conduct of both commanders has been marked by discretion, a spirit of conciliation, and a sacred respect for private rights; while the military movements have been ably conceived and brilliantly executed.

On her outward voyage the Congress touched at Honolulu, and landed Mr. Ten Eyck, the commissioner of the United States to the Sandwich islands. It was the good fortune of Commodore Stockton to contribute largely to an amicable adjustment of an unhappy misunderstanding between our former agent and the King's government, which threatened injury to our commercial interests.

The home squadron, on the 13th of May last, consisted of the frigates Cumberland, Raritan, and Potomac; sloops Falmouth, John Adams, and St. Mary's; steamers Mississippi and Princeton; brigs Somers and Por-

poise, and schooner Flirt—under command of Commodore Conner. It has been increased since by the sloops Albany and Boston; steamers Spitfire and Vixen; brigs Perry and Truxtun; schooners Reefer, Petrel, and Bonito, and store-ship Relief.

During the last two years, the menaces of hostilities on the part of Mexico have made it necessary to confine the operations of the squadron principally to the Gulf of Mexico.

On the 29th of March, 1845, the acting Secretary of the Navy, in a confidential despatch, informed Commodore Conner "that the President of the United States is impressed with a belief that it is a possible contingency that the government of Mexico may resort to acts of hostility against the United States, and has directed me to order the other vessels of the home squadron under your command to join you at Vera Cruz. The disposition of the President is to maintain the most friendly relations with the Mexican republic, and to meet any belligerent movement on the part of that republic in the most decisive manner. You will therefore so dispose of the force which now is or may be placed under your command as will give the most effectual protection to our citizens and commerce. You will be cautious not to violate the rights of others, but to resist and punish any aggression on ours. If a public declaration of war shall be made by Mexico against the United States, you will so conduct your operations as to show to her and to the world that, while ready to do justice and to maintain peace, we are prepared to vindicate the national honor, and to visit on our public enemies the utmost severities of the war thus provoked. If, without such an open declaration, hostilities shall be commenced on her part, you will meet and visit them with the utmost promptness and energy." And on the 16th of August, 1845, it was again impressed on him by the Secretary of the Navy, "that the policy of this government is the preservation of peace, if possible."

In the extremely delicate circumstances in which he was placed by the menaced hostilities on the part of Mexico, Commodore Conner fully sustained his reputation for sound judgment in the performance of his duty.

On the 3d day of May, 1846, he received intelligence at Vera Cruz which left no doubt on his mind that orders had been given by the Mexican government to General Arista to attack the American army east of the Del Norte with the forces under his command. On the 4th the Commodore sailed with the principal part of his squadron for the Brazos Santiago, and anchored off the bar on the 8th while the battle of Palo Alto was raging. Although too late to take part in that memorable conflict, the arrival of the squadron was most opportune, and effectual security was given to the depot at Point Isabel by landing 500 seamen and marines under Captain Gregory, of the Raritan. A detachment under Captain Aulick, of the Potomac, proceeded up the river to Burita, and aided in establishing a military post at that place.

For these prompt and gallant movements, the commodore, his officers, and men received the thanks of the President through this department.

On the 13th of May, the Secretary of the Navy informed him that Congress had declared that a state of war exists between the United States and the republic of Mexico, and ordered him to exercise all the rights that belonged to him as the commander-in-chief of a belligerent squadron. Under these orders, he declared and enforced a blockade of the

principal ports of Mexico on the gulf. The enemy had no ships of war which he dared to show on the open sea, and, determined on commencing war, precaution had been taken, in advance of the meditated attack, to place his public vessels in situations where, from natural obstacles, they could not be reached by the ships of our squadron. As soon as authority was given by the appropriations of Congress, measures were taken by the department to purchase, for employment in the squadron, small vessels of suitable draught of water to cross the dangerous bars which guard the ports of Mexico. Three schooners and two small steamers were purchased; but the last of these did not report to the squadron, from uncontrollable causes, until early in November.

On the 7th of August, Commodore Conner appeared off the bar of Alvarado, with a purpose of attempting the capture of the enemy's vessels-of-war in that river. The return of bad weather, endangering the small vessels in the open roadstead, and the rapidity of the current from the swollen state of the river, induced him to abandon his design, and to withdraw his force.

On the 15th of October he made another attempt to enter the Alvarado river for the same purpose. In endeavoring to cross the bar, one of the steamers, having in tow the principal division of the attacking force, grounded and became entangled with the vessels in tow. The current could not be overcome in the state of the wind, without the aid of steam, and the commodore had the mortification of being compelled to retire.

