

**Report of Col. David Jewett,
Commander of the privateer Heroína,
to the
Supreme Director of Buenos Aires
February 1st, 1821**

What follows is a transcription of the *Report* written by Colonel David Jewett to the Supreme Director at Buenos Aires in early 1821. Jewett was the commander of the Buenos Airean privateer, the *Heroína*, which had sailed the year before.¹

There are two important things that need to be recognised from this Report. Firstly that Jewett's *privateer* commission was to pursue Spanish vessels, not Portuguese ships as Buenos Aires was not at war with Portugal.

Secondly, and perhaps most importantly for the modern era, is that Col. Jewett makes no mention of the claim he made for the Falkland Islands in November, 1820. At the time that Col. Jewett made the claim, on behalf of the United Provinces of South America, doubt was leveled as to the true nature of his intentions.

After 1833, Buenos Aires would assert that Jewett was acting on their *Orders* when he staked the claim for the United Provinces. No such *Order* has ever been produced, and it is surprising, had such an instruction of the Buenos Airean Government really existed, that Col. Jewett did not inform Buenos Aires of the completion of his *Orders* in this *Report*.

Spelling errors have been left as they were found.

Roger Lorton 2013

¹ There are two common spellings of David Jewett's name. *Jewitt* is the spelling used by Fitzroy, Weddell and Greenhow and appears to accord with the signature on a letter to the Supreme Director of Buenos Aires in 1821. It was also the way that his father spelt the surname although other members of the same family used two 'e's. I have gone with '*Jewett*' purely because it has become the most commonly used and allows for easy checking of the available references.

Port Soledad, Falkland Islands
February 1st, 1821
On Board the Frigate Heroina

Your Excellency -

Embracing this the first and only opportunity, to announce the painful history of events which have followed in distressing and rapid succession, from our leaving the waters of La Plata, up to the present moment, impresses upon me a task that requires an able pen and a mind less torn by sufferings, and less occupied by the continued combination of factious and designing villainy:- but painful as the task is, and arduous, my duty demands it. I shall naught extenuate, nor aught set down in malice, in giving as concise a view of our past, and continued misfortunes, and present situations as circumstances will permit, reserving a more minute relation to a personal communication, if ever I am to have that honor.

A very few days after our departure from the river, we had to encounter a series of violent gales, and contrary winds, which caused the ship to leak in such a manner as to damage much of our stores, and to discover the want of that character amongst the principal officers, required to constitute the necessary energy and union, to ensure success in the important object of our enterprize. Added to which was the distressing situation of my second Major Adams a worthy and meritorious officer, who was never able to be brought on deck after lifting our anchor before the City, until he expired on the 26th day of May. The First Lieutenant, Mr. Joseph Hughes with a constitution worn out with debauchery, and a mind with depravity, was rather an instrument to facilitate that factious spirit which began to respire, than to afford the indispensable aid to subordination, that his station required. Nor was the inexperience of the 2nd Lieutenant, or the visionary and credulous nature of his character, fitted to correct the train of evils which daily arose, and his own weakness and ignorance led him to become, more, the inactive accessory than the vigilant opposer, to the grounds of succeeding evils. The 3^d, 4th and 5th Lieutenants destitute of the principles of duty seemed to have contented themselves in maintaining a neutrality, and without using their exertions to check a current of evils, which in the sequel would not only destroy the harmony, but the grand object of the expedition:- and left me without a single officer to give the necessary aid, either in timely checking those growing evils, or to prevent that contagion diffusing itself thro' a number of villains who have been discovered among the crew.

At a moment when the factious disposition of officers had given vent to the evil intentions of a part of the crew, the general cause of complaint was made as to the bad sailing of the ship, her leaking, and incapacity for a successful cruize, even previous to my arrival before the port of Rio Janeiro – off which to our inexpressible regret it was discovered, that the bad quality of our water casks, had lost by leakage, the greater part of our water, and would compel an immediate abandonment of that station for the necessary supply. It was thought best to proceed to the island of Trinidad, for that purpose, as a return to the River Plata would produce ruin and delay. On our arrival at that island it was found only possible to obtain a partial and very limited supply – which required the necessary quantity for further operations, to be obtained in some situation where the casks might be landed and repaired, and the bends and bows of the ship be caulked: under such distressing and imperious circumstances, it was viewed as indispensable to pursue a track across the Equator for the Northern Hemisphere, leaving the coast of Brazil, and seek the necessary supplies of water and repairs in some one of the Cape Verd Islands for which we accordingly proceeded. In this passage the restless and factious spirit of both officers and men, discontented with the sailing of the vessel and her leaking made it a pretext to combine among various of them to protest to me against the state of the ship, and to solicit or demand my going to the United States of America direct. Such an idea in movement I opposed as unnecessary, rash, and ruinous to the concern, and dishonorable in the extreme, and was so fortunate as to quiet, if not destroy, for that moment, the intention.

