

# For Flag and Profit: The Life of Commodore John Daniel Danels of Baltimore

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WITH THE SIGNING OF THE TREATY of Ghent on Christmas Eve of 1814, the merchants and seamen of Baltimore had every reason to expect that the city would return to its prewar position as the fastest growing center of seaborne commerce in America. For about a year Baltimore appeared to have regained her prewar status. Slowly, however, the merchant fleets of Europe began to encroach upon Baltimore's trade with the West Indies and South America. The sleek clipper schooners of the Chesapeake could not compete with the larger bulk carriers of the European nations. Between 1816 and 1819, the declining value of vessels coupled with falling freight rates and commodity prices caused the collapse of many of Baltimore's oldest mercantile firms. The decline of the mercantile houses left the city's ship masters and seamen with three choices of earning a livelihood: continue to engage in the diminishing merchant service, enter the slave trade, or join the forces of the South American colonies in revolt against Spain. For captains and seamen who had just concluded two and one-half years of successful combat against the world's greatest navy, the choice for many was easy.

Baltimore's trade relations with South America began in 1796 after Spain declared war on Great Britain.<sup>1</sup> The city was two days' sail closer to South America than other American ports to the northeast. Foreign news in nineteenth-century United States was closely linked with seaborne commerce. Two Baltimore vessels brought

the news of the beginning of the patriot revolution in Caracas in 1810 to the United States.<sup>2</sup> It was also fitting that the news of the patriot cause in South America came initially to Baltimore because that city proved to be most receptive in the ensuing years to the requests for aid from the various patriot representatives. In addition to Baltimore's long standing commercial relationship with South America, two additional factors made her a haven for patriot activity. During the early nineteenth century, Baltimore was the center of Roman Catholicism in the United States. Because the patriot spokesmen were all Roman Catholics, they found Baltimoreans a most sympathetic audience to their pleas for aid. In addition, Baltimore in 1810 was much like the city is today, having a wide variety of nationalities all living and working together. This situation also provided an atmosphere more tolerant of the patriot representatives than many of the cities in the United States.<sup>3</sup>

From 1810-1812 Baltimore's merchants and sea captains played both sides of the revolution in South America. The firm of D'Arcy and Didier, for example, traded arms with whichever side held the ports.<sup>4</sup> For obvious reasons the revolutionary situation in South America was not of utmost concern to the citizens of Baltimore during the War of 1812. After the Treaty of Ghent, however, and with the establishment of peace between the major European powers, Baltimore found herself at a disadvantage. Her sleek clipper schooners could not compete with the larger bulk carriers of the European nations. Baltimore's trade with Europe was hindered because she was over

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two hundred miles further from Europe than the other major ports in northeastern United States.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the renewed pleas of the patriot representatives in Baltimore found willing ears when they requested not only supplies but men and ships to help overthrow the control of Madrid. In fact the port became so notorious for its activities in behalf of the revolutionaries that in 1817 during a debate on a neutrality bill, John Randolph stated that the proposed legislation was actually a peace treaty between Spain and Baltimore.<sup>6</sup> The seamen and merchants of Baltimore were characterized as either pirates or patriotic privateers depending upon which side of the South American situation a person took his stand. The most successful and controversial of these "sailors of fortune" was John Daniel Danels of Oldtown, Baltimore.

Born on 19 December 1783 in Maine,<sup>7</sup> Danels, like many other seamen and merchants, appears to have been drawn to Baltimore in the early days of the nineteenth century by the increasing opportunities for trade and employment. The records of the Baltimore Custom House indicate that in the years immediately preceding the War of 1812, Danels served as a merchant captain for the house of John Netherville D'Arcy and Henry Didier, Jr.<sup>8</sup> This firm had extensive business connections in France, Haiti, South America, and New Orleans. Little is known about Danels's personal activities during these prewar years except that in about 1811 he married an emigre from Santo Domingo named Eugenia, whose dowry was her weight in gold.<sup>9</sup>

