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John Julius Guthrie and the cruise of the Levant to China, 1855-1858

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JOHN JULIUS GUTHRIE
AND
THE CRUISE OF THE LEVANT TO CHINA, 1855-1858

Thesis

for

Dr. F.W. Gregory

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree

Bachelor of Arts

University of Richmond

Annette C. G. Bruce
1977

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Lieutenant John Julius Guthrie (Photograph of a Daguerrotype in the Possession of the Author).

THE LEVANT SAILS FOR THE FAR EAST

By the middle of the nineteenth century United States trade with China was growing rapidly. Each year sturdy merchant vessels and sleek clippers sailed into China port cities to exchange American gold for the silks, tea, and spices of the Orient. In order to protect these commercial ships, and the merchants and diplomats who lived at the trading centers, the United States Navy kept the East Indies Squadron posted off the Chinese coast.¹ As this was an unhealthy area, the ships assigned to the station were rotated regularly, each vessel remaining there about two years before a new one arrived to replace it. In October of 1855 the sloop-of-war Levant was ordered to the East Indies Station to relieve the Vandalia. Her Captain, Commander William Smith, spent the next month outfitting the ship. By early November the vessel was ready to sail.²

On Wednesday, November 13, the Levant lay anchored in New York harbor, an unimposing image in the bleak overcast dawn. Although a full-rigged ship, with three masts carrying square sails, she was one of the smallest in the Navy. And at that particular time, bare of all canvas, with only the stumpy lower half of her masts protruding from the hull, there was little about the vessel to impress the watermen and stevedores who might have glanced her way while beginning their day's work. But this was an important day for the Levant, and even at that early hour the men of the morning watch were busy on deck making final preparations to get under way. The water tanks in the hold had been filled the night before. All week lighters from the navy yard had been

plying to and from the ship bringing biscuit, beef, whiskey, powder, shot, rope, canvas, tools, clothing, and the hundreds of other items that would be required during the long voyage ahead. These supplies had to be carefully stowed, so that stores could be reached when needed. Captain William Smith and his fifteen officers examined the trim (how the ship floated in the water), moved ballast to improve her balance, and sent two forward guns on shore to lighten the bow. This morning the crew was most probably occupied with getting the decks cleared, lashing down loose stores, nailing furniture to the decks below, and making last minute checks of the tiller and rigging.³

In the first light of the Autumn day John Julius Guthrie watched the sailors at their work. He was Second Lieutenant of the Levant,⁴ and officer of the watch. Since four A.M. he had been on duty, keeping note of weather conditions, the rate and direction of the wind, and seeing that a sharp look-out was kept for danger in any form. This job was more important at sea, than in a home port, but the regimen was followed nevertheless, and vigilance paid off. A week before a smaller vessel had crashed into the sloop in broad daylight, splintering the flying jib boom and bowsprit cap. The crew had worked steadily since then repairing the damage, and had only just finished on the previous Saturday. Fortunately, Guthrie's watch passed with no similar mishap. Everything was going smoothly. At seven o'clock a boat came alongside and the harbor pilot climbed up the accomodation ladder to the deck. His job was to guide the Levant through the shoals of the harbor, out into deep water. There were last minute preparations to make, however, before he would be needed. Another lighter arrived with cooking utensils and provisions which had to be sent below before the ship could put out to sea. Lieutenant Guthrie was

relieved at eight, but he would have had a difficult time resting at such an exciting time.⁵

With these preparations completed, all was in readiness. The Boatswain blew a long, shrill note on his pipe and bellowed, "All hands up anchor." As the call was repeated throughout the ship the seamen hurried up to the main deck to take their assigned stations. Each man had a particular job and, although all were new to the ship, the training they had received in the past few weeks taught them where to go. The officers and petty officers told them what to do. One group "cleared the hawse," thus untangling the anchor cable, while others fitted long bars into the capstan, a spool-like device that pulled the anchor up. Then a team of men pushed the bars, turning the capstan around, using sheer muscle to haul up the anchor. Men below coiled the cable in a compartment in the hold, until the anchor rose out of the water and was pulled tight against the ship's bow. A hawser, or thick cable, was made fast to the Levant, and the sloop got underway in tow of the tugboat Hercules. Under the skilled direction of the harbor pilot they made their way through the shallow water, headed toward the Atlantic. And while the ship moved slowly onward the crew made ready to set the sails. The topmen, those sailors who worked high in the rigging, swayed up the top half of the masts and lashed them in place. After securing them with stays to the deck and other masts, the men attached the yards, the horizontal spars that held the sails. Another gang of sailors fitted the flying jib boom to the end of the bowsprit.⁶

By eleven o'clock all of the rigging was in place with the sails rolled up to the yards and lashed tight. Once again the entire crew was summoned, this

time to "make sail." The topmen would scurry up the shrouds and range themselves along the yards, standing on narrow foot-ropes. Then, leaning over the yards to keep from falling, they untied the lashings and "loosed the sails." Men on deck heaved down on the sheets, dragging the sails down into position, until the canvas was pulled taut to the yard below. Only the jib and topsails were set while the ship was attached to the tug boat, so that the vessel would not sail too swiftly in the dangerous waters.⁷ But early in the afternoon the Hercules cast off, taking with her the pilot, a bundle of hastily written letters from the crew, and Captain Smith's dispatch to the Secretary of Navy.⁸ Once out of the harbor the men made all sail. The Levant caught a moderate sea breeze,⁹ and headed south to Rio de Janeiro and from there to the Orient.

When the ship was safely at sea, the dull monotony of the voyage began. Guthrie passed his days keeping watch and musing on his fate. He had been to China before, when he sailed there in Commodore George Read's flagship, the Columbia.¹⁰ That had been eighteen years ago, but the prospect of returning to the pestilential region was unpleasant. For two years Guthrie had been assigned to the Naval Observatory in Washington, where he and Matthew Fontaine Maury struck up a life-long friendship. During that time he and his wife and children lived in Georgetown and enjoyed an active social life.¹¹ It is small wonder he was loath to leave home for a sickly station some eighteen thousand miles distant. Upon receipt of his orders, Guthrie had put in a request for transfer to the Mediterranean, but since that was the most desirable of all the squadrons, all positions there were taken. He was forced to accept the inevitable with as good grace as he could muster. The Levant's destination,

the East Indies Squadron, was one of the least popular in the Navy, so Guthrie's disaffection was shared by most of his fellow officers and sailors.¹²

Many naval men relied on alcohol to dull the pain of separation from family and friends, or to relieve the long periods of boredom on a lengthy cruise. But Guthrie, after several bad experiences with liquor in his youth,¹³ was not a heavy drinker. He seemed to get more pleasure from reading or observing the birds and fish that appeared about the ship. In this pursuit he and Lieutenant Julius Heilman apparently had a common interest. Both were keen observers of nature, always on the lookout for plants, animals and unusual meteorological phenomena. On the first day out, the officer of the watch spotted two whales, one on either side of the ship. Guthrie imagined the creature's thoughts as it watched the Levant slicing through the water: the whale "would rise upon the surface, puffing and blowing, and sporting about the ship... spouting water and blowing as though he would ask 'who are you? and what are you doing out here anyhow?'" When the animal had satisfied his curiosity he would "unceremoniously depart," obviously "disgusted with our conduct in particular and ship in general." Heilman's watch the next day was chiefly spent gazing at the sea gulls and stormy petrels as they hovered above the rigging. He also paused to examine a patch of seaweed, which he identified as *Facus Natus*.¹⁴

Deck duty, or watch, could be a boring four-hour period if the officer did not find amusement in his surroundings. The lieutenant on watch was supposed to keep a lookout for changes in wind or weather, and other ships on the horizon, but he rarely saw anything save a wide expanse of sea. Normally there was little for him to do but pace the quarter deck and keep an eye on the sails. If the wind changed direction, however, the watch officer snapped to attention. He sent word for First Lieutenant George Colvocoress, the executive officer,

who came on deck day or night to make important decisions. On his order, the men would grab hold of the braces and haul the yards around, facing the sails to leeward, to be sure that the wind was blowing from directly behind them again. If this was not done, the ship could be taken aback, and could even lose a mast if the wind was strong. After dealing with this minor crisis things returned to normal.¹⁵

