Of the equipment of the squadron: The incidents relating thereto, from its first appointment to its setting sail from St. Helens.

The squadron under the Command of Mr. Anson (of which I here propose to recite the most material proceedings) having undergone many changes in its destination, its force, and its equipment, in the ten months between its first appointment and its final sailing from St. Helens; I conceive the history of these alterations is a detail necessary to be made public, both for the honour of those who first planned and promoted this enterprise, and for the justification of those who have been entrusted
trusted with its execution. Since it will from hence appear, that
the accidents the expedition was afterwards exposed to, and which
prevented it from producing all the national advantages the strength
of the squadron, and the expectation of the public, seemed to pre-
face, were principally owing to a series of interruptions, which de-
layed the Commander in the course of his preparations, and which
it exceeded his utmost industry either to avoid or to get removed.

When in the latter end of the summer of the year 1739, it
was foreseen that a war with Spain was inevitable, it was the opi-
nion of several considerable persons then trusted with the Admi-
nistration of affairs, that the most prudent step the Nation could
take, on the breaking out of the war, was attacking that Crown
in her distant settlements; for by this means (as at that time
there was the greatest probability of success) it was supposed
that we should cut off the principal resources of the enemy, and
reduce them to the necessity of sincerely desiring a peace, as they
would hereby be deprived of the returns of that treasure by which
alone they could be enabled to carry on a war.

In pursuance of these sentiments, several projects were exa-
mined, and several resolutions taken in Council. And in all these
deliberations it was from the first determined, that George An-
son, Esq, then Captain of the Centurion, should be employed as
Commander in Chief of an expedition of this kind: And he then
being absent on a cruise, a vessel was dispatched to his station
so early as the beginning of September, to order him to return with
his ship to Portsmouth. And soon after he came there, that is, on
the 10th of November following, he received a letter from Sir
Charles Wager, ordering him to repair to London, and to attend
the board of Admiralty: Where, when he arrived, he was inform-
ed by Sir Charles, that two Squadrons would be immediately fitted
out for two secret expeditions, which however would have some
connexion with each other: That he, Mr. Anson, was intended
to command one of them, and Mr. Cornwall (who hath since lost
his life gloriously in the defence of his Country’s honour) the other:

That
That the squadron under Mr. Anson was to take on board three Independent Companies of a hundred men each, and Bland’s regiment of Foot: That Colonel Bland was likewise to im-
berk with his regiment, and to command the land-forces: And that, as soon as this squadron could be fitted for the sea, they were to set sail, with express orders to touch at no place till they came to Jeve Head in the East-Indies: That there they were only to stop to take in water, and thence to proceed directly to the city of Manila, situated on Luconia, one of the Philippine Islands: That the other squadron was to be of equal force with this commanded by Mr. Anson, and was intended to pass round Cape Horn into the South-Sea, and there to range along that coast; and after cruizing upon the enemy in those parts, and attempting their settlements, this squadron in its return was to rendezvous at Manila, and there to join the squadron under Mr. Anson, where they were to refresh their men, and refit their ships, and perhaps receive further orders.

This scheme was doubtless extremely well projected, and could
not but greatly advance the Public Service, and at the same time the reputation and fortune of those concerned in its execution; for had Mr. Anson proceeded for Manila at the time and in the manner pro-
posed by Sir Charles Wager, he would, in all probability, have arrived there before they had received any advice of the war between us and Spain, and consequently before they had been in the least pre-
pared for the reception of an enemy, or had any apprehensions of their danger. The city of Manila might be well supposed to have been at that time in the same defenceless condition with all the other Spanish settlements, just at the breaking out of the war: That is to say, their fortifications neglected, and in many places decayed; their cannon dismounted, or useless by the mouldring of their carriages; their magazines, whether of military stores or pro-
vision, all empty; their garrisons unpaid, and consequently thin, ill-affectcd, and dispirited; and the royal chefs in Peru, whence alone all these disorders could receive their redress, drained to the very bottom: This, from the intercepted letters of their Viceroy's

