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A BRITISH REPORT ON WEST FLORIDA AND
LOUISIANA, NOVEMBER, 1812

by RICHARD K. MURDOCH

AFTER RETURNING THE two Floridas to Spain by the Treaty of Paris of 1783, England watched with satisfaction while her thirteen former colonies struggled to reach agreement with the government in Madrid on the thorny problem of the southeastern boundary. The Treaty of San Lorenzo of 1795 failed to satisfy either party and the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 further confused the problem by introducing boundary claims in the region west of the Mississippi River. The suggestion to use force to achieve a permanent settlement with Spain was heard with increasing frequency in Washington. Even Thomas Jefferson, in retirement at Monticello, advised action when he wrote his nephew, John Wayles Eppes, "I wish you would authorize the President to take possession of East Florida immediately. The seizing [of] West Florida will be a signal to England to take Pensacola & St. Augustine; . . . we shall never get it from them but by a war, which may be prevented by anticipation -" ¹

At times, apparently despairing of action from Washington, some of the border populace took matters into their own hands, goaded on by a combination of continual depredations by Indians supposedly loyal to Spain, of the bizarre activities of adventurers such as General James Wilkinson and William Blount of Tennessee, of the still unsolved intrigues of Aaron Burr, and of the ludicrous "invasions" of the Florida region by William Augustus Bowles. ² After the forced abdication of Charles IV, a puppet in the hands of France since 1795, and the installation of Joseph Bonaparte as king, a violent civil war broke out in Spain, and a provisional government loyal to the claims of Ferdinand VII and supported by English arms was established in Cadiz. Spain's

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1. Thomas Jefferson to John Wayles Eppes, Monticello, January 5, 1811, Paul L. Ford (ed.), *The Works of Thomas Jefferson*, 12 volumes (New York, 1904-1905), XI, 160-161.
 2. Lyle N. McAlister, "William Augustus Bowles and the State of Muskogee," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XL (April, 1962), 317-328.

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American colonies, including the two Floridas, remained loyal to the provisional government and to its English ally.³ Many in the United States feared that settlement of the southeastern boundary would now involve the republic with England, protector of the Spanish Bourbon cause. The Floridas in the hands of a weak Spanish monarchy was one thing; the Floridas in the hands of a vigorous and hostile England was something quite different.

Under these circumstances, it seemed logical for the local populace to take the initiative in seizing portions of West Florida and in attempting to take possession of Amelia Island as a stepping-stone to St. Augustine and perhaps to all of East Florida.⁴ By late spring of 1812, when relations between the United States and England had almost reached the breaking point, it was assumed that if war came, the enemy would certainly use Florida's ports, especially Pensacola and Mobile, with or without permission of local Spanish authorities. With such bases it would be possible to attack the United States, either by land, using the numerous river routes into what is now western Georgia and Alabama, or by sea, utilizing these ports as anchorages where warships could be repaired and prizes converted safely to privateers. The two major bays in West Florida offered by far the best naval facilities for warships of moderate size preparing for an attack on New Orleans or on American shipping at the mouth of the Mississippi River. It was with considerable apprehension that the citizens of Louisiana learned of the declaration of war on June 18, 1812, by the United States, for they knew that sev-

3. Although the supporters of the Bonapartists did send several agents into Latin America, the incumbent Spanish officials permitted only a few to land and the general attitude toward Joseph's agents is said to have been one of "mild hostility."

4. The so-called "Amelia Island Affair," involving a number of well known Americans including George Mathews, former governor of Georgia, and John H. McIntosh, a former general, occupied considerable space in the eastern newspapers in the spring and early summer of 1812. The outbreak of war with England played a significant part in the eventual abandonment of the project to seize East Florida (lest such an act drive Spain into the war on the side of the English). Isaac J. Cox, "The Border Missions of General George Mathews," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XII (December, 1925), 309-333; Rufus K. Wyllys, "The East Florida Revolution of 1812-1814," *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, IX (November, 1929), 415-445; Rembert W. Patrick, *Florida Fiasco; Rampant Rebels on the Georgia-Florida Border, 1810-1815* (Athens, 1954); John Anthony Caruso, *The Southern Frontier* (New York, 1963), 351-365.

eral British warships were patrolling the Gulf of Mexico searching for French privateers.⁵

Apparently the British had made preliminary plans in case of hostilities for immediate action against the commerce of the United States.⁶ The naval squadron based on Port Royal in Jamaica had received instructions covering such an eventuality. The major task was to disrupt American commerce in the Gulf of Mexico and the Florida Straits, and to close the mouth of the Mississippi River, thus denying the western states sea communications with their growing markets along the Atlantic seaboard.