We pursued our northern destination until our arrival at the Cape Verd Islands, where with every vigilance possible we repaired as far as circumstances would permit, both Water Casks and hull of the vessel, and proceeded towards the coast of Spain; examining such vessels as we met (and could sail fast enough to speak) until the 27th day of July 1820 when we got sight of a heavy ship of war or strong armed ship at 10 o'clock in the morning and immediately made all sail in chase, which from the near equality of sailing, we were unable to come up with, until after midnight. Having myself received a hurt two days before, which disabled me from standing on the deck long at a time, I ordered the chase to be progressed with all possible sail, and to call me when within gun shot. I declared to the officers that in the event of her proving to be an enemies ship whatever her force it

was my intention to bring her to close action the moment I could lay my ship alongside and gave orders to clear the ship accordingly. On coming up with the chase, the weather being clear moon-light, we being to windward and within half musket shot, she from appearances confirmed the first opinion that she was a ship of war. - At this moment and before hailing, she fired a shot, which passed between the foremast and bowsprit end. Then I hailed her several times, to which at length received an indistinct answer, by some understood "*Portuguese.*" - I ordered him to send an officer and boat on board, which being repeated several times, and as often refused, I found it necessary to enforce the demand and assured him both in Spanish and English, that unless he complied I should fire into him, and being again refused, I ordered Lieut. Edwards to fire from the Fore Castle of the upper deck one gun across his fore-foot elevating the same, which was accordingly done, and as soon as fired, was returned from the ship with a full broadside of round grape and langrage musketry and repeated with a brisk fire, being then within a short pistol shot distance - I ordered the batteries to be opened upon her which was continued for the term of fifteen minutes close action, when she was silenced for the space of two or three minutes - hearing cries and groans on board of her, I immediately ordered a cessation of firing, supposing her to have struck, when she directly resumed the action, then at half pistol-shot distance which I as soon returned with two broadsides, when they cried for quarter, stating that they had struck on which I despatched Lieut. Edwards and the necessary officers and men to take charge for the night; she proved to be, as you will perceive by the documents herewith presented, the ship Carlota of 22 heavy guns besides small arms, with a crew of 62 men and 14 passengers from La Bahia de todos os Santos bound to Lisbon with a full cargo. Under all considerations I officered and manned the ship, keeping her in company; and on examining the state and condition of our supplies, I considered it indispensably necessary to take a direction through the Azores, Madeira, Canaries and Cape Verd Islands, to the Southern Hemisphere, and accordingly on the 6th day of August then in sight of Fayall, with light airs of winds and calms we continued our course to the South East for the Island of Madeira. At this time the greatest extent of our provisions was for eighty days, and much of that in bad condition & of bad quality, which, together with the still uncertain state of the Water Casks - the situation of the ship - the conduct of the officers - the distance from the place of our ultimate destination, with the want of any resources of credit or Orders for obtaining any supplies in any part of Europe or the United States rendering that impossible, together with the expiration of twelve days in which we could make but little progress, in connexion with the calms incidental to these latitudes at that season of the year, and the baffling winds, to be expected in the vicinity of the Islands thro' which we anticipated to pass - and the same to be looked for in crossing the Equator to the Southern Hemisphere, impelled me to make my course direct thro' the Cape Verd Islands - Hence to push with all possible despatch, keeping in Company the ship taken, and in case of securing a fortunate passage across the Equator, on reaching the coast of Brazil, should the provisions, and state of the ship permit, to remain on that station as long as possible, and accordingly made the best of our way for the Islands, with light and baffling winds and in consequence our advance but very slow. On the 12/13th August, 1820 began to unfold itself a dark and horrid complot of conspiracy for Murder, Robbery and Piracy - it was discovered and the proceedings, with the termination, as far as hitherto disclosed will be found detailed in the various documents that will be remitted by this opportunity.

I shall only briefly state, the short notice and manner by which I discovered and suppressed this daring & horrid attempt, and submit my conduct to that Government, whose Standard, by the assistance of Divine Providence, I have been permitted to protect, and save the lives of the few of her sons, who have been my companions in the painful & desperate crisis.

