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FIVE DOLLARS PER ANNUM. | WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 27th, 1805 | *PAID IN ADVANCE.*

Copy of a letter from Commodore Preble to the Secretary of the Navy.

Accompanying a Message from the President.

(Concluded.)

August the 9th, we were engaged supplying the bombs and gun-boats with ammunition and stores, and getting every thing in readiness for an attack the moment commodore Barron should arrive and make the signal. I cannot but regret that our naval establishment is so limited as to deprive me of the means and glory of completely subduing the haughty tyrant of Tripoli, while in the chief command, it will however afford me satisfaction to give my successor all the assistance in my power, At 3 P. M. I went on board the Argus for the purpose of reconnoitering the harbor of Tripoli, we stood in towards the town, and were near being sunk by the enemy's fire—One of their heaviest shot which struck about three feet short of the water line, raked the copper off her bottom under water, and cut the plank half through. In the evening the wind blew strong from the N. N. E. the squadron weighed and kept under sail all night. The day following we anchored, Tripoli bearing S. S. W. 6 miles distant. At 10 A. M. the French consul hoisted a white flag at his flag-staff under the national colours, which was a signal that the Bashaw was ready to treat. I sent a boat into the harbor and took this opportunity to forward captain Bainbridge and his officers, letters from their friends: the boat was not allowed to land, but returned in the afternoon and brought me a letter advising that the Bashaw was ready to receive 500 dollars for the ransom of each of the prisoners, and terminate the war without any consideration for peace or tribute; this is 350,000 dollars less than was demanded previous to the action of the third inst. These terms I did not hesitate to reject, as I was informed by captain Chauncy that it was the expectation of our government on the arrival of four frigates, to obtain the release of the officers and crew of the Philadelphia without ransom and dictate the terms of peace. I enclose you copies of our correspondence which will convince you that our attacks have not been made without effect.

16th. No news of the frigates, and but short allowance of water in the squadron. I sent the Enterprise to Malta, with orders to the agent there, to hire transports and send off immediately a supply of fresh water, provision and other stores which have become necessary, as some of the squadron have now been five months in sight of this dismal coast, without once visiting a friendly port: those vessels as well as the gun boats receive their supply of water and provisions from the Constitution.

18th. As the season is fast approaching when we may expect bad weather, and no news of the frigates, I have determined to make an attack as soon as the wind proves favorable. At 8 P. M. I sent captains Decatur and Chauncy in two small boats to reconnoitre the harbor, and observe the disposition of the enemy's flotilla at night: they returned at midnight, and reported that they were anchored in a line abreast, from the Mole to the Bashaw's castle, with their heads to the eastward, for the defence of the inner harbor. At day light the wind shifted suddenly from N. E. to N. N. W. and brought a heavy sea on shore, which obliged us, for greater safety, to weigh and stand to sea.

20th. We had gained an offing of 9 or ten leagues, still blowing hard. We met with the Ketch Intrepid, from Syracuse, with a cargo of fresh water stock, and vegetables for the squadron.

22d. Fell in with a ship from Malta, with water and live stock for the squadron. These cargoes arrived very opportunely, as we have for some time past been on short allowance of water. The wind having moderated, we stood in, and anchored with the squadron 6 miles N. E. by N. from Tripoli; all the boats were engaged in discharging the transports. The Enterprise arrived from Malta, but brought no intelligence of the long expected frigates.

24th. With a light breeze from the N. E. we stood in with the squadron prepared for action, intending to attack the town and shipping in the night. At 8 in the evening anchored about two and an half miles from the batteries. At midnight it fell calm. I sent the bomb vessels under the protection of the gun boats, to bombard the town; the boats of the squadron were employed in towing them in. At 2 A. M. the bombardment commenced, and continued until day light, but with what effect is uncertain. At six all the boats joined us, and were taked in tow by the squadron, which was under weigh, and standing off. At 7 anchored 4 miles north of the town. The weather for several days proved unfavorable for approaching the shore.

