

NAVAL OPERATIONS AGAINST TRIPOLI

Commodore Edward Preble to the Secretary of the Navy

US SHIP CONSTITUTION, Malta Harbor, 18 September 1804

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 ENTERPRISE 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 sea-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 bombadiers, gunners, and sailors, attached to each boat, who were shipped by permission of their Government. This step I found necessary as every vessel in the squadron was considerably short of complement. The gun-boats are constructed for the defence of harbors; 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 too small to make any 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 SYREN, 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, one thousand and sixty. I proceeded to make the necessary arrangements for an attack on Tripoli, a city well walled, protected by batteries judiciously constructed, mounting one hundred and fifteen pieces of heavy cannon, and defended by twenty-five thousand Arabs and Turks; the harbor protected by nineteen gunboats, two galleys, two schooners of eight guns each, and a brig mounting ten guns, ranged in order of battle, forming a strong line of defence, at secure moorings, inside a long range of rocks and shoals, extending more than two miles to the eastward of the town, which form the harbor, protects them from the northern gales, and renders it impossible for a vessel of the CONSTITUTION's draught 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 eighteen or twenty-six pounder in the bow, and two brass howitzers on their quarters, and carry from thirty-six to fifty men. The galleys have each one hundred men; schooners and brigs about the same number. The weather was not favorable for anchoring until the 28th, when, with the wind ESE the squadron stood in for the coast, and, at 3 PM anchored, per signal, Tripoli bearing S two and a half miles distant. At this moment the wind shifted suddenly from ESE to NNW, and thence to NNE. 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 gaining 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 northeast to south southeast, without increasing much until the 31st July, when it blew away our reefed fore-sail, and close reefed maintopsail; fortunately the sea did not rise in proportion to the strength of the gale, or we must have lost all our boats. August 1st the gale subsided, and we stood towards the coast: every preparation was made for an attack on the town and harbor. August 3d, pleasant weather, wind from the 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 galleys had advanced, in two divisions, without the rocks, I determined to take advantage of their temerity. At half past 12, 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 first 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 1 o'clock, having made the necessary arrangements for the attack, wore ship and stood towards the batteries. At 2 signal 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 3, general signal for battle. At three-quarters 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 nine boats. Our boats gave the enemy showers of grape and musket 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 a dull sailer, made the best use of his sweeps, but was not able to fetch far enough to the 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 stuck to 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, which base conduct enabled the poltroon (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 she 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, took 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 thirty-three officers and men killed, and twenty-seven made prisoners, nineteen 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 thirty-six to eleven. The Turks could not withstand the ardor of this brave officer and his assistants; in a few minutes the decks were cleared, and her colors hauled down. On board of this boat fourteen of the enemy were killed, and twenty-two 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 are very severe. He speaks in the highest terms of Mr. Henley, and those who followed him. Lieutenant Bainbridge, in No. 5, had his latteen yard shot away early in the action, which prevented his getting alongside the enemy's boats, but he galled them by a steady and well-directed fire with 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 galleys, 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 cables 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 4, the wind inclining to the northward, I 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, PM, 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 the ship is a twenty-four pound shot nearly through the centre of the mainmast, thirty feet from the deck; main royal yard and sail shot away; one of our quarter-deck guns damaged by a thirty-two pound shot, which, at the same time, shattered a marine's arm; two lower shrouds and two backstays were shot away, and our sails and running rigging considerably cut. We must impute our getting off thus well to our keeping so near that they over shot us, and to the annoyance our grape shot gave them; they, are, however, but wretched gunners. Gunboat No. 5 had her main yard shot away, and the rigging and sails 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 their killed and wounded, both among their shipping and on shore. Three of their gun-boats were sunk in the harbor, 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. Harriden, the master, gave me full satisfaction, as did all the officers and ship's company. I was much gratified with the conduct of Captain Hall and Lieutenant Greenleaf, and the marines belonging to his company, in the management of six long twenty-six pounders, on the spar deck, which I placed under his direction. Captain Decatur speaks in the highest terms of the conduct of Lieutenant Thorn and Midshipman McDonough, of No. 4, as does Captain Somers of Midshipmen Ridgely and Miller, attached to No. 1.

Annexed is a list of killed and wounded; and, enclosed, a copy of my general orders on this occasion.

Killed — Gun-boat No. 2, Lieut. James Decatur.

Wounded — Constitution, one marine; gun-boat No. 4. Captain Decatur, (slight,) one sergeant of marines, and two seamen; gun-boat No. 6. Lieut. Trippe, severely, one boatswain's mate, and two marines; gun-boat No. 1. two seamen; 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 she soon came up with, and brought within hail. She proved to be a French privateer, of four 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 fourteen 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 in altering the rig of the three prizes, from latteen 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 dismasted. Was informed by the French captain, that the damage these vessels received in the action of the third had occasioned their masts being taken out.

