1 December 1845

Wind South and Westward in light breezes, heading SSE—at 2:15 discovered a sail standing to the Westward. At about 3:15 made her out a barque (American built); showed her our colors. She showed American colors, but her manner of steering being so wild that suspicion was awakened in the minds of the officers as to her legal character. Consequently we bore down on her, hailed her, and received for answer that she was the Brig Pons, Philadelphia, bound to New York—Captain Galiano. A boat was sent on board of her (her main topsail hove to the mast) in charge of the First Lieutenant, and when he got on board Portuguese colors were run up. From the barque the First Lieutenant then informed us that she had no shipping papers and was a slaver with nine hundred slaves on board!!! She was immediately taken possession of—her crew sent on board of us which amounted to forty people in toto.
THE CAPTURE OF THE PONS

When first spotted by the Yorktown the Pons tried to edge away, which only made the Americans more suspicious. The captain of the Pons, later identified as a Portuguese named Gallano (or Gallino), mistook the Yorktown for the British brig Cygnet, whose watchfulness had for twenty days delayed loading the slavership. Gallano hoisted what would have been the protective American colors. Captain Bell responded with American colors, then confused Gallano by switching to the British flag. When Bell hailed and asked what ship, the answer was, “Barque Pons of Philadelphia, from Cabinda, bound for New York.” Bell then dispatched his first lieutenant, Steele, to board her. Steele recognized the Pons; he had been aboard her in the Philadelphia Navy Yard two years earlier when she had been doing some work for the navy, and in November 1844 he had seen her at Madeira.¹ As Steele’s boat reached the Pons her captain, recognizing U.S. uniforms, hauled down his U.S. flag and hoisted a Portuguese flag. Meanwhile Bell maneuvered the Yorktown closer alongside the slavership. As he did so, and at the moment Steele climbed aboard, Bell observed someone throwing something overboard from the Pons’s cabin. (It was a handkerchief tied up with the ship’s American papers and other incriminating documents, weighted with two hundred musket balls.)² Bell called out to get Steele’s attention, but by this time the slaves sensed a possible rescue. The jubilation of nine hundred shouting voices erupted beneath Steele’s feet. It was a sound, said Bell, that “could be heard a mile”—and rendered Bell inaudible to the lieutenant.

Confronting the Pons’s captain, Steele demanded the ship’s papers. “I have none; I have thrown them overboard,” responded Gallano. “What is your cargo?” asked Steele, then receiving the reply, “About nine hundred slaves, from Cabinda, bound for Brazil.” Since the ship had shown the American flag, had no papers, and had the words “Pons of Philadelphia” painted on her stern, Steele took possession of her as a prize.³
In his official report to Secretary of the Navy Bancroft dated 11 December 1845, Bell writes:

I was so anxious to despatch the vessel in the shortest time for Liberia, in order to land the slaves, and relieve them from their miserable confinement, that it was not in my power to give you a more particular account of this vessel. . . .

The *Pons*, under the command of James Berry, was at anchor at Kabinda for about twenty days before she took on board the slaves, during which time she was closely watched by H.B.M. Brig *Cygnet*, Commander Layton. At about nine o'clock on the morning of the 27th November, the *Cygnet* got under way and stood to sea immediately. Berry gave up the ship to Gallano, who commenced getting on board the water, provisions and slaves; and so expeditious were they in their movements that at eight o'clock that evening the vessel was underway, having embarked nine hundred and three slaves. Instead of standing directly to sea, she kept in with the coast during the night. At daylight they were off Kacono, about twenty-five miles to the north of Kabinda, when they discovered the *Cygnet* in the offing. They immediately furled all their sails and drifted so near the shore, that the negroes lined the beach in hope of a shipwreck. They continued in this situation until meridian; when finding they had not been discovered, they set their lower sails in order to clear the shore, and as the *Cygnet* drew off from the land, they afterwards set their more lofty ones. Two days afterwards we captured her. Her crew consisted of Spaniards, Portuguese, Brazilians and some from other countries, and although continuing under the American flag, with probably American papers, not one American was on board.

As I could not dispatch her the evening of her capture, she kept company with us that night; the next morning I regret-
ted to learn that eighteen had died and one jumped over-
board. So many dying in so short a time, was accounted for
by the Captain, in the necessity he had of thrusting below all
who were on deck, and closing the hatches, when he first fell
in with us, in order to escape detection.

