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Naval Intelligence.

CAPTURE OF THE ESSEX-FRIGATE!

Copy of a letter from Captain Porter, to the Secretary of the Navy.

Essex Junior, July 3d, 1814, at sea.

Sir—I have done myself the honour to address you, repeatedly, since I left the Delaware; but have scarcely a hope that one of my letters has reached you; therefore, consider it necessary to give you a brief history of my proceedings since that period.

I sailed from the Delaware on the 27th of October, 1812, and repaired, with all diligence, (agreeably to instructions from Commodore Bainbridge,) to Port Praya, Fernando de Noronha, and Cape Frio; and arrived at each place on the day appointed to meet him. On my passage from Port Praya to Fernando de Noronha, I captured his Britannic majesty's packet Nocton; and after taking out about \$1,000 sterling in specie, sent her under command of Lieut. Finch, for America. I cruised off Rio de Janeiro, and about Cape Frio, until the 12th January, 1813, hearing frequently of the Commodore, by vessels from Bahia. There I captured but one schooner, with hides and tallow; I sent her into Rio. The Montague, the admiral's ship, being in pursuit of me, my provisions now getting short, and finding it necessary to look out for a supply, to enable me to meet the Commodore by the 1st of April, off St. Helena, I proceeded to the island of St. Catharines, (the last place of rendezvous on the coast of Brazil,) as the most likely to supply my wants, and, at the same time, afford me that secrecy necessary to enable me to elude the British ships of war on the coast, and expected there. I here could procure only wood, water, and rum, and a few bags of flour; and hearing of the Commodore's action with the Java, the capture of the Hornet by the Montague, and of a considerable augmentation of the British force on the coast, and of several being in pursuit of me, I found it necessary to get to sea as soon as possible. I now, agreeably to the Commodore's plan, stretched to the southward, scouring the coast as far as Rio de la Platta. I heard that Buenos Ayres was in a state of starvation, and could not supply our wants; and that the government of Montevideo was very inimical to us. The Commodore's instructions now left it completely discretionary with me what course to pursue, and I determined on following that which had not only met his approbation, but the approbation of the then Secretary of the Navy. I accordingly shaped my course for the Pacific; and after suffering greatly from short allowance of provisions, and heavy gales off Cape Horn, (for which my ship and men were illly provided,) I arrived at Valparaiso on the 14th March, 1813. I here took in as much jerked beef, and other provisions, as my ship would conveniently stow, and ran down the coast of Chili and Peru; in this track I fell in with a Peruvian corsair, which had on board twenty-four Americans as prisoners, the crews of two whale ships, which she had taken on the coast of Chili. The captain informed me that, as the allies of Great Britain, they would capture all they should meet with, in expectation of a war between Spain and the United States. I consequently threw all his guns and ammunition into the sea, liberated the Americans, wrote a respectful letter to the Vice Roy explaining the cause of my proceedings, which I delivered to her captain. I then proceeded for Lima, and re-captured one of the vessels as she was entering the port. From thence I proceeded for the Gallapagos islands, where I cruised from the 17th April, until the 3d October, 1813; during which time I touched only once on the coast of America, which was for the purpose of procuring a supply of fresh water, as none is to be found among those islands, which are perhaps the most barren and desolate of any known.

While among this group, I captured the following British ships, employed chiefly in the sperm whale fishery, viz.

Letters of Marque.

	tons.	men.	guns.	pierced
Montezuma,	270	21	2	for
Polley,	175	26	10	19
Georgiana,	280	25	6	18
Greenwich,	338	25	10	20
Atlantic,	355	24	8	20
Rose,	320	21	8	20
Hector,	270	25	11	20
Catharine,	270	29	8	18
Seringapatam,	357	31	14	26
Charlton,	274	21	10	18
New Zealander,	259	23	8	18
Sir A. Hammond,	361	31	12	18

3465 303 107

As some of those ships were captured by boats, and others by prizes, my officers and men had several opportunities of shewing their gallantry.