Besides in trimming the sails, the typical monotony was relieved in different ways. On exceptionally fine days the seamen assembled on deck to wash their clothes and hammocks. This was a fun time, when everyone could relax, talk, and enjoy the pleasant weather. When washed, the clothes and bedding were hoisted aloft to dry.¹⁶ On Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays of alternate weeks, the crew exercised at the great guns. Without warning, the drummer beat "quarters", a rhythm which was supposed to sound like the tune "Hearts of Oak." Upon hearing the ominous roll of the drum everyone in the ship sprang into motion, running in different directions to their assigned places. One division of men were responsible for sending up ammunition from the magazine. Others manned the rigging to attach extra stays to the masts and yards, so these would not fall if hit by the enemy's shot. The marines, normally taking little part in shipboard duties, formed into rank and file on the main deck. They served as snipers and boarding parties in action at sea. Each lieutenant commanded a division of about four guns, two on each side of the ship, and Guthrie, being the senior lieutenant below the Executive was stationed by the forward guns. When all officers and men were at their posts the exercise began. In order to make the practice as realistic as possible, it was necessary to simulate battle conditions. While the guns crews went through the motions of loading and firing their pieces,

Colvocoress kept interrupting them with orders to "repel boarders" or trim sails. In these emergencies a number of sailors would leave their guns to attend to the problem, while the others continued firing. Occasionally the Executive Officer would call "fire!" from a distant part of the ship. Then a party of seamen had to hasten to the scene to extinguish the imaginary blaze. Most of the men considered the exercises silly and a waste of time, but the officers knew that all of these skills could be needed when they reached China.¹⁷

Most of the trip to Rio de Janeiro was uneventful. The temperature remained at about seventy degrees, and there was little rain. For the first part the winds were strong, and the Levant made over a hundred miles a day. But as they sailed farther south, their progress slowed to twenty or thirty miles.¹⁸ Guthrie spent much of his spare time reading, either from his own collection or the ship's library. It was his custom to familiarize himself with the histories and cultures of the countries he visited, so he began with Perry's Instructions and Correspondence Relating to the Naval Expedition to Japan. After that he launched into an account written by Colvocoress of his experience as a member of the Wilkes Expedition to the Pacific. In addition to books of this type, his selections included sacred works, such as lives of saints, for ever since his marriage he had been a devout Catholic.¹⁹

The Navy at that time required every midshipman to keep a journal recording the ship's position, weather conditions, and important events of the day. Many senior officers continued the custom in order to practice navigation, and to pass idle hours. So each evening Guthrie noted the longitude and latitude of the Levant, which he had calculated that day.

With this, his books, and the conversation of the other officers, he passed many afternoons and evenings in the officer's quarters, or wardroom.²⁰ During the calm at the end of November, he and Lieutenant Heilman continued their natural history studies. Guthrie spotted another whale and several Portuguese men-of-war when keeping two watches on deck. While on duty several nights later, his friend observed a "brilliant meteor." On December 7 the officers came on deck to see a school of flying fish. A week later the ship crossed the Equator and sighted land--the island of Fernando de Noronha, off the eastern point of Brazil. The first leg of the journey was almost over.²²

The Levant continued south without stopping at the island, which soon disappeared from view. Realizing their destination was only a few days away, and wanting to make a good impression, the officers and sailors set to work repairing and cleaning the ship. They painted the ship's boat, replaced worn sails, and "holystoned" the decks to remove stains and dirt. Holystoning was an unpopular task in which the seamen sanded the planks of the decks with porous blocks of stone, grinding off a thin layer of wood and leaving the decks a spotless off-white.²³ While busy at this work, the crew sighted many ships sailing north from Rio. Often the passing vessels merely raised their flags to show their nationalities, but sometimes they came together and exchanged news and letters. As the number of ships increased the men of the Levant became more and more excited. Anticipation of getting on shore filled everyone's thoughts after five weeks at sea. They did not have long to wait for their arrival. Ten days after leaving Fernando de Noronha, the ship came within view of land again, and that night the lookout discovered the Raza Island light, marking the entrance to the Bay of Rio de Janeiro.²⁴

Rather than attempt to navigate the narrow mouth of the bay in the dark, they stopped outside, "hove to," and waited until morning. But by five A.M. the Levant was under way again, "standing in" toward the harbor. At its entrance the English ship Sharpshooter took her in tow and steamed to the anchorage on the east side of the city. Just before noon the sloop dropped anchor near two other American ships: the Germantown and the Savannah, Commodore William Salter's flagship. Vessels of all nationalities crowded the harbor, and protocol demanded that the Levant recognize each with a formal salute. The Master of the ship therefore broke out the necessary flags while the officers and seamen manned the guns. At noon they hoisted the American flag and fired thirteen guns for the Commodore. When this was acknowledged with an equal number of shots, they honored the Brazilian flag with twenty-one guns and the French and Brazilian admirals with thirteen each.²⁵ Once the official greetings were exchanged the Levant was considered a welcome guest in the Brazilian port.

During their short stay in the harbor, the crew labored at repairing and refitting the ship. The entire ship's company was needed to tighten the stays, backstays, and shrouds (the lines supporting the masts). These ropes had become loose since leaving New York, and were no longer holding the masts firmly in place. Once the rigging was secured, a gang of men scrubbed out the water tanks and refilled them with fresh water. The ship's boats brought wood, sand, and other provisions until the Levant was completely stocked once more.²⁶

If any of the sailors had entertained hopes of going ashore, they were sorely disappointed. The Captain needed all of his men sober for the necessary work on board, so the crewmen never left the ship. Two seamen

did manage to escape while loading provisions into the ship's cutter. They enjoyed a few hours of freedom before being brought back and put in irons. But for the remainder of the men, life in port was little better than at sea. They still toiled much of the day and kept watch during the night, and in sweltering heat, for December in Brazil is the beginning of summer. The scenery was a pleasant change, however, and the sailors appreciated fresh beef and vegetables after weeks of dried and salted food. Most men used the occasion of being in port to write letters to loved ones at home, which undoubtedly brought a little comfort. Since leaving the Levant was forbidden, the men were pleasantly surprised to receive an invitation to dine with the crew of the Germantown. Captain Smith relented and a large group of seamen went "on liberty" to the other ship. Besides this one opportunity to go "ship visiting," the sailors had to be content with amusing themselves on the decks of the Levant.²⁷

While the crew remained on board the ship, the officers took turns visiting the city, and when the bulk of the work was completed, Lieutenant Guthrie got permission to go on shore. He knew Rio well, having stopped there several times on previous cruises. The city was located in a valley surrounded by tall mountains. One of the most prominent peaks was the Sugar Loaf, located at the entrance of the harbor. It served as a landmark for sailors and afforded a fine view of the city. But with the other mountains, it effectively cut off any breeze, making the valley oppressively hot at this time of year. Guthrie had friends in town, so he probably repaired to one of their houses to escape the sultry weather. Many of the wealthier inhabitants made a practice of entertaining navy men who stayed in the city. By

this means Guthrie had become acquainted with Henrique de Madeiros, a local physician, and the two men remained close for many years.²⁹ After his two days of liberty, Guthrie reboarded the Levant and found Heilman and Lieutenant James Higgins in hot water for returning to the ship drunk. Captain Smith had both young men sign written pledges to abstain in the future.³⁰

On January 5 at daylight, a tug boat pulled the sloop out to sea. As the ship passed the Germantown the sailors who had played host to the crew cheered lustily. The delighted seamen returned the shouts with equal enthusiasm and the Levant sailed from the anchorage with the men in good spirits. By noon they were in the open sea, leaving the Sugar Loaf several miles behind. For the next twenty-two days the ship headed east toward Africa, making good time all the way.³¹

The first day at sea was a clear, pleasant Sunday. Larger ships had chaplains to lead worship services on the Sabbath, but since the Levant was not so fortunate, weekly devotion was left up to the individual. On the first Sunday of each month, however, a different sort of ceremony was held. In the morning, around ten, the Captain and the First Lieutenant inspected the crew at their guns, and afterwards mustered the men on the quarter deck. While the officers, sailors, and marines stood at stiff attention the Captain read them the Articles of War--the regulations of the service. In measured tones Smith would outline the punishment for any offenses the crew might commit, with the hope that the regular reminder would influence them to behave. And during the early weeks of the cruise it proved effective. Only one fight broke out on this part of the trip and the combatants were immediately sent to the brig to meditate on their crime.³²

In addition to the threat of punishment, constant activity helped the sailors stay out of trouble. Lieutenant Colvocoress kept up exercises of all kinds, especially gun practice. Usually the gun crews went through the motions of loading and firing their weapons without using "live shots," but this developed little skill in aiming and proved a poor simulation of real battle. During the trip to Cape Town though they had a day of target practice. The men lowered a large floating target over the side and set it adrift in the water. Then for an hour or so the Levant sailed back and forth in front of the object, allowing the starboard and port side batteries to fire "broadships" at it. Any hits were duly reported to the Captain. When the divisions had finished the exercise the ship's cutter rowed out and brought the target back on board.³³

