

Copy of a letter from Commodore Preble, to the secretary of the Navy, dated the 18th September.

[Communicated to Congress on the 20th instant, by the President.]

Sir, I had the honor to write you from Messina, under date of the 5th of July; I then expected to have sailed the day following, but was detained by bad weather until the 9th, when I left it with two small bomb vessels under convoy, and arrived at Syracuse; where we were necessarily detained four days. On the 14th I sailed; the schooners Nautilus and Enterprize in company, with six gun boats and two bomb vessels, generously loaned us by his Sicilian majesty. The bomb vessels are about thirty tons, carry a thirteen inch brass mortar, and forty men. Gun-boats twenty-five tons: carry a long iron twenty four pounder in the bow, with a complement of thirty five men. They are officered and manned from the squadron, excepting twelve Neapolitan bombardiers, gunners and sailors attached to each boat; who were shipped by permission of their government. This arrangement necessary, as every vessel in the squadron was considerably short of complement. The gun-boats are constructed for the defence of harbours; they are flat-bottomed and heavy, and do not sail or row even tolerably well. They were never intended to go to sea, and I find cannot be navigated with safety, unless assisted by tow ropes from larger and better sailing vessels; nor even then in very bad weather. However, as they were the best I could obtain, I have thought it for the good of our service to employ them, particularly as the weather in July and August is generally pleasant; and without them my force is too small to make an impression on Tripoli.

On the 16th of July we arrived at Malta where we were detained by contrary gales until the 21st, when we left it; and arrived in sight of Tripoli the 25th, and were joined by the Siren, Argus, Vixen, and Scourge. Our squadron now consisted of the Constitution, three brigs, three schooners, two bombs, and six gun-boats—our whole number of men 1060. I proceeded to make the necessary arrangements for an attack on Tripoli; a city well walled, protected by batteries, judiciously constructed, mounting 115 pieces of heavy cannon, and defended by 25 000 Arabs and Turks, the harbor protected by 19 gun boats, two gallees, two schooners, of eight guns each, and a brig mounting ten guns, ranged in order of battle, forming a strong line of defence at secured moorings inside a long range of rocks and shoals, extending more than two miles to the eastward of the town, which from the harbor protects them from the northern gales, and renders it impossible for a vessel of the Constitution's draft of water to approach near enough to destroy them, as they are sheltered by the rocks, and can retire under that shelter to the shore, unless they choose to expose themselves in the different channels and openings of the reefs for the purpose of annoying their enemies. Each of their gun-boats mounts a heavy 18 or 26 pounder in the bow and two brass howitzers on their quarters, and carry from 36 to 50 men. The gallees have each 100 men, 3 schrs. and brigs about the same number.

The weather was not favorable for anchoring until the 28th, when, with the wind E. S. E. the squadron stood in for the coast, and at 3 P. M. anchored per signal, Tripoli bearing south 2 1/2 miles distant. At this moment the wind shifted suddenly from E. S. E. to N. N. W. and from thence to N. N. E. at 5 o'clock it blew strong with a heavy sea, setting directly on shore. I made the signal to prepare to weigh.—At 6, the wind and sea having considerably increased, the signal was made for the squadron to weigh and gain an offing; the wind continued veering to the eastward, which favored our getting sea room, without being obliged to carry so great a press of sail, as to lose any of our gun-boats, although they were in great danger. The gale continued varying from N. E. to E. S. E. without increasing much, until the 31st, when it blew away our reefed foresail and close reefed main-top-sail; fortunately the sea did not rise in proportion to the strength of the gale, or we must have lost all our boats.—August the 1st, the gale subsided and we stood towards the coast; every preparation was made for an attack on the town & harbor. August the 3d, pleasant weather, wind east, stood in with the squadron towards Tripoli; at noon we were between two and three miles from the batteries, which were all manned and observing several of their gun boats and gallees had advanced in two divisions without the rocks, I determined to take advantage of their temerity; at half past 12 o'clock, I wore off shore, and made the signal to come within hail, when I communicated to each of the commanders my intention of attacking the enemy's shipping and batteries. The gun