Among the vessels on patrol in the Caribbean was the sloop *Brazen*,⁷ attached to the Jamaica and Leeward Islands Squadron. The sloop, under command of Richard Plummer Davies, was ordered to return to Port Royal from its station off Port au Prince in June, 1812.⁸ When the *Brazen* reached Jamaica on June 23, Davies was "discharged" from that command and ordered on board the *Garland* with post rank.⁹ We was officially superseded

5. Among the British warships reported to be cruising in the Gulf of Mexico and the western Caribbean late in 1811, was *HMS Southampton*. Definite news that war had been declared reached New Orleans on July 9, having been brought from Washington overland by a Dr. Cozens (*Richmond Enquirer*, August 14, 1812). On July 16, the governor ordered a draft for de militia to form a brigade for the defense of that city and Baton Rouge. J. F. H. Claiborne, *Mississippi, as Province, Territory and State* (Jackson, Mississippi, 1880), 318. In writing to Washington four days later, the governor referred to a letter, dated June 19, that he had received from the secretary of state containing the news of the declaration of war. Reed McC. B. Adams, "New Orleans and the War of 1812," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, XVI (July, 1933), 484-485; Washington *National Intelligencer*, July 16, 1812.

6. There had been considerable speculation in many quarters long before the actual declaration of war that hostilities were inevitable, for as the editor of a Washington newspaper pointed out, "the measure [declaration of war] must have been long anticipated, and therefore cannot excite surprise." Washington *National Intelligencer*, June 20, 1812.

7. "The *Brazen* was a 26 gun sloop laid down in 1801 and completed in 1808 to the design of Sir John Henslow, Surveyor of the Navy. She was 110 ft. 3 in. in length. . . . She finally became a convict ship and then a floating Chapel on the River Thames and was broken up in 1848." Letter from J. Munday, Assistant Keeper, Library, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, England, August 2, 1963.

8. Captain Davies commanded a division of gun-boats during the Walcheren [Holland] expedition in 1809; and subsequently the *Brazen* sloop, and *Garland* of 22 guns. John Marshall, *Royal Naval Biography*, 12 volumes (London, 1823-1830), Supplement, Part III, 76.

9. Davies' post rank dated from June 19, 1812, and it was to assume this rank that he returned to Port Royal. He took command of the *Garland* on June 24, two days before he was ordered to sail for England as part of a large convoy. Log of *HMS Brazen*, June 24 and 26, 1812. Microfilm of the original in Public Record Office, London (Adm. 51-2013).

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on June 25, by James Stirling, recently arrived from England on board the *Thetis*, although the actual assumption of command was delayed until the 29th.¹⁰ The new commanding officer supervised the overhauling of rigging and spars and the revictualling of the *Brazen*, duties that required nearly two weeks. It is presumed that during this time Stirling was fully instructed as to what actions he would take in the eventuality of war with the United States.¹¹ On July 11, the *Brazen* set sail to the westward, passing through the Yucatan Channel to Campeche where the sloop was intercepted by the frigate *Arethusa*, possibly confirming the rumor that war with the United States was now a fact. Three days later, on July 25, Captain Stirling sailed for Pensacola Bar which he reached on August 4, anchoring off Santa Rosa Island.¹²

On August 6, while cruising between Santa Rosa Island, his eastern base, and the Balize entrance to the Mississippi,¹³ he took his first prize, the American brig *Beaver*, en route from Havana to New Orleans, which he put under a prize crew of a lieutenant and five seamen.¹⁴ During the next ten days, the

10. Log of HMS *Brazen*, June 25 and 29, 1812. James Stirling (1791-1865), fifth son of Andrew and Anne (Stirling) Stirling of Drumpellier, Lanarkshire, entered the Royal Navy in 1803, and was promoted to lieutenant in August, 1809. He commanded the *Brazen* from June, 1812, to 1818. Ten years later he was named the first governor of Western Australia. Marshall, *Naval Biography*, X, 200-201; William R. O'Byrne, *A Naval Biographical Dictionary*, 2 volumes (London, 1861), II, 1120-1121; *Dictionary of National Biography*, 63 volumes (London, 1885-1900), LIV, 380-381.
11. According to a dispatch from Charleston, South Carolina, news of the declaration of war reached that city and Savannah, Georgia, on June 26. It apparently was known in St. Augustine, and probably in Havana prior to July 3, and this news should have been received in Port Royal before July 11, the date the *Brazen* sailed from that place. *Washington National Intelligencer*, July 16, 25, 1812.
12. "St. Rosa Island extends E. by N. and W. by S., 14 leagues, and completely fronts the whole Bay of Pensacola; it is so low that the seas, in gales, wash its tops, and is no where more than one-fourth or one-third of a mile wide. Point Siguenza is the western point of the Island . . . on which fortifications are erected. . . ." Edmund M. Blunt, *The American Coast Pilot* (New York, 1842), 258.
13. The name Balize, derived from the French *balise* or "beacon," refers to Balize Bayou between Main Pass and South Pass in the delta of the Mississippi River, and the name was often applied to much of the delta area. At one time there was a small blockhouse and a pilot house on the low-lying island of the same name. For a detailed discussion of the military installations at the Balize written by Spanish officials prior to 1803, see James A. Robertson, *Louisiana under the Rule of Spain, France, and the United States 1785-1807*, 2 volumes (Cleveland, 1911), I, 158-160.
14. The *Beaver* was taken without a fight on August 6, 1812. Log of HMS *Brazen*, August 6, 1812.