28th. We were favored with a pleasant breeze from the eastward. At 3 P. M. we weighed, and stood in for Tripoli. At 5 anchored the constitution two miles N. by E. from fort English, and 2 and an half from the Bashaw's castle; the light vessels ordered to keep under weigh. We were employed until 8 P. M. in making arrangements for attacking the town; a number of the officers, and many of the seamen of the Constitution being attached to the bomb, gun, and ship's boats; captain Chauncy with several of his officers, and about 70 seamen and marines volunteered their services on board the Constitution. All the boats in the squadron were officered and manned, and attached to the several gun boats; the two bomb vessels could not be brought into action, as one was leaky, and the mortar bed of the other had given way. The John Adams, Scourge, transports and bombs, were anchored seven miles to the northward of the town. Lieut. commandant Dent, of the Scourge, came on board the constitution, and took charge on the gun deck; lieut. Izard of the Scourge also joined me. Lieut Gordon commands gun boat No. 2. and lieut. Laurence of the Enterprize, No. 5—these are the only changes. At half past 1 A. M. the gun boats in two divisions, led by captains Decatur and Somers were ordered to advance, and take their stations close to the rocks, at the entrance of the harbor, within grape shot distance of the Bashaw's castle. The Siren, Argus, Vixen, Nautilus, Enterprize, and boats of the squadron accompanied them. At 3 A. M. the boats anchored with springs on, within pistol shot of the rocks, and commenced a brisk firing on the shipping, town, batteries, and Bashaw's castle, which was warmly returned, but not as well directed; the ship's boats remained with the gun boats, to assist in boarding the enemy's flotilla, if it should venture out; while the brigs and schooners kept under weigh ready for the same service, or for annoying the enemy as occasion might present. At day light presuming that the gun boats had nearly expended their ammunition, we weighed with the Constitution and stood in for the harbor. Fort English, the Bashaw's castle, crown and mole batteries kept up a heavy fire on us as we advanced. At half past 5 I made the signal for the gun boats to retire from action; and for the brigs and schooners to take them in tow—We were then within two cable's length of the rocks, and commenced a heavy fire of round and grape on thirteen of the enemy's gun boats and gallies, which were in pretty close action with our boats. We sunk one of the enemy's boats, at the same time, two more disabled, ran on shore to avoid sinking; the remainder immediately retreated. We continued running in, until we were within musket shot of the crown and mole batteries, when we brought to, and fired upwards of 300 round shot besides grape and canister into the town, Bashaw's castle and batteries. We silenced the castle and two of the batteries for some time. At a quarter past 6 the gun boats being all out of shot and in tow, I hauled off, after having been 3-4 of an hour in close action. The gun boats fired upwards of 400 round shot, besides grape and canister with good effect. A large Tunisian galliot was sunk in the mole; a Spanish ship which had entered with an ambassador from the grand seignior, received considerable damage. The Tripoline gallies and gun boats lost many men and were much cut.

The Bashaw's castle and town have suffered very much; as have their crown and mole batteries. Captains Decatur and Somers conducted their divisions of gun boats with their usual firmness and address; and were well supported by the officers and men attached to them. The brigs and schooners were also well conducted during the action, and fired a number of shot at the enemy; but their guns are too light to do much execution. They suffered considerably in their sails and rigging. The officers and crew of the Constitution behaved well, I cannot in justice to Capt. Chauncey, omit noticing the very able assistance I received from him on the quarter deck of the Constitution, during the whole of the action. The damage which we have received is principally above the hull; three lower shrouds, two spring stays, two topmast back stays, trusses, chains and lifts of the main yard shot away.

Our sails had several cannon shot through them, and were beside considerly cut by grape; much of our running rigging cut to pieces, one of our anchor stocks and our larboard cable shot away, and a number of grape shot were sticking in different parts of the hull; but not a man hurt! a boat belonging to the John Adams, with a master's mate (Mr. Creighton) and eight men, was sunk by a double headed shot from the batteries while in tow of the Nautilus, which killed three men and badly wounded one, who with Mr. Creighton, and the other four, were picked up by one of our boats. The only damage our gun boats sustained, was in their rigging and sails, which were considerably cut with the enemy's round and grape shot.

At 11 A. M. we anchored with the squadron 5 miles N. E. by N. from Tripoli, and repaired the damage received in the action.

29th and 30th, preparing the bomb vessels for service; supplying the gun-boats with ammunition, &c. 31st, a vessel arrived from Malta with provisions and stores; brought no news of commodore Barron, or the frigates. We discharged this vessel's cargo and ordered her to return.

September the 2d, the bomb vessels having been repaired and ready for service, lieuts. Dent and Robinson, resumed the command of them. Lieutenant Morris of the Argus took command of No. 3; and Lieutenant Trippe having nearly recovered from his wounds, resumed the command of No. 6, which he so gallantly conducted the 3d ultimo. Captain Chauncey, with several young gentlemen, and sixty men from the John Adams, volunteered on board the Constitution. At 4 P. M. made the signal to weigh; kept under sail all night. At 11 P. M. a general signal to prepare for battle: a Spanish Polacre in ballast, came out of Tripoli, with an ambassador of the Grand Seignior on board, who had been sent from Constantinople to Tripoli to confirm the Bashaw in his title; this ceremony takes place in all the Barbary regencies, every five years. The captain of this vessel informed us, that our shot and shells had made great havock and destruction in the city, and among the shipping, and that a vast number of people have been killed; also informs us that three of the boats which were sunk by our shot, in the actions of the 3d and 28th ult. had been got up, repaired, and fitted for service.