With the outbreak of war, Danels was one of the first to sail from Baltimore bearing commission number six in the letter-of-marque trader *Eagle* bound for Haiti in July, 1812.<sup>10</sup> Danels returned to Baltimore in September and immediately cleared for St. Barts.<sup>11</sup> While returning to the Chesapeake in November, the *Eagle* was captured by the British ship of war *Sophie* and taken to Bermuda for condemnation. Danels was exchanged, but the *Eagle's* owner, John Randall, objected to seizure of his vessel as it had carried a British trading license. Randall appealed the seizure all the way to the Admiralty in London, but the continu-

ance of hostilities prevented his appearance in court.<sup>12</sup>

While Danels was returning from Bermuda, his old employers, D'Arcy and Didier, were purchasing *Rossie*, Joshua Barney's successful privateer schooner. Commissioned as a letter-of-marque trader, the *Rossie*, with Danels in command, cleared Baltimore for Bordeaux in mid-December. By 17 January 1813, Danels and the *Rossie* were in Plymouth, England as a prize to the frigate *Dryad* of the Rochefort squadron.<sup>13</sup>

Once again Danels was exchanged and returned to New York on 9 November 1813. Thus far he had shown little of the ability and luck that was to make him famous in South America. Meanwhile the Royal Navy had successfully blockaded the Chesapeake Bay, so D'Arcy and Didier, like many other Baltimoreans engaged in privateering, moved their base of operations to New York City. In early 1814 Danels took command in New York of the D'Arcy and Didier letter-of-marque trader *Delille*. His first voyage was an uneventful round-trip from New York to Bordeaux. Returning to sea in the spring of 1814 in the *Delille*, Danels sailed from New York to Bordeaux, and to New Orleans before returning to New York on 13 May 1814. He experienced his first real success as he captured five small vessels and fought a successful ninety-five minute engagement with the British letter-of-marque brig *Surprise* off Cuba. As he returned to New York, Danels was chased by a blockading frigate but managed to outrun his antagonist.<sup>14</sup>

After the *Delille's* return to New York, D'Arcy and Didier decided to refit the schooner as a six gun privateer and renamed her *Syren*. On 5 June 1814, Danels and *Syren* left New York for the English Channel. A gale off Sandy Hook carried away her bowsprit and the *Syren* put back to New York. When the *Syren* again departed on 12 June, Danels was not on board. Under the command of Danels's former first mate, the *Syren* sailed for European waters. After a successful cruise, which included the capture of H.M.S. *Landrail* off Gibraltar, the *Syren* returned to New York on 16 August 1814.<sup>15</sup> By mid-

September with Danels in command, the *Syren* again headed for the English Channel. Within two months Danels had stopped several British vessels and the *Syren's* hold was filled with \$50,000 in prize goods. Upon returning to the coast of the United States, Danels decided to land at Philadelphia rather than New York or Baltimore. Within fifteen minutes after picking up a pilot off Cape May, Danels found himself aground and the *Syren's* rudder broken. Danels managed to refloat his schooner and with a jury-rigged rudder, sailed back to Cape May where he anchored for the night. As the *Syren* rode at anchor, the pilot and several of the crew stole the longboat and fled ashore. The next morning a fourteen-gun schooner and several barges from the British blockading squadron attacked the *Syren*. Danels sank two of the barges before deciding to run the *Syren* aground. He then burned the *Syren's* upper works and left the hull with the prize goods in the custody of the custom agents at Cape May. As he proceeded up to Delaware to Wilmington to get assistance, Danels saw the citizens of Cape May plunder his vessel. To make matters worse, none of the four enemy vessels taken by Danels on the cruise ever reached an American port.<sup>16</sup>

