

REPORT

OF THE

SECRETARY OF THE NAVY.

NAVY DEPARTMENT, *December 6, 1847.*

Sir: By the act of Congress of June 17, 1844, a peace establishment was adopted authorizing the employment in the navy of seven thousand five hundred petty officers, seamen, landsmen, and boys. By the act of August 10, 1846, it was increased to ten thousand, with a direction that on the conclusion of the existing war with Mexico, the number should be reduced to seven thousand five hundred. During the past year it is not believed that more than eight thousand men have been at any one time in service. The honor of the flag, the safety and the efficiency of ships of war, require that they shall not go to sea without the crews allowed by well-digested regulations fixing their respective complements.

The difficulty of enlistments for the naval service, caused mainly by the extraordinary activity in the mercantile marine, the high rate of freights, and the consequent increase of seamen's wages, has delayed the consummation of contemplated arrangements for the employment of cruisers on several stations, and the increase of our naval forces in the gulf and on the Pacific.

In the month of April last, orders were sent to Commodore Read to detach a sloop from the African squadron and send her to the Mediterranean. In obedience to this order the Marion, Commander Simonds, reached Gibraltar in July. The steamer Princeton, Commander Engle, sailed from Philadelphia in June for that sea. In August, the revenue cutter Taney, Lieutenant Commanding C. G. Hunter, temporarily transferred by the Treasury Department, sailed from New York with the same destination; and there is no doubt that Commodore Read, in the frigate United States, has, in obedience to his orders, assumed the command of the naval force in the Mediterranean.

The measures for the collection in the Mediterranean sea of this force for the protection of our commerce, were hastened by intelligence, received early in June, that an American vessel called the *Carmelita* had been seized on the high seas and carried into Barcelona by a vessel called the *Unico*, claiming to cruise under Mexican authority. The alleged prize was promptly released by the Spanish authorities, and the captors imprisoned for trial. The attempt of the Mexican government, by issue of letters of marque to persons

not *bona fide* citizens, with authority to cruise in vessels the property of foreigners against our commerce, and thus to legalize piracy, has not found favor or commanded success in any quarter. I am happy to state, that with the single exception of the *Carmelita*, I have received the most satisfactory reports from our naval commanders in every quarter of the globe that our commerce has not been molested; and there is no reason to apprehend any interruption of its successful prosecution by the attempted measures of Mexico—measures inconsistent with the spirit of the age, resorted to as a means of revenue, with a certain result of untold atrocities if favored, and which deserve, as they have received, the reprobation of the civilized world.

The activity of the vessels sent to the Mediterranean has removed all apprehension even in that sea, and the most complete success has attended the measures of precaution which were adopted. It gives me great satisfaction to state, that the honorable fidelity with which Spain has executed her treaty stipulations with us, has signally disappointed the lawless persons within her dominions who may have been disposed to accept the tempting offers of Mexico.

During the past year the squadron on the coast of Africa, under command of Commodore Read, has been actively and successfully employed in the humane duty of suppressing the slave trade. It is not known that a vessel, with American papers, has escaped seizure, where there was just reason to suspect that she was engaged or intended for employment in the violation of our laws or the dishonor of our flag.

In the month of September, Commodore Bolton sailed from Norfolk in the sloop *Jamestown*, to relieve Commodore Read in the command of the squadron on that station. The necessity of sending the *Marion* and the *United States* to the Mediterranean, and the return of the brig *Dolphin*, Commander Pope, to the United States, has reduced the squadron below the force which the United States engaged by the treaty of Washington to maintain on that station; but preparations are in progress and near completion to supply the deficiency.

It is contemplated by the department, as a permanent arrangement, to maintain a squadron in the Mediterranean sea principally with the ships which shall have served a portion of the usual period of a cruise on the African station. By this transfer, it is hoped that our officers and men will not be required to remain in the inhospitable climate of the coast longer than one year in a cruise.

No selection of a permanent depot has been made in the Mediterranean since we were required to withdraw our stores from Mahon. For the present the squadron will be supplied by means of store-ships sent from the United States.