The vessel has no slave deck, and upwards of eight hun-
dred and fifty men piled almost in bulk, on the water casks
below; these were males, about forty or fifty females were
confined in one half of the round house cabin on deck. The
other half of the cabin remaining for the use of the officers.
As the ship appeared to be less than three hundred and fifty
tons, it seemed impossible that one half could have lived to
cross the Atlantic. About two hundred filled up the spar deck
alone, when they were permitted to come up from below,
and yet the captain assured me that it was his intention to
have taken four hundred more on board, if he could have
spared the time.

The stench from below was so great that it was impossi-
ble to stand, more than a few moments, near the hatchways.
Our men who went below from curiosity were forced up sick
in a few minutes. Then all the hatches were off. What must
have been the sufferings of these poor wretches when the
hatches were closed? I am informed that very often in these
cases, the stronger will strangle the weaker, and this was
probably the reason why so many died or rather were found
dead the morning after the capture. None but an eye witness
can form a conception of the horrors these poor creatures
must endure in their transit across the ocean.

I regret to say that most of this misery is produced by our
own countrymen; they furnish the means of conveyance in
spite of existing enactments, and altho there are strong cir-
cumstances against Berry the late master of the Pons, suffi-
cient to induce me to detain him if I should meet with him,
yet I fear neither he or his employers can be reached by our present laws. He will no doubt make it appear that the Pons was beyond his control when the slaves were brought on board. Yet from the testimony of the men who came over from Rio as passengers, there is no doubt the whole affair was arranged at Rio between Berry and Gallano before the ship sailed. These men state that the first place they anchored was at Onin, near the River Lagos in the Bight of Benin. Here they discharged a portion of their cargo, and received on board a number of hogsheads or pipes filled with water. These were stowed on the ground tier and a tier of casks containing spirits were placed over them. They were then informed that the vessel was going to Kabinda for a load of slaves.

On their arrival at the latter place the spirit was kept on board until a few days before Berry gave up the command, covering up the water casks in order to elude the suspicions of any cruiser. For twenty days did Berry wait in the roadstead of Kabinda protected by the flag of his country, yet closely watched by a foreign man of war who was certain of his intention. But the instant that cruiser is compelled to withdraw for a few hours, he springs at the opportunity of enriching himself and owners, and disgracing the flag which had protected him. As we are short handed I have shipped those men, much to their gratification, who came out as passengers in the Pons from Rio to Kabinda, in order that their testimony may be taken should Berry be in the United States on our return and committed for trial. I have landed the balance of the prize crew here, with the exception of one who died of coast fever, a few days after he came on board this Ship.

In my letter of the 30th ultimo I stated that I should send to the United States in the Pons, the Captain, Cook and cabin
boy. Afterwards I found it necessary to send two others to assist the cook in preparing food for the slaves.4

Actually the Pons was not 350 tons, as Bell had estimated, but only 197.5 Eight hundred fifty human beings had been crammed naked below deck into a space of less than 2,000 square feet. Lawrence’s entry continues:

The Captain [of the Pons] it must be admitted was a man of most dignified appearance—and showed no more agitation than he would have in a probability on the most commonplace occasion. Mr. Cogdell was then sent on board her as prize master, and myself, as his chief mate with twelve men as a crew. Upon boarding this vessel, I felt such a load of misery fall upon my heart that I almost wished myself a wild beast, that I might escape the pain of sympathy that I felt for the sufferings of the wretched slaves (created my fellow beings) confined on board. Of course, they knew some change in their destiny was about to take place, and in their desperate agonies, hope construed it the change about to take place in their favor, and when our boats approached the barque they hailed us with clapping hands and outstretched arms. But who can represent by words the state of the wretches below in the hold? To mention that their tongues were white and dry for want of water, and that their lips were cracked open from same reason, and their bodies covered with loathsome scabs (called the “Cocrau”) and that they were under the influence of a burning fever, that almost burnt one’s hand to touch them, would give a faint notion of their suffering—and the atmosphere was of a temperature of about 160 to 180 Fahrenheit—and alas how few could we succor from this
miserable state, how few could we alleviate from their sufferings—a!

2 December 1845

Wind light; calms etc. this day. Having got things in order we parted company from the Yorktown at 4:15. The wind sprung up; we soon lost sight of her. Fed and watered the slaves. In the morning there were twenty-odd dead bodies; these people died of thirst etc. etc.

Under different circumstances Lawrence would have enjoyed being aboard the Pons. An exceptionally well-constructed and beautiful barque designed for fast sailing, she had been built in New Jersey near Philadelphia four years earlier. Ninety-five feet long, with a twenty-three-foot beam and depth of hold of ten feet, she measured 196 and 57/95 tons. She had three masts, a square stern, and a scroll head. Near the foremast was the “caboose” or cookhouse, containing a large brick fireplace with a grate for the large cook pots. Aft of that was the longboat, protected by a roof. Farther aft was the cabin, then a small quarterdeck with a cabin for the pilot.

