

The Commodore's Decision

By Lou Ann Garrett

IT WAS A LATE SUMMER EVENING in 1842 when the Pacific Squadron sailed into Callao, Peru, routine stop for ships plying the sea lanes of the China Coast and Sandwich Islands. The frigate, *United States*, flagship of the fleet, proudly dropped anchor to leeward of the English Fleet of the Pacific, and the four remaining American vessels followed suit. Immediately salutes and courtesies were exchanged between the fleets, while on deck the Yankee seamen prepared to scrub and polish their vessels.

Thomas Ap Catesby Jones, Commodore of the Pacific Fleet, was known as a strict disciplinarian with a magnetic eye for dust and tarnish; an intrepid sea-officer; a man of heroism and bravery in the finest Navy tradition (witness his burned and withered right hand, a souvenir of 1814), and for hot-tempered stubbornness, as his recent four-year inactive stretch attested. This lay-off had resulted from one run-in too many with the Secretary of the Navy.¹

This night, after exchanging the usual greetings with Vice-Admiral Thomas of the English Fleet, the commodore retired to his cabin, neither strict nor stubborn. He was consumed with worry. Shoving aside a half-finished letter to his wife, Jones painfully maneuvered a secret lock on his desk and extracted an official letter, obviously re-read many times, and stamped with the seal of approval of the President of the United States.

He began reading the now-familiar words:

The primary objects in maintaining a naval force in the Pacific have always been and still are the protection of commerce and the improvement of discipline . . . the unsettled state of the nations bordering on the coast included within your command renders it, in the first instance, necessary to protect the interest of the U. S. in that quarter . . . there be vigilant and keep moving. Nothing but the necessity of prompt and effectual protection to the honor and interests of the United States will justify you in either provoking hostility or invoking an act of hostility, and more especially in a state with which our country is at peace . . .²

The letter, addressed to his confidential attention, was signed by Secretary of the Navy A. P. Upshur and dated December tenth, 1841.

In casual conversation Vice-Admiral Thomas only an hour before, had mentioned that the French Fleet, consisting of eight vessels and 242 guns, had sailed away in the blackness of the night before, her destination unannounced and unknown.³

In the next few days, there followed the usual round of social activities between the two fleets, their respective consulates and the Peruvian government, with Jones ever alert. Of medium height and sandy complexion, the naval officer possessed a spontaneous geniality and wit at such functions. But long after the last harbor light had flickered out and the lapping water had lulled the ships' men to sleep, the commodore's desk lamp burned.

The Admiral's mention of the Mexican debt situation bothered him and he was at a loss to understand the full meaning of it. Had England been negotiating with Mexico; was she still; was Mexico at war with the United States, and if so, what was the situation as far as California was concerned? If war was here, surely the British Fleet would eye California, providing the French weren't already there! Something was happening and Jones knew it would take weeks to find it out from this far-away outpost.

The situation which bothered Jones culminated on the fifth day after his arrival in Callao. At daybreak he was informed that the English Fleet had secretly sailed forth in the night, her destination unannounced and unknown.⁴

Ordering a boat lowered, and without pausing for breakfast, Jones gathered his confidential papers and headed for the home of the United States Consul, a short distance from the harbor.

Arousing the sleepy-eyed diplomat, Jones explained that he felt the situation alarming enough to merit his immediate attention, then added his opinions and his suspicions as far as the movements of the two fleets were concerned.

Upon producing his confidential instructions, Jones in turn, received the full confidence of the official, who produced a letter received but the afternoon before. It was a communiqué from the consul in Mazatlan, John Parrott, dated June 22, which stressed the imminence of war between Mexico and the United States. Two newspapers had been included in the same pouch. The first proved to be a copy of the Mexican *El Cosmopolita* of June 4. In scathing words, the Mexican Minister of Relations, Bocanegra, assailed the United States over the Texas question, writing in terms of open insult and challenge. The tone was "highly belligerent," and the

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declaration was addressed to the United States Secretary of State, Daniel Webster.