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and Governors, is well known to have been the defenceless state of Panama, and the other Spanish places on the coast of the South-Sea, for near a twelvemonth after our declaration of war. And it cannot be supposed that the city of Manila, removed still farther by almost half the circumference of the globe, should have experienced from the Spanish Government, a greater share of attention and concern for its security, than Panama, and the other important ports in Peru and Chili, on which their possession of that immense Empire depends. Indeed, it is well known, that Manila was at that time incapable of making any considerable defence, and in all probability would have surrendered only on the appearance of our squadron before it. The consequence of this city, and the island it stands on, may be in some measure estimated, from the healthiness of its air, the excellency of its port and bay, the number and wealth of its inhabitants, and the very extensive and beneficial commerce which it carries on to the principal Ports in the East-Indies, and China, and its exclusive trade to Acapulco, the returns for which, being made in silver, are, upon the lowest valuation, not less than three millions of Dollars per annum.

And on this Scheme Sir Charles Wager was so intent, that in a few days after this first conference, that is, on November 18, Mr. Anson received an order to take under his command the Argyll, Severn, Pearl, Wager, and Tryal Sloop; and other orders were given to him in the same month, and in the December following, relating to the victualling of this squadron. But Mr. Anson attending the Admiralty the beginning of January, he was informed by Sir Charles Wager, that for reasons with which he, Sir Charles, was not acquainted, the expedition to Manila was laid aside. It may be conceived, that Mr. Anson was extremely chagrined at the loosing the command of so inoffensive, so honourable, and in every respect so desirable an enterprize, especially too as he had already, at a very great expence, made the necessary provision for his own accommodation in this voyage, which he had reason to expect would prove a very long one. However, Sir Charles, to render this disappointment in
in some degree more tolerable, informed him that the expedition to the South-Seas was still intended, and that he, Mr. Anson, and his squadron, as their first destination was now countermanded, should be employed in that service. And on the 10th of January he received his commission, appointing him Commander in Chief of the forementioned squadron, which (the Argyle being in the course of their preparation changed for the Gloucester) was the same he failed with above eight months after from St. Helens. On this change of destination, the equipment of the squadron was still prosecuted with as much vigour as ever, and the victualling, and whatever depended on the Commodore, was so far advanced, that he conceived the ships might be capable of putting to sea the instant he should receive his final orders, of which he was in daily expectation. And at last, on the 28th of June 1740, the Duke of Newcastle, Principal Secretary of State, delivered to him his Majesty's instructions, dated January 31, 1739, with an additional instruction from the Lords Justices, dated June 19, 1740. On the receipt of these, Mr. Anson immediately repaired to Spithead, with a resolution to sail with the first fair wind, flattering himself that all his delays were now at an end. For though he knew by the mutters that his squadron wanted three hundred seamen of their complement, (a deficiency which, with all his activity, he had not been able to get supplied) yet, as Sir Charles Wager informed him, that an order from the board of Admiralty was dispatched to Sir John Norris to spare him the numbers which he wanted, he doubted not of his complying therewith. But on his arrival at Portsmouth, he found himself greatly mistaken, and disappointed in this persuasion: for on his application, Sir John Norris told him, he could spare him none, for he wanted men for his own fleet. This occasioned an inevitable and a very considerable delay; for it was the end of July before this deficiency was by any means supplied, and all that was then done was extremely short of his necessities and expectation. For Admiral Balseken, who succeeded to the command at Spithead, after Sir John Norris had failed to the westward
ward, instead of three hundred able sailors, which Mr. Anson wanted of his complement, ordered on board the squadron a hundred and seventy men only; of which thirty-two were from the hospital and sick quarters, thirty-seven from the Salisbury, with three officers of Colonel Lewther's regiment, and ninety-eight marines, and these were all that were ever granted to make up the forementioned deficiency.