The Rose and Charlton were given up to the prisoners; the Hector, Catharine, and Montezuma, I sent to Valparaiso, where they were hid up; the Polley, Georgiana, and New Zea-

lander, I sent for America; the Greenwich I kept as a store ship, to contain the stores of my other prizes, necessary for us; and the Atlantic, now called the Essex Junior, I equipped with twenty guns and gave command of her to Lieut. Downes.

Lieutenant Downes had conveyed the prizes to Valparaiso, and, on his return, brought me letters, informing me that a squadron under the command of Commodore James Hillyar, consisting of the frigate Phoebe, of 36 guns, the Raccoon and Cherub sloops of war, and a store ship of 20 guns, had sailed on the 6th July for this sea. The Raccoon and Cherub had been seeking me for some time on the coast of Brazil, and, on their return from their cruise, joined the squadron sent in search of me to the Pacific. My ship, as it may be supposed, after being near a year at sea, required some repairs to put her in a state to meet them; which I determined to do, and bring them to action, if I could meet them on nearly equal terms. I proceeded, now, in company with the remainder of my prizes, to the island of Noaquevah, or Madison's island, lying in the Washington group, discovered by a Captain Ingraham of Boston; here I caulked and completely overhauled my ship, made for her a new set of water casks, her old ones being entirely decayed, and took on board from my prizes provisions and stores for upwards of four months, and sailed for the coast of Chili on the 12th December, 1813. Previous to sailing, I secured the Seringapatam, Greenwich, and Sir Andrew Hammond under the guns of a battery, which I erected for their protection; (after taking possession of this fine island for the United States, and establishing the most friendly intercourse with the natives.) I left them under the charge of Lieut. Gamble of the marines, with twenty-one men, with orders to repair to Valparaiso after a certain period.

I arrived on the coast of Chili on the 12th January, 1814; looked into Concepcion and Valparaiso, found at both places only three English vessels, and learned that the squadron which sailed from Rio de Janeiro for that sea had not been heard of since their departure, and were supposed to be lost in endeavoring to double Cape Horn.

I had completely broken up the British navigation in the Pacific; the vessels which had not been captured by me, were laid up and dare not venture out. I had afforded the most ample protection to our own vessels, which were, on my arrival, very numerous and unprotected.

The valuable whale fishery there is entirely destroyed, and the actual injury we have done them may be estimated at two and a half millions of dollars, independent of the expenses of the vessels in search of me. They have furnished me amply with sails, cordage, cables, anchors, provisions, medicines and stores of every description; and the slops on board them have furnished clothing for the seamen. We had in fact lived on the enemy since I had been in that sea, every prize having proved a well found store ship for me. I had not yet been under the necessity of drawing bills on the department for any object, and had been enabled to make considerable advances to my officers and crew on account of pay.

For the unexampled time we had kept the sea, my crew had continued remarkably healthy; I had but one case of the scurvy, and had lost only the following men by death, viz.:

- John S. Cowan, Lieutenant,
- Robert Miller, Surgeon,
- Levi Holmes, O. Seaman,
- Edward Sweeney, do.
- Samuel Groce, Seaman,
- James Spafford, Gunner's Mate,
- Benjamin Geers, } Qr. Gunners,
- John Rodgers, } Qr. Gunners,
- Andrew Mahan, Corporal of Marines,
- Lewis Price, Private Marine.

I had done all the injury that could be done the British commerce in the Pacific, and still hoped to signalize my cruise by something more splendid before leaving that sea. I thought it not improbable that Commodore Hillyar might have kept his arrival secret, and believing that he would seek me at Valparaiso, as the most likely place to find me, I therefore determined to cruise about that place, and should I fail of meeting him, hoped to be compensated by the capture of some merchant ships, said to be expected from England.