On the first part of the voyage across the Atlantic the sailors often passed their free time fishing for dolphins, which swam in schools about the ship. The fresh fish was a welcome supplement to their bland, stale provisions. Lieutenant Guthrie, coming on deck to watch the sailors at this task, was amazed to see the witless dolphins "snap eagerly at a deadly hook baited only with a simple rag or piece of bone." Unlike the anglers, he admired the fish more for their beauty than their taste. But after several good catches the Levant passed into waters where there were no fish at all. Instead the sky abounded with birds of various kinds. Here the men got their first glimpse of the albatross, and enormous bird with an eight foot wingspan. Guthrie was fascinated by its effortless flight and watched it in rapt wonder. "It is rather a pretty sight," he wrote later, "to behold them skimming close to the surface of the rugged sea without even touching its waters with their long wings, then rising, sinking, and circling in the

higher air with so little apparent exertion and such graceful ease."³⁴

Guthrie enjoyed these pleasant aspects of life at sea and he continued to amuse himself by reading. But in spite of these distractions his thoughts often returned to his family. Although he had been a sailor for twenty years, he still had difficulty leaving his wife, Louisa, and their five children. He worried about their getting sick, the boys misbehaving, and all of the other difficulties that he imagined occurring in his absence. Their first letters would not reach him until the Levant arrived in Hong Kong, which was still four months away, so it was hard for him to calm his apprehensions. At each port Guthrie mailed several letters, written to Louisa while at sea, and after leaving Rio he began writing the children too. His sons Benny and Julius were young teenagers, but the little girls were barely old enough to read, ranging from age three to eight.³⁵ The affectionate father wrote each child in turn, and the day before reaching Africa he sat down in his state-room to write Julius. The letter advised the boy to work hard in school, avoid "quarrelling and contention," and be especially kind to his mother and sisters. "Prevail on dearest Ma-Ma to take a walk every day," the anxious husband suggested. His theories on health included regular exercise, and he was determined that his family keep fit. After detailing further instructions on deportment and attitude, Guthrie finished his letter, and returned on deck.³⁶ The Levant was standing in for Table Bay, the harbor of Cape Town.

Once safely anchored, the crew began making preparations for the next stage of the trip. Everyone on board remained busy, but Guthrie seized an opportunity to go ashore and see the city. Cape Town's climate was cooler and drier than that of Rio de Janeiro. He found the town very agreeable, although the wind blew up such "clouds of dust" from the parched streets that he could

barely walk about in the open. Nevertheless, he roamed through the city, enjoying the sights, and stopping to buy fresh peaches, pears, and grapes, which sold there at low prices. As in most places he visited, Guthrie quickly made friends among the residents, and passed most of his time getting acquainted with them.³⁷

The Cape's healthy climate and low prices may have tempted the weary sailors in the ship, but the authorities frowned on deserters. On the second day at anchor, the city police brought a seaman on board who had deserted from the San Jacinto when that ship stopped in Table Bay. She was headed for the East Indies Squadron too, as the flagship, so Captain Smith took the prisoner on board the sloop. Ten men from the Levant, choosing to ignore this warning of the city's policy, made their escape the day before sailing. When the ship was ready to weigh anchor, the sailors had not been found, so the vessel left without them.³⁸

The voyage was half over, but the most difficult part still lay ahead. For two weeks the winds varied, sometimes coming from behind, but often blowing directly in the face of the Levant. The ship could sail over a hundred miles east, only to be forced back an equal distance the next day by the powerful head winds. Waves crashed around the hull as the sloop beat her way slowly eastward, gaining as much ground as possible on good days, and sailing south when the breeze was ahead. The sails required frequent adjustment in the variable winds. Almost every night the sailors were awakened to "reef topsails" or make other changes in canvas. The food was going bad and the seamen were tired. Conditions were ripe for disaster.³⁹

On February 29 the winds were relatively light, blowing from the southeast, but in the late afternoon the Captain ordered all hands to reef the sails.

The topmen scrambled up to their stations and began pulling the sails up a few feet to shorten the amount of canvas exposed to the wind. While a number of the men were bending over the mainyard reefing their sail a rope snapped, knocking one of the sailors, George Crockford, off the yard into the sea. The marine on duty at the taffrail cut away the life buoy, letting it fall into the water in hopes that the unfortunate man could reach it. The officers immediately ordered the ship to "heave to." When the Levant had come to a halt a boat's crew rowed swiftly to the scene of the accident. Pulling Crockford over the side, they found the unlucky topman was already dead. After recovering the buoy the boat returned to the ship. The next morning at 10 o'clock the Boatswain called "all hands to bury the dead," summoning the crew to the main deck for the funeral of their shipmate.⁴⁰ The last rites on a warship were read by the Captain or Chaplain, and performed with rigid uniformity. The dead man's mess mates, those sailors with whom he shared his meals, carried his body up to the main deck and placed it on a plank propped against the ship's side. Heavy shot had been sewn into the shroud so that the body would sink. At the appointed time during the service the sailor's friends tipped the board up, allowing the corpse to slide overboard into the water. Then, without further ceremony, the ship's routine returned to normal, leaving the hard-bitten seamen little time to dwell on the tragedy. Only a week later they gathered around the mainmast bidding for Crockford's clothes at public auction.⁴¹

Six weeks after leaving the Cape of Good Hope, the Levant made a perfect landfall at Christmas Island. At daylight the following morning Java was in sight, about forty miles away. For several days the ship sailed

cautiously through the Strait of Sunda, the narrow waterway between Java and Sumatra. They passed several small islands, including Krakatoa. Just before leaving the Strait for the open sea, they anchored overnight at the village of Anger, on the northwest coast of Java. Captain Smith kept the men occupied, stowing wood and water in the hold, but an atmosphere of mischief pervaded the ship.⁴²

It had been over four months since the Levant sailed from the United States, and many of the sailors took this opportunity to release their pent up tensions. A few hours after arriving at Anger the majority of the crew was intoxicated. Four of the "ship's boys," youngsters brought on board to learn seamanship, got hold of large quantities of liquor and became excessively rowdy. Their rambunctiousness increased until one of them threw a belaying pin at an unsuspecting marine corporal, and all were clapped into the brig. And the spree was not confined to the seamen. Higgins, Lieutenant Heilman's drinking partner from Rio, returned from town obnoxiously drunk, completely forgetting his pledge to the Captain.⁴³ Guthrie's involvement in all of these celebrations was mostly confined to locking up the miscreants. He spent his free time in port writing a letter to his daughter Annette.⁴⁴

The Levant got under way with eleven sailors manacled to the floor of the brig. The prisoners were released once the ship was safely at sea. After three weeks sailing among the islands of the East Indies in calm winds, the ship entered the open waters of the South China Sea. Around the middle of April the men spotted a Chinese junk in the distance. Junks were peculiar vessels, with large, bulky hulls and woven mats for sails. Most of them had eyes painted on their bows which were thought to give the vessels the power of sight.⁴⁵ In spite of the appearance of more Chinese vessels, Hong Kong

was still a good distance away. The officers of the Levant concentrated on getting the ship and crew in top condition. Guthrie and Lieutenant Colvocoress examined the ship's "small arms" (the cutlasses, pikes, pistols, and muskets) and found only a few defects. The carpenter mended the wooden carriage of the number two gun, no doubt damaged during practice firing. Meanwhile, the sailors exercised at boarding (capturing another ship by hand-to-hand combat) and pistol firing, in preparation for any skirmishes with the Orientals.⁴⁶ By the end of the voyage from Anger, the rawest recruits could fight like veterans with all manner of weapons.