Before he could secure another command, the Treaty of Ghent ended Danels's career as a privateer. He returned to his home on Ann Street in Baltimore where he would reside for the next three years with his wife and three children.<sup>17</sup> Like most privateers, Danels returned to his prewar occupation as a merchant captain. Initially, he must have enjoyed some success or perhaps it was his wife's dowry that financed the building of the 150 ton schooner *Eugenia* in late 1815. Records of the Baltimore Custom House list Danels as both owner and master of the new vessel.<sup>18</sup> It appears that Danels continued to carry cargo for his former employers D'Arcy and Didier making passages to France, Haiti, and New Orleans. In what must have been his first voyage in the *Eugenia*, Danels assisted fellow Baltimorean Cornelius Driscoll in the port of Le Havre, France, when Driscoll's vessel grounded and had to be abandoned. Driscoll's crew refused to unload the sink-

ing ship, and Danels was one of the American captains in port who went to Driscoll's aid.<sup>19</sup>

Sometime between 1815 and late 1817, Danels returned to privateering, this time on the side of the former colonies of Spain in South America. What exactly brought about this decision may never be known. Perhaps like many other Baltimore captains and shipowners, Danels was unable to compete with the foreign bulk carriers. From his former employers, D'Arcy and Didier, Danels may have learned of the larger problems faced by merchants now that there was peace in Europe and the neutrality of the United States was no longer an advantage in commercial enterprises. Also in early 1816, Thomas Taylor, a former resident of Wilmington, Delaware, arrived in Baltimore as representative of the patriot government of Buenos Aires. With him Taylor brought six blank letters of marque and reprisal against Spanish seaborne commerce.<sup>20</sup> Taylor was only the first of many agents from Buenos Aires, Mexico, Banda Oriental, and Venezuela who flocked to Baltimore seeking experienced privateersmen and vessels for service against Spain. John Danels may have seen employment in South America as an alternative to the declining merchant service. His decision may also have been influenced by the fact that the *Romp* and the *Orb*, owned by D'Arcy and Didier, were two of the first patriot privateers outfitted in Baltimore.<sup>21</sup>

Sometime in late 1817, Danels commissioned the Ferguson shipyard in Baltimore to construct a brigantine having a length of 101 feet, a beam of 12½ feet, a burthen of 285 tons, and pierced for twelve guns. On 25 March 1818 registration papers for this vessel, now named the *Vacunía*, were filed at the Baltimore Custom House listing John Daniel Danels as owner and a John Cox as master.<sup>22</sup> In April of 1818, the *Vacunía* cleared Baltimore for Teneriffe. Danels, however, had no intention of sailing for Teneriffe. Like other former privateers of Baltimore—John Dieter, Daniel Chayter, James Chayter, Thomas Boyle, James Barnes, John Clark, and Joseph Almeida—John Daniels sailed for the wars in South America.

Danels' activities in South America extended from 1818 until 1825 and may be divided into two distinct categories. From 1818 until 1819, Danels roamed the Atlantic coast of South America as a privateer or pirate depending upon one's point of view.<sup>23</sup> From 1820 through 1825 Danels functioned as part of Simon Bolivar's fledgling navy blockading the coasts of Venezuela and Columbia against Spanish shipping.

When the *Vacunia* sailed from Baltimore in April, 1818, John Danels was not aboard; but as the brigantine neared White Rocks at the mouth of Rock Creek on the Patapsco River, a pilot boat brought out Danels and he replaced Cox as captain. Cox remained as first lieutenant. Danels proceeded down the Chesapeake to the Atlantic. Once at sea the canon were hauled from the hold and the *Vacunia* became a ship of war. Still flying the American flag, the *Vacunia* sailed for Buenos Aires arriving in late April of 1818. No vessels were attacked by Danels on his outward voyage.

Danels anchored in the Rio de la Plata for fifteen weeks; during which time he gave his sixty man crew the option of joining him as a Buenos Airean privateer or going ashore. The entire crew elected to follow Danels. Danels next went through a rather complicated legal procedure that was to forestall any violation of the various neutrality laws enacted by the Congress of the United States. First Danels sold the *Vacunia* to the patriot government of Buenos Aires. Then Danels had himself declared a citizen of Buenos Aires. Finally, he repurchased the *Vacunia* changing her name to *Maipu*. Both Danels and the brigantine were now Buenos Airean and supposedly could not violate American neutrality laws. Having obtained his Buenos Airean commission against Spanish seaborne trade, Danels and *Maipu* finally put to sea on 15 July 1818.