In the month of June, the ship *Ohio*, Captain Stringham, sailed from New-York for Rio de Janeiro. She carried as passengers Mr. Tod, the minister to Brazil, and his secretary of legation, with their families, and arrived there in August. The *Ohio*, on her way to form a part of the Pacific squadron, had orders to remain at Rio until the 15th of November, when she was directed to proceed to

her station. On her arrival at Rio, Commodore Rousseau transferred temporarily the command of the station to Captain Stringham, and returned to the United States in the frigate *Columbia* with Mr. Wise, his family, and secretary of legation, as passengers. Commodore Storer sailed in the frigate *Brandywine* in the month of September for Rio to relieve Captain Stringham, and assume the duties of the command which Commodore Rousseau had honorably discharged, and of which he was relieved at his own request.

The brig *Bainbridge*, Lieutenant Commanding Williamson, has returned home and is undergoing repairs for immediate service. The squadron on the coast of Brazil, consists of the frigate *Brandywine* and brig *Perry*. The steamer *Alleghany*, Lieutenant Commanding Wm. H. Hunter, will proceed to that station as soon as she can be fitted for sea. The presence of a steamer on that station is peculiarly important, under existing circumstances. American whale ships, on their homeward voyage, have long been in the habit of entering certain ports of Brazil, and exchanging portions of their cargoes for necessary supplies. By the laws of Brazil, these ports are not open for the entry of our vessels, and notice has recently been given that these laws will be rigidly enforced. Such a course will be seriously injurious to our commerce, unless timely warning can be given to those who may not otherwise be informed of the existence of the law, until they have incurred its penalties. The *Alleghany* will be sent out to perform this service.

At the date of my last annual report, the squadron on the coast of China, consisted of the *Columbus*, Captain Wyman, and the *Vincennes*, Captain Paulding, under the command of Commodore Biddle. In the month of July, 1846, he visited Jeddo bay, with both ships, and invited a favorable consideration on the part of the Japanese government, of our desire for friendly commercial intercourse. Notwithstanding the prudence and discretion with which he made the overture, he could not prevail upon the government to relax the system by which Japan is closed to the trade of the Christian world, with the exception of the limited privilege accorded to the Dutch, to send one or two small vessels annually from Batavia to Nagaisaiki. Our squadron was treated with kindness, and its wants supplied, but no one was permitted to land; and to the offer of friendly intercourse, the unchangeable answer was, "Go away, and do not come back any more." Although Japan has not yet opened her ports to our enterprising countrymen, the rapid extension of trade with China, with its manifest advantages, can hardly fail to exert a favorable influence with the Japanese, and yet add hers to the ports of distant nations, in which American shipping may safely enter, and American enterprise find a liberal and profitable traffic.

The orders from this department, of the 6th of January, 1846, did not reach Commodore Biddle, until he arrived at Lima, on the 31st of December. He had met the *Independence*, bearing the pennant of Commodore Shubrick, at Valparaiso, who proceeded to Monterey, arriving on the 22d day of January, 1847.

Commodore Biddle arrived in the *Columbus*, on the 2d day of

March, 1847, and assumed the chief command. The squadron then consisted of the Columbus 74, Independence razee, frigates Congress and Savannah, sloops Portsmouth, Levant, Cyane, Warren, and Preble, store-ships Erie, Lexington, and Southampton, and the armed schooner Malek Adhel, which had been captured from the enemy. The Savannah and Levant have returned home, each having been absent nearly four years, and Captain Geisinger left the United States early in November, with orders to take command of the frigate Congress, and proceed to China and give protection to our commerce in that quarter. Commodore Biddle is supposed to have sailed from Monterey, on his return to the United States, on the 25th of July last, and may be expected at home early in the spring. Commodore Shubrick, on whom the command devolved on Commodore Biddle's leaving the station, has, at his request, received permission to return home on the arrival of Commodore T. Ap Catesby Jones, who left the United States early in November, to join the Ohio 74, at Valparaiso, and will probably relieve Commodore Shubrick in the month of March or April next. Commodore Stockton, on his being relieved by Commodore Shubrick, availed himself of the permission given by the department, and has returned to the United States by the overland route.