When Steele and his men boarded her they found 50 female slaves, all naked and most seasick, confined in half of the cabin, the other half having been occupied by the ship’s officers. The sight and smell in the cabin were bad enough, but the 850 male slaves were confined below in the hold, with all the hatches battened, except for one about four feet square covered by an open grating that provided their only ventilation. The Americans learned that 7 had died during the three days prior to the Yorktown’s arrival.

While it was customary among slavers to use lumber to construct a temporary slave deck in the hold, this was not done in the
Pons. Instead, when Lawrence and others of the prize crew went into the hold, the fetid, dark, and boiling-hot space where they had to crouch into about four feet of headroom, they found the slaves lying on mats laid over bags of farina, the grain customarily fed slaves on the Middle Passage. The bags of farina covered over and filled the spaces between barrels full of water that had been put down over the ballast. Shortly after the capture slaves from the hold were permitted up on deck, though there was only room there for about 250.9

The navy men quickly opened the hatches to give more air to those below. When they passed down a bucket of water the captives fought each other for it like dogs for a bone. Because Gallano had wanted to avoid attracting attention his crew had cooked no food, and had not fed the slaves at all during their three days aboard prior to the Pons’s capture. The Americans broke out farina, cooked it with oil, and fed their starving passengers. The mere task of cooking and distributing farina for almost a thousand people, and doing it with any degree of order, would have been a considerable labor for the small prize crew, who in addition, of course, had to manage the ship.

Aboard the Yorktown, once they parted ways with the Pons, the officers and men were disgusted at what they had seen and relieved not to have been chosen for the prize crew. They also daydreamed about spending their prize money, for every man aboard would get a share of the prize paid for capturing a slaver. Assistant Surgeon Williams, for example, began to think of buying a horse.10 The prize crew had more pressing concerns.

3 December 1845

Wind and weather the same. The slaves were a little easier today.
4 December 1845

Wind light from Southward and Westward. At 12 midnight a squall struck us aback. Reduced sail to topsails and kept her before it (South). Toward 8 A.M. wind died away and it fell calm. Ten slaves dead.

5 December 1845

The wind at 5 P.M. today set in fresh and continued so for 24 hours. Fed and watered slaves; twelve or fourteen dead.

7 December 1845

Sunday. On board one week this day. Wind from Southward and Westward; course W by N—Lat. 57°48′ South Long. 2°29′ West. Up to this date ninety-one slaves have expired—oh for a deliverance from this floating hell; my heart is oppressed with a thousand cares—God deliver us.

The final leaves of Lawrence's journal have, like the opening ones, been cut from the book by hands unknown for reasons unknown. The dramatic cry of despair with which Lawrence's journal now ends is, sadly, even more fitting than he knew at the time.

Lawrence had now been sailing for a week on a ship filled with appalling human misery. Of the two officers and ten men in the prize crew he was the junior officer, assigned under Lt. Richard C. Cogdell. As has been seen, Cogdell was hardly a model officer. Indeed, he was an alcoholic and depressive. Knowing something of his past behavior Bell had objected to getting him, but it was Cogdell or nothing. Assured that Cogdell had reformed, Bell took
him and hoped for the best. At the time of the capture of the _Pons_ Cogdell was Bell’s second most senior officer after Steele, who was the first lieutenant—and the only other lieutenant. Though he was not someone Bell might regret losing, Cogdell had apparently behaved well enough up to that point, so he was at least a reasonable choice for command of the prize crew. However, not long after parting company with the _Yorktown_ Cogdell began drinking heavily and treating his crew abusively. At one point when the _Pons_ encountered a squall and the commanding officer should have been on deck, Cogdell was too drunk to leave his berth.\(^\text{11}\) That Lawrence does not mention Cogdell’s behavior in the last week of his extant journal could be due to caution about writing down (even on supposedly private papers) any derogatory remarks about a superior. More likely it indicates the extent to which any personal problems were overwhelmed by the more universal anguish he felt for the plight of the recaptured slaves. Eventually, though, Lawrence would feel compelled to speak up.