The mainland of China was still below the horizon when the Levant received a pilot from the offshore Ladrone Islands. As the vessel headed into Canton Bay several tall mountains came into view, and soon the eager crew perceived the far away shoreline. A full day's sailing brought the ship into the Lyemun Pass, between the island of Hong Kong and the mainland. There they anchored for two days, mending sails and washing the ship. On May 12 the Levant proceeded to the anchorage at Victoria--the city of Hong Kong.⁴⁷

CHINA AND THE ATTACK ON THE BARRIER FORTS

There was something about the Orient that enchanted Europeans, stirring up visions of haughty savages hoarding incredible riches. Since the time of Marco Polo, Westerners had sought to tap the wealth of the Indies, but not until the sixteenth century did European merchant ships discover a sea route to the East. With the discovery came a long series of attempts to establish free trade with the Chinese. In 1557 the Portuguese set up a trading post on the western shore of the Bay of Canton, later naming the town Macao. After that the disdainful Manchu government refused any other contact with Western merchants until 1685. In that year the Chinese emperor opened the city of Canton for trade with England. British commerce there grew and in the early nineteenth century the East Indies Company demanded free trade with Shanghai as well. When the Chinese refused, fighting broke out between the two countries which developed into the Opium War. The English won an easy victory and in 1842 forced the Emperor to sign the Treaty of Nanking, opening five new ports and surrendering Hong Kong to British rule.⁴⁸

United States trade with China began in 1784, when the merchant ship Empress of China sailed from New York to Canton. As the volume of American shipping increased the government took steps to protect the merchants and vessels. The State Department established a consulate at Canton, and the Navy began sending detachments of ships to patrol the China coast. In 1843 Caleb Cushing, the first American commissioner in China, negotiated the Treaty of Wanghia, allowing United States trade in the five British ports. Two years later the Secretary of the Navy organized the East Indies Squadron on a permanent

basis.⁴⁹

When the Levant arrived at Hong Kong, the rest of the Squadron was still en route to China. The San Jacinto had stopped at Singapore, where Commodore James Armstrong assumed command of the station from Joel Abbott. She was due to arrive any day. The third vessel making up the force had only recently left from Norfolk, Virginia. It would be five months before the sloop Portsmouth joined the other ships. The Vandalia sailed from home when the Levant relieved her, but until the San Jacinto brought further orders Smith could only wait in port, resting his crew and servicing his ship.⁵⁰

Hong Kong harbor was tranquil at this time of year, when a calm settled over the area between the winter and summer monsoons.⁵¹ During these sunny days the sailors and officers worked at repairing the Levant. They tarred down all the rigging to prevent rot, and checked the spars for flaws. For several weeks, they scraped the hull and masts, then gave the ship a fresh coat of paint. When the vessel was like new again, Captain Smith had John Bowring, the governor of Hong Kong, on board as his guest.⁵²

For the first time since leaving New York, the seamen received "liberty" to go ashore. Half of them assembled on deck, where the purser gave each man about eight dollars "liberty money," then the ship's boats carried them across the harbor to the city. For two days those left on the Levant waited impatiently for their shipmates to return so they would get their turn to leave. Most sailors spent their holiday in varying degrees of intoxication, returning unwillingly from town with painful hangovers. Six men hid themselves in the crowded city and were never seen again.⁵³

Early in June the San Jacinto sailed into port and anchored near the Levant, which greeted her with a thirteen gun salute. When the flagship was

safely moored, Captain Smith sent a boat to her with the deserter he had taken on at Cape Town.⁵⁴ Summer was beginning in China, bringing in heavy winds and gales from the southeast. On June 15th the barometer dropped and a typhoon descended on the harbor. The crews quickly prepared their vessels for the storm, taking down upper masts and securing boats. For a week a powerful wind blew, often accompanied by lightening and rain, then subsided as quickly as it had begun. Luckily, Hong Kong caught only the edge of the typhoon, suffering very little damage.⁵⁵ With Commodore Armstrong's arrival the Levant began her duties as part of the Squadron, and as soon as the typhoon passed Smith received his first orders. "You will afford to his excellency Peter Parker, our commissioner to China...a conveyance to Shanghai," the directive read, "touching at such intermediate ports as he may desire to visit." On June 30, Mr. Parker, his family, and assistants came on board the sloop. As the ship sailed from Hong Kong the next day, the Chinese boatment in the harbor saluted it with a concert, played on drums and gongs.⁵⁶

The duties of the East Indies Squadron were primarily to protect American ships, citizens, and property, and to keep up good relations with the Chinese government. The diplomatic corps had no control over the Squadron's movements. Consuls and commissioners could only request naval assistance, but usually the Commodore complied. Commissioner Parker was in China to negotiate a revision of the Wanghia Treaty, to increase U.S. trading rights. He wanted to use the ships of the Squadron for transportation and to impress the Orientals with the strength of America's armed forces. He would have preferred making his tour of the port cities in the San Jacinto, but had to be content with the diminutive Levant.⁵⁷

Swatow was the first treaty port north of Hong Kong, but Parker had no need to stop there, so the Levant continued on to Amoy. In a few short days, the ship took on a pilot and stood in to the anchorage at that city. The American consul visited Parker on board during a heavy thunderstorm, and the taoutai, or imperial intendant, came to the ship to exchange greetings. When official business was concluded, the Levant headed north again, this time for Foochow. Arriving at the mouth of the Min River in the late afternoon, the sloop anchored until high tide. Parker and his assistants went up to the city in the cutter. At two A.M. several Chinese boats towed the warship up river, where she remained for about two weeks while Parker met with Caleb Jones, the consul there. On July 13 Jones visited the ship and inspected the sailors at their guns.⁵⁸ Lieutenants Heilman and Higgins spent the afternoon drinking. Heilman became rowdy and the other officer consumed so much liquor that he was sick for five days. Guthrie went ashore to see the sights and shop. He found a variety of tea brands available in the city.⁵⁹ At 4 o'clock on the morning of July 24th, the Levant left Foochow with the flood tide and headed out to sea. After a short stop at Ningpo they sailed into the broad mouth of the Yangtze River. A pilot came on board and the steamer Confucius towed the ship up the Woosung River, a tributary of the Yangtze, to Shanghai.⁶⁰

The Levant's long stay at Shanghai was marked by discontent. For over two months the sloop lay at anchor. Parker was busy meeting with Chinese Diplomats, trying in vain to work out a treaty agreement, but on board the ship most men passed the time in relative idleness. They had completed all necessary repairs while in Hong Kong so that now, besides occasional inspections, their duties were strictly routine. In the typical inactivity on a warship in port, boredom quickly led to bickering and homesickness.⁶¹

Lieutenant Guthrie had been an unwilling member of the cruise from the start, but during the hot summer months in China his unhappiness became overpowering. Naturally he missed his family, and his concern for their safety increased at this time of year when Yellow Fever often swept through American coastal towns. The only communication between himself and home was by letter, which usually went overland via the English mail, and it took six months to receive a reply to any inquiry.⁵² The climate of China was singularly unhealthy. Unsanitary conditions and humid weather caused widespread illness in the Squadron. Shanghai itself was situated on low ground, making it worse than most ports. The river water, the only drinking water available, was filled with waste and refuse from the city, and was sometimes brackish as well. Although the ships' doctors treated it to remove impurities, it often caused diarrhea, dysentery, or chills. Even for those who avoided serious maladies, slight illness frequently caused discomfort and annoyance.⁵³

In addition to these grievences, Guthrie was sorely tried by the Navy in general. After twenty years service he felt his career was taking him nowhere. "My chances here seem to grow slimmer and slimmer every day," he complained bitterly. Other lieutenants who had served just as long were executive officers by this time, and Guthrie resented holding the inferior position of a "watch keeper."⁶⁴ The problem was simple. In a Navy of less than fifty active ships, there were limits to the number of captains and first lieutenants required. Until another executive resigned or was promoted, there were no places to fill. So even though Guthrie might have merited a higher grade, he could not assume it. He probably understood the reasons behind the apparent slight, but with other things, it served as a constant irritant, making his life in China miserable.⁶⁵

Around the time the Levant arrived at Shanghai, Guthrie determined to leave the East Indies Station. He therefore sent a formal request to the Secretary of the Navy, asking to be sent to the Mediterranean, West Indies, or some other area of service "which [would] not combine inferior occupation with the pernicious influences of an ungenial climate." As his health was endangered, he added, a leave of absence to the United States would be the only alternative to transfer. As required by naval etiquette, Guthrie gave the letter to his commander to read and forward. Then, assuming it would reach the Secretary in three months or so, the hopeful Lieutenant made the best of a bad situation, spending most of his free time shopping in Shanghai.⁶⁶

In the hot, cramped quarters of the wardroom, the other officers were cranky too. Higgins and Heilman became hopeless alcoholics, repeatedly reporting back from liberty drunk and remaining hungover for days afterwards. Finally, after breaking another promise to Captain Smith, Higgins resigned his commission and left the ship, rather than face a courtmartial and dismissal. Lieutenant Heilman became friends with the assistant surgeon, A. L. Gibson, and these two asked the Captain's permission to move from the overcrowded wardroom into the steerage. In most ships the steerage was used as midshipmen's quarters, but the Levant carried no midshipman. Smith's clerk, Samuel Coale, lived in one room there, and the other was used for storage. The Captain refused to clear the unoccupied room, explaining that the two officers belonged in the wardroom, the quarters designated for their rank.⁶⁷