In my last report, I had the honor to inform you that "on the 22d of August, 1846, the forces of the United States, under Commodore Stockton, had entered the Ciudad de los Angeles, that our flag was flying at every commanding position, and that California was in the undisputed military possession of the United States." Supposing that the war in California was ended, Commodore Stockton was actively concerting measures for the prosecution of the war on other parts of the enemy's coast and territory, when, in violation of their parole, the Mexican leaders in California, on the 23d of September, renewed hostilities; and in consequence of the small number which could be detailed to garrison the places occupied by our forces, gained some partial advantages. But on the 29th of December, the Commodore, with about six hundred officers and men from the ships Congress, Savannah, Portsmouth, and Cyane, in cooperation with Brigadier General Kearney, with about sixty men of the 1st dragoons, and about fifty mounted riflemen, marched from San Diego for the capital of the Californias. After a march of one hundred and forty miles, they met the enemy at the Rio San Gabriel, on the 8th of January, and drove him in a most gallant manner from a strong and advantageous position; and after another encounter on the 9th, with a similar result, the enemy was driven from the field, and our forces entered the Ciudad de los Angeles without further resistance. By these energetic measures the insurrection was quelled, and by a subsequent capitulation all hostilities in California ceased and have not been since renewed. In this unprecedented march of the sailors of more than one hundred and fifty miles inland, and in their severe encounters with the enemy they are reported to have vied with their brethren of the army in steady discipline and daring courage. They have, in the emergencies in

which the country was placed before the arrival of troops, served in the most creditable manner as infantry, artillery, and dragoons.

From the latest despatches received from the squadron, I am happy to state that everything was tranquil in Upper and Lower California; the military possession complete and undisturbed; trade carried on without interruption, and the civil government in successful operation. I feel authorized to express the confident belief that Mazatlan, San Blas, and Acapulco have before this time been captured by Commodore Shubrick, and are held by the squadron under his command, open to the trade of neutrals under the same conditions as other Mexican ports in the military occupation of the United States. These measures, with the blockade of Guaymas, will effectually exclude from the west coast of Mexico, all contraband trade.

With a view to mask the contemplated combined attack on Vera Cruz and the Castle, orders were given, in October, 1846, to Commodore Conner, commanding our naval forces in the gulf of Mexico, to capture and occupy Tampico. These orders were gallantly executed in November following, and preparations were made with the greatest activity, to enable the navy to bear its proper part in this interesting military operation. Bomb ketchers and steamers were purchased, armed, and sent forward; the ship-of-the-line Ohio, destined for the Pacific, was ordered to the gulf; the sloops Germantown, Saratoga, and Decatur, were fitted and sent down, and all the necessary means at the command of the department, were put in requisition to make the co-operation of the naval force as efficient as possible. I cannot exaggerate my admiration of the conduct of the officers of every grade, who, waiving all privileges of rank and considerations of personal comfort, eagerly sought service in the expedition, and of the gallantry with which their duty was performed by those who were so fortunate as to receive orders for the service.

The combined operations were conducted with the highest skill and courage, and the city of Vera Cruz, with its formidable defences, garrisoned with more than five thousand men, and armed with more than four hundred cannon, after a resistance of barely five days, capitulated with a total loss to the assailants, of twelve killed, of whom six belonged to the navy and six to the army. The entire operation, from the landing of the troops, which was effected from the ships of war, to the surrender of the place, brought the army and navy into the closest contact, and the courage and skill displayed, were not more honorable to both, than the perfect harmony which prevailed. The conduct of the officers and men of the squadron, whether on ship-board or in the battery on the shore, received from the army the highest commendation, while the former enthusiastically applauded the gallantry and skill of their more fortunate brethren of the army.

On the 21st day of March, Commodore Conner, who had been in command of the home squadron for more than three years, and whose health had greatly suffered from the long and honorable service, which he had performed in an unfavorable climate, after the

landing of the troops, and pending the attack on Vera Cruz, transferred the command to Commodore Perry. This gallant officer has conducted the operations of his command with distinguished judgment and success.

