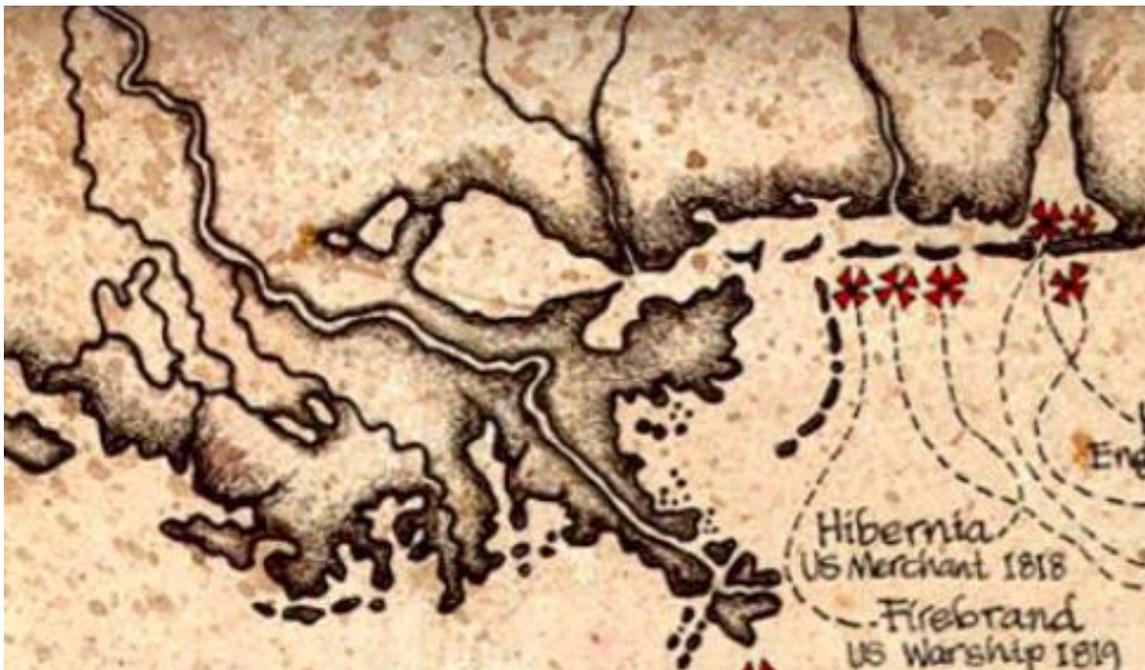


Distant Winds

Two centuries ago was a world in which news traveled slowly. It was very unlike the present information age. Long before television, personal computers, cell phones, automobiles or airplanes, the following report, concerning "The late Hurricane" was published 200 years ago. It appeared in the *Orleans Gazette and Commercial Advertiser*, dated August 4, 1819.

"A dispatch boat has arrived from the bay of St. Louis with letters from an officer in that place, addressed to Commodore PATTERSON, describing the loss of the U.S. schooner Firebrand, whilst at anchor off the Pass of Christian, on the night of Wednesday last, the 28th ult.



Map of sunken vessels, showing the loss of The Firebrand in 1819

Here were 45 persons on board at the time, all of whom are supposed to have perished, as no intelligence had been obtained of the safety of any one of them – and the dead bodies were driving ashore by the waves. The officers on board were Lieutenant GREY, Doctor WARDLE, and Messrs. PERKINS and ADAMS, midshipmen. The schooner Thomas Shields was also capsized at the bay of St. Louis, and all the hands lost. All the houses at the bay of St. Louis were seriously damaged, and most of them blown down: at the Pass, also, only three houses

were left standing: no lives, however, were lost at either place. The whole coast from the Regoulettes [*sic*] to Mobile, which latter place only our intelligence reaches, is a scene of desolation, covered with fragments of vessels and houses, the bodies of human beings, and the carcasses of cattle.

The hurricane, the ravages of which we have partially described, was sensibly felt in New Orleans, but occasioned no serious damage in its vicinity or in the city itself. Its progress appears to have been in an easterly direction through the Gulph [*sic*] of Mexico, from which quarter and from the Atlantic sea board, we await with painful anxiety intelligence of a most disastrous nature.



Several vessels (from small boats to 60-ton brigs) were forced ashore by the wind and waves in the 1819 hurricane.

By a gentleman, just arrived from Mobile, we learn the following particulars. The vessels mentioned form only a small part of the number that he saw ashore:

Schooner Hokee and a sloop, supposed to be the James, Daly, master, ashore at the Pass of Christian.

Schooner Henrietta ashore at Dauphin Island – no lives lost. A schooner at the mouth of the Regoulettes [*sic*], only her masts out of water.”



Commodore Daniel Todd Patterson, U.S. Navy

A later article informed readers that the *USS Firebrand* was intended to be the lead vessel in a “planned expedition fitted out against” a band of some 50 pirates who had established themselves “on a piece of land between two small bayous that empty into lake Barataria”. Two other ships, which were to take part in the frustrated naval mission, “shared a similar fate”.

The above mentioned hurricane was the Bay St. Louis Hurricane of 1819, which is believed to have formed off the coast of Cuba before heading on a west-northwest track towards the Louisiana Gulf Coast. Known as one of the most destructive hurricanes to affect the United

States during the first half of the 19th century, it reached an estimated Cat 3–4 strength before making landfall on July 27 in southeastern Louisiana, bringing heavy winds and a 5-6 feet storm surge.