The other, a copy of the *N. O. Advertiser* of April 19, a Boston journal, contained an item stating that Mexico had ceded California to England for the payment of \$7,000,000!⁵

Thousands of miles from American civilization, weeks from any official line of communication, the two bewildered men faced each other, the diplomat, Pickett, and the military officer, Jones, the former entrusted with the security and best interests of his government, and the latter on tour of the Pacific, months from home base, sworn into a confidential government mission to uphold and maintain the Monroe Doctrine and a sacred duty beyond the routine responsibilities of the military forces.⁶

Jones was sure that Thomas must have received intelligence from someone on the Hudson's Bay clipper that took on supplies the day before and then immediately put out to sea, that he had known the situation when they had been together last evening and duped him.⁷ The two men understood each other, and Mr. Pickett must have said a prayer and a blessing to himself as he shook hands and bid good-bye to the commodore.

Despite immediate orders and activity, supervised by the bewildered officers and crew, it was late in the day before the ships of the Pacific Squadron were loaded and secured, and the moon was well into the sky when they weighed anchor.

On the seventh of September, at a few minutes before midnight, the U.S. Fleet sailed out of Callao, secret destination: California.

When the ships were two days at sea, Commodore Jones ordered a meeting of the ships' commanders. Gravely, withholding nothing, Thomas Ap Catesby Jones laid the evidence before his men, concluding with, "and so, gentlemen, it is my firm conviction that Mexico and the United States are at war and that the British vice-admiral left Callao for the sole purpose of occupying California as a military coup. It is my intention, subject to your approval, to proceed full sail toward Panama. There, I shall dispatch part of the fleet to get the true information and to carry my message to the proper authorities in the States. I shall proceed without delay with the *United States* and the *Cyane* to California."⁸

In complete unity the officers agreed with their commodore's deductions and plans. Captain Armstrong, of the *United States*, whose judgment was highly respected, went further.

"Sir, if the two countries are at war, it is our bounden duty to seize and hold every point and port!"⁹

The veteran seaman went on:

"In accordance with the Monroe Doctrine, the military occupation of California by any European power, but more particularly by our great commercial rival, England, would be an act so decidedly hostile as not only to warrant but to make it our duty to forestall the design of Thomas if possible by supplanting the Mexican flag with that of the United States at Monterey, San Francisco and other tenable points within the territory said to have been recently ceded to England by secret treaty."¹⁰

Jumping to their feet, the men cheered Armstrong, and for the first time, Jones relaxed.

All the next day Jones kept to his cabin, writing. The letters, long and precise, were addressed to the Secretary of the Navy, and they explained Jones' conclusions and actions, and the reasons for the course he was about to take. He concluded with:

The Creole affair, the question of the right to search, the mission of Lord Ashburton, the sailing of a strong squadron from France under sealed orders . . . new difficulties between the U. S. and Mexico, the well-founded rumor of a cession of the Californias, and lastly the secret movement of the English naval force in this quarter . . . having all occurred since the date of your last orders to me . . . Consequently I am without instructions, or the slightest intimations of your views and wishes upon what I consider a vital question to the U. S.: The occupation of California by England under a secret treaty with Mexico.¹¹

Jones stared at the sword of honor hanging above his desk, bestowed upon him by the state of Virginia for heroic services in the War of 1812 and his mind raced back to that moment of heavy decision at Lake Borgne.¹²

His command had included five gunboats and two small schooners, and every man aboard then, himself included, was war-weary and tense. Intelligence had just revealed that Vice-Admiral Cochrane's fleet was sailing for the entrance to the lake, transporting Pakenham's army to charge against New Orleans. With no hope of relief or reinforcements of any kind, Jones had made the decision, an almost suicidal one, but one which perceptibly shortened the war and swung the pendulum of victory to the American side. He had commanded his small fleet to block the narrow entrance to the lake at all cost. Their task, so carried out, had proven successful though costly, with Jones himself seriously wounded in the three-day stand against staggering odds.