Alvarado, Tuspan, Laguna, Fronteira, at the mouth of the Goatzacoalcos, and the city of Tabasco, eighty miles in the interior, the capital of one of the richest and most fertile of the Mexican states, were successively captured and occupied by our naval forces. In many of the operations which led to these results, the service was arduous, the exposure to unhealthy influences, great, and the localities gave to the enemy decided advantages of successful resistance; yet, with an indomitable courage and fortitude, the officers and men met and overcame all difficulties, and still hold these important points except the city of Tabasco, which was voluntarily evacuated, because of its extreme insalubrity. Blessed with vigorous health and a robust constitution, the Commodore has, in person, encountered the hardships and exposure to which those under his command have been subjected. And those high qualities have been exhibited by the squadrons, both in the Pacific and the gulf, which give assurance that the navy would have covered itself with the same laurels, with which a grateful country will crown our armies, if the same opportunity of distinguished service had been afforded.

Of the events which occurred in the gulf of Mexico during the past year, none exercised a higher degree of sympathy and admiration than the loss of the brave officers and men, who perished with the brig Somers, the heroic and romantic generosity evinced by many of them, when in the most imminent peril, and the noble efforts made to save them, by the officers and crews of the British, French, and Spanish ships of war, anchored in view of the wreck. It has afforded me the highest satisfaction to take under your direction, the necessary measures to carry into effect the joint resolution of Congress of the third of March last, which made it the duty of the President to cause suitable gold and silver medals to be prepared and presented to the officers and men attached to the foreign ships of war, "who so gallantly, and at the imminent peril of their lives, aided in rescuing from a watery grave, many of the officers and men of the United States brig Somers."

I have instructed Commodore Perry to procure the names of the brave and generous men, who are entitled to this distinguished mark of a nation's gratitude. He has promptly undertaken the grateful duty and so soon as he shall have obtained and communicated the necessary information, the medals will be prepared and presented.

During the past season I regret to state sickness has prevailed with much virulence in the gulf squadron, and at the places occupied by our naval forces along the coast. Many valuable officers and men have fallen under the ravages of fever, but it is a source of great satisfaction that the number of deaths has been very small in proportion to the number of cases of yellow fever, and of fever of other malignant type. No class of officers has suffered greater proportionate loss than the medical corps of the navy. Their heroic

devotion to their professional duties, has received as it deserved the warm and grateful commendation of their commanding officer, and while their skill and attention rescued from death an unprecedentedly large proportion of their patients, the anxiety and exposure incident to their arduous duty, left them without the strength to resist the disease when themselves attacked. Some of the most accomplished of their highly meritorious corps have fallen victims to the diseases of the season.

I respectfully urge that the increase of the number of surgeons and of assistant surgeons, recommended in the accompanying report of the chief of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, be authorized by law. The unusually large number of vessels in commission makes this increase a matter of urgent necessity.

Immediately after the capture and occupation of Tampico and Vera Cruz on the gulf, and of Monterey, San Francisco and San Diego on the Pacific, the commanding officers of the army and navy, respectively established and collected duties on commerce. Under your direction the instructions from this department have enjoined on the commanders of our squadrons the most considerate regard for the commerce of American citizens and of neutrals, and the smallest possible interference with lawful trade compatible with the successful maintenance of our belligerent rights. This liberal course of policy has been carried out by our officers and justly appreciated by neutral nations. In all its details the scale of duties prescribed and enforced by the officers, as a right of military occupation, was far below the onerous duties levied by the Mexicans. But there was a want of uniformity, and by your direction, in the month of March last, a system was digested, and instructions given to conform to it at the several ports or places held by our land or naval forces by military conquest. Such modifications have been adopted, as experience of the practical working of the systems suggested. The right is derived from the law of nations as the result of successful belligerent operation, and the duty of collection at places held by the navy has been performed by naval officers without any allowance for the service. I respectfully suggest that the act of 1842 be so far relaxed, as to allow to officers performing this duty a commission of one per cent on the amount collected, with a proviso that in no case such commission shall exceed a sum which would afford a reasonable compensation for the risk and trouble incident to the duty.

The moneys collected have been applied under the direction of the commanding officer to the uses of the squadron. No returns have been received from the Pacific, those received from the gulf of Mexico show an amount of between thirty and forty thousand dollars collected—but they do not contain collections since early in September.