Continuing northeastward, the hurricane made a second landfall in the Bay St. Louis-Pass Christian area, before weakening on its path inland. Damage across Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama was severe, leaving uprooted trees and shattered dwellings, and amounting to losses totalling more than \$100,000 dollars (over \$2 million today). Considering how less populated the area was in those days, it is still a large number.

In addition to the capsizing and loss of the U.S. warship *Firebrand*, which ultimately caused the drowning 39 sailors, a number of U.S. soldiers were also caught off guard by the storm and perished. The final death toll, although hardly precise, was given as between 43 and 175 people, some of whom were later found washed up across the Gulf Coast. People also had to contend with displaced alligators, snapping turtles and snakes.

Commodore Daniel Todd Patterson (March 6, 1786 – August 25, 1839) of the United States Navy may be a familiar name to you. It was he, you may recall, who on September 13, 1814, commanded a raid on Jean Lafitte's pirate stronghold in Barataria. Patterson's fleet, which included the *USS Carolina* accompanied by six gunboats and a tender, anchored off the island of Grande Terre and attacked. By midmorning, 10 battle-ready pirate ships formed a line in the bay. It wasn't long before Lafitte's men abandoned their ships, set several on fire, and fled the area. Offering no resistance once Patterson came ashore, 80 "banditti" were captured, but Lafitte escaped to safety. Six of Lafitte's schooners were seized, as well as a brig, one *felucca*, 20 cannon and goods worth a half a million dollars. A *felucca* is a small, wooden, maneuverable Mediterranean-style sailing boat that featured a large lateen-rigged (triangular) sail.

This action against Lafitte's base of operations was a result of American concerns that the famous privateer might join forces with the British. Captain Nicholas Lockyer, along with Royal Marine infantry Captain John McWilliam, had earlier delivered Lafitte a letter, under the seal of King George III, offering British citizenship and land grants in the British colonies in the Americas if he and his men promised to assist in the naval fight against the United States. If they refused, the British Navy would destroy Barataria.

Instead, it was Commodore Patterson, who delivered the knock-out blow at Baratavia. Nonetheless, Lafitte and his men offered to fight alongside the Americans in the Battle of New Orleans – and the rest is history. In the end, Commodore Patterson praised the Baratavia men who served on one of the U.S. Navy ships, and whose skill with artillery was superior to their British counterparts. On land, Lafitte's buccaneers also performed well and were highly commended by Andrew Jackson.

Commodore Patterson, who had seen action in the First Barbary War and the War of 1812, was the original commander in 1814 of what was known as "The New Orleans Squadron" or "The New Orleans Station," which was a U.S. Navy squadron raised out of the impending threat the British forces posed to Louisiana during the War of 1812. It was Commodore Patterson, not General Jackson, who was the first to make preparations to defend New Orleans, foreseeing British designs against the city almost two months before their attack



Including the *Carolina*, "The New Orleans Squadron" consisted of fifteen vessels. Among those were the schooner *USS Sea Horse*, two

small sloops-of-war, the *USS Alligator* and the *USS Tickler*, along with several Jefferson-class gunboats. These gunboats were often referred to as "Jefferson-class" because they were built during the presidency of Thomas Jefferson, who strongly believed America needed a coastal patrol force, not just a blue-water navy.

It was also Commodore Patterson who dispatched Lieutenant Thomas ap Catesby Jones and a small squadron to patrol Lake Borgne in December 1814. The engagement, known as the Battle of Lake Borgne, lasted about two hours, though the actual hand-to-hand combat lasted only five minutes. The British fleet under the command of Captain Nicholas Lockyer (remember his visit to Lafitte) forced the greatly outnumbered American seamen to surrender, but the Americans had inflicted considerable damage and provided General Jackson more time to strengthen his defenses. The *Sea Horse* repelled two attacks by armed British longboats until her commanding officer, Sailing Master William Johnson, beached and burned her to prevent capture. The *USS Tickler* was also scuttled to avoid capture, but the *USS Alligator*, armed with a 4-pounder and a crew of 8, fell into British hands.

The Americans lost their gunboats and a sloop with casualties amounting to 6 (or 10) Americans dead and 35 wounded, compared to British reports of 17 British dead and 77 wounded, some of whom died later. Among the wounded were both Captain Lockyer and Lieutenant Jones (who was a prisoner of war for three months and would later be decorated for his courageous actions in delaying the British advance).

All of this was an important prelude to the actual Battle of New Orleans at Chalmette on January 8, 1815.

After the war, Patterson was commended by Jackson, received a note of thanks from Congress, and was promoted. New vessels were stationed at New Orleans, which participated in counter-piracy operations for over a twenty year period. "The New Orleans Squadron" was eventually merged with "The Home Squadron".

Patterson, who was born on Long Island, New York, married a New Orleans girl, George Ann Pollock, and remained on the southern stations until 1824. Their daughter Georgy married David Dixon Porter, who commanded a semi-autonomous flotilla of mortar boats at the capture of New Orleans during the Civil War. It was part of his foster brother David Glasgow Farragut's successful invasion fleet.

Daniel Todd Patterson was given command of the *USS Constitution* from October 14 until December 5, 1825. He resumed command two months later on February 21, 1826. This historic ship, commissioned and named by George Washington, whose copper bolts and fittings were forged by Paul Revere, saw victories in numerous battles during the War of 1812. She is, of course, lovingly known as "Old Ironsides".



The USS Constitution defeating HMS Guerriere and earning the nickname "Old Ironsides," August 1812

NED HÉMARD

New Orleans Nostalgia
"Distant Winds"
Ned Hémard
Copyright 2019