Resuming the writing, Jones paused for a second time, his attention diverted as always by his ugly, almost useless hand, his battle souvenir, an awkward handicap in letter-writing, and then finished the letter with:

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In this dilemma, all that I can promise is a faithful and a zealous application of my best abilities to promote and sustain the honor and the welfare of my country.¹³

Squaring his shoulders, he signed and sealed the dispatches and then called for the courier from the *Dale*. He instructed him to tell Captain Dornin to give this personally to the attaché in Panama with orders for that person to proceed at once, by the fastest possible route, to Washington and deliver this dispatch to the Secretary of the Navy.¹⁴

On September thirteen, the vessels parted company. Bravely the frigate, *United States*, and the sloop, *Cyane*, set their sails for the coastal winds of the Californias, and for the unknown.

Not a sail was sighted on the horizon as the days sped by and the two vessels made their way toward their destination. On board, the men prepared for battle action, examining and cleaning all cannon and weapons, readying powder and cannonball, holding battle drills. Jones, having made the decision, appeared to relax. The officers' mess, once again, became a genial gathering place.¹⁵

To Richard Maxwell, the ship's youthful surgeon, he recounted the California situation. Jones told of the long history of neglect and disinterest in the Mexican departments of Alta and Baja California by the mother country, and of the apathetic attitude of the California subjects as a result. Then he read the June newspapers to him, telling that Juan Alvarado was about to be replaced as governor by one General Manuel Micheltoarena, who was to land in San Diego with an army of one hundred fifty Mexicans and march to the capital of Alta California, the town of Monterey. There he was to dispossess the stubborn Alvarado and assume the reins as Governor, Comandante-General and Inspector of the Department.

According to Jones' calculations, the general should still be down in the southern portion, and should the British not have entered the picture as yet, the Americans would be able to sail into the port of Monterey, which was the political and commercial core of the department, seize the town and any existing fortifications, and be well intrenched before the general made his appearance. Thus, even with an army, he would be at a distinct disadvantage.¹⁶

The commodore, eyeing the array of maps and military dispatches, books and newspapers strewn about his desk and tables, must have thought:

What I would not give for a miraculous method of communication whereby I would be able to tell just how far our country has entered into the California situation! Unfortunately, I must prepare for anything and everything, including the damn British!

Maxwell well knew of the Commodore's great antipathy for England. Twice he had fought against her, first in real battle, and then in 1825, when he had visited the Sandwich Islands and discovered the British in a scheme to claim the islands for debts. That time the battle had been verbal but just as belligerently delivered and fought, and the taste of victory had been as sweet.

The doctor eyed his friend and commanding officer, and thought of the great military tradition inherent in the man named Jones. A descendant of the Virginia governor after whom the great John Paul Jones was said to have named himself, the Commodore's brother, Roger, also served his country well, rising in the Army to the rank of Brigadier-General. He, too, had seen heroic service, in the battles of Chippewa and Lundy's Lane.¹⁷ Indeed, Maxwell could have no qualms about the Commodore's decision, nor had a man-jack in the entire squadron.

The night of October eighteenth not a man on board either vessel slept well, for all knew land had been sighted and the next day would be the fateful one. On board the *United States*, Captain Armstrong tossed and muttered on his bunk, and Samjy Culverwell, the freckle-faced powder boy, trembled in his hammock as he digested the words of the special orders issued by the Commodore that evening to all hands:¹⁸ Formally but forcefully written, they gave instructions of behaviour, forbidding under severe penalties all plunder, insult or excesses on shore in the stirring action that might soon be expected, and ended with,

During the battle and strife every man must do his utmost to take and destroy, but when the flag is struck all hostility must cease, you must then even become the protectors of all and not the oppressors of any.¹⁹

The dawn was bright with brilliant flashes of orange in the sky as the vessels rounded Point Piños. The Commodore beamed perceptibly. Not an English craft was in sight! He ordered the British colors raised in subterfuge, as was the customary battle practice, and pointed the ships toward the tiny port of Monterey, and, particularly, to a Mexican bark which was just seen emerging for the open seas.²⁰

"Fire a shot across her bow and order her to stand by to be boarded."