Vera Cruz and Tampico are the principal ports, and the duties at those places are not collected by naval officers. No doubt is entertained that a considerable revenue will be collected at the several ports of Mexico in our possession, which will reduce the expenses of the war on our treasury. But the great advantage resulting is, that the admission of trade under moderate duties will

remove the temptation to smuggling, and, the import trade being compelled to pass under the inspection of our officers, the enemy will be deprived of aid by the introduction of articles contraband; and at the same time an active and profitable employment given to our own navigating interests.

In the gulf of Mexico, the squadron has captured a number of steamers and gun-boats of light draught, suitable for entering the rivers along the coast, which were valued and taken into service by the commanding officers with the approval of the department. Their value was subject to distribution as prize money. With every disposition to make prompt payment, especially to the crews, who in the vicissitude of a sailor's life may otherwise never receive their shares, I did not feel at liberty to make payment without adjudication and condemnation by a prize court. The right of a captor is *prima facie* good; but he cannot pass a perfect title without a sentence of a court of admiralty. It has been arranged that the question shall be submitted, by libel, to the district court of the United States, in Louisiana; and it is supposed that the court will exercise jurisdiction without sending in the vessels, which it is desirable to avoid, as they are usefully employed in the squadron. The valuation made by disinterested American ship-masters, is believed to be reasonable, and will be paid according to the provisions of the prize act, whenever the vessels shall have been legally condemned.

In the Pacific, a number of vessels have also been captured. It would not have been compatible with the efficiency of the squadron, to detach prize crews to bring them to the United States by the long voyage around the Cape, and it was indispensable that the legality of the capture should be submitted to judicial investigation. At the request of the commanding naval officer, a prize court was organized by the military officer exercising the functions of civil government in California. Instructions have been given, that in no case will the prize money be distributed until the proceedings of the court, showing the condemnation and sale, shall have been transmitted and passed in review by the department.

The extension of our laws over the Oregon territory, and the establishments of courts with admiralty jurisdiction, would seem to be highly important for the settlement of the delicate and difficult questions which often occur in such cases.

I deem the subject of sufficient importance to transmit with this report, extracts of despatches from this department to the commanding officers of the squadron in the Pacific, on the subject of the law of blockade.

By a joint resolution of Congress, approved on the 3d of March last, authority was given to the Secretary of the Navy, "to place at the disposal of Captain George C. De Kay, of New Jersey, the United States ship Macedonian, for the purpose of transporting to the famishing poor of Ireland and Scotland, such contributions as may be made for their relief; and to place at the disposal of Captain Robert B. Forbes, of Boston, the United States sloop-of-war Jamestown, for the like purpose." There was superadded an al-

ternative authority "to despatch said vessels upon the service aforesaid as public ships, if in the opinion of the Secretary of the Navy, the public interest would be better subserved."

The two ships were placed at the disposal of the experienced navigators named in the joint resolution, respectively, and each having performed its mission of charity, has been returned in satisfactory condition. The sublime spectacle has been presented to the world, of our people in a spirit of Christian benevolence, relieving the sufferings of subjects of a mighty foreign power, which the vast resources of that great empire could not avert, and of our country, while engaged in a foreign war, furnishing from its surplus-products the means of feeding famishing nations abroad.

I was not of opinion that the public interests would be better subserved by sending the Macedonian and the Jamestown on the service required as public ships. The department could not procure the crews necessary for the public service in giving protection to our commerce and in the prosecution of the war. And, I may be permitted to add, that while the voluntary offering of the people of the United States was received with gratitude by the sufferers, and with heartfelt acknowledgments of thanks by high functionaries of the British government; while the relief so gracefully offered and received has contributed to promote affectionate feeling, and strengthen the bonds of friendship which bind the people of the two great countries together, without leaving any painful recollection, such results could not have been expected, if the government of the United States had undertaken thus to minister to the wants of the subjects of Great Britain.

Under the direction of the seventh section of the navy appropriation act of the 3d of March last, ten thousand dollars have been paid on his requisitions to Uriah Brown. On the 14th day of October, Mr. Brown informed the department that he was prepared to submit to inspection an experiment of the liquid fire of his invention. A board of officers was ordered to witness the experiment, and I have the honor to transmit a copy of their report, with a communication from Mr. Brown. No preparation has been made, of which I am aware, to test the practical utility of the shot-proof steamship of his invention. The appropriation is exhausted in the experiment of the liquid fire, and I have no such information as to the principle on which he proposes to make a shot-proof steamship as to justify my forming an opinion or directing an experiment. It is not my opinion that the interest of the United States will be promoted by adopting the invention of liquid fire as a means of national defence.

