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COMMODORE PREBLE'S LETTER.

(Continued from Wednesday's AMERICAN.)

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 the 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 instant. These terms I did not hesitate to reject, as I was informed by capt. Chauncey 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 Chauncey 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 10 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 one

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 taken 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 a 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; capt. Chauncey 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. Commodore Barron, commanding the Scourge, came on board the Constitution, and took charge on the gun deck; lieutenant Lead of the Scourge also joined me. Lieutenant Gordon commands gun boat No. 2 and lieutenant Lawrence of the Enterprise, 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 Scourge, Argus, Vixen, Nautilus, Enterprise, and boats of the squadron accompanied them. At 3 A. M. the boats anchored with springs on within half a mile 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 perceiving 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 galleys, 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 ashore to avoid sinking; the remaining 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 with good effect. A large Tunisian galley was sunk in the mole; a Spanish ship which had entered with an ambalador from the grand seignior, received considerable damage. The Tripoline galleys 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 Captain 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 throats, two spring chays, two topmast baze stays, trussel chains and lifts of the main yard shot away.

Our sails had several cannon shot through them, and were badly considerably cut by grape; much of our running rigging cut to pieces, one of our anchor stocks and our barboard 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 Mrs. 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. Dear 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 ambalador 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 havoc 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.

3d. 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 galleys 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 galleys 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 galleys and within point blank shot, which was warmly returned by them and fort English and by a new battery, built to the westward; but as soon as our boats arrived within good musket shot of their galleys 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 Enterprise as far as the rocks 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 galleys 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 their shells 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 on 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 be brought 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 increasing 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 hoisted off with the Constitution to repair damages. Our main-top sail was totally disabled by a shell from the batteries, which cut away the lichen 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, bow lines, and the running rigging generally very much cut, but no shot in our hull, excepting a few grape. Our gun-boats were in four and fifteen minutes in action. They disabled several of the enemy's galleys 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 firing 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 coronades. They suffered considerably in their rigging, and the Argus received a 32 pound shot in the hull forward, which cut off a bow 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 acknowledged the services of an able and active officer in captain Chauncey, serving on the quarter-deck of the Constitution. A gun rife 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 fire-ship 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, fitted by Lieutenant Wadsworth and Israel. About 100 barrels of powder and 150 fixed shells, were apparently judiciously disposed of on board her. The luz 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 captain Somers and Lieutenant 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 fuze, capt. Somers' boat was manned with 4 seamen from the Nautilus, and lieutenant Wadsworth's, with 6 men from the Constitution. Lieutenant 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 & other combustibles, which were intended to create a blaze, in order to deter the enemy from boarding, whilst the fire was communicating to the fuze, which led to the magazine. The effect of the explosion was their batteries into profound silence, with attendance. 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 burning and falling of shells in all directions. The whole squadron was with the utmost anxiety to learn the fate of the adventurer: 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 covered 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 these boats were detached from the enemy's flotilla to intercept the ketch and wit out 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 torments; 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 reflection, which captain Somers, Lieutenant 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 & 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 & 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 lieutenants Wadsworth and Israel were offi-

cers 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 threatening 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 Enterprise 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 confidant, capt. Campbell, have in fight 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. Chafe 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 Constitution 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 these 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 Constitution, it being necessary the should go into port to be recalculated and refitted.—I notified commodore Barron, that it was my wish to return to the United States in the frigate John Adams, captain Chauncey; this readily and in the handsomest manner met his acquiescence.—I shall accordingly return in that ship.

The service in this quarter cannot suffer from this arrangement, as captain Decatur is at present, without a ship and my return will immediately place him in the exercise of the duties attached to that commission, which he has so gallantly earned and his country generously bestowed. I shall feel a pleasure in leaving the Constitution under the command of that officer, whose enterprising and manly conduct I have often witnessed and whose merits eminently entitle him to so handsome a command.

The other commanders merit the highest commendations for their prompt obedience to orders on all occasions, and for the zeal, spirit and judgment which they displayed in the several attacks on the enemy's shipping and batteries, as well as for the general good order and discipline at all times observed on board their respective vessels. The officers of the squadron have conducted themselves in the most gallant and handsome manner; and the conduct of the different ship's companies has merited my warmest approbation since I have had the honor to command them.

It affords me much satisfaction to observe, that we have neither had a duel nor court martial in the squadron since we left the United States.

I most sincerely regret the loss of our gallant countrymen who have sacrificed their lives to the honor of the service, and that it has not been in my power, consistent with the interest and expectation of our country, to liberate captain Bainbridge and the unfortunate officers and crew of the Philadelphia. Be assured, Sir, I have incessantly endeavored to effect this desirable object. I have no doubt but my successor will be able to effect their release, and establish peace on such terms as will reflect the highest honor on himself and his country.

September 17th. Arrived at Malta with the two detained Greek vessels.—We experienced very bad weather, but had the satisfaction to learn that the bombs and gun-boats had arrived safe at Syracuse the 15th instant without accident. Each of the Tripoline gun-boats which we have captured has two brass howitzers aboard, and a handsome copper gun in the bow, which carries a 32 pound shot, is 11 1/2 feet long and weighs 6,600 pounds.

I send you a plan of the town and harbor of Tripoli, with the disposition of our squadron, and the enemy's flotilla, at the time of the several attacks, with sundry other papers.

I have the honor to be,  
With the highest respect,  
Your most obedient servant,  
EDWARD PREBLE,  
United States Ship Constitution,  
Malta harbor, September 18, 1804.  
HONORABLE  
SECRETARY OF THE UNITED STATES  
NAVY, WASHINGTON.