On the 16th of October Commodore M. C. Perry, with the steamer Mississippi and the small vessels, left the squadron at Lizardo, and sailed for Tabasco. On the 23d he arrived off the bar, and with great judgment and gallantry captured the town of Frontiera, with the enemy's steamers and vessels in port, and proceeded up the river a distance of seventy-four miles, into the interior of a settled country, and appeared before the city of Tabasco. He captured the vessels in the port, and, at the earnest request of the foreign merchants, humanely determined not to involve them in ruin by destroying the town. In dropping down the river one of his prizes grounded, and a large body of Mexicans opened a furious fire on her, which was promptly returned with great effect. The stranded vessel was got afloat and the Mexicans beaten off. But in this treacherous attack one American seaman was killed, and Lieutenant Charles W. Morris and two seamen were wounded. Lieutenant Morris survived until the 1st of November, when he died of his wound on board the Cumberland. His commanding officers have paid a sad tribute to the worth of this brave young officer, whose untimely death is a severe loss to the service.

The objects of the expedition were fully accomplished; and, by the capture or destruction of every vessel and steamer of the enemy in that important river, a check has been given to a commerce by which, no doubt, munitions of war were introduced into Mexico from Yucatan.

Much praise is due to Commodore Perry, and to the officers and men under his command, for the skill, judgment, and courage manifested throughout the expedition.

On the 12th of November Commodore Conner sailed with a large portion of his squadron, and on the 14th the town of Tampico capitulated unconditionally without resistance. Three fine gunboats, and other public property, fell into the hands of the captors. The enemy, anticipating an attack, had withdrawn the garrison, removed the guns, and destroyed

his munitions of war. The success of the enterprise is of great importance, and the enemy has lost one of the most considerable ports on the gulf. Arrangements have been made to hold it, and the commodore is instructed to relinquish the command ashore to the officer of the army commanding the garrison, and resume the operations of the squadron. Additions of great value are made to the naval forces in the gulf, by the captures of the enemy's vessels in Tabasco river and at Tampico, and the prizes adapted to the navigation of the mouths of the rivers along the coast will be equipped and usefully employed as cruisers.

The political condition of the State of Yucatan had induced a course of conduct towards her which exempted her from the evils of war. Having received information which justified the belief that this generous course on the part of the United States had been abused, on the 16th of October last I instructed the commander of the squadron that "the President has given, to the new position in which Yucatan is placed, by the pronunciamiento of Merida, a careful consideration, and directs me to inform you that the State must be regarded as an integral part of the Mexican republic, and her people as a portion of the public enemies with whom we are at war, and you will act towards her as towards other portions of Mexico."

These instructions will be carried into effect.

During the past season the brig Truxtun has been lost; and the brig Perry wrecked, but has been, by great exertions of Lieutenant-commanding Blake, got to Key West, and will be brought to Norfolk for repair. The officers and crew of the Truxtun became prisoners to the Mexicans. An inquiry will be had as to the causes of both disasters—a proceeding due to the officers and to the service.

No general cartel has been established between the two governments to regulate the exchange of prisoners during the existing war. A proposition of the Mexican government to exchange the officers and crew of the Truxtun against General La Vega and the officers who accompanied him prisoners of war in the United States, was, by your direction, acceded to, and the exchange has been carried into effect. Our officers and men were placed on board our squadron and sent home, and the Mexican officers, being at full liberty, have been offered a free passage in one of our public vessels, and, I have reason to believe, have sailed from Pensacola for Vera Cruz.

In concluding my report of the operations of the naval forces in the Gulf of Mexico, I deem it but an act of justice to call your attention to some considerations which must be borne in mind when forming an estimate of the results accomplished.

The navy of the United States is designed for the protection of our commerce in the most distant seas. The vessels composing it are authorized by law, and have been so constructed, in size and draught of water, as to navigate the ocean with safety. The outlets of the rivers emptying into the gulf are protected by bars, which afford but a small depth of water, and the navigation of this confined sea is exposed to dangers for many months in the year by storms, sudden and violent, so that a vessel constructed with a draught light enough to cross the bars encounters considerable risk in keeping the sea. When hostilities with Mexico commenced, no such vessels belonged to the navy. They would have been almost useless, except to prosecute hostilities in her waters. Since the

necessity arose, and authority was given, vigorous efforts to supply these means have been made, and will be continued; but some time has necessarily elapsed before they could be provided to the limited extent which has been reached.

It gives me pleasure to bear testimony to the chivalrous patriotism which has animated the officers of the navy, of all grades, in prompting them to seek active service against the enemy, and to offer, with the most anxious desire, to be permitted to engage in the most perilous enterprises against the enemy, while those engaged in the irksome and harassing duties of a blockade have performed their dull and heavy task without a murmur, and with no stronger desire than to exchange it for some active and useful enterprise, however hazardous or difficult of execution.