3rd. At 2, P. M. Tripoli bore S. S. W. 2 1-2 miles distant, wind E. by N. At half past 2 the signals were made for the gun boats to cast off, advance and attack the enemy's gallies and gun boats, which were all under weigh in the eastern part of the harbour, whither they had for some time been working up against the wind. This was certainly a judicious movement of theirs, as it precluded the possibility of our boats going down to attack the town, without leaving the enemy's flotilla in their rear, and directly to windward.—I accordingly ordered the bomb vessels to run down within proper distance of the town, and bombard it, while our gun boats were to engage the enemy's gallies and boats to windward. At half past 3, P. M. our bombs having gained the station to which they were directed, anchored and commenced throwing shells into the city. At the same time our gun boats opened a brisk fire on the gallies and within point blank shot, which was warmly returned by them and fort English and by a new battery, little to the westward; but as soon as our boats arrived within good musket shot of their gallies and boats, they gave way and retreated to the shore within the rocks and under cover of musketry from fort English. They were followed by our boats and by the Siren, Argus, Vixen, Nautilus and Enterprize as far as the reefs would permit them to go with prudence. The action was then divided. One division of our boats with the brigs and schooners attacked fort English, whilst the other was engaged with the enemy's gallies and boats.—The Bashaw's castle, the Mole, Crown, and several other batteries kept up a constant fire on our bomb vessels which were well conducted, and threw shells briskly into the town—but from their situation, they were very much exposed, and in great danger of being sunk. I accordingly ran within them with the Constitution to draw off the enemy's attention, and amuse them whilst the bombardment was kept up. We brought to within reach of grape, and fired eleven broadsides in the Bashaw's castle, town and batteries, in a situation where more than 70 guns could bear upon us.—One of their batteries was silenced.—The town, Castle, and other batteries considerably damaged. By this time, it was half past four o'clock.——The wind was encreasing and inclining rapidly to the northward. I made the signal for the boats to retire from action, and for the brigs and schooners to take them in tow, and soon after hauled off with the Constitution to repair damages. Our maintop sail was totally disabled by a shell from the batteries, which cut away the leach rope and several cloths of the sail. Another shell went through the fore-top-sail, and one through the jib. All our sails considerably cut—two topmast backstays shot away, main-sheet, fore-tacks, lifts, braces, bowlines, and the running rigging generally very much cut, but no shot in our hull, excepting a few grape. Our gun boats were an hour and fifteen minutes in action. They disabled several of the enemy's gallies and boats, and considerably damaged fort English. Most of our boats received damage in their rigging and sails. The bomb vessel No. 1, commanded by lieutenant Robinson was disabled; every shroud being shot away—the bed of the mortar rendered useless, and the vessel near sinking. She was however towed off. About fifty shells were thrown into the town, and our boats fired 400 round shot, besides grape and canister. They were led into action by captains Decatur and Somers with their usual gallantry. The brigs and schooners were handsomely conducted, and fired many shot with effect at fort English, which they were near enough to reach with their carronades. They suffered considerably in their rigging, and the Argus received a 32 pound shot in the hull forward, which cut off a bower cable as it entered. We kept under weigh until 11 P. M. when we anchored, Tripoli bearing S. S. W. 3 leagues. I again with pleasure acknowledge the services of an able and active officer in captain Chauncey, serving on the quarter deck of the Constitution. At sun rise I made the signal for the squadron to prepare for action. The carpenters were sent on board the bombs to repair damages, and our boats employed in supplying the bombs and gun boats with ammunition, and to replace the expenditures.

Desirous of annoying the enemy, by all the means in my power, I directed to be put into execution a long contemplated plan of sending a fireship, or infernal, into the harbor of Tripoli, in the night, for the purpose of endeavoring to destroy the enemy's shipping, and shatter the bashaw's castle and town. Captain Somers, of the Nautilus, having volunteered his services, had, for several days before this period, been directing the preparation of the ketch Intrepid, assisted by Lieuts. Wadsworth and Israel. About 100 barrels of powder and 150 fixed shells, were apparently judiciously disposed of on board her. The fuzes leading to the magazine, where all the powder was deposited, were calculated to burn a quarter of an hour.