After clearing the mouth of the Rio de la Plata, Danels mustered his crew and announced that he also had a commission from Banda Oriental, modern Uruguay, signed by that country's revolutionary leader Jose Artigas, giving Danels authority to attack both Spanish and Portuguese seaborne commerce. Bearing letters of marque

and reprisal from two separate governments was not legal according to international law. Danels was later to claim he returned the Buenos Airean commission to Buenos Aires via a passing schooner. Officials in Buenos Aires claimed never to have received the documents and declared Danels a pirate. The exact reasons for Danels' securing two commissions are uncertain. Several possibilities do exist. Recent evidence gives the date of the Banda Oriental commission as 14 February 1818, two months before Danels departed Baltimore.<sup>24</sup> By accepting the commission in Baltimore, Danels would have been in violation of the Neutrality Act of 1817. The entire affair of the Buenos Airean commission may have been an attempt to somehow cover Danels' earlier violation of American law. Another possibility is that for some reason Danels wanted a Buenos Airean commission more than a Banda Oriental one. Banda Oriental was the less stable of the two governments. Upon arrival in the Rio de la Plata, Buenos Aires would only give commissions against Spanish and not Portuguese shipping. Also Buenos Aires at least attempted to exert some control over its privateers. This control may have been unwanted and unexpected by Danels.<sup>25</sup>

After clearing the mouth of the Rio de la Plata and announcing the Banda Oriental commission to the crew, Danels renamed his vessel *La Irresistible*, the name which supposedly appears on the February 1818 commission. Danels cruised for a month and a-half in the western Atlantic. His success among the unsuspecting Portuguese merchant vessels was phenomenal as he plundered and sunk over twenty-six of them. Specie from twenty-four of the vessels totalled \$68,000. The *Globo*, bound from Bombay to Lisbon, with a cargo of spices and specie, netted Danels \$30,000 in specie and a cargo valued at \$90,000. But his most valuable prize was the *Gran Para*, Rio de Janeiro to Lisbon, with \$300,000 in specie. Suddenly, John Danels became an international figure. Already his name was better known in Lisbon and Madrid than his adopted hometown of Baltimore.

Using a loop-hole in the neutrality laws, Danels and the *Irresistible* returned to Bal-

timore in September 1818. Danels claimed his brigantine was unfit and needed repairs. The neutrality laws permitted vessels from other nations engaged in war to refit in American ports in an emergency situation. Danels, of course, claimed the *Irresistible* to be in danger of sinking. While waiting for his vessel to be repaired, Danels managed to deposit his \$488,000 prize money in the Marine Bank of Baltimore. By mid-October of 1818 the refit of the *Irresistible* had been completed, and still bearing Banda Oriental papers, Danels returned to South American waters.

From October 1818 until early March of 1819, Danels played havoc with the shipping of all nations. He even boarded American and British vessels searching for Spanish and Portuguese owned cargoes. Prize cargoes and vessels were sold at St. Thomas and Margarita Island. In March, however, at latitude 8° south and longitude 30° west, Danels was engaged by the Spanish brig-of-war *La Nereyda*. Danels's crew numbered about seventy and the *Irresistible* was armed with twelve 18 pounder carronades; *La Nereyda* carried a crew of 142 and was armed with 18 cannons. After a short exchange, Danels boarded *La Nereyda* and took her as a prize. The Spaniards lost 38 killed and 22 wounded.