**LANDING THE RECAPTURED SLAVES AT MONROVIA**

Taking the slaves back to where they had embarked would likely have been the equivalent of again putting them into the hands of those who had sold them in the first place. Most would have wound up back in barracoons waiting to be packed onto the next available slave ship. They could hardly be taken to the United States. As American interests had established Liberia specifically to receive freed slaves from the United States, American policy also made the colony the destination of any slaves recaptured by the American navy. Once a ship carrying slaves was taken she then would be taken first to Liberia to off-load the recaptives, and thence to her home port in the United States for legal proceedings against ship and crew.

The _Pons_ took another week to reach Monrovia, during which the bodies of 41 more slaves slipped into her wake. When early on
the evening of 14 December she dropped anchor off Cape Mesurado, 764 of the original 903 were still alive. The survivors could not be simply put ashore. Boats or canoes were needed to lighter them in, and arrangements had to be made as to their disposition once ashore. It took a day for Cogdell to arrange with the local authorities for off-loading and caring for the recaptives. As part of that process a group from Monrovia boarded the *Pons* that forenoon, as sharks swarmed about the ship, drawn by the bodies of ten captives found dead that morning.\textsuperscript{12} J. J. Roberts, the governor of Liberia, was accompanied by several individuals: one Judge S. Benedict, a Dr. James W. Lugenebeel, Rev. W. B. Hoyt, and Rev. J. B. Benham. Hoyt and Benham were Methodist Episcopal missionaries who had arrived in Liberia from the United States less than a week earlier. Lugenebeel was a young missionary doctor who had also been appointed U.S. Agent in Liberia for Recaptured Africans. The stench aboard the slaver was so awful that the visitors could bring themselves to stay aboard only a short while, observing the crowded deck and peering into the hold.

Hoyt, Benham, and Lugenebeel all wrote eyewitness accounts within twenty-four hours of boarding the *Pons*. Hoyt remarked that although he had been prepared beforehand by Cogdell, whom he describes as “the gentlemanly officer in command,” the scene he encountered was “impossible for language to convey.”\textsuperscript{13} The recaptives, many emaciated and all absolutely naked, crowded the decks in various postures; swarms of flies buzzed about the suppurating sores on arms and legs. Below deck were hundreds more. The day, Hoyt noted, was warm, and the smell was overpowering:

Here and there might be seen individuals in the last agonies of expiring nature, unknown, and apparently unnoticed. There was no offer of sympathy to alleviate in the least their misery. Their companions appeared dejected, weighed down with their own sorrows. My heart sickens at the
remembrance of that awful scene. As I came on the crowded
deck, I saw directly in front of me one emaciated and worn
down by long suffering to a mere skeleton, pining away and
apparently near eternity. I looked over into the steerage. The
hot, mephitic air almost overpowered me. At the foot of the
ladder lay two of the most miserable beings I ever beheld.
They were reduced, as the one above named, so that their
bones almost protruded from their flesh. Large sores had
been worn upon their sides and limbs, as they had been
compelled to lay upon the hard plank composing the deck of
the vessel. They lay directly under the hatchway, whither they
had crawled, apparently to obtain a little purer air. One I
thought dead, until by some slight motion of the limbs I dis-
covered his agonies were not yet ended. The other lay with
his face toward me, and such an expression of unmitigated
anguish I never before saw. I cannot banish the horrid pic-
ture. These were not isolated cases, but as they were those
that were first noticed they made, perhaps, a stronger
impression on my mind.¹⁴

Like Hoyt, Benham could not bring himself to enter the hold,
where the temperature was guessed to be between 100 and 120
degrees, and from which the smell was overpowering. The sights
on deck were enough:

The sailors pointed me to a group of three little boys,
under the bow of the long boat, on deck. One of them was
probably eight years of age, and almost in a dying state, and
had been pining away for the last six days. Two others, per-
haps ten and twelve years of age, were sitting by him, one on
either side, watching him with a great deal of apparent symp-
athy, and administering to him as they were able. They had
procured a small quantity of oakum, with which they had
made his bed, and a small piece of muslin for his pillow.
They did not leave him night or day, and the sailors always found one of them awake. Through an interpreter I commended them for their kindness to the little sufferer, and promised to take them to live with me, and that they should bring with them their sick companion. I gave each a slip of paper with my name, directing them to keep them, so that I might know them when they landed.

The elder boys are brothers, the younger was from the same tribe.\(^{15}\)

The next day, 16 December, the recaptives were landed ashore. Boats and Kroo canoes took them from the Pons to the beach. As the boats got within wading distance of the sand the recaptives, nearly all completely naked, leaped into the surf and splashed eagerly onto Liberian soil. The little boy described above was not among them; his body with seven others had been cast overboard. The two brothers who had watched over him for two weeks came ashore clutching soggy scraps of paper, their “tickets” to be taken in by Rev. Benham. Seven hundred fifty-six came ashore alive.