On the night of the 13th August when the fatal deed was to have been perpetuated, between twelve and one o'clock under the silence and darkness of night the champions had doomed all but the Assassin band to bleed. At the hour of Eleven o'clock all the officers with few exceptions were asleep and defenceless - confident security seemed to possess all - but myself. From Eight o'clock an inexplicable impression of some latent danger deprived me of sleep, and as usual at that hour, without undressing I reclined in my Cot, satisfied that the Centinels were on the alert and faithful, and strove to divest myself of what I considered a visionary impression, or an attack of lowness of spirits - but in vain - the impression at nine o'Clock was stronger than my reason, and I was impelled to rise, and in disguise went on deck, where to my surprise I saw Sailing Master Thomas leave the Gun deck forward without a hat, come on the Fore Castle, pass aft and down to the Cot of Mr. Hughes the 1st Lieutenant, and behind a blanket which was suspended for a curtain, remain some minutes whispering with Mr. Hughes from whence he went to the Ward Room. I then returned to my Cabin reflecting on the course of his visit, at an hour in which his duty did not call him to so singular an adventure. I remained until ten o'clock, when, in the disguise as before, I went on deck, where I again found Thomas sitting between the bows of the boats forward, without a hat, and several men moving on the forecastle, and near him, on his discovering me, he went below. With some encreased apprehension at such singular occurrences, I returned to my Cabin, where reflexion gave no relief - I remained there until twenty minutes before twelve o'clock, midnight, when again I

went upon deck, and found a perfect silence reigning thro' every part of the ship – I passed unobserved by the Officers or people on the Quarter Deck to the Starboard gangway, which appeared to me, to be without any person but myself, when a low voice said, Colonel be on your guard, your life will be attacked this night. In the same low voice, I asked at what hour, the voice replied in one hour – I asked who was at the head of such a conspiracy, the voice replied Mr. Thomas – I then asked who else, but got no reply – I searched for the person who might have given the information but found none. I instantly returned to my Cabin, armed myself, and immediately went on deck where the same silence existed as when I had left it. I called immediately the Captain and Lieutenant of the troops, and Lieutenant Carnelia, and instantly ordered Mr. Thomas into double irons, at the same time ordering on deck the Boatswain, Gunner, the Masters Mate John L. Clarke and Ships Steward Mr. J.C.Goss, armed the troops and doubled the Sentinels with loaded pistols and proceeded to such as I supposed to be the principals, which will be shewn, by adverting to the dictos and proceedings which followed.

I cannot omit my gratitude to my aid Lieut. Luciano Castelli whose cool, prompt, and energetic assistance shewed the Veteran, in a gallant youth – the conduct itself. Vega was unrivalled, the Captain of the troops the subordinate officers and soldiers, acquitted themselves to the honour of our standard.

Lieut. Carnelia who in the Fiscals report will appear to be compromitted during this trying moment has manifested, and conducted, with much energy and afforded me every assistance in his power. When the scourge of Death had so far reduced our numbers, that it was extremely difficult, from the number of sick, prisoners, and guard, to secure the sails from the sudden and tempestuous weather which we have had to encounter, to do so, Lieut. Carnelia has shewn the best example and used every exertion, at all times; - and ever since our arrival, at which time only ten seamen could be found to do duty, and those more or less affected by Scurvy, - On the 28th, day of August last the avenging hand of Death, began its slow but destructive attacks, with the most awful symptoms of inveterate Scurvy sweeping to destruction the strongest, and with few exceptions, all it met. Its first ravages commenced in the Prize, when the greatest exertions were made to save the infected, and prevent the fatal attacks upon others; three times the crew of that ship was in a great measure changed, and transferred to this ship whereby from the character of a cruizer, my ship became literally a floating hospital, whence were daily committed to the deep, more or less bodies, victims of this horrid malady.

The state of sickness and mutiny on board my ship might have been supposed a sufficiency of the bitter cup; when astonishing to be told, at the moment of this crisis, I discovered that an intention and a plot was formed to murder the officers, take possession of, and run away with the prize. This also I was fortunate in suppressing, and to keep the ship in company with me, until the 20th day of October last, three days before striking soundings on the North Banks of this Island, at which time we encountered a very violent Gale from N.W. to W. during which we entertained much apprehension for the safety of both vessels, and in the height of the gale lost sight of the Prize, since which I have no intelligence of her – I cannot however believe her to be lost, from the very superior strength of this ship, and having seen her about two hours before the tempest abated.