The Phoebe, agreeably to my expectations, came to seek me at Valparaiso, where I was anchored with the Essex, my grand prize the Essex Junior, under the command of Lieut. Downes, on the look out off the harbor; but, contrary to the course I thought he would pursue, Commodore Hillyar brought with him the Cherub sloop of war, mounting 28 guns, eighteen 32 pound carronades, eight 24's, and two long 9's on the quarter deck and fore-castle, and a complement of 180 men. The force of the Phoebe, is as follows: thirty long 18 pounders, sixteen 32 pound carronades, one howitzer, and 6 three pounders in the tops, in all 53 guns, and a complement of 320 men; making a force of 81 guns and 500 men; in addition to which, they took on board the crew of an English letter of marque laying in port. Both ships had picked crews, and were sent into the Pacific, in company with the Raccoon of 22 guns and a store ship of 20 guns, for the express purpose of seeking the Essex, and were prepared with flags bearing the motto, "God and country; British Sailors' best rights; Traitors offend both." This was intended as a reply to my motto, "Free Trade and Sailors' Rights," under the erroneous impression that my crew were chiefly Englishmen, or to counteract its effect on their own crews. The force of the

Essex was 46 guns, forty 32 pound carronades, and 64 long 12's, and her crew, which had been much reduced by prizes, amounted only to 285 men. The Essex Junior, which was intended chiefly as a store ship, mounted 20 guns, ten 18 pound carronades, and ten short 6's, with only 60 men on board. In reply to their motto, I wrote at my mizen, "God, our Country and Liberty; Tyrants offend them."

On getting their provisions on board, they went off the port for the purpose of blockading me, where they cruised for nearly six weeks; during which time I endeavored to provoke a challenge, and frequently, but ineffectually, to bring the Phoebe alone to action, first with both my ships, and afterwards with my single ship, with both crews on board. I was several times under way, and ascertained that I had greatly the advantage in point of sailing, and once succeeded in closing within gun shot of the Phoebe, and commenced a fire on her, when she ran down the Cherub, which was 24 miles to leeward; this excited some surprise and expressions of indignation, as previous to my getting under way, she hove too off the port, hoisted her motto flag and fired a gun to windward. Com. Hillyar seemed determined to avoid a contest with me on nearly equal terms, and from his extreme prudence in keeping both his ships ever after constantly within hail of each other, there were no hopes of any advantages to my country from a longer stay in port. I therefore determined to put to sea the first opportunity which should offer; and I was the more strongly induced to do so, as I had gained certain intelligence that the Tagus, rated 38, and two other frigates, had sailed for the sea in pursuit of me; and I had reason to expect the arrival of the Raccoon from the N. W. coast of America, where she had been sent for the purpose of destroying our Far establishment on the Columbia. A rendezvous was appointed for the Essex Junior, and every arrangement made for sailing, and I intended to let them chase me off, to give the Essex Junior an opportunity of escaping. On the 28th March, the day after this determination was formed, the wind came on to blow fresh from the southward, when I parted my larboard cable and dragged my starboard anchor directly out to sea. Not a moment was to be lost in getting sail on the ship. The enemy were close in with the point forming the west side of the bay; but on opening them, I saw a prospect of passing to windward, when I took in my top-gallant sails, which were set over single reefed top-sails, and braced up for this purpose; but on rounding the point, a heavy squall struck the ship and carried away her main-top-mast, precipitating the men who were aloft into the sea, who were drowned. Both ships now gave chase to me, and I endeavored in my disabled state to regain the port; but finding I could not recover the common anchorage, I ran close into a small bay, about three-quarters of a mile to leeward of the battery, on the east side of the harbor, and let go my anchor within pistol shot of the shore, where I intended to repair my damages as soon as possible. The enemy continued to approach, and shewed an evident intention of attacking, regardless of the neutrality of the place where I was anchored; and the caution observed in their approach to the attack of the crippled Essex was truly ridiculous, as was their display of their motto flags, and the number of Jacks at all their mast heads. I, with as much expedition as circumstances would admit of, got my ship ready for action, and endeavored to get a spring on my cable, but had not succeeded when the enemy, at 54 minutes after 3 P. M. made his attack, the Phoebe placing herself under my stern, and the Cherub on my starboard bow; but the Cherub soon finding her situation a hot one, bore up and ran under my stern also, where both ships kept up a hot raking fire. I had got three long 12-pounders out of the stern ports, which were worked with so much bravery and skill, that in a half an hour we so disabled both as to compel them to haul off to repair damages. In the course of this firing, I had by the great exertions of Mr. Edward Barnwell, the Acting Sailing-master, assisted by Mr. Linscott, the Boatwain, succeeded in getting springs on our cable three different times; but the fire of the enemy was so excessive, that before we could get our broadside to bear, they were shot away, and thus rendered useless to us. My ship had received many injuries, and several had been killed and wounded; but my brave officers and men, notwithstanding the unfavorable circumstances under which we were brought to action, and the powerful force opposed to us, were no ways discouraged—all appeared determined to defend their ship to the last extremity, and to die in preference to a shameful surrender. Our gaff, with the ensign and the motto flag at the mizen, had been shot away, but FREE TRADE and SAILORS' RIGHTS continued to fly at the fore. Our ensign was replaced by another; and to guard against a similar event, an ensign was made fast in the mizen rigging, and several Jacks were hoisted in different parts of the ship. The enemy soon repaired his damages for a fresh attack; he now placed himself, with both his ships, on my starboard quarter, out of the reach of my carronades, and where my stern guns could not be brought to bear; he there kept up a most gallant fire, which it was out of my power to return, when I saw no prospect of injuring him without getting under way and becoming the assailant. My top-sail sheets and haliards were all shot away, as well as the jib and fore-top-mast-stay-sail-haliards. The only rope not cut was the flying-jib-haliards; and that being the only sail I could set, I caused it to be hoisted, my cable to be cut, and ran down