Virtually the entire population of Monrovia, perhaps a thousand strong (about a quarter of the non-aboriginal population of Liberia) came down to the shore to watch. The slaver captain Gallano, who had been permitted ashore to buy warm clothing for the voyage to his trial in Philadelphia, was a spectator, too. When the Liberians saw his handiwork they turned toward him in fury. He hastily left the scene, lucky to escape unharmed.\(^{16}\)

Some of the recaptives were too weak to climb out of the boats unaided. Still, freedom and the cool water of the surf seem to have reanimated many, who clapped their hands, exclaimed, and even sang in joy as they rushed onto the beach.\(^{17}\) The Monrovians gave them small bits of biscuit and a little water at first, then filled a dugout canoe with water, “into which they plunged like hungry pigs into a trough—the stronger faring the best.”\(^{18}\) Others spotted
a nearby stagnant pool and “swallowed its black contents with great avidity” until some of the Liberians, with violent benevolence, drove them away with threats and even whips. On the half-mile walk up from the beach to Monrovia some lay down to die but were picked up and carried by their stronger companions or by Monrovians.

The landward side of the disembarkation was run by Dr. Lugengeel in his official capacity as U.S. Agent for Recaptured Africans. Aboard the Pons John Lawrence supervised the business of getting the recaptives into the boats and canoes and on their way ashore. Lieutenant Cogdell’s “infirmity” had overwhelmed him and he had taken refuge ashore. 19

THE NEW LIBERIANS

As quickly as possible Lugengeel parcelled out the new Liberians to the missionaries and to colonist families. The U.S. government had placed one thousand dollars at Lugengeel’s disposal for expenses. He thus had a little over a dollar per recaptive, a budget he actually managed to stay well within. (The United States had also given him two thousand dollars to construct a receiving facility, but the structure was not built until 1847, so Lugengeel had to create a makeshift situation for the Pons arrivals.) Under a special act of the Liberian legislature the new arrivals were apprenticed for a set period, during which time their sponsors were to teach them a trade, the English language, and other useful skills. As almost all the recaptives were between the ages of eight and eighteen, the missionaries saw them as children in need of education. The missionaries requested and received permission to care for, to educate, and of course to convert a hundred of the children. Of these the twenty girls were especially welcome, as the missionary school had had a particularly difficult time recruiting female students from the local tribes. With what may strike a modern reader as breathtaking swiftness and assurance, the missionaries had within a day
given new western names to all their recruits. Hence the Pons suddenly produced (no doubt before they themselves knew who they were) the likes of Silas Comfort, Benjamin Clark, Lorenzo D. Sherwood, James W. Lugeneel, Gabriel Hoyt, and Mary Hoyt. The two boys with notes from Rev. Benham became John Wesley and David A. Shepard.

In a hastily called meeting the day before the landing the missionary group had on the spot subscribed $135 of its own money to cover temporary expenses for their planned one hundred children. Within days they had sent off to their sponsoring group in the United States a bundle of narratives and appeals—the "Circular Appeal of the Methodist Liberian Mission." Lugeneel parceled out another two hundred recaptive servants in a couple of days, six hundred by the end of the month, and the remaining group shortly thereafter. He required each responsible party to promise in writing to present their recaptive servants "well clothed" at the next probate court, scheduled for early February, for final legalities. The children were bound as apprentices and the adults were bound for seven years. Lugeneel sent one group of seventeen identified as "Congos" and apparent "headmen" to the settlement of New Georgia (where some Congos were already established), to be looked after until they could fend for themselves.

Whether the new Liberians understood all their new obligations seems questionable, and there was also the possibility of abuse or neglect on the other side of the apprenticeship contracts. It may be said the recaptives were simply being transferred from one form of servitude to another, albeit a more benign one. However, apprenticing was still practiced in the United States as it had been since earliest colonial times. On that model a system established in Liberia years before the arrival of the Pons had been applied to settlers from the states and recruits from local tribes, as well as to recaptives. The Pons strained the system, though, by injecting roughly three times as many recaptive servants as the total that
had been brought to Liberia since the colony's establishment. Indeed, the ratio of colonists (in all of Liberia) to new Pons arrivals was only about four to one. One bit of luck was that the ship Roanoke that had arrived from the States only days before (8 December) with Hoyt, Benham, a third minister, their wives, and 190 new settlers emancipated by the will of their late master in Virginia, had also bought supplies that could be diverted to the emergency needs of the recaptives.