Brazen patrolled off Balize Bar, chasing numerous small coastal vessels, some American and others, Spanish and neutral. The crew of the *Beaver* and two river pilots that were on board were landed at the first opportunity as the *Brazen* was not large enough to accommodate many prisoners.

Early on the morning of August 19, when the *Brazen* was a few miles to the east of the Chandeleur Islands, the wind began to blow and in a few hours all the sails that had not been furled or reefed were carried away. By late that afternoon, the weather had become so foul that according to the *Brazen's* log, "it was blowing a severe storm increasing to a hurricane."¹⁵ When it was obvious that the sloop was taking on too much water, Stirling ordered the main and mizzen masts to be cut away and the guns on the quarterdeck to be thrown overboard.¹⁶ Shortly thereafter the foremast was likewise cut away, and, in its fall, the bowsprit was snapped off, leaving the *Brazen* completely dismasted. By laying in the lee of Grand Grosier Island and employing three anchors, Stirling was able to save his ship from being cast on shore, although at daybreak on the 20th he found that she had dragged anchor to within a quarter mile of the beach.¹⁷ When the wind abated a jury mast was rigged and the sloop sailed close to the brig *Warren*, one of her prizes, that had been cast on shore.¹⁸ By employing the mainmast from the wreck, Stirling eventually reached Pensacola Bar on September 3. The next four weeks were spent in repairing the sloop and in cleaning it from deck to keel. The Spanish offered full cooperation, permitting a work detail of fifteen men to land and cut timber for masts

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15. Reference to the start of the hurricane is timed in the log at 5:20 p.m. *Ibid.*, August 19, 1812. According to one account, "at New Orleans on the night of the 19th August, about 10 o'clock, a gale commenced, occasionally accompanied with rain and hail, which continued with most dreadful violence, for upwards of four hours. . . ." Athens *Georgia Express*, October 16, 1812.
 16. Although the log of the *Brazen* does not specify the number of guns thrown overboard, according to a resident of Pensacola who visited the sloop after her return from patrol, it was ten. Letter from Fort Stoddert, September 16, 1812, Washington *National Intelligencer*, October 6, 1812.
 17. Grand Grosier Island lies between the southernmost of the Chandeleur Islands and Breton Island, off the coast of what is now St. Bernard Parish.
 18. The *Warren*, bound from Boston to New Orleans, was captured August 18, as she lay at anchor off Horn Island, near present-day Pascagoula, Mississippi. Log of HMS *Brazen*, August 18, 1812.

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and spars.¹⁹ Some of the English seamen got drunk and became riotous, and Captain Stirling was obliged to go ashore to obtain their release from the local *carcel*.

The month long stay in port was not all hard work. On the evening of September 18, Stirling and his officers were invited to come ashore to attend "a great illumination" as guests of Governor Mauricio Zuniga,²⁰ in honor of the news of the promulgation of the Spanish constitution of 1812.²¹ A week later, Stirling invited the governor to come on board the *Brazen*, where he was received with full honors including a salute of thirteen guns.²²

By the end of the month, Stirling decided that all repairs possible with the limited equipment in the Pensacola shipyard had been made, and on the 29th, the *Brazen* crossed the bar, returning to her assigned patrol off the mouth of the Mississippi River.²³ After reaching Santa Rosa Island from a short cruise to Cape San Antonio, the western tip of Cuba, the captain realized that the hasty repairs to his ship had not been sufficient to make her completely seaworthy.²⁴ He therefore decided to escort the half dozen prizes taken by the *Brazen* to Port Royal where complete repairs could be made in the navy yard. After convoying the prizes as far as the Isle of Pines, the *Brazen* anchored off Burnt Key for emergency repairs and to take on fresh water. A few days later, Stirling followed the convoy to Jamaica, reaching Port Royal on November 20. He went ashore at once to make a

19. It was predicted in the southeast that assistance rendered English vessels by Spanish authorities in Florida made it "justifiable in taking immediate possession of Pensacola, to prevent its becoming a receptacle for our captured vessels - a depot for British Munitions of war and an asylum for every villainous buccaneer from Providence to Jamaica." Letter from Fort Stoddert, August 22, 1812, Washington *National Intelligencer*, September 19, 1812.

