In this year when California is celebrating the Centennial of the discovery of gold, it is interesting to recall an incident which occurred in Monterey in 1842. There, for one day, the flag of the United States flew over the leading city of California.

After Texas became an independent republic in 1836, the United States government became uneasy that European nations had designs on California. One of the duties of the United States naval squadron in the Pacific was to keep watch on the Pacific naval forces of these European nations.

The United States Pacific squadron, commanded by Commodore Thomas Ap Catsby Jones, lay at Callao, Peru, in September, 1842. The unexplained departure of a British squadron sent Jones and a part of his fleet off to Monterey. The ensuing events are best described in the words of Jones himself. In a letter written from Monterey Bay,
October 22, 1842, to Waddy Thompson, Minister of the United States to Mexico, he said:

"Early in September I received a letter, dated 22d of June, from John Parrott, Esq., our consul at Mazatlan, enclosing the Mexican gazette 'El Cosmopolita' of the 4th of June, containing three highly belligerent official declarations against the United States.

"These documents reached me at Callao, Peru, at the moment of the departure of the English squadron from that coast on secret service; which circumstance, connected with other information relating to the affairs of the United States, Mexico, and England, left no doubt on my mind that there would be war with Mexico immediately.... Under these impressions, it at once became my duty to secure some point on this coast, whereat the citizens of the United States in California, and our whale ships, &c., in the Pacific, might rally for protection against Mexican privateers and enemies' cruisers.

"This port was selected, as having some advantages, and which, by a quiet and rapid movement, I entered on the 19th instant, and immediately summoned the authorities of the place to surrender to the United States forces under my command, (present the frigate United States and the sloop Cyane,) which was immediately complied with, without a moment's hesitation, although I gave 18 hours for consideration; nor did the governor even ask for any reasons for my making the demand, appearing and in fact professing not to know of any difficulties existing between the two countries.

"The day after the capitulation, I ascertained satisfactorily that, as late as the 25th of August, 1842, no act of hostility had been committed against the United States by Mexico, from which I inferred that the crisis in our dispute with that country had terminated amicably; whereupon, I immediately restored the Mexican flag and authority over Monterey, IN ALL DUE FORM AND CEREMONY, and interchanged friendly salutations and visits. It is a source of great satisfaction, that, notwithstanding what has happened, no angry word or
unkind expressions have been used by either party; and that, although we had one hundred and fifty seamen and marines on shore for thirty hours, not one private house was entered, or the slightest disrespect shown to any individual, nor was any species of property, public or private, spoiled, if I except the powder burnt in the salutes, which I have returned two-fold.” (House Document 166, 27th Congress.)

The Mexican government made so much diplomatic palaver out of this incident that Jones was recalled by our government as a conciliatory gesture. His recall carried no official censure.

At the end of the Mexican war, Commodore Jones was again put in command of the Pacific squadron, in October, 1847. He remained on the Pacific Coast for several years and became well known in California before and after the discovery of gold in 1848.

William H. Myers was twenty-six years old and had apparently seen naval service before he enlisted in the United States Navy in July, 1841, as a gunner on board the United States sloop of war Cyane. His ship was part of the Pacific squadron under Commodore Jones which left Norfolk in November, 1841, for a three-year-cruise to the Pacific. Myers was back in California in 1847, as a gunner on the USS Dale, when California was again taken by United States forces. On this last tour of duty he made a series of water color drawings which eventually came into the collection of President Roosevelt and were published by Random House in 1939 as “Naval Sketches of the War in California.” The originals are now in the Roosevelt Library in Hyde Park.

On his first visit to California in 1842-43, during which “Commodore Jones’ War” occurred, Myers kept a day-to-day illustrated log. Included in this log book was the illustrated letter reproduced here. Myers wrote this letter to his friend William Hancock, from Santa Barbara, ten days after the Monterey incident.

K. K. BECHTEL

DECEMBER 1948
Letter reproduced from the original in the collection of K. K. Bechtel.

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SAN FRANCISCO
1948
Dear Billy,

(Santa Barbara), October 30th, 1842.

You will have heard, probably, before this reaches you, of our famous victory at Monterey, the subject of the taking of the Madras. By the time we arrived in the harbor, the British warships were at anchor, but they were not expecting to see us. We were, however, expected to help, but we were not. 

I wrote that the island was our destination; every thing as to our reception was a perfect mystery. After a 43-day voyage, we met a barque standing out of the harbor, we hoisted English colors, and she took us. She was a few hours before we were informed in a bombast speech from the commodore, that Mexico was to consider as the enemy of our country, and we were to take every place upon the coast. We entered Monterey sound. A barque, a brig, and a schooner, kept a running out there, for a surrender having been the alternative of giving up the town or being cannonaded the next day by eleven o'clock, a flag of truce was flying. During these negotiations, at 11 AM on the 20th of the flag was raised. Our rockets landed guns that told match, and all the paraphernalia of smoke and sound the boats on the marines and all our arms weapon. The flag was pulled above, but all the prisoners were allowed to leave. The barque was given up. With the barque, the barque was given up. With the parley, the parley was given up. All the prisoners were allowed to leave. With the parley, the parley was given up. All the prisoners were allowed to leave. With the parley, the parley was given up. All the prisoners were allowed to leave. With the parley, the parley was given up. All the prisoners were allowed to leave. With the parley, the parley was given up. All the prisoners were allowed to leave. With the parley, the parley was given up. All the prisoners were allowed to leave. With the parley, the parley was given up. All

I am very much hurried. Dear Billy, but little at present.

[Signature]

P.S. You could begin to think of counting, or shooting. I am sure the expect of an end all winter. I consider that the commissary has abstracted from my pocket no less than 3000 dollars for we could have taken Monterey, St. Francis, St. Gabriel, St. Juan, St. Barbara, St. Mary, St. Blas, Magdalena, St. Thomas, Acapulco, &c. Many of these places besides ships &c. &c. &c..

As I am much hurried, dear Billy, but little at present.
I send this by the north westman Barstable, who put it on board the ship's alert ready for home, by which you will receive it. I do not expect to see any letters or hear from them for at least 2 years by that time. I shall be home. I have given you a slight description of Monterey and our Balancing Ships Company, but I cannot delineate a portion of my anguish at my last prize money except by a Janet Grant No 4. You will oblige me by giving my respects to all inquiring friends particularly Softt Whitel and family and also to mother and sister and believe me yours

Mrs. Keble

By this are very scarce here, when you eat always think of me and the luxuries I have lost, to obtain glory, brandy, butter and salt pork. I thought it was bad enough to have a wife but a Acting Commissioner is far worse upon my soul. This 3 years of glory and dirty thiefs will done. Pass over, then buy for home and clean the Coast, but there are very beautiful women. Notwithstanding, if it was not for them I should have been dead long ago give my best to others.

Yours respectfully

Mrs. Keble

New York
My brave associates, partners of my toil, my feelings, and my fame, can Moar words add vigor to the virtuous energies which inspire your hearts? I've you have judged as I have the baseness of the crafty plot by which these bold Mexican would allure you, they feel time only for the villainous purpose of enslaving you; then now the hoist note of preparation for dance of deeped carnage is stealing silently on the blood stained banners of Mexico wave their ensanguined folds off the chains of the noble and the brave. I think I see them now; oh—the—e-e—horrid sight—by give me some gin to revive me—forward and storm the world's curse is only one soldier in the just March

Taking of Monterey 10-20th 1842 by the
Frigate United States & Schoof of War Iowa—3:36 18 New who Califonia