and mortar boats were immediately manned and prepared to cast off; the gun boats in two divisions of three each; the 5th division commanded by captain Somers in No. 1, lieutenant Decatur in No. 2, and lieutenant Blake in No. 3. The second division commanded by captain Decatur, in No. 4, lieutenant Bainbridge in No. 5, and lieutenant Trippe in No. 6. The two bombards were commanded by lieutenant commandant Dent, and Mr. Robinson, first lieutenant of this ship. At half past one o'clock having made the necessary arrangements for the attack, wore ship and stood towards the batteries; at 2, signals made, to cast off the boats; at a quarter past 2, signal for bombs and gun boats to advance and attack the enemy; at half past 2, general signal for battle; at 1/4 past 2 the bombs commenced the action by throwing shells into the town. In an instant the enemy's shipping and batteries opened a tremendous fire, which was promptly returned by the whole squadron within grape shot distance; at the same time the second division of three gun boats, led by the gallant captain Decatur, was advancing with sails and oars to board the eastern division of the enemy, consisting of one boat. Our boats gave the enemy showers of grape and musketry balls as they advanced, they however, soon closed, when the pistol, sabre, pike, and tomahawk, were made good use of by our brave tars. Captain Somers being in the dunder, made the best use of his sweeps, but was not able to fetch far enough to windward to engage the same division of the enemy's boats, which captain Decatur fell in with; he, however, gallantly bore down with his single boat on five of the enemy's western division, and engaged within pistol shot, defeated and drove them within the rocks in a shattered condition, and with the loss of a great number of men. Lieutenant Decatur in No. 2, was closely engaged with one of the enemy's largest boats, of the eastern division, which struck him, after having lost a large proportion of men, and at the instant that brave officer was boarding her, to take possession, he was treacherously shot through the head, by the captain of the boat that had surrendered, who on base conduct enabled the partition (with the assistance he received from other boats) to escape. The third boat of captain Somers' division, kept to windward, firing at the boats and shipping in the harbor; had the gone down to his assistance, it is probable several of the enemy's boats would have been captured in that quarter. Captain Decatur in No. 4, after having, with distinguished bravery, boarded and carried one of the enemy, of superior force, to take his prize in tow and gallantly bore down to engage a second, which, after a severe and bloody conflict, he also took possession of. These two prizes had 33 officers and men killed and 27 made prisoners; 19 of which were badly wounded. Lieutenant Trippe, of the Vixen, in No. 6, ran along side of one of the enemy's large boats, which he boarded with only midshipman John Henley and nine men; his boat falling off before any more could get on board; thus was he left compelled to conquer or perish, with the odds of 25 to 11. The Turks could not withstand the ardor of this brave officer and his assistants; in a few minutes the decks were cleared and her colours hauled down. On board of this boat 14 of the enemy were killed and 22 made prisoners, seven of which were badly wounded, the rest of their boats retreated within the rocks. Lieutenant Trippe received eleven sabre wounds, some of which very severe; he speaks in the highest terms of Mr. Henley and those who followed him. Lieutenant Bainbridge in No. 5 had his latten yard shot away early in the action which prevented his getting along side of the enemy's boats; but he galled them by a steady and well directed fire within musket shot; indeed he pursued the enemy until his boat grounded under the batteries; she was fortunately soon got off. The bomb vessels kept their stations although covered with the spray of the sea, occasioned by the enemy's shot; they were well conducted by lieutenants Dent and Robinson, who kept up a constant fire from the mortars and threw a great number of shells into the town. Five of the enemy's gun boats and two gallees composing the centre division, and stationed within the rocks as a reserve joined by the boats that had been driven in and supplied by fresh men from the shore to replace those they had lost, twice attempted to row out to endeavor to surround our gun boats and their prizes. I as often made the signal to cover them, which was promptly attended to by the brigs and schooners, all of which, were gallantly conducted, and annoyed the enemy exceedingly; but the fire from this ship kept their flotilla completely in check. Our grape shot made great havoc among their men, not only on board their shipping, but on shore. We were several times within two cable's length of the rocks, and within three of their batteries; every one of which, in succession, were silenced so long as we could bring our broadside to bear upon them. But the moment we passed a battery it was reanimated and a constant heavy fire kept up, from all that we could not point our guns at. We suffered most when wearing or tacking; it was then I most sensibly felt the want of another frigate. At half past four the wind inclining to