Disappointment over this refusal contributed to problems among the officers. Lieutenant Heilman's drinking problem grew worse. A couple of weeks later he drank himself into a stupor while keeping the morning watch, staggered from the

main deck down to his cabin and passed out without being relieved. On Smith's advise he too sent in his resignation. Around the same time Gibson and the Captain had another argument. The surgeon's watch had been stolen in early August, and all attempts to find it failed. Lieutenant Colvocoress received an anonymous letter proposing to return the watch if the thief was pardoned. Gibson and Smith agreed to the terms and the unknown mediator made the necessary arrangements. However, when Gibson had his timepiece back he suggested that they try to apprehend the thief. Smith reminded him of the pledge, whereupon Gibson denied having given his word and declared he would not honor it for a thief in any case. After a lengthy argument, Smith ended by refusing to help the surgeon. By the end of September the Levant had lost two officers. Guthrie and Gibson remained on board but both were sick of the ship and station.⁶⁸

Whenever possible Guthrie went ashore and browsed through the shops in Shanghai, buying presents for Louisa and the children. He sent home bolts of silk, satin, nankeen, and other fabrics to be made into clothing for the entire family. Besides purchasing a large number of souvenirs and chinaware, he was always on the lookout for bargains of any kind.⁶⁹ Meanwhile he waited patiently, assuming his request for transfer was on the way to Washington. But when the San Jacinto arrived at Shanghai in mid-September, Armstrong had Guthrie's letter with him. He had not yet forwarded it to the Secretary. Soon after the ship anchored Guthrie received a message to report to the flagship. The Lieutenant took a ship's boat and presented himself at the Commodore's cabin, where the older officer tried to dissuade him from sending his letter, saying it would harm his career. Guthrie replied that he considered his request "no crime or disgrace," and insisted that it be sent. So the Commodore forwarded the letter with a note stating that Guthrie's health was perfect and the transfer should

be denied. On reboarding the Levant, Guthrie realized the rashness of his action. But his feelings had not changed, and he determined to return home, even if it meant retiring from the Navy. He even enjoyed the prospect of a different occupation in which he could buy a house and live with his family.⁷⁰

After the uninteresting and unhappy sojourn in Shanghai, most of the Levant's crew were happy to receive orders south. On October 19 the ship weighed anchor and sailed for Hong Kong, carrying orders for the sloop-of-war Portsmouth which had recently arrived there from the United States. The officers and crew expected no more excitement in the southern port than they had found in Shanghai, but when the Levant reached Hong Kong, they discovered trouble brewing between the Chinese and English. Chinese authorities had captured the English boat Arrow smuggling opium into Canton, the trading center up river from Hong Kong, and had summarily beheaded the Chinese crew. In retribution for the brutal attack on English property, the Governor of Hong Kong sent a body of British troops to Canton. Commander Andrew Hull Foote, Captain of the Portsmouth, learning of the Englishmen's plans, took a gang of sailors and marines up to the city to protect Americans there. When the Levant arrived from Shanghai, Smith hastened to join Foote.⁷¹

Sailing up the Pearl River from Hong Kong, the sloop soon reached Whampoa, thirteen miles below Canton. Between the two cities a number of islands divided the river into several narrow streams. The main one leading up to Canton was the Whampoa Channel, and this passage was closely guarded by four Chinese citadels, known as the Barrier Forts. Smith left the ship at anchor, taking eighty men in boats up to Canton to reinforce Foote. The British had already attacked and taken the Chinese forts across the river from the city and they were preparing to launch an offensive against Canton itself.⁷²

The main part of the city was off limits to foreigners, whom the Manchus feared would corrupt the citizenry with Western ways. European merchants and diplomats lived outside of town, in a foreign section built to accommodate them. Each country had a "factory" in this area where its import firms did business with Chinese dealers. Yeh Min-ch'en, the Governor and imperial commissioner, hated all Europeans, doing all in his power to disrupt their commerce and terrorize their citizens.⁷³ With these aims in mind, Yeh refused to protect Americans during the crisis with the English, even though the United States force remained strictly neutral. If Americans were hurt, he told their consul, Oliver Perry, the Englishmen would have to bear the responsibility. So Smith and Foote organized their men into a battalion to guard the United States factory, knowing that Yeh would use any opportunity to harass or attack the foreign section.⁷⁴

The day after Smith's men arrived, the British opened fire on the Governor's palace inside the city's walls, and the next afternoon took the residence by storm. Many of the Americans used this chance to see the interior of the city, but the naval force stayed out of the way to avoid any semblance of aggression.⁷⁵ An incident occurred, however, that almost pulled the United States into the conflict. Lieutenant Guthrie, who had accompanied Smith to Canton, was down at the river in front of the factories on the day the British made their attack. He was just sending off two boats, carrying a number of drunken sailors back to the Levant, when James Keenan, the American consul from Hong Kong, hurried out to speak to him. Keenan asked if he could get transportation down river in one of the boats. Unaware of the consul's real plan, Guthrie agreed and as the two vessels, the ship's whale boat and gig, pulled away from the shore, he returned to his duties at the encampment. When the boats passed the spot where the

English troops had landed, Keenan had the whale boat take him ashore. Then, in spite of protest from Coale, Captain Smith's clerk in charge of the gig, the consul armed himself with a pistol and cutlass and left the boat. On his request, one of the inebriated seamen accompanied him, carrying an American flag. Both men passed through the breach in the city wall and made their way to Yeh's palace. They remained there for most of the afternoon, the flag in full view, and before leaving Keenan turned and fired his pistol at a nearby crowd of Chinamen. When Captain Foote heard about the episode he issued a hurried circular forbidding American involvement in the conflict. Fortunately, the whole affair seemed to have escaped Yeh's notice, passing without causing much difficulty, but Keenan was later dismissed for his indiscretion.⁷⁶

For two weeks after the British attack the American force in Canton maintained an uneasy neutrality while the English continued shelling the city. Governor Yeh seemed to be trying his best to start trouble with the United States forces. In early November he issued a proclamation offering one hundred taels (thirty dollars) for every foreigner's head brought in to the Canton authorities. Commissioner Parker demanded that he change the wording of the decree to exclude Americans, but Yeh ignored his pleas. Soon afterwards a Chinese sniper fired at the sailors guarding the foreign factories. Yeh refused to take responsibility for any attacks on Americans. His only recommendation was that they leave the city all together. Most of the Americans in Canton, fed up with the Governor's arrogance, were secretly applauding the British for their military action.⁷⁷

The San Jacinto arrived in Whampoa from Shanghai on November 8. Foote went on board to confer with his Commodore, and Armstrong, insisting on placating

the Chinese if possible, ordered him to remove the naval force from Canton. Almost all Americans in the city had evacuated anyway, so the sailors were no longer needed. Foote, with Assistant-surgeon Gibson from the Levant, headed up to the city to remove Smith and his men. But as they rowed up Whampoa Channel the first barrier fort fired two shots at their boat, one landing quite near, the other ricocheting past. The men waved the flag and Captain Foote fired his revolver at the fort, ordering the oarsmen to pull on. When the craft came within range of the next fortress it met them with a salvo of cannon balls and grape shot. The Chinese continued firing even after the boat turned back toward the anchorage.⁷⁹

The next day the Cum Fa, a privately owned steamer, went to Canton and brought back the sailors and marines, leaving only a small force under Captain Smith to reassure the citizens there. But that afternoon the forts attacked another ship's boat, killing a seaman from the San Jacinto.⁸⁰ Commodore Armstrong determined to silence the Barrier Forts before they caused any more damage. His own ship was too heavy to ascend the channel, so he transferred its captain to the Levant, himself going on board the Portsmouth. Steamers towed the two sloops up river to the forts. Before the Levant came within range of them she went aground in the muddy bottom of the passage, leaving her companion ship to face the batteries alone. But with his Dahlgren guns, the newest, most accurate cannon of that time, Foote had no trouble. By dark he had silenced the first barrier fort and greatly weakened the others. The Levant floated off the bar during the night and came up to support the other ship, but the Chinese remained quiet all the next day.⁸¹

Since the forts showed no signs of aggression and Armstrong was ill, he left the two ships under Foote's charge and returned to Shampoa. There

he wrote a letter to Governor Yeh, demanding an explanation within twenty-four hours for the unwarranted attack on his men. Smith returned from Canton with the rest of the naval battalion and resumed command of the Levant. Foote's orders were to remain at anchor in front of the forts and take any necessary steps to prevent their renewing hostilities. When, on November 19, he discovered the Chinese setting up new batteries, he received Armstrong's permission to storm the strongholds and attempt to capture them.