But the Commodore's mortification did not end here. It has been already observed, that it was at first intended that Colonel Bland's regiment, and three independent companies of a hundred men each, should embark as land-forces on board the squadron. But this disposition was now changed, and all the land-forces that were to be allowed, were five hundred invalids to be collected from the out-pensioners of Chelsea college. As these out-pensioners consist of soldiers, who from their age, wounds, or other infirmities, are incapable of service in marching regiments, Mr. Anson was greatly chagrined at having such a decrepit detachment allotted him; for he was fully persuaded that the greatest part of them would perish long before they arrived at the scene of action, since the delays he had already encountered, necessarily confined his passage round Cape Horn to the most rigorous season of the year. Sir Charles Wager too joined in opinion with the Commodore, that invalids were no ways proper for this service, and solicited strenuously to have them exchanged; but he was told that persons, who were supposed to be better judges of soldiers than he or Mr. Anson, thought them the properest men that could be employed on this occasion. And upon this determination they were ordered on board the squadron on the 5th of August: But instead of five hundred, there came on board no more than two hundred and fifty-nine; for all those who had limbs and strength to walk out of Portsmouth defected, leaving behind them only such as were literally invalids, most of them being sixty years of age, and some of them upwards of seventy. Indeed it is difficult to conceive a more moving scene than the embarkation of these unhappy veterans: They were themselves
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delves extremely averse to the service they were engaged in, and 
fully apprized of all the disasters they were afterwards exposed to; 
the apprehensions of which were strongly mark’d by the concern 
that appeared in their countenances, which was mixed with no 
small degree of indignation, to be thus hurried from their repose into 
a fatiguing employ, to which neither the strength of their bodies, 
nor the vigour of their minds, were any ways proportioned, and 
where, without seeing the face of an enemy, or in the least pro-
moting the success of the enterprize they were engaged in, they 
would in all probability uselessly perish by lingering and painful dis-
eases; and this too, after they had spent the activity and strength of 
their youth in their Country’s service.

And I cannot but observe, on this melancholy incident, how extreme-
ly unfortunate it was, both to this aged and diseased detachment, and 
to the expedition they were employed in; that amongst all the out-
pensioners of Chelsea Hospital, which were supposed to amount to 
two thousand men, the most crazy and infirm only should be culled 
out for so fatiguing and perilous an undertaking. For it was well 
known, that however unfit, invalids in general might be for this 
service, yet by a prudent choice, there might have been found 
amongst them five hundred men who had some remains of vigour 
left; And Mr. Anson fully expected, that the best of them would 
have been allotted him; whereas the whole detachment that was 
fent to him, seemed to be made up of the most decrepit and mis-
erable objects, that could be collected out of the whole body; and 
by the deferment abovementioned, these were a second time cleared 
of that little health and strength which were to be found amongst 
them, and he was to take up with such as were much fitter for an 
infirmary, than for any military duty.

And here it is necessary to mention another material particular in 
the equipment of this squadron. It was proposed to Mr. Anson, 
after it was resolved that he should be sent to the South-Sea, to take 
with him two perrons under the denomination of Agent Victuallers. 
Those who were mentioned for this employment had formerly been
in the Spanish West-Indies, in the South-Sea Company's service, and it was supposed that by their knowledge and intelligence on that coast, they might often procure provisions for him by compact with the inhabitants, when it was not to be got by force of arms: These Agent Victuallers were, for this purpose, to be allowed to carry to the value of 15,000 l. in merchandize on board the squadron; for they had represented, that it would be much easier for them to procure provisions with goods, than with the value of the same goods in money. Whatever colours were given to this scheme, it was difficult to persuade the generality of mankind, that it was not principally intended for the enrichment of the Agents, by the beneficial commerce they proposed to carry on upon that coast. Mr. Anson, from the beginning, objected both to the appointment of Agent Victuallers, and the allowing them to carry a cargo on board the squadron: For he conceived, that in those few amicable ports where the squadron might touch, he needed not their assistance to contract for any provisions the place afforded; and on the enemy's coast, he did not imagine that they could ever procure him the necessaries he should want, unless (which he was resolved not to comply with) the military operations of his squadron were to be regulated by the ridiculous views of their trading projects. All that he thought the Government ought to have done on this occasion, was to put on board to the value of 2 or 3000 l. only of such goods, as the Indians, or the Spanish Planters in the least cultivated part of the coast, might be tempted with; since it was in such places only that he imagined it would be worth while to truck with the enemy for provisions: And in those places it was sufficiently evident, a very small cargo would suffice.

