

THE CRUISE OF THE PRESIDENT

Captain John Rodgers, USN to the Secretary of the Navy

United States' Frigate PRESIDENT, Boston, 1 September 1812

I had the pleasure of informing you of the arrival of the squadron, and now to state the result and particulars of our cruise.

Previous to leaving New York on the 21st of June, I heard that a British convoy had sailed from Jamaica for England, on or about the 20th of the preceding month, and on being informed of the declaration of war against Great Britain, I determined in the event of commodore Decatur joining me with the UNITED STATES, CONGRESS and ARGUS, as you had directed, to go in pursuit of them. The UNITED STATES, CONGRESS and ARGUS, did join me on the 21st, with which vessels, this ship and the HORNET, I accordingly sailed in less than an hour after I had received your orders of the 18th of June, accompanied by your official communication of the declaration of war.

On leaving New York, I shaped our course south-eastwardly, in the expectation of falling in with vessels, by which I should hear of the before mentioned convoy, and the following night met with an American brig that gave me the sought for information: the squadron now crowded sail in pursuit; but the next morning was taken out of its course, by the pursuit of a British frigate, that I since find was the *BELVIDERA*, relative to which I beg leave to refer you to the enclosed extract from my journal: after repairing as far as possible the injury done by the *BELVIDERA* to our spars and rigging, we again crowded all sail and resumed our course in pursuit of the convoy, but did not receive further intelligence of it until the 29th of June, on the western edge of the banks of Newfoundland, where we spoke an American schooner, the master of which reported that he had two days before passed them in latitude 43, longitude 55, steering to the eastward; I was surprised to find the squadron was still so far to the eastward of us, but was urged, however, as well by what I considered my duty, as by inclination, to continue the pursuit.

On the 1st of July, a little to the eastward of Newfoundland bank, we fell in with quantities of cocoa-nut shells, orange peels, &c. which indicated that the convoy were not far distant, and we pursued it with zeal, although frequently taken out of our course by vessels it was necessary to chase, without gaining any further intelligence until the 9th of July, in latitude 45, 30, longitude 23, we captured the British private armed brig *DOLPHIN*, of Jersey, and was informed by some of her crew that they had seen the convoy the preceding evening, the weather was not clear at the time, but that they had counted 85 sail, and that the force charged with its protection consisted of one two decker, a frigate, a sloop of war, and a brig.

This was the last intelligence I received of the before mentioned convoy, although its pursuit was continued until the 13th of July, being then within 18 or 20 hours sail of the British channel. From this we steered for the island of Madeira, passed close by it on the 21st of July, thence near the Azores, and saw Corvo and Flores; thence steered for the banks of Newfoundland; and from the latter place (by the way of Cape Sable) to this port, it having become indispensibly necessary (by the time we reached our own coast) to make the first convenient port in the United States; owing, I am sorry to say, to that wretched disease the scurvy, having made its appearance on board of the vessels, most generally to a degree seriously alarming.

From the western part of the banks of Newfoundland to our making the island of Madeira, the weather was such, at least six days out of seven, as to obscure from our discovery, every object that we did not pass within four or five miles of, and indeed for several days together the fog was so thick as to prevent our seeing each other, even at a cable's length asunder, more than twice or thrice in twenty-four hours.

From the time of our leaving the United States until our arrival here we chased every vessel we saw, and you will not be a little astonished when I inform you that, although we brought to every thing we did chase, with the exception of four vessels, we only made seven captures and one re-capture.

It is truly an unpleasant task to be obliged to make a communication thus barren of benefit to our country: the only consolation I individually feel on the occasion, being derived from our knowing that our being at sea obliged the

enemy to concentrate a considerable portion of his most active force, and thereby prevented his capturing an incalculable amount of American property that would otherwise have fallen a sacrifice.

I am aware of the anxiety you must have experienced at not hearing from me for such a length of time, but this I am sure you will not attribute in any degree to neglect, when I inform you that not a single proper opportunity occurred from the time of leaving the United States until our return.

Mr. Newcomb, who will deliver you this, you will find an intelligent young man, capable of giving such further information as you may deem of any moment: he will at the same time deliver you a chart, shewing the track in which we cruised: annexed is a list of vessels captured, re-captured and burnt.

The four vessels we chased and did not come up with were, the *BELVIDERA*, a small pilot-boat schooner, supposed to be an American privateer, the hermaphrodite privateer brig, *YANKEE*, which we lost sight of in a fog, but whose character we afterwards learnt, and a frigate supposed to be British, that we chased on the 28th ultimo near the shoal of George's bank, and should certainly have come up with, had we have had the advantage of two hours more daylight.

On board of the several vessels of the squadron there are between 80 and 100 prisoners taken from the vessels we captured during our late cruise: the government not having any agent for prisoners here, I shall send them to commodore Bainbridge, to be disposed of in such manner as best appears with the interest of the United States, and which I hope may meet your approbation.

John Brannan, ed. *Official Letters of the Military and Naval Officers of the United States During the War with Great Britain in the Years 1812, 13, 14, & 15 With Some Additional Letters and Documents Elucidating the History of that Period.* (Washington: 1823), pp. 52–54.