the northward, made the signal for the bombs and gun boats to retire from action, and immediately after, the signal to tow off the gun boats and prizes, which was handsomely executed by the brigs, schooners, and boats of the squadron, covered by a heavy fire from the Constitution. At three quarters past 4 P. M. the light vessels, gun boats and prizes being out of reach of the enemy's shot, I hauled off to take the bomb vessels in tow. We were two hours under the fire of the enemy's batteries, and the only damage received in this ship is, a 24 pound shot nearly thro' the centre of the main-mast, 30 feet from the deck, main royal yard and fall shot away; one of our quarter deck guns damaged by a 32 pound shot, which at the same time shattered a mariner's arm. Two lower shrouds and two back stays were shot away and our sails and running rigging considerably cut; we must impute our getting off thus well, to our keeping to near that they overtook us, and to the annoyance our grape shot gave them; they are however but wretched gunners. Gun-boat No. 5, had the main yard shot away; and the rigging and falls of the brigs and schooners were considerably cut.—Lieutenant Decatur was the only officer killed, but in him the service has lost a valuable officer; he was a young man who gave strong promise of being an ornament to his profession; his conduct in the action was highly honorable, and he died nobly. The enemy must have suffered very much in killed and wounded both among their shipping and on shore.—Three of their gun-boats were sunk in the harbour, several of them had their decks nearly cleared of men by our shot, and a number of shells burst in the town and batteries, which must have done great execution. The officers, seamen, and marines of the squadron, behaved in the most gallant manner.—The Neapolitans in emulating the ardor of our seamen answered my highest expectations. I cannot but notice the active exertions and officer like conduct of lieutenant Gordon, and the other lieutenants of the Constitution. Mr. Harrden, the master, gave me full satisfaction as did all the officers and ship's company. I was much gratified by the conduct of captain Hall, and lieutenant Greenleaf, and the marines belonging to his company in the management of six long 26 pounders on the spare deck, which I placed under his direction. Captain Decatur speaks in the highest terms of the conduct of lieutenant Thain, and midshipman M Donough of No. 4, as does captain Somers, of Midshipmen Ridgely & Miller attached to No. 1. Annexed is a list of killed and wounded, and I enclose a copy of my general orders on this occasion.

Killed—gun-boat, No 2, lieutenant James Decatur.

Wounded—Constitution, one marine. Do—gun boat No. 4, captain Decatur, slight, one sergeant of marines, and two seamen.

Do—gun-boat No. 6, lieutenant Trippe, severely, one boatswain's mate, and two marines.

Do—gun-boat No. 1, two seamen. Do—gun-boat No. 2, two seamen.

Total—one killed and thirteen wounded.

August 5th. We were at anchor with the squadron about two leagues north from the city of Tripoli, the Argus in chase of a small vessel to the westward, which the soon came up with, and brought within hail. She proved to be a French privateer of 4 guns, which put into Tripoli a few days since for water, and left it this morning. I prevailed on the captain for a consideration, to return to Tripoli, for the purpose of landing 14 very badly wounded Tripolitans, which I put on board his vessel with a letter to the prime minister, leaving it at the option of the bashaw to reciprocate this generous mode of conducting the war. The sending these unfortunate men on shore to be taken care of by their friends, was an act of humanity on our part, which I hope will make a proper impression on the minds of the barbarians—but I doubt it. All hands were busily employed altering the rig of the three prizes, from latten vessels to sloops, and preparing for a second attack. Observed one of the enemy's schooners and the brig [two corsairs] in the harbor to be distressed was informed by the French captain, that the damage these vessels received in the action of the 3rd, had occasioned their masts being taken out.