By the terms of the annexation of the republic of Texas as one of the States of our Union, the public vessels which composed the Texan navy were ceded to the United States. On the eleventh day of May last, Hiram G. Runnels, esq., appointed agent for that purpose, received at Galveston, from the Texan authorities, the sloop-of-war Austin, brigs Wharton and Archer, and the schooner San Bernard. The sloop Austin has been brought to Pensacola and will be rebuilt, and form an interesting accession to the navy of the United States. The two brigs and schooner, after survey, were found too much decayed to justify their repair, and have been ordered to be sold. The proceeds of sale will be paid into the treasury of the United States.

Under orders from their government, certain officers of the Texan navy were in charge of the vessels in ordinary when the delivery was made, and continued in that employment at the request of our agent.—They could not be paid as officers of the navy of the United States; but believing it to be just and proper, directions have been given to make them compensation for taking care of the property of the United States, at the rate of pay which was allowed them by Texas at the date of its incorporation into our Union.

Beyond this, I have not considered that the laws of the United States authorized me to make payment to any one, because of his having been an officer of the navy of Texas.

The estimates for the naval service for the next fiscal year have been prepared by my direction, and transmitted to the Secretary of the Treasury according to law.

I have the honor to present herewith the reports from the several bureaux, and estimates in detail for the several branches of the naval service. They are based on the employment, pending the war, of ten thousand men, as allowed by law, and a number of vessels in commission to give them employment. A statement of the classes of vessels, with their rate and number, is marked E, in the papers accompanying the report from the Bureau of Construction. No estimates are presented for the construction of vessels as permanent additions to the navy. I deem it, however, my duty to suggest that authority for building at least four sea-steamers, capable of bearing an armament sufficient for their own defence, would essentially promote the interests of the public service. The great utility of such vessels in the squadrons in the Pacific, the China seas, on the coast of Africa, and on the Brazil stations, is established by the experience of other nations who employ them.

The estimates from the Bureau of Yards and Docks have been pro-

pared in reference to the existing and pressing wants of the public service, and attention is respectfully asked to the remarks of the officer at the head of that bureau. The difficulties which have been experienced in the work on the dry-dock at New York have retarded its progress, but its practicability is not doubted, and its great importance to the navy induces me earnestly to recommend the appropriation of the required funds for its prosecution.

The importance of Pensacola as a naval station, with the necessary facilities of repairing and refitting ships-of-war, has, for many years, been pressed on the consideration of Congress. But at no period has the public interest so imperiously required that improvements should be made at that place as at this time. A large naval force is employed in the Gulf of Mexico, exposed to injury from tempests and engaged in hostile operations. If any of our vessels become materially disabled, they cannot be repaired without leaving the station, and coming as far north as Norfolk; and in the voyage the most serious disasters may befall them.

A dock, with sufficient capacity to receive vessels of the largest class, is an indispensable improvement at Pensacola, and I earnestly recommend that an appropriation may be made for that purpose.

A fever of most malignant form has prevailed in the hospital at Pensacola during the past season. I herewith transmit a copy of a report of a joint board of army and navy surgeons, who were directed to investigate the causes. Their opinion is, that the place will be restored to its former salubrity by removal of local causes of disease. Estimates are submitted for this purpose.

By the act of Congress of August 10, 1846, the appropriations for the navy yard at Memphis, for the current year, are to be confined, in the expenditure, to the construction of a ropewalk. Proper measures have been adopted to conform to this restriction. The estimates are prepared with this view. If it shall be deemed advisable to make this yard a place of construction—and in view of its great advantages in the building and outfit of steamers, I may hope that the original purpose of the establishment will not be abandoned—it will be advisable not to continue the restriction on the appropriation for the next year.

The piece of ground called St. Helena, opposite to the navy yard at Gosport, has been bought, by virtue of authority given in the act of 10th August last. When the State of Virginia shall have consented to the said purchase, an estimate will be submitted to make the improvements which were contemplated when the authority to make the purchase was given.

The system by which clothing is furnished to the navy has realized the expectations of those who devised it. The supply is abundant, of excellent quality, at a cheap cost; and no appropriation is asked for the next year, or, without some great disaster, will ever be required again.