Dr. Lugenebeel had already been fully occupied with the arrival of the Roanoke, since a number of her passengers had required his medical attention. To this situation was suddenly added the staggering task of treating and generally looking after the sorely neglected recaptives from the Pons. Obviously many of the recaptives were in poor shape, too; sixty-five died in the next two months. Lugenebeel fortunately could rely upon the help of two Liberians he was training as physicians. Struggling against debilitating illness himself, Lugenebeel managed his manifold responsibilities remarkably well.

The American recolonization societies responded to the missionaries' "Circular Appeal" with substantial shipments of clothing and other supplies. Indeed, they swiftly chartered the barque Chatham to carry their gathered materials to Liberia, at a total cost of over five thousand dollars. Meanwhile, shortly after Bell's arrival with the Yorktown in January the citizens of Monrovia gave a public dinner honoring him and his officers for the capture of the Pons.

Unsurprisingly, not all of "Captain Bell's protagees," as the Liberia Herald was to call them, adhered to their contracts. The following July the Herald lamented that "a number of these people are living wild in the woods, and at night come in town and carry off cattle &c. Within the last fortnight six milk cows and a number of sheep, hogs and goats have been carried off by these marauders." In fact, many of the locals to whom they had been assigned were
so impoverished and ill-prepared as to be scarcely able to take care of themselves, much less their new wards. A poor harvest that year had made things worse. By late June Governor Roberts reported that “hundreds of [Pons recapitives] . . . most of them emaciated, sick and in a wretched state of helplessness,” were at large in the community, while “Scores of them, for the last month or two, have been hanging upon the skirts of the colonists. Indeed, the present scarcity of provisions is owing, in a great degree, to their numerous depredations upon the young crops of our farmers.”

Fortunately the colonists were able to issue thousands of dollars worth of food, clothing, and tobacco to the new arrivals. By December 1846, a year after the Pons landing, the Herald remarked that “These people or a large portion of them are becoming of value to their guardians—those remaining in the colony, show no disposition, now to wander off.” Lugeneel reported in early 1847 that, “They have generally abandoned their thievish practices, and also the practice of running away. . . . Many of them have made remarkable progress in acquiring a knowledge of the English language and the habits of civilization.”

A more skeptical view suggests that after finding it impossible to live in the woods, most of the recapitives had surrendered to the requirements of their new and not particularly generous masters, the colonists. The Yorktown’s Surgeon Williams revisited Liberia in 1848, and naturally had a special interest in the Pons recapitives. By his observation their clothing was skimpy and, except for the girls taken in by the mission, their education neglected. As for their food, “that consists of the refuse of their masters’ tables.”

On the other hand, the pugnaciousness of some proved convenient. A correspondent from the settlement of Grand Bassa, where relations with the indigenous Fishmen had not been smooth, reported happily that “Our Congoes have really turned out manly; they have thrown more dread upon the Fishmen . . . and the surrounding tribes, than I have ever known exerted upon them before.” Colonist Mildred
Skipwith, writing in 1848, commented, “The surviving ones are as healthy a set of people as ever a person would wish to see, several of which has embraced the religion of our saviour—and making rapid improvements in Education. Tho I must say of a truth that they are the most savage, & blud thirsty people I ever saw or ever wishes to see.” In 1850 Lugubee reported that most of the inhabitants of New Georgia were recaptives, and that the settlement provided most of the vegetables for Monrovia. Years later, too, a Pons survivor named John Robinson is mentioned as the manager of a coffee plantation owned by the Methodist mission.