20. Mauricio Zuniga served as governor of West Florida from July, 1812, to April, 1813, when he was replaced by Matheo Gonzalez Manrique. He served a second term in 1816.

21. Letter from Mobile, September 30, 1812, Washington *National Intelligencer*, November 14, 1812.

22. Log of HMS *Brazen*, September 26, 1812.

23. While the *Brazen* was undergoing repairs at Pensacola, patrol duties off the Mississippi delta were carried on by HMS *Arethusa* and *Southampton*. Letter from Fort Stoddert, September 16, 1812, Washington *National Intelligencer*, October 6, 1812.

24. It is doubtful that Stirling was able to replace the guns lost during the hurricane as the Spanish shipyard in Pensacola had no available armaments.

full report of the activities of his patrol and to explain the damage to his vessel.

Among the documents prepared by Stirling was the following report which, according to its date, was drawn up during the three or four days the *Brazen* lay at anchor off the Isle of Pines. The writer apparently drew heavily on his own observation of conditions in West Florida and along the Gulf coast, to which he added what he and his officers may have learned from Governor Zuniga and other Spanish officials during their stays in Pensacola. Some of the information he no doubt gathered from members of the crew of the *Brazen* which had been in Caribbean and Gulf waters before the outbreak of hostilities and before Stirling assumed command.

The original of Stirling's report on the Floridas was addressed to Vice-Admiral Charles Stirling, his uncle, who, late in 1812, was commander-in-chief of the Jamaica and Leeward Islands Squadron.²⁵ The present copy eventually came into possession of Admiral Henry Hotham, commander of the British fleet blockading the coast of southern New England. It is reproduced here through the kindness of his great-grandson, the present Lord Hotham, who has the original document; the East Riding County Record Office, Beverley, Yorkshire, where the document is on deposit; and the United States Navy Department Library, Washington, where a microfilmed copy was made available.²⁶ No effort has been made to correct spelling, capitalization, or punctuation, although marginal comments have been included in the body of the text.

25. Although a Vice-Admiral of the White, commander-in-chief at Jamaica, and apparently a capable officer, Charles Stirling (1760-1833), a younger brother of James Stirling's mother, was accused of irregularities and was courtmartialled in May, 1814. Marshall, *Naval Biography*, I, 402-409.

26. File No. DDHO/7/93. The papers of Admiral Sir Henry Hotham, KCB (1777-1833), are in the County Archives, East Riding County Record Office, Beverley, Yorkshire, England.

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Copy Warren ²⁷

His Majesty's Sloop Brazen
November 15th 1812

Sir: His Majesty's Ship under my Command having been forced to take shelter in the Bay of Pensacola, in West Florida, ²⁸ in order to repair the damage received in a severe Hurricane off the River Mississippi, ²⁹ I feel it my duty to report to you such Circumstances relative to the state of that Country as I have been enabled to obtain knowledge of, either by my own observation or from the accounts of those to whom the Country is best known. In making this statement it is my intention in the first place to treat of the Province in general, then of its Establishments and the nature of the Sea Ports; lastly of the means of defence, and the most likely methods to frustrate the attack upon it, at present in the meditation of the American Government. ³⁰

The appearance of West Florida causes the supposition that it must have been formerly covered by the Sea, the whole Province being a level plain, and the soil invariably Sandy, it is at present however extremely well wooded, presenting extensive Forests of Oak and Pine trees, and various other kinds of Wood useful in Ship Building; it has also fine rivers some of which are of great size, and on whose banks there may be found patches of