That evening, when word of the plan spread, the crew of the Levant looked forward to the attack with undisguised elation. Many of the men had never been in action before, and the idea of striking a blow for their country filled them with excitement. Lieutenant Guthrie took one of the ship's boats, and under cover of night made a reconnaissance of the approaches to the fortifications. When he returned Captain Smith chose a landing party from among his men and officers, picking Guthrie to command one of the divisions. ⁸³ At daybreak Foote signalled the Levant and both vessels commenced firing at the first barrier and Fiddler's Reach forts. On board the Levant the eager sailors waiting to charge the forts watched as the guns' crews shot large holes in the granite walls, urging them on with wild cheers. At first the forts returned the fire, sending round shot flying into the hull and through the rigging. One ball struck the number seven gun, wounding a seaman named Riley, but within an hour the Barrier Fort ceased fire. ⁸⁴

Around nine A.M. the boats landed under cover of the ships' guns and the force of 286 sailors and marines formed into "marching order" on the shore below the batteries. After wading through a creek, holding their cartridge boxes over their heads and dragging a howitzer behind them, the officers led the men in a charge against the rear of the Barrier Fort. The Chinese fled

from the interior in full retreat over the surrounding rice fields, and the Americans took possession of the stronghold. They remained there all day, spiking the guns and burning their carriages. After completing this task there was not much to do but wait until dark, the famished men feasting on stray chickens and a captured hog, which officers and sailors devoured half raw. Lieutenant Guthrie passed part of the afternoon examining the construction of the citadel and making a small sketch of it in his notebook. At three o'clock the next morning they quietly left the fort and returned to the boats, but the Chinese discovered their movements and kept up a heavy fire while the crews pulled back to their ships.⁸⁵

After a hasty breakfast on board the two sloops, the boats set out again, towed by the Cum Fa, up toward Fiddler's Reach, the second barrier fort. They landed under a hail of roundshot, one ball striking one of the Portsmouth's boats, killing three men. The approach to the fort was a narrow embankment running through the rice paddies, but fearing enemy fire the men left the roadway and marched through the fields. Arrow-headed rockets were landing all around them as the men ran through the mud towards Fiddler's Reach, but the Levant's accurate firing silenced most of the fort's guns. In less than half an hour the men charged through the breach the ships' guns had made in the wall and forced the Chinese to withdraw. The sailors immediately manned the remaining cannon of the batteries and turned them on the Island Fort across the river. That afternoon the soldiers there exploded the powder magazine and abandoned the place. A party of American marines landed and took possession of that citadel as well. When the Island Fort was secured the boats brought the rest of the landing force

There, where Guthrie and the others spent a cold, hungry night sitting around fires discussing present and past glories.⁸⁶

The marines and sailors were back at their boats again before dawn, and after a stirring address by Captain Foote they headed across the water to the Square Fort, the last of the Whampoa Channel strongholds. "In cheers and hurrahs the boats pushed on, under a brisk fire from the fort," Guthrie recounted, "and though the shot flew round in all directions, fortunately no man was killed." The force landed directly under the walls and with another loud yell charged through the gun ports, beating the Chinese back before them. At sunrise the American flag waved over all of the Barrier Forts. For the rest of the morning the victors demolished the interior of the fort. After that they left and proceeded down the river in perfect martial order, while the crew of the Portsmouth "manned the rigging" and gave three resounding cheers in formal tribute to their heroic shipmates.⁸⁷ Guthrie returned on board the Levant with two prizes: a small brass cannon and a Chinese flag he had pulled down with his own hands after entering one of the forts. During the next week the officers supervised as the sailors mined the foundations of the strongholds and levelled them to the ground.⁸⁸

The assault on the Chinese fortifications had been a complete success, Foote and his men capturing all four citadels with only seven men killed. Admiral Seymour, commander of the British naval force called the attack "one of the handsomest engagements he had ever seen," and Commissioner Parker praised the landing force for "vindicat[ing] the honor of our flag..." American citizens in Canton had nothing but approbation for the Squadron. Although a little known battle in the history of United States armed forces, this first display of naval power in China gained the Americans considerable

prestige in the eyes of the Orientals.⁸⁹

When the Barrier Forts were completely destroyed, Armstrong wrote to Yeh demanding assurance that Americans would be safe from further attack, and the Governor promised to remain friendly in the future. After the Levant had repaired all damages incurred in the fight she moved up river to Canton, as a refuge for American citizens in case the Chinese changed their minds. On the night of December 14, Guthrie and the rest of the crew stood on deck to watch a great fire which raged through the foreign section of the city. Rumors spread that Governor Yeh had ordered the destruction of the trading center, and in fact the flames were solely concentrated around the factories. Crewmen from the Levant spent the next day loading the Americans and their belongings on the ship, for the consulate and factory were burned to the ground. Seeing no reason to remain longer at Canton, the sloop worked her way back down to Hong Kong. There the battle-weary sailors enjoyed two months of relaxation in clear, pleasant weather.⁹⁰

Early in February Lieutenant Guthrie received a reply to the letter he had written back in September. It contained the Secretary's curt refusal to his request for transfer. This unwelcome news left the officer bitterly disappointed. "I certainly never wish my children to enter the Army or Navy," he wrote home shortly afterwards, "one fool in the family is quite enough." Becoming increasingly fed up with the service and his shipmates, Guthrie tried to distract his thoughts elsewhere. He and Captain Foote became friends. Both officers were deeply religious, and Foote shared Guthrie's dislike of the East Indies Station. The Lieutenant also spent many of his free days in town, where he enjoyed the society of the naval storekeeper, and acquaintance from Portsmouth, Virginia.⁹¹

After the excitement of the late battle, the remainder of the cruise seemed frightfully dull. With the coming of Spring the Levant sailed for Manila, where a number of seriously ill seamen received a passage home. The hot, humid climate of the Phillipines increased the sickness among the crew, and soon after leaving smallpox broke out on board. Guthrie and the other officers were not infected, but by early April there were twenty-seven cases of the dreaded disease. Upon leaving Manila the Levant proceeded to Shanghai, where she went into dry-dock to have her copper repaired. The ship and crew remained there in relative inactivity until June. In the meantime the entire Squadron was suffering from a multitude of diseases. Armstrong wrote to the Secretary, explaining that he was near death, and asked to be relieved. He begged the Navy Department to send the Levant and San Jacinto their orders home.⁹²

In September, when the ship was back in Hong Kong, Guthrie made an appeal to the new Secretary of the Navy, hoping that gentleman would prove more agreeable to his wishes. This time the Lieutenant asked for a leave of absence to return home at his own expense, and Captain Smith forwarded the request with no additional comment.⁹³ But even before his letter reached Washington, the U.S. Steamer Minnesota arrived at Hong Kong to replace the Levant. A few weeks later the sloop received her orders to return to the United States. A thrill of joy pulsated through the little ship and the men set to work with enthusiasm, preparing to sail.⁹⁴ Guthrie packed up crates of souvenirs and other purchases to send to America before he left, and wrote an exuberant letter apprising his family of the happy news. On December 7, 1857 the Boatswain and his mates called "all hands up anchor for home," and shortly after the Levant sailed from China with a fair wind.⁹⁵

The sloop-of-war was at sea four months, stopping briefly at Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro before she arrived at Boston Navy Yard. It had been two and a half years since they had left from New York harbor, so the officers and crew were anxious to leave the ship and rejoin their families.⁹⁶ Guthrie received orders detaching him from the Levant three days after their arrival. Immediately setting out for Georgetown, he enjoyed a happy reunion with his wife and children. Before long the Secretary sent him new orders to the Naval Observatory. With the prospect of many months at home with family and friends, working again as assistant to Matthew Maury, the unhappiness of the cruise quickly faded. He presented the captured Chinese flag to his native state, North Carolina, whereupon the legislature, in "high appreciation" for his bravery and patriotism, voted him a sword of honor. Guthrie came to feel pride and satisfaction in the gallant role he had played at the Barrier Forts, and although he was destined to leave the navy four years later to join the Confederate forces, the action he saw while on board the Levant became one of the high points of his career.⁹⁷

GLOSSARY

Backstays--ropes supporting the masts from the rear.

Braces--ropes used to change the angle of the yards, thus the sails.

Bowsprit--a spar extending forward from the ship's bow.

Bowsprit cap--the tip end of the bowsprit.

Deck duty--see "watch".

Flying jib boom--a horizontal spar on the end of the bowsprit used to support the flying jib, a triangular sail in front of the foremast.

Grapeshot--a cannon charge composed of many small balls instead of one large ball.

Heave to--to stop the motion of a ship through the water by careful adjustment of the sails.

Leeward--the direction towards which the wind is blowing, downwind.

Lighter--a barge which is used to load or unload ships.