At first Danels tried to sell his prize in St. Thomas, but the citizens refused him the right to land. Danels then sailed to Margarita Island off the coast of Venezuela where a patriot prize court did not ask too many questions. The *Irresistible* and her Spanish prize arrived at Margarita Island on 22 March 1819. By 29 March, *La Nereyda* had been condemned by the prize court and sold at auction to a Venezuelan national named Antonio Franchesco. The former Spanish brig was renamed *Congress de Venezuela* and awarded Venezuelan letters of marque and reprisal. A former lieutenant of Danels, Henry Childs, was appointed her captain and *Congress* was fitted out as a privateer.

While the prize sale was being negotiated, Danels appears to have been holding discussions with General Juan Arizmendi, the liberator of Margarita Island, concerning the possibilities of joining Simon Boli-

var's fledgling navy. Danels may have entered into these discussions because the day of the patriot privateer was drawing rapidly to a close. Pressure had been brought to bear on the emerging nations in South America by both the United States and European powers to withdraw all letters of marque and reprisal. Too many of the so-called privateers had turned to out-right piracy. By late 1819 most of the revolutionary governments had ceased to issue commissions.<sup>26</sup>

While Danels and Arizmendi were negotiating, the Buenos Airean privateer *Creola* arrived at Margarita and anchored next to the *Nereyda* and the *Irresistible*. Like Danels, the *Creola* captain was approached with an offer to join Bolivar's fleet. The *Creola* crew, however, were from Baltimore and wanted to return home.<sup>27</sup> One night the *Creola* crew boarded the larger *Irresistible*, surprised Danels' crew and took over the vessel. The *Creola* mutineers found crewmen aboard the *Irresistible* who also wanted to return to Baltimore. After permitting those crewmen to go ashore who wanted to stay on Margarita Island, the mutineers cut the *Irresistible's* anchor lines and sailed out of St. John the Greek Harbor. Although the *Irresistible* was no longer covered by her Banda Oriental letters of marque, the mutineers proceeded to stop and plunder vessels of all nations. The mutineers had become true pirates. Danels learned of the mutiny the next day and immediately followed in *La Nereyda*.

By 15 April 1819, the *Irresistible* had made her way back to the Chesapeake Bay. Off the mouth of the Patuxent River a revenue cutter took the *Irresistible* into custody and quarantined the former privateer at the Nottingham Custom House. Most of the crew managed to slip away but were later captured and put on trial in Richmond, Virginia, for piracy. The ringleaders were eventually hanged. Meanwhile Danels and the *Nereyda* had reached Baltimore. Upon learning that the *Irresistible* was anchored at Nottingham on the Patuxent, Danels went to Nottingham, took his brigantine, and sailed back to Baltimore, much to the consternation of the custom officials.

The recovery of the *Irresistible* appears

to have been the least of Danels' problems upon his return to Baltimore. During the next nine months he would be involved in no fewer than five separate court cases related to his activities in South America. Two of the cases would eventually reach the Supreme Court. Upon his return in April of 1819, Danels discovered that Joaquim Jose Vasquez, Consul General of the King of Portugal, had filed suit to recover the specie taken by Danels from the *Gran Para*. The case was tried in U.S. District Court for Maryland before Judge Theodorick Bland. Don Vasquez held that the *Irresistible* had been outfitted as a ship of war to serve a foreign country by Danels in Baltimore, thereby violating various acts of Congress relating to the neutrality of the United States. Danels's lawyers argued that Danels had not become a privateer until he reached the Rio de la Plata and that he was now a citizen of Banda Oriental. Judge Bland decreed that Danels had violated the neutrality laws and awarded the *Gran Para* specie, worth \$300,000, to Don Vasquez. The decision upset Danels and the directors of the Marine Bank where the specie had been deposited. Supported by the Marine Bank, Danels appealed the Bland decision to the Circuit Court of Maryland, which upheld Judge Bland. By 1822 the case had reached the Supreme Court where Chief Justice Marshall affirmed the decree of the Circuit Court.<sup>28</sup>

At about the same time that Don Vasquez was filing suit against Danels for the *Gran Para* specie, William A. Swift was also filing a suit against Danels in Judge Bland's court on behalf of the King of Portugal to recover the specie taken from the *Globo* and the twenty-six other Portuguese vessels plundered by the *Irresistible*. Again, the decision went against Danels and the Marine Bank. Danels appealed to the Circuit Court of Maryland but the district court decree was upheld. This case did not reach the Supreme Court.