**LAWRENCE’S LAST WEEKS: WITH THE PONS**

Although Cogdell managed to impress the Reverend Hoyt as a “gentlemanly officer” when he met the delegation of Liberian leaders on the day after the Pons dropped anchor off Monrovia, nevertheless Cogdell saw the need to explain his condition as due to the understandable stress and fatigue of the previous two weeks aboard the prize ship. Actually Cogdell had been drinking heavily for days. Likely others of the prize crew, including Lawrence, had been imbibing more than usual, too, not without reason. Cogdell’s situation, though, was extreme. He went ashore the very day they anchored and remained there, incapacitated, until shortly before the Pons sailed for Philadelphia two weeks later. (Staying ashore for even a single night was, it will be recalled, directly contrary to orders.) Thus it fell to Lawrence not only to supervise the off-loading of the recaptives on 15 December but also to make all the preparations necessary for the transatlantic voyage. These included off-loading 195 bags of farina and beans and some rice, the “slave food”; mending sails and making other repairs; loading ballast; and ensuring sufficient food and drink was aboard to last forty-five days, the anticipated outside length of the trip to Philadelphia. Only one boat was available (apparently the Pons had only one and no budget to hire locally), so all of this took a while for Lawrence
and the ten crewmen to accomplish. Some of the crew became ill, though none so thoroughly as Cogdell. Lawrence must have visited him more or less daily to get whatever instructions Cogdell would have been in condition to give, and to keep him informed of their progress, a task that can hardly have been easy. Not only did Lawrence by this time have strong feelings against the lieutenant, but also Cogdell was in a very poor state indeed. Dr. Proust, the local doctor contracted to look after the prize crew, spent twice as much time treating Cogdell as he did treating the other eleven combined. When Lugenbeel visited him on 18 December (four days after the arrival) he “found him laboring under some deep emotion of the mind.” For days groaning and sighing deeply, Cogdell refused nourishment (at least of the solid kind). On 22 December Lugenbeel discerned clear symptoms of delirium tremens. These worsened until the day after Christmas when Lugenbeel used “powerful opiates and other means to overcome the violence of his disease.” Cogdell was well enough, though weak, to sail with the Pons on New Year’s Day, 1846.

Captain Bell had directed Cogdell to remain at Monrovia no longer than necessary, but Lawrence thought the departure was too hastily made, out of a desire on Cogdell’s part to get away before the arrival of the Yorktown or some other U.S. Navy ship: “He is making every effort to hasten us off in the most unprepared state imaginable. I have the most gloomy forebodings as to the result of our passage.”

Imagine Lawrence’s frame of mind on the afternoon of New Year’s Day, 1846, as he watched his men work the capstan and raise the anchor, and saw the wind fill the worn sails of the Pons. He had spent two weeks aboard ship in conditions more ghastly than he could ever have imagined, witness to incredible suffering that he and the rest of the prize crew could scarcely begin to palliate. For most of that time, too, he had been under the command of an abusive drunkard. In the two weeks after disembarking the slaves, fully occupied in dealing with Cogdell and making preparations for get-
ting under way, he must often have glanced past Cape Mesurado in
the hope of seeing a warship coming in whose captain would rec-
ognize the situation and relieve Lawrence from having to cross the
Atlantic with a man he regarded as monstrous. But no such ship
arrived. The Pons got under way with Lawrence, Cogdell, ten prize
crew, and four Portuguese from the slave crew aboard. The slaver
captain, Gallano, had turned his shopping trip ashore into a per-
manent absence, making his way to Canot’s establishment at Cape
Mount, where he had boarded the Roanoke (the same ship that had
brought the missionaries and freed slaves from the United States to
Monrovia) for South America. In a twenty-one-year career in
slaving the Pons was Gallano’s twenty-fourth load of slaves; he had
been stopped six times by the British and now once by the
Americans.

Upon his arrival in Philadelphia Cogdell reported that the
weather had been mild the first couple of weeks. However, on
12 January Lawrence had come down with a fever. On 30 January
he died, and the next day Cogdell buried him at sea. Lawrence
was twenty-four years old.

THE AFRICAN SQUADRON

Like all American squadrons, the U.S. African Squadron was
ordered to protect American interests in its area, but specifically it
was also charged with stopping slave ships leaving the African
coast. It carried out this mission with some credit considering the
extent of its capabilities. Mission and purpose, however, were not
quite identical. The American government could hardly have
expected the little squadron to stop the slave trade altogether. The
squadron was expected, though, to (1) add weight to the U.S. insis-
tence that the British leave U.S.-flag vessels alone, and (2) create
sufficient risk to slavers abusing the American flag to greatly
diminish or eliminate that practice. The squadron served these
ends quite well.
Including the 913 recaptives aboard the Pons, between 1843 and early 1862 the African Squadron captured 34 ships and rescued 3,676 slaves, not all of whom lived to reach Liberia. In the comparable period between 1843 and 1861, the British African Squadron took hundreds of prizes and landed 45,612 recaptives ashore.\textsuperscript{41} The British could draw upon a much larger navy and furthermore supported their efforts on the West African coast much more thoroughly and consistently. They could also inspect ships of all major flags except the stars and stripes, and they eventually inspected those ships, whereas the U.S. squadron was limited to ships of its own flag. The British also relied on the equipment provisions of the Quintuple Treaty and the effective operations of specialized courts they had set up in Sierra Leone to facilitate condemning slavers captured prior to loading their cargo. In contrast, the U.S. African Squadron had to send its prizes, like Patuxent and Pons, all the way across the Atlantic for sometimes dubious results.