In supplying our squadrons abroad, depots, or stores, in which provisions are collected in anticipation of the wants of the vessels, are indispensable. I concur in the recommendation of the chief of the Bureau of Provisions and Clothing, that the act of June 17, 1844, requiring the Secretary of the Navy to order commissioned or warrant officers of the navy to take charge of the naval stores for foreign squadrons, ought to be modified. The compensation allowed would command the services of competent and experienced persons in civil life. It is a duty which but few officers desire, or are qualified for; and it does not appear proper to re-

quire of an officer to enter into bond to perform duties under orders. From the experience had of its operation, I have no doubt that money would be saved by allowing the appointment of civilians, with the advice and consent of the Senate, and thus enlarge the sphere of selection.

The act of March 3, 1843, requiring supplies for the navy to be procured by contract, on advertisement, with the lowest bidder, has not been construed to affect contracts executed prior to its enactment. Contracts for the supply of cheese and butter for five years were in a course of execution at the date of the passage of this law, and will expire one in December, 1846, and one in May, 1847. The result of a careful examination made at the bureau is, that economy has been promoted, and the quality of the ration greatly improved by this mode of contracting. I respectfully invite attention to the recommendation on that subject.

The naval school, during the past year, has been continued under the judicious superintendence of Commander Franklin Buchanan, and gives renewed promise of usefulness to the service. At the last session of Congress it was made the subject of no special appropriation, but permission was given to apply a limited sum, (\$28,500,) from the existing appropriations, to "instruction, improvements, and repairs at Fort Severn." This moderate provision has enabled the department to make some necessary additions to the accommodations of the school, and has been found sufficient for its economical support. It is hoped that a similar provision will be adopted for the ensuing year. The propriety of affording to midshipmen the means of acquiring that knowledge which is essential to the skillful discharge of their professional duties, has been long recognised by Congress in its annual appropriations for instruction on board our ships-of-war. In the prosecution of a like purpose, a naval school, it is believed, will be found to add little to the cost of the present defective system, while it cannot fail to be attended with the most important benefits to the navy.

Connected with the Bureau of Ordnance and Hydrography is the Observatory. Besides conducting an extensive series of astronomical observations, it is the duty of that office to construct charts, prove nautical instruments before purchase, rate chronometers, and supply our armed cruisers with the nautical books, instruments, maps and charts, necessary to their safe conduct at sea. The arrangement is such as to promote economy, and to give assurance that these indispensable aids may be relied on. The observations made and published are exclusively the work of naval officers, and are highly creditable to their scientific attainments. There can be no doubt that, with the facilities of the Observatory, we might produce our own nautical ephemeris, for which we are now dependent on foreign nations, and without which our ships that are abroad could not find their way home, nor those at home venture out of sight of our own shores. A small appropriation would be sufficient to accomplish the object; and it may well be anticipated that the expenditure would be returned, by supplying our merchant vessels with the American Nautical Almanac at cost.

I invite attention to the report from the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery. The authority to appoint a small number of assistant surgeons is necessary to the public service. Under existing circumstances, it has been found necessary to employ citizen physicians in some of our smaller vessels.

The commandant of the marine corps has prepared estimates for the number of officers and marines as fixed by law. I am strongly impressed with the opinion, that an increase of the rank and file of the corps would greatly promote the efficiency of our ships in their operations against Mexico. With light pieces, prepared as field artillery, on board each ship, the expeditions, which must include operations on shore, would derive important aid from increased guards of marines.

The act of August 4, 1842, provided that, until otherwise ordered by Congress, officers of the navy shall not be increased beyond the number in the respective grades that were in the service on the 1st day of January, 1842. This restriction has been construed to apply to warrant officers, other than midshipmen. The number of boatswains, gunners, carpenters, and sailmakers happened to be small for the wants of the service at the date fixed. Embarrassment is often felt for want of authority to add to the number. It is a power which has never been abused; and, as such appointments are rewards of meritorious seamen or mechanics, it appears to me that the restriction might be removed without detriment to the public interest or danger of abuse.

I cannot conclude this report without inviting attention to the operation of the act of Congress of March 3d, 1845, in regard to the appointment of midshipmen. The justice of the principle established is unquestionable, and its application has given general satisfaction. Previously to its passage, appointments were made without regard to residence, and resulted in inequalities which it will take many years to remove. The law forbids any appointment from a State having more than its proportion. Some applications for midshipmen's warrants have recently been made in behalf of sons of officers who have fallen in battle, which could not be granted, on account of their residence in States not entitled. I recommend that the restriction of the law may be so far removed that one out of five or six vacancies, as they occur in the grade of midshipmen, may be filled at large, irrespective of the place of residence, in the same manner as a portion of the cadets at West Point are now annually appointed. Cases of peculiar merit, occasionally presenting themselves, might thus be provided for under the direction of the President.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

J. Y. MASON.

To the PRESIDENT.