While Danels was having problems in Baltimore, the federal government had managed to capture most of the mutineers from the *Creola* and the *Irresistible* and tried them for piracy before Chief Justice John Marshall in Richmond, Virginia.<sup>29</sup> Al-

though Danels was not directly involved in this trial, two of the ring-leaders, after being sentenced to hang, accused Danels of murder. The condemned seamen testified that during the *Irresistible's* second cruise Danels had stopped a British merchant vessel to search for Spanish owned cargo. After the British captain had lowered his flag, Danels had allegedly fired off a carronade. The wad struck the British captain and killed him. Federal authorities brought Danels to trial in Baltimore before Judge Theodorick Bland. Danels's defense was that he had ordered the carronade not to be fired, but his order had not been obeyed. Judge Bland found Danels not guilty because accidents often occur in war-like situations.<sup>30</sup>

Danels's legal problems in Baltimore were just beginning. On 21 April 1819, six days after Danels returned from Margarita Island in *La Nereyda*, John B. Bernabeau, representing the King of Spain, filed suit in the District Court of Maryland to recover *La Nereyda*. As before, the presiding judge was Theodorick Bland. Although the Spanish case was similar to that of the Portuguese in that Bernabeau claimed violation of American neutrality laws, Bernabeau further claimed that the entire Admiralty Court and sale proceedings on Margarita Island were a hoax. Bernabeau challenged Danels's lawyers to produce a bill of sale showing that the alleged Venezuelan national, Antonio Franchesco, had actually purchased *La Nereyda*. Danels was further challenged to produce the orders from Franchesco that gave Danels permission to have the brig commissioned as a Venezuelan privateer with Henry Childs as master.

Danels's lawyers were able to do little to prove that Franchesco did purchase the Spanish brig. Their best effort was a deposition from Henry Childs, who could hardly be considered an unbiased source. Once again Judge Bland found in favor of the foreign claimants, and *La Nereyda* was returned to the Spanish. As in the Portuguese cases, Danels appealed to the Circuit Court of Maryland. The attorneys representing Danels changed their tactics in the appeals procedure. Rather than deal at length with the Franchesco situation, the

attorneys for Danels focused on the fact that in several speeches in 1817 and 1818, President James Monroe had called the situation in South America a civil war rather than a revolution. Because both parties in a civil war are considered as equal, no violation of United States neutrality occurred when *La Nereyda* entered Baltimore Harbor. A neutral can give aid to belligerents of both sides in a civil war. The United States, therefore, had no right to confiscate Danels's prize. The attorneys for Danels further argued that Danels could not be held in violation of the 1817 Neutrality Act because the 1818 Neutrality Act put a time limit on the laws of 1817. By the time Danels's case had been heard, these time limits had passed. The Court agreed with the arguments of Danels's lawyers and returned *La Nereyda* to him.

In 1823, however, the case was appealed to the Supreme Court. On 8 March 1823 Justice Joseph Story delivered the opinion of the Court that Danels had violated the various neutrality acts, that the President was unclear in the civil war issue, that the Prize Court on Margarita Island had no jurisdiction over a Banda Oriental prize, and finally that there was definitely a question as to the sale of the vessel to Franchesco. The decree of the Circuit Court was reversed.<sup>31</sup>

Danels, in addition to the two prize cases, was brought before the District Court of Maryland by United States Attorney Elias Glenn on charges of violating the Neutrality Acts of 1817 and 1818. Pressure to prosecute Danels came from Secretary of State John Quincy Adams who had received notes from the Portuguese and Spanish Ambassadors requesting Danels be placed on trial.<sup>32</sup> Adams also wanted to use the trial to showcase, for the various revolutionary leaders, the fallacies in their privateering laws. In addition Adams wanted to bring to light the questionable activities of the prize courts on Margarita Island.<sup>33</sup>