But though the Commodore objected both to the appointment of these officers, and to their project; yet, as they had intimated that their scheme, besides victualling the squadron, might contribute to settling a trade upon that coast, which might be afterwards carried on without difficulty, and might thereby prove a very considerable national advantage, they were much listened to by some considera
derable persons: And of the 15,000 l. which was to be the amount of their cargo, the Government agreed to advance them 10,000 upon imprest, and the remaining 5000 they raised on bottomry bonds; and the goods purchased with this sum, were all that were taken to sea by the squadron, how much soever the amount of them might be afterwards magnified by common report.

This cargo was at first shipped on board the *Wager* Store Ship, and one of the Victuallers; no part of it being admitted on board the men of war. But when the Commodore was at St. Catharine's, he considered, that in case the squadron should be separated, it might be pretended that some of the ships were disappointed of provisions for want of a cargo to truck with, and therefore he distributed some of the least bulky commodities on board the men of war, leaving the remainder principally on board the *Wager*, where it was lost: And more of the goods perishing by various accidents to be recited hereafter, and no part of them being disposed of upon the coast, the few that came home to England, did not produce, when sold, above a fourth part of the original price. So true was the Commodore's prediction about the event of this project, which had been by many considered as infallibly productive of immense gains. But to return to the transactions at Portsmouth.

To supply the place of the two hundred and forty invalids which had deserted, as is mentioned above, there were ordered on board two hundred and ten marines detached from different regiments: These were raw and undisciplined men, for they were just raised, and had scarcely anything more of the soldier than their regimentals, none of them having been so far trained, as to be permitted to fire. The first detachment of these marines came on board the 8th of August, and on the 10th the squadron sailed from Spithead to St. Helen, there to wait for a wind to proceed on the expedition.

But the delays we had already suffered had not yet spent all their influence, for we were now advanced into a season of the year, when the westerly winds are usually very constant, and very violent; and it was thought proper that we should put to sea in company.
pany with the fleet commanded by Admiral Balchen, and the expedition under Lord Cathcart. And as we made up in all twenty-one men of war, and a hundred and twenty-four fall of merchantmen and transports, we had no hopes of getting out of the Channel with so large a number of ships, without the continuance of a fair wind, for some considerable time. This was what we had every day less and less reason to expect, as the time of the equinox drew near; so that our golden dreams, and our ideal possession of the Peruvian treasures, grew each day more faint, and the difficulties and dangers of the passage round Cape Horn in the winter season filled our imaginations in their room. For it was forty days from our arrival at St. Helens, to our final departure from thence: And even then (having orders to proceed without Lord Cathcart) we tided it down the Channel with a contrary wind. But this interval of forty days was not free from the displeasing fatigue of often getting sail, and being as often obliged to return; nor exempt from dangers, greater than have been sometimes experienced in surrounding the globe. For the wind coming fair for the first time, on the 23d of August, we got under sail, and Mr. Balchen shewed himself truly solicitous to have proceeded to sea, but the wind soon returning to its old quarter, obliged us to put back to St. Helens, not without considerable hazard, and some damage received by two of the transports, who, in tacking, ran foul of each other: Besides this, we made two or three more attempts to sail, but without any better success. And, on the 6th of September, being returned to an anchor at St. Helens, after one of these fruitless efforts, the wind blew so fresh, that the whole fleet struck their yards and topmasts to prevent their driving: And, notwithstanding this precaution, the Centurion drove the next evening, and brought both cables a-head, and we were in no small danger of driving foul of the Prince Frederick, a seventy-gun ship, moored at a small distance under our stern; which we happily escaped, by her driving at the same time, and so preferring her distance: Nor did we think ourselves secure, till we at last let go the sheet anchor, which fortunately brought us up.

However,