Quarter Deck--the stern section of the main deck, sometimes raised.

Reef--to reef sails is to reduce the area of sail exposed to the wind by tacking the sail partly up to the yard and lashing it in place.

Sheets--ropes which pull the sails down from the yards, opening them to the wind.

Shrouds--ropes which support the masts laterally, and also serve as ladders for the men going aloft.

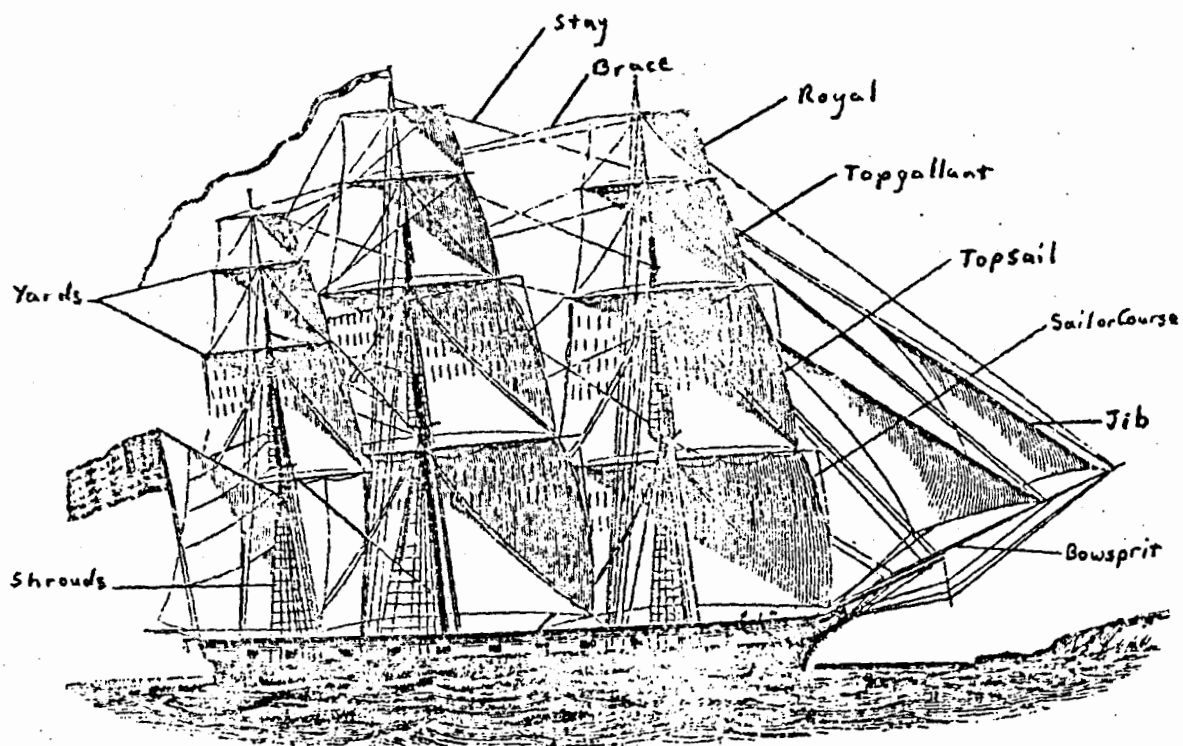
Spars--masts, yards, or other wooden supports for the sails.

Stays--ropes supporting the masts from the front.

Taffrail--rail at the stern of a ship.

Watch--a four hour period in which an officer and a portion of the crew are on duty on the deck. Officers and crew were rotated, each keeping watch about twice a day.

Yards--horizontal spars, attached to the masts, to spread the sails and support them.



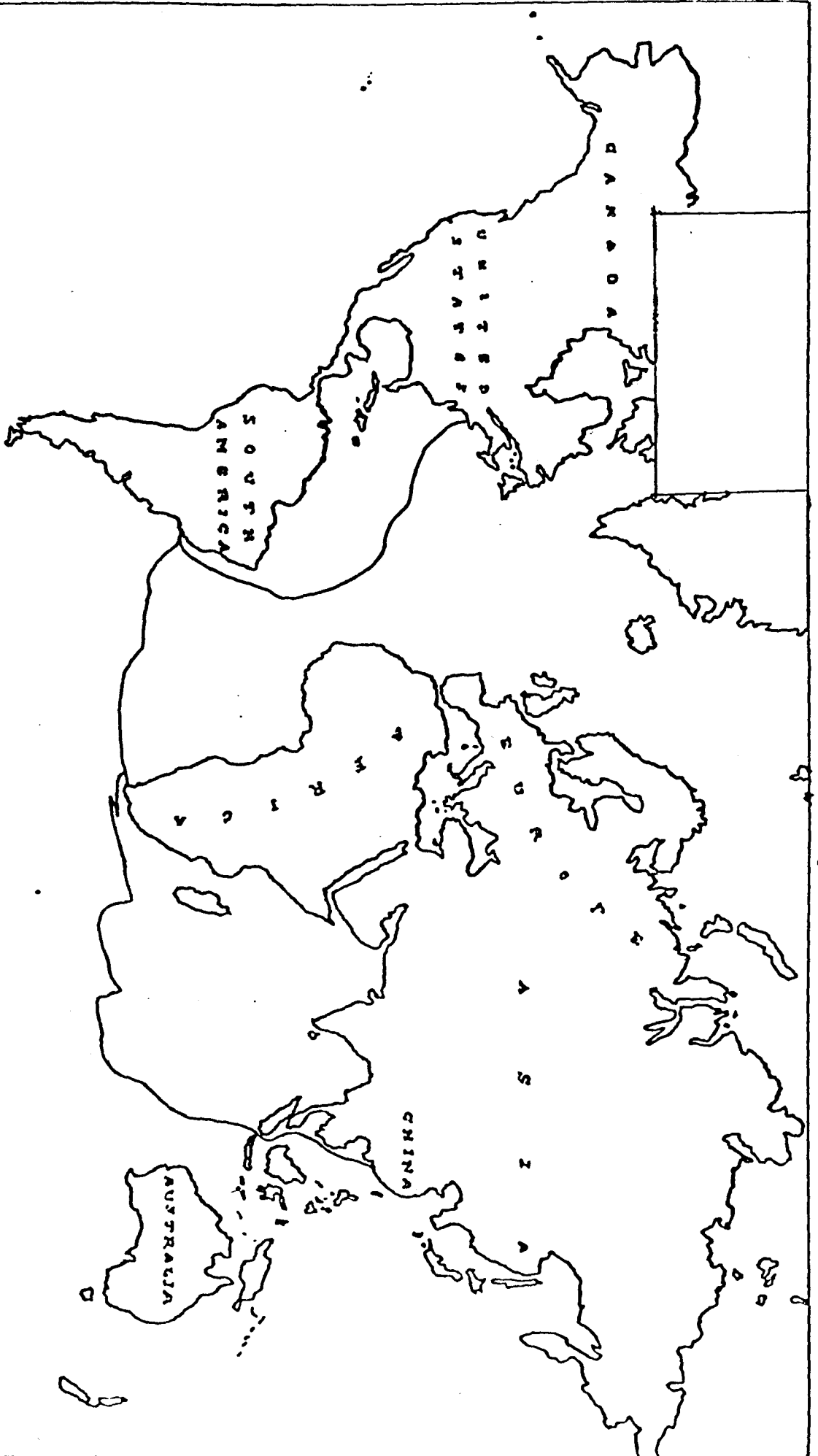
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Sloop 792T - 150 seamen