Glenn brought the Danels Case to trial before Judge Theodorick Bland. The two specific charges against Danels were that he had violated the Neutrality Act of 3 March 1817 by fitting out a vessel of war in the United States for service under a

foreign flag and that Danels had violated the Neutrality Act of 20 April 1818 by adding to the armament of *Irresistible* in Baltimore during the period between the first and second cruises of the brigantine.<sup>34</sup>

Judge Bland acquitted Danels of the 1818 charge because Danels proved he had not added to the *Irresistible's* armament, only replaced it. Danels was also acquitted of the 1817 charge because the Act of 1818 had placed a limit on the length of time the 1817 laws would be applicable. By the time Danels had come to trial, this time period had expired. Elias Glenn had had enough of Judge Bland and the Maryland Courts, he decided not to appeal the case any farther. Judge Bland was summoned to Washington by Secretary Adams to discuss his apparent prorevolutionary sympathies. The judge was able to clear himself.

Perhaps the pressure of too many law suits or perhaps because of arrangements made at Margarita Island in March 1819, John Danels sailed the *Irresistible* from Baltimore in late 1819 or early 1820 to join Simon Bolivar's Admiral, Luis Brion, at Margarita.<sup>35</sup> Upon arriving at Margarita, Danels sold the *Irresistible* to Brion along with the food and military supplies in her hold. The *Irresistible* was renamed the *Urdameta* and added to Brion's fleet of twenty-seven small vessels.<sup>36</sup> Before selling the *Irresistible*, however, Danels had captured two Spanish vessels, the *Ceres* and the *Diligencia*. The *Ceres* was used by General Arizemerdi for the defense of Margarita; while the *Diligencia*, with Danels most likely in command, became part of Brion's fleet. The *Diligencia* was one of fifteen vessels sent by Bolivar to cover the landing of General Mariano Montilla at Rio Hacha in an effort to surround the Spanish forces at Maracaibo. After Brion's fleet shelled Rio Hacha for half a day, Montilla made a successful landing and eventually joined in the siege of Maracaibo. Brion lost five ships in the attack, but Danels seems to have come through unscathed.<sup>37</sup>

Danels returned to Margarita in late summer of 1820 and somehow purchased two small merchant vessels in which he carried food and munitions to patriot forces at Angostura on the Orinoco River. One of

Danels' vessels was taken by the Spanish as it entered the Orinoco; the second vessel made a safe passage and was then leased to the patriot forces.

Returning to Margarita, Danels purchased with his personal funds the brigantine *Vencedor* and two schooners, the *Voluntario* and the *Centella*. With these three vessels now leased to the combined navies of Venezuela and Colombia, Danels joined in the blockade of Cumana and La Guaira after the Spanish defeat at Carabobo on 24 June 1821. Danels served under the command of General Jose Bermudez until Cumana surrendered. With his three vessels Danels then moved on to blockade La Guaira where he helped impede the evacuation of the Royalist forces. As a result of his services at Cumana and La Guaira, Danels applied for and was granted Venezuelan citizenship and the rank of commodore in Bolivar's navy.

During the summer and fall of 1822, Danels returned to Baltimore as an agent of the Colombian and Venezuelan navies with orders to purchase a 30-gun corvette for no more than 80,000 pesos. Unable to find a suitable vessel at a given price in Baltimore, Danels journeyed to Philadelphia and finally New York before finding a suitable ship. Danels finally purchased the 497 ton ship *Hercules* from David Leavitt.<sup>38</sup> After renaming the ship *Bolivar*, Danels sailed for Venezuela, arriving in late October of 1822.

In early November of 1822 Danels was placed in command of an eight vessel squadron with orders to patrol the waters between the Spanish stronghold at Puerto Cabello and Curacao, to deny entrance of any merchant vessels to Puerto Cabello and to intercept any Spanish convoys bound for Maracaibo. During this period Danels managed to capture the Spanish corvette *Maria Francesca*, which was added to his squadron.