27. This copy of the original report was sent to Sir John Borlase Warren (1753-1822), commander of the North American Station during part of the War of 1812 who maintained his headquarters at Halifax in Nova Scotia.
28. When Stirling's report was written, West Florida was generally considered to comprise the area from the Pearl to the Apalachicola River, although many Americans insisted that the Perdido River, the present western limit of Florida, was the correct boundary. Pensacola was the seat of the Spanish provincial government and the second largest town in the Floridas. Almost from the start of hostilities with the United States, enemy warships regularly used the port facilities of both Pensacola and Mobile. Mrs. S. J. Gonzalez. "Pensacola-Its Early History," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, II (April, 1909), 9-25.
29. The writer refers to the hurricane of August 19-20, 1812, one of the worst ever to strike the coast of Louisiana. According to reports, nearly sixty vessels were wrecked or driven ashore in the delta region. Milledgeville *Georgia Journal*, September 23, October 14, 21, 1812. For additional details concerning the hurricane, see *Niles Weekly Register*, September 26, 1812.
30. Southern newspapers, reflecting local sentiment, contained editorials advocating the seizure of West Florida in the same way that the area between the Mississippi and Pearl Rivers had been occupied in 1810. For a discussion of the latter event, see Isaac J. Cox, *The West Florida Controversy, 1798-1813* (Baltimore, 1918); Henry Eugene Sterkx and Brooks Thompson, "Philemon Thomas and the West Florida Revolution," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XXXIX (April, 1961), 378-386.

ground much superior to the general run of the Country.³¹ The Climate during the greater part of the year, is wholesome, and favourable for labour, seldom too Cold, never too Hot, a Climate in which anything might be produced, if the soil was equally good; it is subject however in the Months of August, September and October to dreadful hurricanes which in their Course lay whole Forests level with the ground and under which there is but one consolation for those who encounter them that they seldom continue longer than a few hours. Although the Country is capable of improvement, it has not advanced a Single step toward it, under the Government of Spain, and unlike her other Colonies, instead of increasing the revenue it has been a possession of Considerable expence.³² Its Trade at present is confined to Traffic with the Indians and a kind of Counterband Trade with New Orleans, neither of which can yield much revenue, and yet there is to support an inappropriately large Establishment of Public Officers, in order to do credit to one of the last Conquests made by the Spanish Arms.³³

This Conquest altho much boasted of seems to have given few real advantages, and I should think under the present circumstances as far as Spain is concerned, it would be wise to relinquish it. Florida, the Western portion of it at least, can be valuable alone to the power that possesses Louisiana for this reason, that it has good and Commodious Sea Ports in which Louisiana is much wanting and it is more than probable, if ever these two Provinces should be united under the same Authority, Mobile and Pensacola would become the Seats of all the Exportation trade of Louisiana. Consequently their neighbouring Territories would increase in value and improvements, without this junction Florida holds out no lure to settlers, and it is rendered still less inviting by Comparison with Louisiana famed for its productive Soil, and other Natural advantages. That Florida might be improved if differently Circumstanced, there can be no doubt, since its Nature

31. Reference is to the Pearl, Tombigbee, Alabama, Perdido, Choctawhatchee, and Apalachicola Rivers.
32. Frequently during the second Spanish period (1783-1819) officials in St. Augustine lamented the low economic state of West Florida.
33. The Spanish were understandably proud of the reconquest of Mobile and Pensacola by Bernardo de Galvez. See John W. Caughey, *Bernardo de Galvez in Louisiana, 1776-1783* (Berkeley, 1934); Albert W. Haermann, "The Spanish Conquest of British West Florida, 1779-1781," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XXXIX (October, 1960), 107-134.

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is similar to that of South Carolina and Georgia, but that it can ever be a valuable possession under the present system is next to an impossibility.

Three Settlements only have yet been made in it; Pensacola, Mobile, and St. Marks, the Population of which does not exceed 3000 Souls, beside which there may be as many Back Settlers and Traders among the Indians, as may amount to 1000 more.³⁴ Pensacola the Principal place is an Open Town built for the most part of Wood, and situated about Seven Miles from the Mouth of the Bay, in a level Country, which except in the immediate neighborhood of the Town, is covered with thick Pine Woods. The Governor of West Florida resides here, Don Manuecios Zuniga, a Lieutenant Colonel in the Spanish Army, who has under his Command from 5 to 600 Troops of various kinds, all poorly provided.³⁵ The Population of Pensacola is made up by those who fill official Situations, and some few families who moved there when New Orleans became subject to America. There is also established there an English Mercantile House of great respectability, carrying on a Trade with the Indians, enjoying several immunities under the Spanish Government, and possessing property to a considerable amount throughout the Floridas.