The state of the Heroina on entering this port cannot be adequately described and scarcely imagined. Only ten effective seamen calculated to do the duty of the ship, to attend the sick, the dying, and to bury the dead – without the most distant hope of relief, but from the salutary effects of the fresh earth, and a partial cessation from the heavy duty of working the ship through a series of tempestuous weather and severe cold, the fatigue of which, helped on by despondency, from witnessing the rapidity of the hand of death, encreased by terrors, and sufferings from the the violence of the weather – left me all but abandoned – in this situation I entered the Bay of this port on the 27th (civil) day of October, 1820, at the close of the same. Finding myself in a situation to bring the ship to an anchor, and unable to reach the port, I ordered it to be done, being then about ten miles distant from the antient town of Soledad. On the following day I proceeded in my boat to explore what resources might be afforded by this place, as the only dependence for saving from an immediate dissolution (I may say) the survivors of misfortunes; who from the bad quality of our provisions, the short allowance, and total want of vegetables, and fresh stock, were reduced to the verge of despair. - Under the dilapidated state in which I found the remains of this once hospitable place, I was compelled to form tents with the shattered sails of my ship, to shelter the sick which was done as early as early early ² as possible. I was enabled to reach a safe anchorage for my ship, when on landing the sick and affected, the sudden change of air, and effect of the earth, gave an equally immediate termination to the existence of many, and relief to others. The limited resource for vegetable supplies, and the laborious exercise of the chase gave but a partial refreshment to the sick and those able to do duty. Nor was it until the 12th day of December following, when all that survived were found sufficiently recovered to be brought on board – and the sails of the ship were found to have suffered much during the time on shore, from the violence of the winds and weather. -

Nor can I here omit stating that our situation was still more aggravated, by having in the number of our sick, several of the Mutineers, whom humanity compelled me to land, and consequently was bound to keep a guard on shore. For this service, in the first instance I gave the command to the gallant Vega, who acquitted himself to my full satisfaction: in turn he was relieved by the Captain of the Troops, who from that period seems to have manifested a disposition factious and disgusted. The appearance of such disposition was first manifested by his violent correspondence, on my embarking again the recovered sick and prisoners, and taking the ruining sails on board, at which time I also withdrew the guard from shore. On his coming on board, he secretly attempted the seduction of the officers to join in compelling me, at once to leave this place, and go to Buenos Ayres in the state the ship was – As a witness to this conduct, I must name that gallant & honourable youth my aid & sub Lieutenant Don Luciano Castelli. Captain Ansvategui finding none of the officers willing to second him in the attempt, with the exception of Midshipman Marilio, was on the twentieth day of January 1821 prompted to make a Public Protest, copy of which with our whole correspondence will accompany the present. It is to be observed that not content with including the troops in his protest, he also speaks of the injury to the crew of the ship. In conversation afterwards with an officer he asserted, that he had been urged to the measure by the Gunner, Boatswain, and all the Masters Mates, to make the Protest general in their name also. But on those officers being called upon to say, whether it was the case, they not only denied the fact, but said that they never had held any intercourse with him upon the subject, nor ever had entertained the idea of taking such a step – for further information upon this point also I beg leave to refer again to my aid Don Luciano Castelli. In consequence however of his attempt to seduce the ships officers, and this his formal renunciation of any and every responsibility appertaining to his office, as it was considered, I suspended him from the command of the Troops, and to remain as a passenger until the pleasure of the Supreme Government was known, with the option of taking his passage in an English ship then in this port and bound to the Pacific.

It is here that with much pain I am compelled to state that any want of harmony should have existed with the Sons of the Country I serve, but be assured that every exertion has been made to avoid so unhappy an event: but without prejudice or partiality I am obliged to state that such is the Genius & temper of Captain Ansvategui, that it is impossible to steer clear of his vindictive and malevolent spirit – his exercise of it I must refer to personal relation, as being too unpleasant, here to present among the black catalogue of my troubles. -

Should the disposition of Government place this Ship again in Commission it will be found necessary to give her the requisite repairs, and advisable to change most of the Officers, and a great part of the crew.

Persuaded that my misfortunes will be sufficient to induce the Supreme Government to provide for my immediate relief, from my present painful and distressed situation, by sending a Commander of their confidence to supercede me – I rest assured that my supplication will be granted as early as possible.

With the highest sense of
Respect
I have the honour to be
Your Excellency's
Most obedient and
Devoted Servant

David Jewitt

To His Excellency
The Supreme Director
of the United Provinces
of South America