On the afternoon of 1 May 1823, Danels spotted a large Spanish squadron off Puerto Cabello. Under the command of Angel Laborde, this force was heading for Lake Maracaibo in order to support Spanish troops holding the last major city in Colombia and Venezuela. Laborde's squadron, although

smaller than Danels's, consisted of a frigate, a corvette, and three smaller vessels. The two squadrons met at 3:00 P.M. and battled at pistol shot range until sundown. Danels's corvettes *Carabobo* and *Maria Francesca* battled Laborde's frigate *Sabina* to a draw. The patriot brigantine *Independencia* was badly mauled by the Spanish corvette *Ceres* and was saved only by the courage of her crew and captain. Laborde's vessels managed to force the surrender of two of Danels's corvettes and to kill forty patriots while taking three hundred prisoners. The Spanish suffered only seventeen wounded.<sup>39</sup> Danels was court martialed for the loss of the two corvettes, but he answered the charges against him in such a way that he was totally absolved and restored to active duty. Laborde's fleet ran into Puerto Cabello and refitted before continuing its voyage to Lake Maracaibo. From 8 May 1823 until 24 July the opposing fleets of Colombia, under the command of Jose Padilla, and Spain, under the command of Angel Laborde, manoeuvred within the confines of Lake Maracaibo. While the fleets fought on the lake, patriot infantry attacked the Spanish garrison. By 3 August 1823 the Spanish had had enough and surrendered. Puerto Cabello held out until November before its garrison too surrendered. Colombia at last was free from Spanish control. Danels, however, does not appear to have taken part in these final victories.

Danels remained in Colombian service until 1824 at which time he requested a pension and permission to return to Baltimore. Plans for a combined Colombian-Mexican naval attack on Havana had come to naught, and Danels saw his services were no longer in demand. As a gesture of goodwill Danels agreed to cancel approximately 50,000 pesos owed to him by Colombia for the services of his vessels, supplies purchased for the army and fleet, and expenses incurred on his trip to Baltimore. This gesture gained Danels his discharge from Colombian service.

During the entire time Danels was in South America, his wife and family remained in Baltimore. The family residence was now 53 Albemarle St. and would remain so until the commodore's death in



1855.<sup>40</sup> In all John and Eugenia Danels would raise seven children: John (b. 1812), Lewis (b. 1815), Eugenia (b. 1820), Elizabeth (b. 1825), Simon Bolivar (b. 1826), Joseph (b. 1827), and Placetta (b. 1830).<sup>41</sup> An eighth child, James (b. 1816), is mentioned in the Danels will<sup>42</sup> but does not appear in any census reports after 1830. After his return from South America, very little is heard of John D. Danels in the Baltimore press. Eugenia's death on 8 December 1851<sup>43</sup> was noted in the *Baltimore American* as the passing of a woman who spent her entire life assisting the poor and needy of Baltimore. The notice of the Commodore's death on 29 October 1855 was even shorter than Eugenia's, noting only his service in the cause of freedom in Colombia and Venezuela.<sup>44</sup>

Danels, however, did not die fully satisfied in the way he had been treated by Colombia and Venezuela regarding some outstanding debts. The Commodore's will mentions unsettled claims that had been begun to be adjudicated in 1845 by James Buchanan and were still outstanding. Danels still claimed that Venezuela and Colombia owed him \$300,000 for vessels and cargoes supplied to these nations between 1819 and 1820. The Department of State had worked out an agreement under which Colombia and Venezuela each would pay 28.5 percent of the claim and Danels would surrender his claim to the remainder.<sup>45</sup> Ten years later the claim still had not been settled.

The services rendered by John Daniel Danels to cause of South American freedom were officially honored at the 5 July 1959 graduation ceremonies at the Escuela Naval de Venezuela.

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