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34. There are no exact figures for the total population of Spanish West Florida at the beginning of the War of 1812, although the figure of 3,000 is often used. Stanley Faye, "British and Spanish Fortifications of Pensacola, 1781-1821," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XX (January, 1942), 277-292.
35. It was reported that when Governor Zuniga reached his new post, he was accompanied by approximately 100 Negro and mulatto troops from Havana to re-enforce the sixty regulars drawn from the Louisiana regiment already in Pensacola. This is much less than the five to six hundred mentioned in this report. W. C. C. Claiborne to Secretary of State Monroe, July 20, 1812, Adams, "New Orleans and the War of 1812," 484-485; Cox, *West Florida Controversy*, 612; *Washington National Intelligencer*, November 14, 1812. The rumor that these troops were commanded by British army officers was no doubt due to the fact that there were a number of Irish officers in the Spanish garrison. Nashville *Tennessee Herald*, September 5, 1812. In the entire province, Governor Zuniga could muster only 288 men, "almost destitute of supplies." Cox, *op. cit.*, 615.
36. Reference is to the trading house of John Forbes and Company, successor to Panton, Leslie and Company, which carried on extensive trade with the Indians in both East and West Florida under royal protection. In addition, many of Forbes' agents penetrated into what is now southern Georgia and Alabama. This company had done much to frustrate the grandiose plans of William Augustus Bowles. The records of this concern are located in part in the East Florida Papers in the Library of Congress and in the St. Augustine Historical Society, and some have been published in the *Florida Historical Quarterly*.

Mobile is also an Open Town, or village on the West Side of Mobile Bay, containing a slender Population, and protected by a Fort advantageously situated, and capable of Sustaining a long defence. It has some Trade with the Indians, and a little with the Back Settlers but it is not a place of any consideration.³⁷ Since the Americans have seized upon the Country to the Eastward of Pearl River, Mobile has been however the Frontier Fort, and withstood an attempt made by the Americans to take it last Spring.³⁸

St. Marks upon the River Apalache East from Pensacola is a little more than a Fort for the Protection of a few Storehouses, containing wares used in Traffic with the Indians.³⁹ Provisions of all kinds are cheap in this Country, a Bullock weighing 5 or 6 cwt., seldom selling for more than 15 Dollars and Flour 10 Dollars pr. Barrel.⁴⁰ The Timber provided here is of different kinds but the live oak and Pitch Pine are most prevalent.⁴¹ Iron may be obtained also besides many other of the most necessary Articles used in Common Life.

The Harbours of West Florida are its most important part, and are the more so from being the only good harbours in the Gulf of Mexico. The River Mississippi although a safe Port never the less labours under many difficulties for as the Current always runs out, when the Wind is light or Contrary no vessel can enter, and not infrequently vessels lay for several Weeks exposed outside the Bar and unable to approach it. Pensacola on the other hand is easy of access and egress, and will admit vessels of more draught of Water than the Mississippi, the latter having on the Bar from 13 to 14 feet only, while the former has generally 3 fathoms and sometimes 22 feet. Mobile will admit also vessels

37. For a brief account of early Mobile, see Peter J. Hamilton, *Mobile of the Five Flags* (Mobile, 1913); *Colonial Mobile: An Historical Study*. . . . (Boston, 1897).

38. Probable reference is to the reported activities of Reuben Kemper who was eventually suppressed by Judge Harry Toulmin and the governor of the Louisiana Territory. Caruso, *The Southern Frontier*, 315.

39. This isolated post and the store-house of John Forbes had been the goal of one of the "invasions" by William Augustus Bowles in 1792.

40. The price of flour at \$10 a barrel compares favorably with the \$6 a barrel at New Orleans early in 1812. Adams, "New Orleans and the War of 1812," 232.

41. For a short description of timber available in East and West Florida, see Richard K. Murdoch, "Report of the Forest Resources of Spanish East Florida in 1792," *Agricultural History*, XXVII (October, 1953), 147-151.

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drawing 17 feet and both of them inside are deep and Capacious enough for Vessels of the greatest burthen; after vessels have entered the Mississippi it is usually 7 or 8 days before they reach New Orleans, and often as much before they can get out again on leaving it; all these are disadvantages in the way of Commerce, of which there is much complaint, and add to this, the air of the Mississippi, when the River is at low Ebb, is extremely unhealthy.⁴²

The Bay of Pensacola is narrow at the entrance, and protected at present by a Battery on each side, the Batterys however are in bad repair, and unless much strengthened would not prevent a Man of War cleverly conducted from entering; after passing the Mouth of the Bay she would be secure from all annoyance from the Shore as she may take up a position 3 or 4 Miles from either side.⁴³ Water, Wood and Spars of any size may be obtained here with ease, and while the Spaniards hold it, refreshments, Cordage, Canvas, and other Stores may also be procured.