Jones noted that she was the *Joven Guipuzcoana*, a former British commercial vessel converted into a government ship by Mexico. On shore, he could distinguish much activity, with people running to and fro and gathering in groups near a building which was obviously a military fort or presidio.

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With a search of the ship revealing nothing pertinent to the situation and the captain obviously ignorant of the matter at hand, Jones ordered the bark to precede them into port and then to stand by for further instructions. Upon returning to his vessel, the commodore ordered their true colors run up on both ships.

It was mid-afternoon when the three vessels anchored as close to the fort as the depth of water permitted, and soon the commodore received on board the master of the *Fama*, an American whaler lying in port for repairs.

Impressed by the dignity and rank of the officer, the seaman stuttered and stammered while addressing him but managed to get out the fact that he had just returned from a run to the Sandwich Islands and that war talk was definitely prevalent there. He added that right here in Monterey he had heard that the British were coming to claim the territory.²¹

At this, Jones and Armstrong nodded to one another. This, along with the general excitement noticeable on shore, and the fact that no Americans had come on board from the town, substantiated their theory.

"The time for action had now arrived," wrote the Commodore later in his report of the day to the Secretary of the Navy, adding:

Whilst nothing had occurred to shake my belief in the certainty of hostilities with Mexico, the reiterated rumored cession of California to England was strengthened by what I have already related. Hence, no time was to be lost, as another day might bring Admiral Thomas with a superior force to take possession in the name of his sovereign; General Micheltorena, the new governor-general of California, might appear to defend his capital, since he is said to be three-days' march from here.²²

If I took possession of the country and held it by right of conquest in war, and there was war with Mexico, all would be right; then if the English should come and claim under a treaty of cession, as such treaties do not give title till possession is had, I should have established a legal claim for my country to conquered territory, and at least have placed her on strong grounds for forcible retention or amicable negotiations, as after-circumstances might dictate.²³

Continuing with a logic born of a lifetime of naval and political service to his country, Jones wrote on:

If Admiral Thomas should afterwards arrive and attempt to supplant our flag on shore, the marines of the squadron to man the guns of the fort without weakening our ships would insure us the victory, and the responsibility would rest on the English commander. On the other hand, if it should turn out that amicable relations had been restored between the United States and Mexico, that Mexico had not parted with the Californias, and that at the time I de-

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manded and took possession of Monterey there was no war, the responsibility at first might seem to rest on me, certainly not on our government, who gave no orders upon the subject.

But I may be wrong, *toto coelo*, in all my deductions and conclusions. If so, I may forfeit my commission and all that I have acquired in seven and thirty years' devotion to my country's service. Terrible as such a consequence would be to me and my family, it will not be sufficient to deter me from doing what I believe to be my duty, when a concatenation of unforeseen and unforeseeable events require prompt and energetic action for the honor and interests of my country.²⁴

At four that afternoon, Jones ordered a boat lowered for his emissary, Captain Armstrong, and four aides, to proceed ashore under a flag of truce and demand a surrender of the post to the United States, "to avoid the sacrifice of human life and the horrors of war." They were to contact the military and civil governors of the department present, and give them until ten the next morning to make their surrender.²⁵

After the little craft pulled away, Jones began an impatient two-hour vigil, first scanning the horizon for the truant English fleet, then looking to shore for any signs of increased activity or hostility, and his men.

Shortly after six the men returned to the flagship, bursting with news. They had delivered the papers, but to a Captain Mariano Silva, since Alvarado was absent.