I have the honor to present herewith the reports from the several Bureaus of Construction, Equipment and Repair, of Ordnance and Hydrography, of Yards and Docks, of Provisions and Clothing, and of Medicine and Surgery, with estimates in detail for the several branches of the naval service for the next fiscal year. They are based on the employment, pending the war, of ten thousand men, as allowed by law, and a number of vessels in commission requiring their services. These reports present a gratifying ex-

hibit of the condition of the public works and of the public property subject to the control and direction of the Navy Department, and the estimates have been prepared and revised with a careful desire to ask for nothing which is not necessary to the public interest. I respectfully ask the favorable consideration of the suggestions made by the experienced, able, and faithful officers at the head of the bureaus.

The gross amount estimated for is ten millions three hundred and sixty-five thousand eight hundred and twenty-two dollars. The amount appropriated for the current fiscal year is \$10,052,636 10. The estimates now presented include an item of \$1,200,000 to complete the four war steamers, authorized by the act of the 3d of March last, an increase of the appropriation under the head of contingent enumerated, and \$350,000 dollars for the prosecution of the work on the dry dock at New York. The reasons for these appropriations are given in the reports, and, I presume, will be satisfactory. There are other objects estimated for, requiring an inconsiderable expenditure, which seem to me to be necessary for the efficient discharge of the public duties devolved on the department. Of the appropriations made for the current year, the unexpected balances will, without doubt, prove adequate to all the wants of the service.

I deem it not inappropriate to the occasion, as illustrating the expenditures of the Navy Department since the commencement of the Mexican war, to present a comparative statement of appropriations and expenditures for the last three years, under the heads of appropriation of "pay," "contingent," "increase and repair," "provisions and clothing," and "surgeons' necessaries and appliances." These may be denominated the variable appropriations, and will show the increase of expenditure during the war over that of a corresponding period in time of peace. This comparison exhibits the following result:

For the year ending—	Appropriations.	Available aggregate.	Expenditures.
June 30th, 1845	\$5,058,815 71	\$6,194,453 28	\$5,818,388 79
do 1846	5,085,892 00	6,564,426 62	6,371,544 50
do 1847	6,434,349 00	7,961,733 48	6,435,416 56

And of the expenditure for increase and repair during the past year \$345,571 have been paid for fifteen vessels, storeships, steamers, and schooners, of suitable draught of water, purchased and sent to the gulf of Mexico.

By direction of the 3d March, 1847, measures were taken for building four war steamers of the first class, and they are in a course of rapid construction. The models, tonnage, and machinery were adopted on the report of a mixed board of naval officers, constructors, and engineers, and I have no doubt the vessels will constitute a most valuable accession to the navy.

By the same act, contracts were authorized for the transportation of the mail in steamers between New York and Liverpool, between New York and New Orleans, and from Havana to Chagres.

The contractors on these two routes were named in the law, and the basis of the contracts was adopted by Congress, by reference to proposals heretofore submitted to the Postmaster General, by Messrs. Collins & Sloo, respectively. The contracts, with these gentlemen have been entered into as directed by law, embracing conditions by which the steamers are to be constructed, under proper inspection, so as to be convertible into war steamers and subject to be taken for public use, at a fair valuation, at the pleasure of the department. The 5th section of the act made it the duty of the Secretary of the Navy to contract on the part of the government of the United States "for the transportation of the mail from Panama to such port as he may select in the territory of Oregon, once a month each way, so as to connect with the mail from Havana to Chagres across the Isthmus; said mail to be transported in either steam or sailing vessels, as shall be deemed most practicable and expedient."

The department did not find any specific direction in regard to this contract, as to persons to be employed, prices to be paid, or the duration of the contract. Proposals were, therefore, invited by advertisement, reserving to the department the right to take the bid deemed most favorable and leaving to the bidders to propose their own terms as to the duration of the contract, the rate of compensation and the description of vessels in which the service was to be rendered.