The Town is upon the Waters Edge, and the Fort a flank redoubtment more for a place of refuge, than the protection of the Town, stands at a Gunshot distance from it on a rising ground. Much resistance cannot be expected from the Governor, who is an old Man / in his present means/, but even now he has a greater force than that with which the place was so long and bravely defended against the Spaniards in 1782.⁴⁴

The Bay of Mobile is also narrow at the entrance, the Town stands near Thirty Miles from the Mouth of the Bay which is large but has not so much depth of water as that at Pensacola. Both are safe during the greater part of the year, but more care is necessary on the Hurricane Seasons than at other Times.

Thus far I have related only facts and I trust Sir you will not

42. Stirling's figures on the depth of water in the three ports are nearly identical to those published officially in 1842. In addition, his comments on the effect of winds and current on navigation in the Mississippi delta compare favorably with later detailed reports. Edmund M. Blunt, *The American Coast Pilot* (New York, 1842), 258-266. The prevalence of fevers in the New Orleans area during certain times of the year is a confirmed fact.

43. For more details on the fortifications, see Faye, "British and Spanish Fortifications of Pensacola," 277-292.

44. This statement is of doubtful accuracy for when Galvez attacked Pensacola in 1781, with 7,000 Spanish and French troops, he was opposed by Brigadier-General John Campbell with 1,500 soldiers and about 1,000 Indian warriors. Cecil Johnson, *British West Florida, 1763-1783* (New Haven, 1943), 217-218.

think me intrusive in doing so, but I feel now embarrassed much in making the remaining part of my report which as it will be only a detail of my own opinion, I have less right to trouble you with. Perhaps however you will excuse them, for the sentiment which gave rise to them, that of the strongest desire of being serviceable, in any degree, however small.

It is long since the Government of the United States first Threatened an Invasion of West Florida, but it has been deferred from time to time, in the hope of obtaining a better excuse for such an unwarrantable proceeding, the time has now arrived, and as they pretend to fear that Great Britain will occupy the Floridas, they mean to prevent such an event by annexing them at once to the United States. For this purpose Troops and Military Stores are now collecting at Fort Stoddard (a Post upon the Northern boundary of Florida) and the object of this intended attack is not even made a secret.⁴⁵ To prevent its success and to annoy the Enemy I considered desirable objects, and studied to obtain all possible information on the subject, for the purpose of laying before you.

The Protection of Florida must depend principally upon the conduct and numbers of the Troops employed and the strength of the Resolution with which the Spaniards mean to defend it, but as the force in that Province is not adequate to its defence, and as reinforcements cannot, they say, be spared from the Havannah, I think means less regular, may be found for opposing the Enemy. The first of these would be to engage the Indians of the Creek Nation in the Contest, and which I am well assured might be easily done. They have still the highest attachment to the English, and the greatest hatred to the American name, the Government of which Country has lately circumvented them in the purchase of lands;⁴⁶ they do not it is true exceed 10,000

45. Fort Stoddert was located on the west bank of the Mobile River about twenty-five miles above Mobile. There is great confusion over the spelling of the name (Stoddert, Stoddart, Stoddard) but when the fort was begun in 1799, it was named for Benjamin Stoddert of Maryland, Secretary of Navy under John Adams. Patrick, *Florida Fiasco*, 309 and 332.

46. Reference may be to the 1804 cession by the Creeks of the Oconee-Ocmulgee tract in central Georgia and to the laying out of a horse-path from the Ocmulgee to the Alabama River, a trace soon crowded with emigrants heading for the Mississippi region. Angie Debo, *The Road to Disappearance* (Norman, Oklahoma, 1941), 74-75. It is also possible that Stirling refers to the projects to move the Cherokees to the west, one of the reasons for the actions of Tecumseh in 1811. R. S. Cotterill, *The Southern Indians: The Story of the Civilized Tribes Before Removal* (Norman, Oklahoma, 1954), 173-175.

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Warriors but as the Americans will come down through the Woods, Indians would be useful allies, and as they Scalp at this time all the stragglers Americans who fall into their hands, the fear of such treatment would probably tend to thin the Ranks of the American Army.⁴⁷

In the plan of attack as it is at present expected, it would not be possible for any Naval Force to prevent it or to harrass the Enemy in its progress because the nature of the Country will not admit of any strong position being taken up, nor can a campaign be carried on with any degree of equality between those who are, and those who are not acquainted with Woods and Rivers, but a Small Squadron might easily make a diversion and I think it possible drained as Louisiana is even of part of its Militia,⁴⁸ for 4 or 5 small vessels, Sloops, Brigs and Schooners to lay New Orleans under contribution and take or distroy all the vessels in the Mississippi.⁴⁹ There is nothing to stop their progress up this River, except Fort Plaquemene,⁵⁰ to which a Ship may pass very close, and easily silence it, and as the City stands upon the waters edge, unprotected by Forts or Battery's and at present without Troops it might be forced into any terms; Should a Diver-sion however in this way not succeed to the full, it would at all