Then Armstrong told of the confused state of affairs on shore. It appeared that Alvarado, having been theoretically deposed as governor, quickly retired to his Alisal Rancho, some forty miles inland, with a full retinue, having no desire to do battle against the United States. A former supercargo, now a merchant of Monterey, Thomas Larkin by name, eagerly consented to act as interpreter for the commodore.²⁶ In reply to the officer's query concerning the existing defense power of the town, Armstrong gave his report:

I asked each of my men to scan the town defenses carefully but completely. Putting it all together, I can say that Monterey does not appear to have more than sixty professional soldiers and no weapons worth mentioning, despite eleven cannon, all covered with rust or partially dismantled.²⁷

Armstrong concluded that the place looked like anything but a town girded for war.

In digesting this piece of news, Jones rationalized that even if Alvarado had been clever enough to have concealed forces hidden in the surrounding hills, he would not allow his cannon power to

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remain in utter disuse. No, a *comandante* would certainly maintain his weapons in fighting condition, even under the guise of routine maneuvers. Something was wrong, and Jones felt it in his very bones.

Shortly before midnight, as the crew manned their battle watch, a light was seen off shore, and shortly a boat appeared alongside the *United States*. Captain Armstrong received the three men and presented them to the Commodore in his quarters. They were Captain Pedro Narvaez, representing the military authority. José Abrego, the civil representative,²⁸ both of whom spoke no English, and their translator, Thomas Larkin. Bowing stiffly to the Californians, the officer extended his hand in welcome to Larkin and then quickly turned to the business at hand. He began a carefully-worded recitation of the situation so that Larkin could translate precisely, and when he mentioned the probable state of war between Mexico and the United States, all three men started with surprise.

Both Narvaez and Abrego professed complete ignorance of the entire situation, including the rumored Mexican cession of the Californias, supposedly a *fait accompli* by now, to Britain, but their remarks and attitude were at no time hostile.

"These gentlemen agree to sign the Articles of Capitulation, at least to the extent of their somewhat questionable power, since Micheltorena has not yet arrived and Alvarado's duties have taken him into the interior for the present," Larkin explained, as he finished reviewing the terms of surrender to the two men.²⁹

After a few polite remarks, the Californians, apparently satisfied, left, but at Jones' request, Larkin remained on board and the two talked through the night, exploring the situation from all angles and possibilities.

Jones learned that Mexico had been guilty of criminal neglect as far as this territory was concerned and had alienated the loyalty of most of her subjects, Spanish, Mexican, and Indian. Even now, the average Californio was looking longingly at the United States. The Russians had finally given up their feeble attempt at conquest as a hopeless dream, as had the French, but not so the British! They were only too well aware of the tremendous potentialities in this fertile country. They had consistently sent over commissions and expeditions and had their secret agents planted over the entire area, from San Diego to Sonoma.³⁰

Both men were in agreement on the entire situation as it now stood, or as they felt it stood to the best of their knowledge.

It was an impressive sight which the natives of Monterey be-

held the next morning. Promptly at eleven o'clock, one hundred and fifty men, marines and sailors from the two vessels, put out to shore, in full battle regalia, under Commander Stribling.

As they formed battle ranks on shore, the Mexican garrison marched out of the fort with colors flying and gave up their arms at the government house near the landing. In a matter of minutes the American forces had marched on the now-abandoned fort, their quick pace in time with a military march played by the company's band from the moment forces had landed on the beach. Soon the Mexican tricolor was seen fluttering to the ground. Not a resident or even an Indian could be seen and the only sound to accompany the band and the slap of muskets in unison was the screech of a flock of wheeling seagulls overhead.

As the Stars and Stripes was hoisted, the band broke into a stirring musical salute. A few minutes before noon a salute was exchanged between the guns of the fleet and those now commanded by the Yankees within the fort. Within the space of an hour the formalities were over, with not a shot fired save in salute. The United States had conquered and now claimed possession of the land known as the Mexican Department of Alta California.³¹

Jones, however, was still perturbed.³² The fact that the entire campaign was carried out with no loss of life, without, in fact, a single belligerent moment, was extremely gratifying to the man who had seen the real and awful horror of combat. And certainly the sight of his country's flag flying for the first time over a new territory on this far-western reach of the continent was a thrilling sight to this patriotic commander.