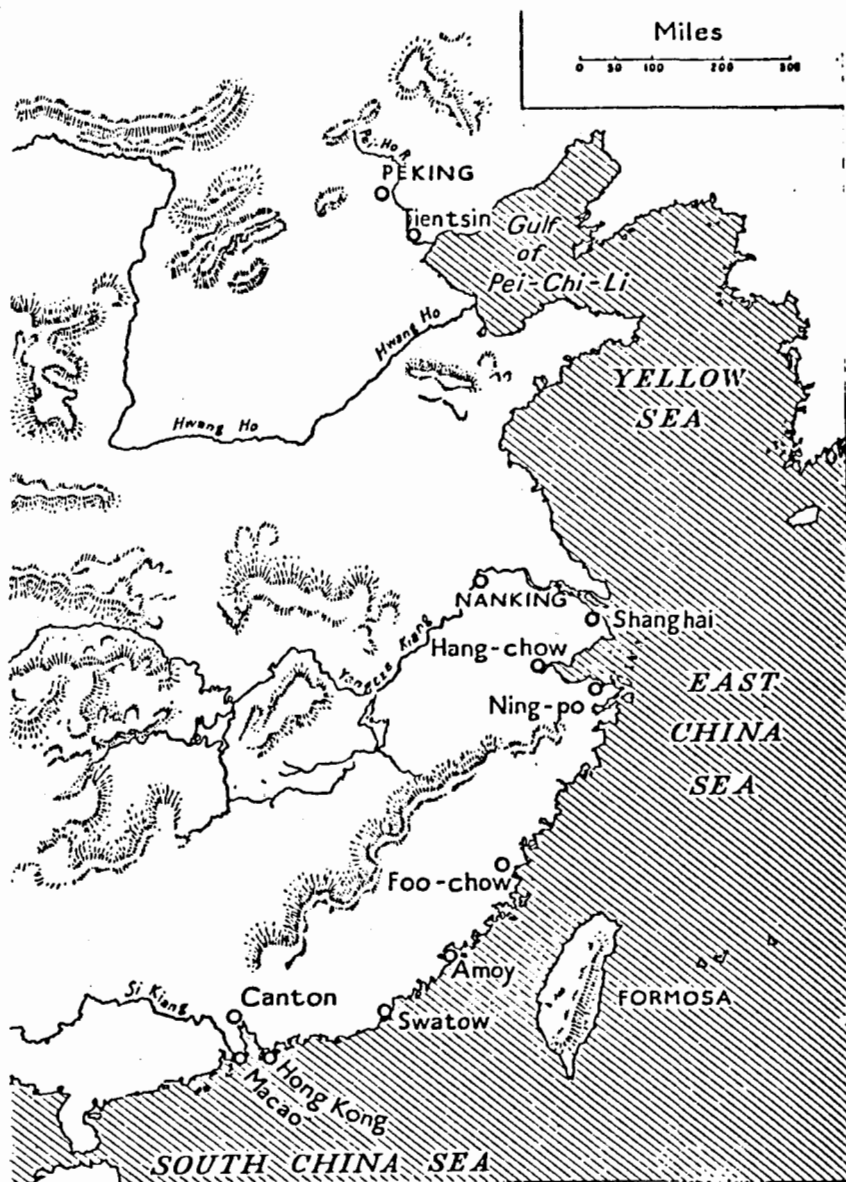
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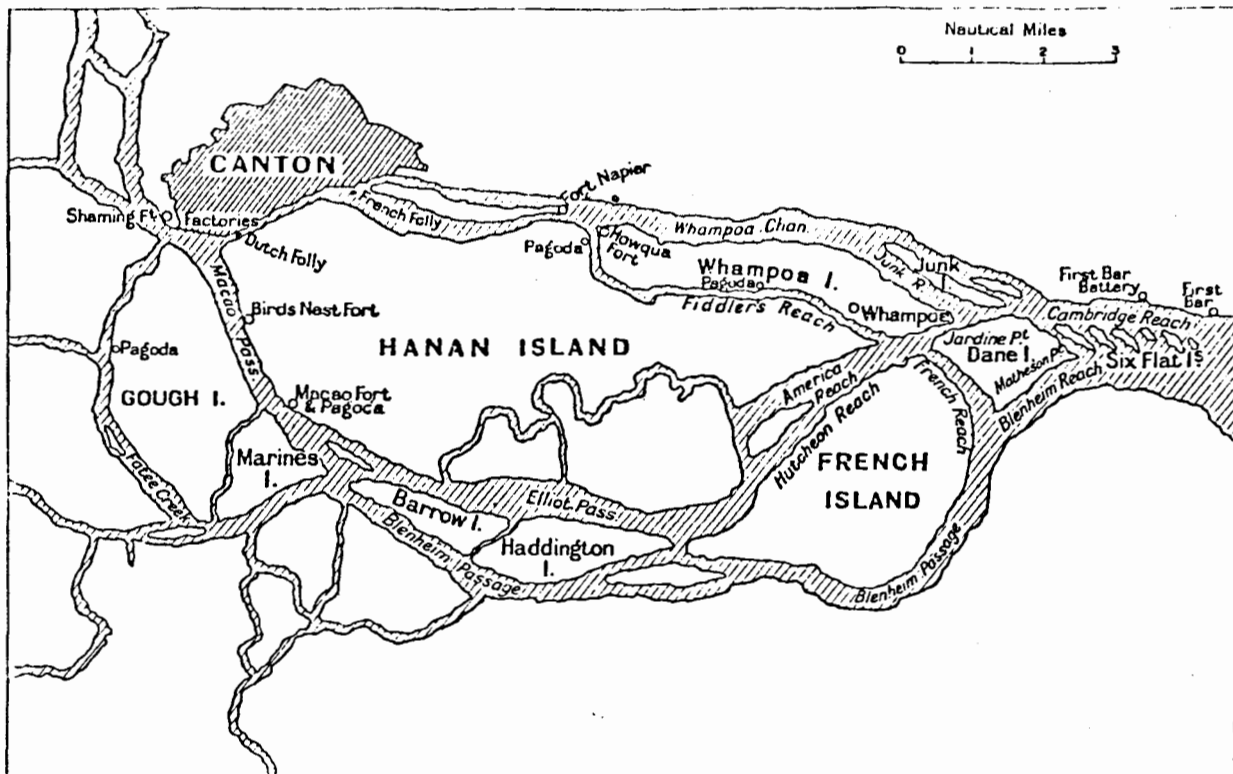
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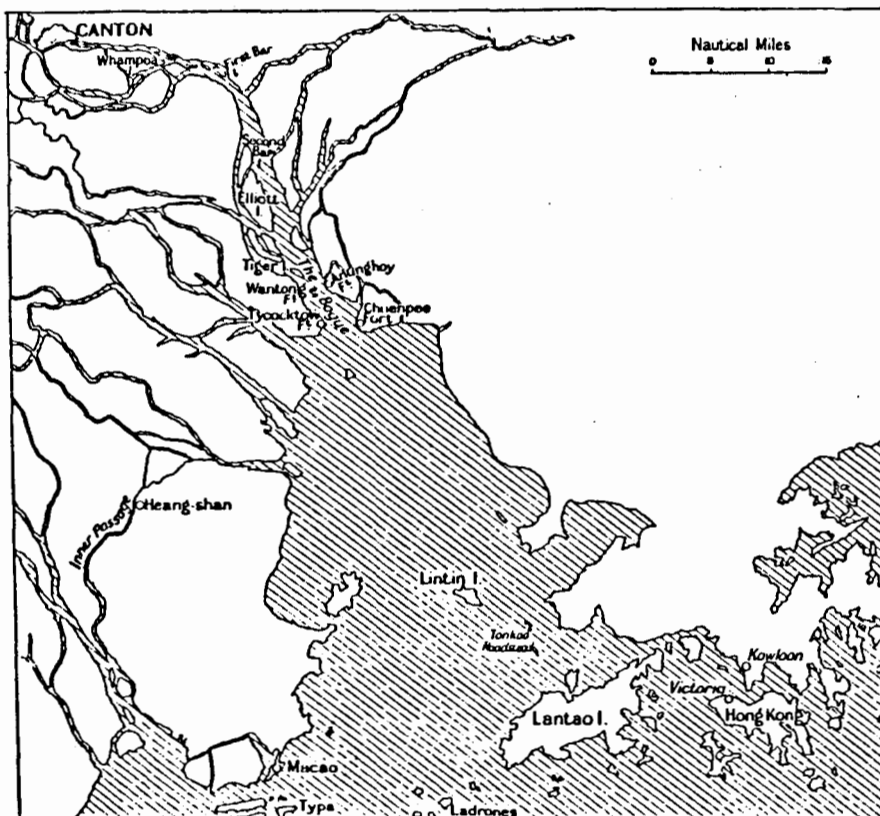
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Guthrie, John Julius. Journal Written on board the U.S. Columbia, 1838-1839. Record Group 45. A diary kept by JYG. Very much personal information: his reactions to events, places he visited and so forth.

Guthrie, John Julius. Journal Written on board the U.S. John Adams, 1834-1836. Record Group 45. A diary kept by JYG of his first cruise as a young midshipman. Very interesting comments on his attitudes towards the Navy, places he visited, etc.

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Daniel, R. P. Medical Journal Written on board the U.S. San Jacinto, 1855-1858. Record Group 45. Deals mostly with cases he examined on the flagship, but gives a little information on the climate and general health conditions in China at that time.

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Guthrie Papers in the Possession of Raymond Guthrie Downing, New York City.

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Guthrie. Miscellaneous Guthrie Family Papers. These include letters written by other family member, often containing information on JJG and his family. Also some bills and other papers from the rest of the family.

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