

U. S. Gun Boat Paul Jones March 29, [18]63

My Dear Rodgers

I returned here yesterday having been detained at Jacksonville to take care of the land forces. I wrote the Admiral word that so soon as reinforcements had arrived to enable them to hold the place without the presence of the vessel I would make a reconnaissance up as far as Palatka. This was done on the 23 and everything was found quiet & satisfactory on the River. Nothing could be learned of the steamer St. Mary's. On my return from the reconnaissance on the evening of the 24th ist. I informed the commanding officer at Jacksonville of my intention to leave the next day but during the night the Enemy having shelled the town with an Eighty pound Rifle which they had succeeded in mounting on a R. R. [Railroad] Car & running in unobserved to within two miles of the town & which was only checked by the fire of the Norwich Guns- which fortunately could be brought to bear. I considered it advisable to remain a day or two longer until the Commanding Officer of the land forces could send out a sufficient force to drive the Enemy back & destroy the R. R. Track some two or three miles in the interior so as to prevent their approach. At my urgent solicitation & advice this was done effectually & all fears of a second shelling removed.

On the 27th to the surprise of everyone orders were recd. [received] from Genl. Hunter [General David Hunter] to evacuate the Town & return to Port Royal- as I considered my presence no longer necessary & glad to escape the distressing sight of witnessing the grief & despair of the loyal inhabitants who were obliged to leave with the army from having compromised themselves through the positive assurance of French [General William H. French?] & C. [Company?] that the place would be permanently held & an advance made into the interior. I took my departure on the morning of the 28th leaving the Norwich and Uncas to cover the Town during the embarkation. I must say that this move [as made?] on the part of the Army was one of the most illadvised & illjudged affairs which has occurred during this war & it will ever be a subject of deep mortification and disgust to me in having been accidently mixed up with it. God grant that I may never again be placed in a like position or have anything to do with Army expeditions so long as it is commanded out here by its present chief.

Before leaving I supplied the Norwich & Uncas with one month's coal- I would suggest that a light draft vessel with coal may be sent at an early day as I do not consider it prudent or safe for either vessel to leave the River even for one day to go to Fernandina- besides this it is only once or twice during the month the Norwich can cross the bar.

So soon as I have taken on board the provisions & stores from the Keystone State & the return of the Paul Jones Jr. from Dolby where she goes to take orders for the Wamsutta to go to Nassau. I will proceed up the coast as far as St. Catherines for the purpose of investigating into the difficulty between Captain Gillespie and one of his officers- I think it very likely that having got so far I will proceed on to Port Royal by the way of Aussabaw [Ossabaw Sound] (inside passage) to get a supply of coal- we have little over

one hundred tons here which I think it best to keep for the other Gun Boats- In doing this I shall not be over 48 hours absent from my station.

One of my Masters has made an application to be detached from the vessel. Please ask the Admiral to grant his request as I have no particular wish that the gentleman should be disappointed in his desire to have more active service.

[Letter stops here]

Transcribed by Nicole J. Milano, University of Florida, 2009