But where was the British fleet? It was a reckless, radical step this man had taken. Now it was done. But he must still look for evidence to press his claim.

On shore, the people could be seen gathering and discussing the copies of the proclamation which had been issued. Besides guaranteeing their present rights and privileges, Jones had proclaimed:

Although I came in arms as the representative of a powerful nation, upon whom the central government of Mexico has waged war, I come not to spread desolation among California's peaceful inhabitants. It is against the armed enemies of my country, banded and arrayed under the flag of Mexico that war and its dread consequences will be enforced . . . you have only to remain in your homes in pursuit of peaceful vocations to insure security of life, person and property from the consequences of an unjust war, into which Mexico has plunged you . . . those Stars and Stripes, infallible emblems of civil liberty, now float triumphantly before

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you, and henceforth and forever will give protection and security to you, to your children and to unborn countless thousands . . .³³

(Signed) Thomas Ap Catesby Jones, Commodore, U.S. Navy
Acting Military and Civil Administrator

The rest of the day proved uneventful. The blue-jackets paraded and took formal possession of the various government buildings and strategic points in the vicinity, always careful to avoid any altercation or embarrassment with the residents. Having been severely lectured on the subject, the men refrained from loitering, entering private dwellings or pilfering of any kind. As a matter of fact, their very business-like air first puzzled and then pleased the Californios. Those Americanos! So efficient!

And so handsome in their uniforms! Although doors remained tightly barred as night approached, many a *señorita* peered through shutter slats at the marching Yanquis, and her heart skipped a beat. Already news had spread of the safety of the passengers on the *Joven Guipuzcoana*, including the beautiful Señorita Estudillo and her aunt. Already they planned excitedly that one day soon there would be a grand military *baile*, a *merienda*, a *fiesta*, *si*?³⁴

The morning sun of Monterey was dazzling when Commodore Jones set foot on the shore. In full military regalia, he and Armstrong joined Larkin on the beach, and as they marched toward their headquarters, set up in the Mexican Customs House, the brilliance of the sun caused Jones to blink and turn his head away from the reflection caused by his sword. The beauty and apparent fertility of this country amazed him, and he plied Larkin with questions about terrain, agriculture, water, trails, and other data of importance to Washington. A great sense of excitement filled him, and his faith in California's future was to be evidenced a few years later when he invested heavily in its real estate.³⁵

After a tour of the area and a pleasant and enlightening conversation with the trader, Larkin, Jones acknowledged a messenger, sent to him from the fort, with papers and dispatches they had found. Asking Larkin to translate them, they proceeded to the merchant's store and fell to the task at once. Both men were shaken by the contents.

Here was a Mexican newspaper, dated August 4. It clearly indicated that relations with the United States were friendly up to that date. Another document, an official communiqué, gave evidence that the rumor of California's cession to England was just that and no more. A rumor. A third paper, a Mexican journal, cited the Monroe Doctrine as a chief obstacle of such a cession should it ever be desired by Mexico!³⁶

Commodore Thomas Ap Catesby Jones had feared this; since the moment his fleet had weighed anchor at Callao he had felt a gnawing distrust of his own judgment, of his own conclusions. As he pondered the situation, another report came, this one from Captain Armstrong, stating that an American merchant ship had just put into port, and her captain, a trusted and reliable American, definitely reported passing the English Fleet of the Pacific well on its way to the Sandwich Islands!³⁷

At length, Jones decreed:

In my opinion, the motives and only justifiable grounds for demanding a surrender of this territory have been removed, or at least rendered so doubtful as to make it my duty to restore things as I found them with the least possible delay.³⁸

Never was Larkin to forget the courage with which the Commodore spoke as he thus admitted his great error in judgment, and announced his decision to remedy the situation immediately.³⁹

A misty fog had blotted out the last rays of sun and white caps churned in the bay when Jones and Larkin came alongside the flagship, and soon they were seated at the conference table with the other ships' officers, who had been urgently summoned, and who had quickly arrived with grave and puzzled faces.