September 4th, The Intrepid being prepared for the intended service, Capt. Somers and Lieut. Wadsworth made choice of two of the fastest rowing boats in the squadron, for bringing them out. After reaching their destination and firing the combustible materials, which were to communicate with the fuzes, capt. Somers' boat was manned with 4 seamen from the Nautilus, and lieut. Wadsworth's, with 6 from the Constitution. Lieut. Israel accompanied them. At 8 in the evening, the Intrepid was under sail, and standing for the port, with a leading breeze from the eastward. The Argus, Vixen and Nautilus convoyed her as far as the rock. On entering the harbor, several shot was fired at her from the batteries. In a few minutes after, when she had apparently nearly gained the intended place of destination, she suddenly exploded, without their having previously fired a room filled with splinters and other combustibles, which were intended to create a blaze, in order to deter the enemy from boarding, whilst the fire was communicating to the fuzes, which led to the magazine. The effect of the explosion awed their batteries into profound silence, with astonishment. Not a gun was afterwards fired for the night. The shrieks of the inhabitants informed us that the town was thrown into the greatest terror and consternation by the explosion of the magazine, and the bursting and falling of shells in all directions. The whole squadron waited with the utmost anxiety to learn the fate of the adventurers, from a signal previously agreed on in case of success, but waited in vain; no signs of their safety were to be observed. The Argus, Vixen and Nautilus hovered round the entrance of the port until sunrise, when they had a fair view of the whole harbor. Not a vestige of the ketch or boats were to be seen. One of the enemy's largest gun-boats was missing, and three others were seen very much shattered and damaged, which the enemy were hauling on shore. From these circumstances I am led to believe, that those boats were detached from the enemy's flotilla to intercept the ketch, and without suspecting her to be a fire-ship, the missing boat had suddenly boarded her, when the gallant Somers and heroes of his party, observing the other three boats surrounding them, and no prospect of escape, determined at once to prefer death and the destruction of the enemy, to captivity and torturing slavery, put a match to the train leading directly to the magazine, which at once blew the whole into the air, and terminated their existence. My conjectures respecting this affair are founded on a resolution, which capt. Somers, lieuts. Wadsworth and Israel had formed, neither to be taken by the enemy, nor suffer him to get possession of the powder on board the Intrepid. They expected to enter the harbor without discovery, but had declared, if they should be disappointed, and the enemy should board them, before they reached the point of destination, in such force as to leave them no hopes of a safe retreat, that they would put a match to the magazine and blow themselves and their enemies up together—determined, as there was no exchange of prisoners, that their country should never pay ransom for them, nor the enemy receive a supply of powder through their means.—The disappearance of one of the enemy's boats, and the shattered condition of three others, confirm me in my opinion, that they were an advanced guard, detached from the main body of the flotilla on discovering the approach of the Intrepid, and that they attempted to board her, before she had reached her point of destination, otherwise the whole of their shipping must have suffered, and perhaps would have been totally destroyed. That she was blown up before she had gained her station is certain, by which the service has lost three very gallant officers. Captain Somers, and lieuts. Wadsworth and Israel were officers of conspicuous bravery, talents and merit—they had uniformly distinguished themselves in the several actions—were beloved and lamented by the whole squadron.

September the 5th. We were employed in supplying the gun-boats with ammunition, &c. and repairing the bomb vessels for another attack, but the wind shifting to the N. N. E. a heavy swell setting on shore; and other indications of bad weather, determined me for greater safety to take the guns, mortars, shot and shells out of the boats into the Constitution and John Adams; which was accordingly done. The weather continuing to wear a threating aspect until the 7th, and our ammunition being reduced to a quantity not more than sufficient for three vessels to keep up the blockade; no intelligence of the expected reinforcement; and the season so far advanced as to render it imprudent to hazard the gun boats any longer on the station; I gave orders for the John Adams, Syren, Nautilus, Enterprize and Scourge to take the bombs and gun boats in tow, and proceed to Syracuse with them, the Argus and Vixen to remain with the Constitution to keep up the blockade.

September the 10th. The United States ship President, commodore Barron, and Constellation, captain Campbell, hove in sight and soon joined company, when the command of the squadron was surrendered to commodore Barron, with the usual ceremony. I continued in company with the squadron until the 12th, when three strange ships came in sight standing direct for Tripoli. Chase was given and two of them boarded and taken possession of by the Constitution, the President in company, about four leagues from Tripoli, but not more than five miles from the land; while the Constellation and Argus were in chase of the third. The two boarded by the Constitution were loaded with about sixteen thousand bushels of wheat. Tripoli is in a state of starvation, and there can be no doubt but those cargoes were meant as a supply and relief to our enemies.

Considering the season too far advanced and weather too uncertain to hazard any further operations against Tripoli at present, commodore Barron determined that the prizes should be sent to Malta, under convoy of the Con-