Astoria, in the Oregon Territory, was determined on as the northern terminus of the route, with a right of changing it reserved to the department, and the law was construed to require a mail to be transported from one point to the other within thirty days. The distance is more than three thousand miles, and the winds and currents known to be such as to render it impracticable to perform the required service in sail vessels. It was, therefore, determined to employ steamers. The great distance at which the service is to be performed; the heavy expenses which must be incurred by the contractors in providing on the Pacific coast; the necessary shops and materials for repair; the indispensable fuel and depots for coal, induce me to adopt the term of ten years as the duration of this contract, which has been adopted by the Post Office Department for its foreign mail contracts. But to guard myself against the reproach of exceeding the authority which it was the intention of Congress to confer, a clause is inserted in the contract reserving to Congress the right to annul the contract at its approaching session, if it shall be deemed proper or expedient to do so.

The contracts require the vessels to be ready for sea in October and November, of the year 1848, and the right of pay will commence with the commencement of the performance of the mail service stipulated. The annual compensation under these agreements will be to E. K. Colling, \$385,600; to A. G. Sloo, \$290,000; to Arnold Harris, \$199,000. An appropriation for payments under the contracts with Collins and Sloo, during the fiscal year commencing the

1st July, 1848, if the contractors comply with their undertaking, of nearly three-fourths of the annual compensation will be required, and about one-fourth for that of Harris. And as an act of justice to the contractors, I respectfully suggest that, in making the appropriation, Congress will declare its approval of the term which has been adopted, and whether the reserved power of annulling the contract shall be exercised.

I regard them as favorable contracts, and the establishment of a regular and speedy intercourse by mail between the Atlantic cities and Oregon as of the highest national importance.

I have cordially co-operated in the establishment of the several lines of steamers, stipulated by these contracts. Thirteen new vessels will be constructed in the most skilful manner, which may be used as war steamers, and will be available for national purposes on any emergency.

The contracts stipulate that a mail agent, to be appointed by the Postmaster General, shall be placed and maintained on board. But as the contract is made with this department, and the payments will be made from the treasury on bills approved here, unless otherwise directed, it may be a question whether the law sufficiently provides for the regulation and collection of postage by the Post Office Department, and how far such receipts would be applicable to the payment of these contractors. I respectfully submit that the necessary legal enactments on the subject may be made by Congress.

The Observatory is in successful operation, and its usefulness to the naval service is confirmed by experience. I respectfully renew the recommendation contained in my last report, that an appropriation of a sum not exceeding six thousand dollars be made for the collection of materials to compile a Nautical Almanac for the use of the navy and merchant marine. I submit herewith a communication from the superintendent on the subject of duties paid into the treasury on instruments imported for use at the Observatory. When the estimates were submitted and appropriations were made, it was not foreseen that these duties, amounting to two thousand two hundred and seventy-nine dollars and twenty cents would be chargeable. I recommend that Congress direct that they be refunded.

At the last session of Congress, a clause was inserted in the navy appropriation bill, that the superintendent of the Observatory should be a captain, commander, or lieutenant in the navy, and while performing duty as such, his annual pay should be three thousand dollars.

In the form in which the act passed, this provision is so worded, that the accounting officers of the treasury deemed it uncertain to whom it applied, and recommended that Congress should pass an explanatory law. No payment has been made under the law, but the superintendent has received only his duty pay as a lieutenant in the navy. I respectfully recommend that the clerical error be corrected, and that the salary be allowed as was intended, commencing with the present fiscal year.

There are in attendance at the navy school about ninety midshipmen, prosecuting their studies under great advantages, preparatory to their examination, with a view to promotion. The school is well conducted, and will unquestionably be of very great advantage to the naval service. The examinations which are there made, before an applicant can enter the service, and those which determine his qualification for promotion, after five or six years of service, exert the most beneficial influence; in retaining in the service only those who are free from physical defect and have the mental endowments essential to a skilful and accomplished naval officer.