Carefully, explicitly, Jones addressed his colleagues, presenting the newly-found data and evidence supporting his drastic new decision, and his final proclamation of restoration of Monterey to Governor Alvarado and Captain Silva.

The men were astounded and wholeheartedly in favor of holding California anyway, particularly in view of the apparent dislike its citizens felt for their new general, Micheltorena.³⁹

Meantime, according to the best intelligence Jones could muster, the new *comandante*, together with an army of over a hundred *cholos* imported from Mexico, had left the south supposedly intent upon forcibly deposing Alvarado and had proceeded as far as the mission of San Fernando when the messenger reached him with the news of the fall of Monterey to the Americanos. Turning back to Los Angeles in full and hasty retreat, he commenced issuing commands and battle communiqués to all the *alcaldes* and *comandantes* from Arguello in San Diego to Vallejo in Sonoma, to rally to the cause. Safely ensconced in the southern pueblo, he poured forth messages and instructions, flowery and magniloquent.

"Would that I were a thunderbolt to fly and annihilate the invaders," he wrote to Vallejo. He ordered a march on Monterey from the north and a quick rout of the enemy. He, Micheltorena, was sorry he could not run up himself but he felt his first duty was

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to establish headquarters in Los Angeles and to "arrange operations of a war so just, so holy, so national," and protect his supply of arms and ammunition in the pueblo!⁴⁰

However, he added, "triumph is certain; with my present force I would not hesitate to attack but it is just that all share in the pleasure of victory, since we are all Mexicans."

To Alvarado he wrote:

"Are there Mexican bosoms which do not feel themselves boil with valour at seeing this effort to rob us of our territory?"⁴¹

Despite the illogical and precarious political situation that apparently prevailed throughout California, the Commodore was convinced that his course was clear. After dispatching a letter to Alvarado by way of Silva, announcing the new state of affairs and the Commodore's desire to return the capital to the exact status of October nineteenth, he instructed his men to set about making the necessary preparations for the ceremony. Nothing would be spared. He insisted upon giving all due honor and courtesy to Alta California, a country in which he now considered himself a guest or an intruder, depending upon the reactions to the ensuing events.⁴²

It was nearly six o'clock when Commodore Jones, his captains, and aides stepped ashore near the Customs House. Standing at rigid attention, the officers watched the American garrison march from the fort with the precision of troops on review, keeping step with the band music. After the last man had embarked and left the fort, a special squadron at the Presidio hauled down the Stars and Stripes. A minute later the Mexican colors went up, and as they caught the ocean breeze, the awesome silence around the plaza of Monterey was shattered by the cannon of the Pacific Squadron of the United States saluting the flag of Mexico.

Jones and his officers saluted, and as they boarded their small boat an eerie orange light enveloped them and the entire beach. Far out on the horizon the dazzling sun seemed suspended for an instant over the point, then plunged into the quiet sea.

With the soft purple of dusk, the liberation of Monterey and of California was completed.

Perhaps it was the smart precision and gentlemanly conduct of the Yanqui forces, or perhaps the knowledge that they, the Californians, were right back where they had been, under the thumb of an incompetent, greedy master whose only interest in them was revenues and taxes. At any rate, before Jones had come alongside his flagship, the whole market place was swarming with people, discussing and arguing, and many a true Californian openly showed

his regret at the sudden turn of events, laughing sarcastically about the "liberation of our country from invaders."⁴³

From the safety of his inland ranch, Alvarado wrote to Micheltoarena, rivalling the new *comandante* in eloquence, that "My heart bounds with joy in my bosom . . . the joy of my people is complete!"⁴⁴

To Vallejo he addressed similar phrases, reporting the sequence of the events of the day, carefully refraining from revealing his true sentiments in the whole matter, now that the tide had turned. Vallejo received this letter just as he was about to march on Monterey at the head of a hastily-assembled army of soldiers, friendly Indians, and citizens of Sonoma. Returning to his home, Vallejo entered the contest of words, a correspondence that lasted through several months. President Tyler of the United States, Secretary Daniel Webster, Ambassador to Mexico Waddy Thompson, all were targets of the enraged Vallejo's pen.⁴⁵ Perhaps the proud Californian resented his own very minor role in the Monterey events far more than the actual "ignominious acts" of which he wrote. Perhaps he resented the more important role played by his nephew, Alvarado.