47. John Innerarity, agent for John Forbes, travelled through the Upper Creek towns in October, 1812, and he reported in a conversation with Alexander Cornell that the Indians had accused the Americans of perpetual encroachment on the lands of the Creeks guaranteed by treaty. The agent further reported that he [Cornell] said "he was sick at constantly hearing the boastings of the Americans and of their bitter enmity to the English-For his part he was their true friend. . . ." "The Creek Nation, Debtor to John Forbes and Company, successors to Panton, Leslie, and Co. A Journal of John Innerarity, 1812," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, IX (October, 1930), 67-95.

48. According to reports from New Orleans, the militia brigade raised in the summer of 1812, was stationed much of the time in the neighborhood of Baton Rouge. Claiborne, *Mississippi, as Province, Territory and State*, 319.

49. Laying coastal towns under contribution (ransom) to avoid destruction of buildings and/or fishing fleets was a common practice in the War of 1812, especially along the New England seashore. It was one of the main complaints of New England against the manner in which the national government was conducting the war.

50. According to the "Military Report on Louisiana and West Florida," prepared by the governor, Baron de Carondelet, in 1794, "the enemy, once master of Plaquemine, will be master of all Louisiana. . . ." Robertson, *Louisiana*: I, 293-345. For a detailed description of the fort and an explanation of its importance, see *Ibid.*, I, 160-162.

events annoy and might oblige the Enemy to abandon the invasion of Florida for the protection of New Orleans.

The Navigation of the Mississippi is of the highest importance, since five of the United States, and four Territories depend upon it for the exportation of their Produce.

When the Crops have been gathered in the interior States, they are embarked upon the Ohio and other great Rivers which fall into the Mississippi and come down with the stream to New Orleans, whence they are shipped for the Northern Atlantic States and other places; this is their only channel for Commerce, for the Chain of the Allegany Mountains prevents a communication by land carriage, and should the Mississippi therefore be well blockaded, or possession taken of New Orleans (an undertaking not very difficult) the distress which the interior States would be subject to, would be extreme, and it would increase the number of those in America who sigh for Peace with England.⁵¹

The Blockade of the River Mississippi, may be effected by two Vessels of War, one to continue immediately off the Mouth of the River, while the other should visit occasionally the Islands laying to the Northward of it, where small vessels sometimes land and receive Cargoes.⁵²

A Frigate may lay at Anchor about 7 or 8 Miles from the Bar of the River, and affectually prevent any thing passing, in or out, and should the Wind come round to the South East and blow very strong, which does at one Season of the Year, she could always get off the Coast having the advantage of a strong Easterly Current, with all other Winds she would be perfectly safe, the Weather in the Gulf of Mexico is in general moderate and fine, except in the Autumn, when hurricanes visit it, and in the depth of Winter, when it is subject to the North West Gales, these latter upon the Northern Shore, can do no harm, but many vessels are lost every year during the hurricane season.

The Naval Force of the Enemy now upon the Mississippi Station consists of two large Brigs and tender Gun Boats, and it is

51. The hostility of a number of prominent New Englanders toward the war was already well known.

52. Reference is to the islands (Dauphin, Petit Bois, Horn, Ship, Cat, etc.) off the coast of Alabama and Mississippi which guard the inland passage.

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said, they are fitting a Ship out with twenty Guns for the purpose of guarding the entrance of the River.⁵³

I have the honour to be, Sir, with the highest respect, Your most Obedient Humble Servant,

(Signed), James Stirling

To Charles Stirling, Esq.
Vice Admiral of the White, etc. etc. etc.
Jamaica

53. According to the annual report of the Secretary of the Navy to Congress, the naval force stationed at New Orleans under command of Captain John Shaw, consisted of the brigs *Siren* (16 guns) and *Viper* (10 guns) and a fleet of twenty-six small gunboats, seven of which were undergoing repairs. Paul Hamilton to Langdon Cheves, Washington, December 3, 1811, *American State Papers: Naval Affairs*, 4 volumes (Washington, 1834-1861), 1, 229, 249, 252. Later information confirmed that all naval vessels had weathered the hurricane by seeking shelter in Bay St. Louis. Several of the gunboats were identified as numbers 27, 66, 156, 162, and 163. *Richmond Enquirer*, August 14, September 29, October 6, 1812.