The U.S. African Squadron operated much in the manner established by Commodore Perry, making long and necessarily inefficient patrols from its base at the Cape Verde Islands. As they came and went, the captains and commodores showed varying degrees of enthusiasm and effectiveness. By any measure, however, Captain Bell, who captured two more ships after the Patuxent and Pons, was one of the best. Under President Buchanan in the late 1850s the squadron rendezvous was moved to Loando on the African coast, where the whole operation was better supported and more efficient.\textsuperscript{42} Then in 1862 the ships were called home for good as the Lincoln government focused its resources on the war that would end slavery in the United States.

Clearly the British squadron seized more slave ships and rescued more slaves than the U.S. squadron, but both efforts pale when compared with the massive volume of the trade: between 1843 and 1862, more than half a million slaves were successfully exported to the Western hemisphere, roughly ten times the num-
ber interdicted by the British and American squadrons. The transatlantic slave trade was not actually suppressed until after the American Civil War, which was followed by a variety of political and military efforts that finally terminated the institution.

The U.S. African Squadron was a stepchild of strategy and might have been represented by a pin stuck into a map. But that pin would have represented ships of pine and wood, drenched in rain or baked in the equatorial sun; it would have represented men from Maryland and the Carolinas and New York, rocking interminably in the swells off the African coast, eating year-old beef and weevily bread and hoping to get home. It would also have stood for John C. Lawrence, a young man encountering people and things he had only read about or not even imagined.

We cannot identify the disease that killed John Lawrence, though a likely guess would be quartan malaria. Whatever the specific microbe, it found Lawrence during his time aboard the Pons, so it is accurate to say that, though it was not his intent, Lawrence gave his life in the struggle against slavery. His beneficiaries, the Pons survivors, never knew.

31. Chandler to Bancroft, 11 February 1846, MOL.

32. United States v. Schooner Patuxent and Cargo, Motion Re't'ble, 5 May 1847 [incorrectly dated 5 May 1846], Patuxent file.


Chapter 13. October 1845


Chapter 14. November 1845


2. James Buchanan to Bancroft, 8 October 1846, MLR.

Chapter 15. December 1845


2. Philadelphia Public Ledger, 11 April 1846, 2.


4. Bell to Bancroft, 11 December 1845, CDL.

5. Forfeiture Petition, 1 May 1847, District Court for Eastern District of Pennsylvania, Pons Papers.

6. The ship’s measurement is given exactly thus in legal documents, odd though the fraction may seem.

9. Bell to Bancroft, 11 December 1845, CDL.
10. Lewis J. Williams to William Williams, 30 November 1845, Archer-Mitchell-Stump-Williams Family Papers.
11. Bancroft to Prof. H. H. Lockwood, Judge Advocate, 17 July 1846, IS.
14. Ibid.
16. Liberia Herald, April 1846; African Repository, April 1846, 118.
17. Dr. J. W. Lugonbeel, 16 December 1845, letter to editor in National Intelligencer; African Repository, April 1846, 143.
19. Lugonbeel to Bell, 17 January 1846, and Lawrence to Bell, 30 December 1845, both enclosed in Bell to Bancroft, 27 January 1846, CDL.
22. African Repository, August 1846, 236.
31. Liberia Herald, 4 December 1846, 15.
35. Lugenbeel to Bell, 17 January 1846; Lawrence to Bell, 30 December 1845; both enclosed in Bell to Bancroft, 27 January 1846, CDL.
36. Lugenbeel to Bell, 17 January 1846, enclosed in Bell to Bancroft, 27 January 1846, CDL.
37. Lawrence to Bell, 30 December 1845, enclosed in Bell to Bancroft, 27 January 1846, CDL.
39. Hoyt, Land of Hope, 88; Lugenbeel to McLain, 29 December 1845, in African Repository, April 1846, 112. Hoyt says Gallano had been stopped three times, while Lugenbeel says "six times by British cruisers." As Lugenbeel is more specific and was writing almost immediately after conversing with Gallano, his figure seems more reliable.
40. Richard C. Cogdell to Bancroft, 29 April 1846, MOL. In the undated letter to Bancroft reporting his arrival with the Pous in Philadelphia on 13 March 1846, Cogdell says Lawrence took sick on 12 January, while in his letter of 29 April 1846 he says Lawrence became sick on 1 January.
42. Ibid.
43. Earl E. McNeilly, Navy and the Suppression of the Slave Trade, 204–38.