And what of "The Enemy?"

Jones set to work at once, writing voluminous letters and dispatches, apologies and explanations. However, though wordy, these reports were factual and sincere, for the Commodore felt it his bounden duty to set the records straight as quickly as possible.⁴⁵

Although the American commodore and his ships stayed in California waters for some time, most of the people were quick to forgive if there had been any bitterness, and quick to entertain. Up and down the coast, in every port, the people vied with each other to see who could give the grandest *baile*, the most spectacular *fiesta* for the Yanqui "visitors." Even Micheltoarena, now that he had bombastically asserted himself, became the gracious host and when the men put into the southern port of San Pedro, he invited them to a true "gala" of which natives spoke for generations to come.⁴⁶

Nationally and internationally, however, reverberations of the event were seriously felt and in Washington Jones became a *cause célèbre*. To appease Mexico, the Commodore was ordered relieved of his command and to proceed to Washington. On January 24, Naval Secretary Upshur sent the following communiqué to Jones:

In adopting this course, it is not designed to prejudice the case, nor even to indicate an opinion as to the propriety or impropriety of your conduct in the matter alluded to. This will of course be made the subject of proper inquiry after your return to the United States.⁴⁷

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The order went, albeit with tongue in cheek:

The present order only has reference to the just claims of Mexico on this government, for such a disavowal of the attack on Monterey as will fully recognize the rights of Mexico and at the same time place the conduct of the government in a proper light before the nations of the world. Commander Dallas will relieve you as soon as he can conveniently reach the station; and you will return to the United States in such mode as may be most convenient and agreeable to yourself.

The latter sentence was the key to an ostensible order to stand before a court martial. Correctly interpreting the face-saving measure, Jones obeyed the command, managing to find a circuitous two-year route "the most agreeable and convenient mode."⁴⁸

While Congress ordered an investigation, Jones sailed on.

By the time he presented himself in Washington, everyone had simmered down, from the President to Daniel Webster. Even the Mexican representatives had been somewhat appeased. More important current affairs were at hand, and eventually Thomas Ap Catesby Jones was commended, decorated, and requested to resume his former command.⁴⁹

Jones was pleased to receive the following letter, just before returning to Washington:

It gives me pleasure to assure you that your remaining without employment since your return to the United States has not been the result of any displeasure of the President of the United States or of this department. The President has authorized me to say to you that in those circumstances of your conduct while in command of the Pacific Squadron, which induced your recall, on explanation, he perceives evidence of an ardent zeal in the service of your country, and devotion to what you deemed to be your duty, regardless of personal consequences, which entitle you to anything but censure from your government . . .

(Signed) Secretary of the Navy Upshur⁵⁰

Without a doubt, Jones proved himself a true patriot when he faced the greatest risk an American officer can be party to — declaring war upon a country and seizing its territory — all without authority or intelligence of any official merit, and with only his devout patriotism and astuteness to guide him.

NOTES

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4. P. R., p. 68.
5. P. R., p. 86.
6. Bancroft, Hubert Howe, *History of California*, Vol. IV (San Francisco, 1886), p. 301.
7. P. R., p. 68.
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11. P. R., p. 69.
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13. P. R., p. 69.
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41. *Ibid.*
42. Bancroft, p. 311.
43. Kelsey, Rayner, "The U.S. Consulate in California," unpub. thesis, p. 45.
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48. *Ibid.*
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