The 7th the French privateer came out and brought me a letter from the French Consul, in which he observes, that our attack of the 3d instant had disputed the Bashaw to accept of reasonable terms; and invited me to send a boat to the rocks with a flag of truce, which was declined, as the white flag was not hoisted at the Bashaw's castle. At 9 A. M. with a very light breeze from the eastward, and a strong current, which obliged the Constitution to remain at anchor, I made the signal for the light vessels to weigh, and the gun and bomb boats to cast off and stand in shore towards the Western batteries, the prize boats having been completely fitted for service, and the command of them given to lieutenant Crane, of the Vixen, Thors, of the Enterprize, and Caldwell, of the Syren; the whole advanced with sails and oars. The orders were for the bombs to take a position in a small bay to the westward of the city, where but few of the enemy's guns could be brought to bear on them, but from whence they could annoy the town with shells. The gun boats, to silence a bat-

tery of seven heavy guns; which guarded the approach to that position, and the brigs and schooners to support them, in case the enemy's flotilla should venture out, at half past 1 P. M. a breeze from N. N. E. I weighed with the Constitution, and stood in for the town, but the wind being on shore made it imprudent to engage the batteries with the ship, as in case of a mast being shot away, the loss of the vessel would probably ensue, unless a change of wind should favor our getting off. At half past 2 P. M. the bomb and gun boats having gained their stations, the signal was made for them to attack the town and batteries. Our bombs immediately commenced throwing shells, and the gun boats opened a sharp and well directed fire on the town and batteries and within point blank shot, which was warmly returned by the enemy. The seven gun battery in left that two hours was silenced, except one gun—I presume the others were dismounted by one shot as the walls were almost totally destroyed. At a quarter past 3 P. M. a ship hove in sight to the northward, standing for the town; made the Argus signal to chase.—At half past 3 one of our prize gun boats was blown up by a hot shot from the enemy, which passed through her magazine. She had on board 28 officers, seamen and marines; 10 of whom were killed, and 6 wounded. Among the killed were James R. Caldwell, first lieutenant of the Syren and midshipman John S. Dorsey, both excellent officers; midshipman Spence and 11 men were taken up unhurt. Captain Decatur, whose division this boat belonged to, and who was near her at the time she blew up, reports to me that Mr. Spence was superintending the loading of the gun at that moment, and notwithstanding the boat was sinking, he, and the brave fellows surviving, finished charging, gave three cheers as the boat went from under them, and swam to the nearest boats, where they assisted during the remainder of the action. The enemy's gun boats and gallees, (15 in number) were all in motion close under the batteries, and appeared to meditate an attack on our boats; the Constitution, Nautilus and Enterprize were to windward, ready at every hazard to cut them off, from the harbor, if they should venture down; while the Syren and Vixen were near our boats to support and cover any of them that might be disabled.—The enemy thought it most prudent, however, to retire to their snug retreat behind the rocks, after firing a few shot. Our boats, in two divisions, under captain Somers and Decatur, were well conducted, as were our bomb vessels, by lieutenants Dent and Robinson. The town must have suffered much from this attack, and their batteries, particularly the seven gun battery, must have lost many men. At half past 5 P. M. the wind began to freshen from the N. N. E. I made the signal for the gun and bomb boats to retire from action, and for the vessels to which they were attached, to take them in tow. The Argus made signal that the strange sail was a friend. In this day's action No. 4, had a 24 pound shot through her hull; No 6 had her latten yard shot away; No. 8, a 24 pound shot through her hull, which killed two men. Some of the other boats had their rigging and falls considerably cut. We threw 43 shells, and about 500 twenty-four pound shot into the town and batteries. All the officers and men engaged in the action, behaved with the utmost intrepidity. At half past 6 all the boats were in tow, and the squadron standing to the N. W. At 8, the John Adam, captain Chauncey, from the United States, joined company. At 9 the squadron anchored, Tripoli bearing S. E. 5 miles distant. Gun boat No. 3, was this day commanded by Mr. Brooks, master of the Argus, and No. 6, by lieutenant Wadsworth, of the Constitution. Annexed is a return of our loss in this attack.

Killed—Gun boat No. 9, 1 Lieutenant, 1 Midshipman, 1 Boatswain's mate, 1 Quarter gunner, 1 Sergeant of marines, and 5 Seamen.

2 Ditto gun-boat No. 8. 2 Seamen.

12 to al.

Wounded; gun-boat No. 9, 6 seamen, two of which mortally.

Capt. Chauncey brought me the first positive information that any reinforcement was to be expected. By him I was honored with your letters of the 7th, 2d and 3d May, informing me that four frigates were coming out under commodore Barron, who is to supercede me in the command of our naval forces in these seas, at the same time, approving my conduct, and conveying to me the thanks of the President for my services. I beg you, sir, to accept my warmest thanks for the very obliging language in which you have made these communications, and to assure the President, that to merit the applause of my country, is my only aim, and to receive it, the highest gratification it can bestow.