August 7th—The French privateer came out, and brought me a letter from the French Consul, in which he observes, that our attack of the third instant has disposed 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 nine AM, 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 Lieutenants Crane, of the VIXEN, Thorn, of the ENTERPRISE, 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 battery 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 come out. At half-past one PM, a breeze from NNE, 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 two PM, the bomb and gun-boats having gained their station, the signal was made for them to attack the town and batteries, within point blank shot, which was warmly returned by the enemy. The seven gun battery, in less than two hours was silenced, except one gun; I presume the others were dismounted by our shot, as the walls were almost totally destroyed. At a quarter-past three PM a ship hove in sight to the northward, standing for the town; made the ARGUS signal to chase. At half-past three one of our prize gun-boats was blown up by a hot shot from the enemy, which passed through the magazine; she had on board twenty-eight officer, seamen, and marines, ten of whom were killed, and six wounded; among the killed were, James R. Caldwell, First Lieutenant of the SYREN, and Midshipman John S. Dorsey, both excellent officers; Midshipman Spence, and eleven 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 gunboats and galleys (fifteen in number) were all in motion close under the batteries, and appeared to meditate an attack on our boats; the CONSTITUTION, NAUTILUS, and

ENTERPRISE, 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 Captains 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 five, PM, the wind began to freshen from the NNE; 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 twenty-four pound shot through her hull; No. 6, her latteen yards shot away; No. 8, a twenty-four pound shot through her hull, which killed two men; some of the other boats had their rigging and sails considerably cut. We threw forty-eight shells, and about five hundred 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 six, all the boats were in tow, and the squadrons standing to the northwest. At eight, the JOHN ADAMS, Captain Chauncey, from the United States, joined company. At nine, the squadron anchored, Tripoli bearing southeast, five 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—One lieutenant, one midshipman, one boatswain's mate, one quarter gunner, one sergeant of marines, and five seamen.

Killed, Gun-boat No. 8—Two seamen.

Wounded, No. 9—Six seamen, two of whom mortally. Total—Twelve killed, six wounded.

Captain Chauncey brought the first positive information that any reinforcement was to be expected. I was honored with your letters of the 7th, 22^d, and 31st of May, informing me that four frigates were coming out, under Commodore Barron, who is to supersede me in the command of our naval forces in these seas, at the same time approbating 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 every moment, as they were to sail from Hampton Roads four 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 eight, on board the CONGRESS and CONSTELLATION, a day or two previous to her sailing,) I determined to wait a few days for the arrival of Commodore Barron, before another 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 termination of the Tripoline 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, were taken out to man the bombs, gun, and ship's boats, when prepared for an attack.

August the 9th, we were engaged supplying the bombs and gun-boats with ammunition and stores, and getting everything 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 three PM, 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 from the NNE, the squadron weighed and kept under sail all night. The day following we anchored, Tripoli bearing SSW, six miles distant. At ten AM, the French Consul hoisted a white flag at his flag-staff under the national colors, 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 five hundred dollars for the ransom of each of the prisoners, and terminate the war without any

consideration for peace or tribute; this is three hundred and fifty thousand 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 Captain 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 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 eight PM, 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 NE to NNW, and brought a heavy sea on shore, which obliged us, for the greater safety, to weigh and stand to sea.

20th. We had gained an offing of nine 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 six miles NE 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 NE, we stood in, with the squadron prepared for action, intending to attack the town and shipping in the night. At eight in the evening, anchored about two miles and a half 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 two AM, 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 seven, anchored four 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 PM we weighed, and stood in for Tripoli. At 5, anchored the CONSTITUTION two miles N by E from Fort English, and two-and-a-half from the Bashaw's castle; the light vessels ordered to keep under weigh. We were employed until 8 PM in making arrangements for attacking the town; a number of the officers, and many of the seamen in the CONSTITUTION being attached to the bomb, gun, and ship's boats; Captain Chauncey, with several of his officers, and about seventy 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. Lawrence, of the ENTERPRISE, No 5; these are the only changes. At half-past one AM 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 SYREN, ARGUS, VIXEN, NAUTILUS, ENTERPRISE, and boats of the squadron accompanied them. At three AM 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 daylight, 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 five,

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 cables' 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 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 three hundred 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 six, the gun-boats being all out of shot and in tow, I hauled off, after having been three-quarters of an hour in close action. The gun-boats fired upwards of four hundred 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 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 shrouds, two spring-stays, two topmast back-stays, trusses, chains, and lifts of the mainyard shot away.

Our sails had several cannon shot through them, and were beside considerably 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, 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 AM, we anchored with the squadron, five miles NE 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 2^d. the bomb vessels having been repaired and ready for service, Lieutenants Dent and Robinson, resumed the command of them. Lieut. 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 on the 3^d ultimo. Capt. Chauncey, with several young gentlemen, and sixty men from the JOHN ADAMS, volunteered on board the CONSTITUTION. At 4 PM, made the signal to weigh; kept under sail all night. At 11 PM, 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 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 3^d and 28th ultimo, had been gotten up, repaired, and fitted for service.

3rd. At 2 PM Tripoli bore SSW 2½ 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 harbor, 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, PM 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, a little 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 SYREN, ARGUS, VIXEN, NAUTILUS and ENTERPRISE, 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 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 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 seventy guns could bear upon us. One of their batteries was silenced. The town, castle, and other 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 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 foretop-sail, and one through the jib. All our sails considerably cut—two topmast back-stays shot away, mainsheet, 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 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 fired four hundred rounds, 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 thirty-two pound shot in the hull forward, which cut off a bower cable as it entered. We kept under weigh until 11 PM when we anchored, Tripoli bearing SSW three 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 sunrise 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 Lieutenants Wadsworth and Israel. About one hundred barrels of powder and one hundred and fifty 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, 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 fuzes, Captain Somers' boat was manned with four seamen from the NAUTILUS, and Lieutenant Wadsworth's with six from the CONSTITUTION. Lieutenant Israel accompanied them. At eight 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 afterward 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 her boats was 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 the 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 Captain Somers, Lieutenants 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 Lieutenants 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 NNE 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 seventh, 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 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 twelfth, 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 CONSTITUTION, it being necessary she should go into port to be recaulked 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 a most gallant and handsome manner; and the conduct of the different ships' 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 abaft, and a handsome copper gun in the bow, which carries a 29 pound shot, is 11 ½ 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.

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