

SURVEY OF MAY RIVER, &c.

LETTER

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY,

TRANSMITTING

*A copy of the Report of Lieutenant Wilkes of the Survey of May River, &c.*

JANUARY 15, 1839.

Read, and laid upon the table.

NAVY DEPARTMENT, *January 14, 1839.*

SIR: I have the honor to transmit herewith a copy of the report of Lieutenant Wilkes of the survey of "May river, from Tybee bar to Hunting island," directed by the act of Congress approved 3d March, 1837.

A chart of this survey is also herewith transmitted.

I am, sir, very respectfully, &c.

J. K. PAULDING.

HON. SPEAKER of the Ho. of Reps. of the U. S.

WASHINGTON CITY, *August 9, 1838.*

SIR: The accompanying chart of the "southern coast of the United States, from Tybee bar to Hunting island, (May river,)" has just been completed, and I have now the honor to submit the following report relative to the practicability of establishing a naval depot within the waters embraced in the surveys.

The principal entrance to Calibogue sound and May river is over Tybee bar, which affords sufficient water for a sloop of war at low water. Tybee bay opens into a wide expanse, between Tybee island on the south, Hilton-head island on the north, the ocean on the east, and the main land on the west; from which many rapid streams bring much alluvial with them; which, on meeting the water of the ocean, deposits itself, and forms extensive sand-bars, many of which are dry at low water; and when there is any sea on, they form extensive breakers, which are, no doubt, subject to great changes, although the sand is very hard. These constitute the great impediments to reach May river through Tybee bay

and Calibogue sound, and I am apprehensive will forever place a barrier to its ever becoming a site for a naval depot. The waters of Calibogue sound (about ten miles long and from one to one and a half wide) are bold and deep, and form a large and safe harbor. Into the northern part of this sound May river falls, and above (four miles up it) the place said to be adapted for a naval depot is situated. There are many small streams entering into May river: at their mouths are always found extensive sand-spits, running, in many cases, nearly across May river. Just below the site that was designated to me as that to which the act of Congress is supposed to refer, there is one of large extent, which confines May river to very narrow limits, so much so as to render it alone a serious objection against establishing a naval depot at this place, and would certainly oblige the Government to undergo a very heavy expense to remove it; and then there would be a great doubt in my mind whether it would be effectual. Other points were examined within the limits of our duties, but they were deemed so little adapted to the purpose, and so insalubrious by the inhabitants themselves, as to preclude the possibility of any establishment near them. The northern part of Calibogue sound was also examined, where it is joined by Skull creek, about a mile above May river; here the passage is very narrow, and nearly closed up. Skull creek connects Calibogue sound with Broad river or Port Royal sound, but of this passage to the ocean no examination was made, as it was beyond the limits of my work.

On the whole, considering the difficulties to be encountered in passing from Tybee bar into Calibogue sound, the intricacies and narrowness of the channel, and the changes the numerous sand-bars must undergo after gales of wind, I cannot bring myself to any other conclusion than that it is altogether unfit for the location of a naval establishment.

In conclusion, I would beg leave to add my testimony to the untiring zeal and perseverance of the officers who were engaged on this duty with me, and to recommend them to your notice.

With great respect, I have the honor to be your obedient servant,

CHARLES WILKES.

HON. JAMES K. PAULDING,

*Secretary of the Navy.*