Captain Chauncey informed me that the frigates might be expected very moment, as they were to sail from Hampton Roads 4 days after him; in consequence of this information, and as I could not bring the John Adams into action, she having left all her gun carriages for her gun deck, except 8, on board the Congress and Constitution a day or two previous to her sailing, I determined to wait a few days for the arrival of Commodore Barron before in-

other attack, when, if he should arrive, the fate of Tripoli must be decided in a few hours, and the bashaw completely humbled. Had the John Adams brought out her gun carriages, I should not have waited a moment, and can have no doubt but the next attack would make the arrival of more ships unnecessary for the Tripolitan war. I gave captain Chauncey orders to remain on the station, that we might be benefited by the assistance of his boats and men, as nearly half the crews of the Constitution, brigs and schooners, are taken out to man the bombs, guns and ships boats when prepared for an attack.

(To be continued.)

Congress

OF THE United States of America.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

TUESDAY, January 29.

DEBATE ON THE GEORGIA CLAIMS.

In committee of the whole, Gen. VARNUM in the chair.

After reading over the report of the committee of claims, which concludes with submitting the following resolution,

Resolved, That three commissioners be authorized to receive propositions of compromise and settlement, from the several companies or persons having claims to public lands within the present limits of the Mississippi territory, and finally to adjust and settle the same in such manner as in their opinion will conduce to the interest of the United States: Provided, That in such settlement the commissioners shall not exceed the limits prescribed by the convention with the state of Georgia.

Mr. DANA moved that the committee rise and report the resolution.

Mr. J. RANDOLPH wished before the committee rose, that the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. Dana) would assign some reasons for the adoption of the resolution—No two things could be more opposite than the prefatory statement made by the committee of Claims and the resolution which terminated the report. As there were no reasons assigned, he suspected the gentleman had kept them back with a view of surprising the House by their novelty; but he hoped the committee would not agree to the motion unless some better cause were assigned for its adoption than had been his hero made known.

Mr. DANA said he committee of Claims, in the report now before the committee of the whole, had confined themselves to a statement of facts derived from the documents referred to them. He conceived it to be the business of the committee of Claims to investigate the facts, and arrange them in such a manner as to free the House from the labor of detail—they had done this, and the report was a summary of all that had passed in review before them.—It was left to gentlemen to reason on the case according to their course of reflection. Whether the committee reasoned on the subject well or ill, he did not know that gentlemen were bound to follow them in their conclusions. Indeed, he apprehended that were the reasoning ever so energetic, it would not go to satisfy every gentleman. On a question like the present, he despaired of making it satisfactory to the gentleman who had asked for reasons. He was persuaded that gentleman could not be convinced by any argument the committee might have used, and it was idle to call upon them to perform impossibilities.

The question on the committee's rising, and reporting their argument to the resolution was put, and carried—Ayes 61—Noes 50.

The Speaker having resumed the chair, Gen. Varnum reported the foregoing resolution as agreed to.

Mr. BRYAN called for the reading of that rule of the House, which restrains interested persons from voting.

The clerk read the same as follows: "No member shall vote on any question in the event of which he is immediately and particularly interested; or in any other case, where he was not present when the question was put."

A motion was made to consider the report of the committee of the whole, and carried: Ayes 64—Noes 51.

Mr. CLARK moved a proviso as an amendment, declaring, that no part of the five millions of acres reserved, should go to compensate the claimants under the act of Georgia, passed in 1795.

Mr. J. RANDOLPH called the yeas and nays on the amendment.

Mr. DANA observed that the report on the table had been made on the application of persons claiming land under the act of 1795. The amendment, said he, is nothing more or less than a denial to comply with the prayer of the petitioners, and whether it was not to all intents and purposes a substitute for the resolutions agreed to in the committee of the whole, he would leave to the Speaker. If it were decided to be a substitute, it could not be received conformably to the rules of the House.

The Speaker said the resolution reported from the committee of the whole was a general one, including all claims; the amendment went to limit and confine the resolution to a particular class, and therefore he conceived it to be in order.