The operation of the act of March 3d, 1845, requiring appointments of midshipmen to be made from the States and Territories according to representation in Congress, has been highly favorable in enlarging the interest felt by the whole country in the navy. It will be yet some time before the irregularities amongst the States will be removed: The maximum number of midshipmen allowed by law is four hundred and fifty-one. The divisor fixed by the act of 1845, is, at this time, 230. It will change as the number of members of the House of Representatives varies. I recommend that the restriction imposed by the act of August 1, 1842, by which the number of midshipmen is limited to 451, be so far removed as to authorize an increase of the number to 460, and at all times hereafter that each State and Territory shall have two midshipmen for each representative in Congress to which it may be entitled. This small increase will contribute to hasten the establishment of equality, and will simplify the distribution of midshipmen amongst the States and Territories. Cases have been presented to the department of sons of those who have fallen in battle, which have confirmed the opinion that it would be wise and just to give the authority asked for in my last report to appoint one midshipman out of eight or ten, at large, irrespective of actual residence.

I have the honor to present the estimates for the maintenance of the marine corps.

Under the provisions of the act of March last, the additional officers authorized were appointed, and the recruiting service has been actively performed. The full number of privates authorized by law has not been enlisted. It is respectfully suggested whether, as this additional force is to be discharged at the end of the war, and the services of the corps or large portions of it will be required on land in Mexico, the privileges of bounty land or scrip, given to soldiers enlisting in the army ought not to be extended to the marines.

In the month of May last, when it was very desirable to strengthen the column of the army under Major General Scott, it gave me pleasure to tender for that purpose a portion of the marine corps. A battalion of marines, under Lieutenant Colonel Watson, was promptly sent forward and joined the main army, at Puebla, on the 6th of August. They have performed their duties with the highest honor, and displayed the qualities of veteran troops. In the brilliant operations in the valley of the city of Mexico they bore a conspicuous part, and in the battle of Chapultepec, amongst the glo-

vious dead, who fell in gallantly defending their country's honor, was Major Twiggs; the second in command of the battalion. Lieutenant-Colonel Watson, after an arduous and distinguished career of service at the head of his detachment, left his command, after the capitulation of the city of Mexico, on his way to the United States to recruit his impaired health, when he was prostrated by sickness in Vera Cruz, and breathed his last at that city the 16th of November. The marine corps has rendered most important service with the squadrons in the Gulf and the Pacific, and seems to me to be entitled to the most favorable consideration of Congress.

The system now established for disbursements of money and supplies in the navy, is satisfactory in its results. The purchases are made on fair competition, and the duty of distributing on ship-board, and of accounting to the department by the pursers, is performed with great regularity and accuracy. The limited number of pursers in the navy has made it indispensable to require of the commanding officers of the smaller vessels the performance of the duty of pursers; and it has happened, from unavoidable causes sometimes in the prosecution of active operations against the enemy, that the commander was separated from his vessel and her stores. While there has not been a case in which any suspicion of misapplication of public property could attach to an officer doing duty as a purser, there is no doubt that officers thus situated have had to meet losses by being held to account for all the stores received, to the delivery of which they could not attend without neglect of the paramount duty as commander of the vessel. I am entirely satisfied that it is injurious to the service, and unjust to the officers, to impose on them the duties of purser. The appointment of twelve assistant pursers, with a salary of one thousand dollars, which is now allowed by law to a commodore's secretary, will supersede the necessity of so employing the officers. From these appointments promotions might be made to the grade of purser, and the experience acquired, and qualifications exhibited in the inferior grade, would add greatly to the usefulness of the officer when promoted, and required to perform more responsible duties. I am satisfied that it is injurious to the discipline of the service, that the commanding officer of a vessel should stand in the relation towards her crew of purser. If any supposed error exists in his account, about which a sailor is always sensitive, the captain should be an impartial umpire between him and the purser. If the captain be the purser and the author of the supposed mistake, the man becomes discontented under a sense of wrong, which there is no one to redress. I, therefore, respectfully recommend that authority be given to appoint, by warrant, twelve assistant pursers in the navy.

The measures taken by the department in execution of the act of Congress authorizing the construction of floating dry-docks, with appendages, at Philadelphia, Kittery, and Pensacola, will be made the subject of a special report.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully, your obedient servant,
J. Y. MASON.

To the PRESIDENT.