on both ships, with an intention of laying the Phoebe on board. The firing on both sides was now tremendous; I had let fall my fore-top-sail and fore-sail, but the want of tacks and sheets rendered them almost useless to us—we were enabled, for a short time, to close with the enemy; and although our decks were now strewn with dead, and our cock-pit filled with wounded—although our ship had been several times on fire, and was rendered a perfect wreck, we were still encouraged to hope to save her, from the circumstance of the Cherub, from her crippled state, being compelled to haul off. She did not return to close action again, although she apparently had it in her power to do so, but kept up a distant firing with her long guns. The Phoebe, from our disabled state, was enabled however, by edging off, to choose the distance which best suited her long guns, and kept up a tremendous fire on us, which mowed down my brave companions by the dozen. Many of my guns had been rendered useless by the enemy's shot, and many of them had had their whole crews destroyed. We manned them again from those which were disabled, and one gun in particular was three times manned—fifteen men were slain at it in the course of the action! but, strange as it may appear, the captain of it escaped with only a slight wound. Finding that the enemy had it in his power to choose his distance, I now gave up all hopes of closing with him, and, as the wind, for the moment, seemed to favor the design, I determined to endeavor to run her on shore, land my men and destroy her. Every thing seemed to favor my wishes. We had approached the shore within musket shot, and I had no doubt of succeeding, when, in an instant, the wind shifted from the land, as is very common in this port in the latter part of the day) and paid our head down on the Phoebe, where we were again exposed to a dreadful raking fire. My ship was now totally unmanageable; yet, as her head was toward the enemy, and he to leeward of me, I still hoped to be able to board him. At this moment Lt. Commandant Downes came on board to receive my orders, under the impression that I should soon be a prisoner. He could be of no use to me in the then wretched state of the Essex; and finding (from the enemy's putting his helm up) that my last attempt at boarding would not succeed, I directed him, after he had been about 10 minutes on board, to return to his own ship, to be prepared for defending and destroying her in case of attack. He took with him several of my wounded, leaving three of his boat's crew on board to make room for them. The Cherub now had an opportunity of distinguishing herself, by keeping up a hot fire on him during his return. The slaughter on board my ship had now become horrible, the enemy continuing to rake us, and we unable to bring a gun to bear. I therefore directed a lawser to be bent to the sheet anchor, and the anchor to be cut from the bows to bring her head round: this succeeded. We again got our broadside to her, and as the enemy was much crippled and unable to hold his own, I have no doubt he would soon have drifted out of gun shot before he discovered we had anchored, had not the lawser unfortunately parted. My ship had taken fire several times during the action, but alarmingly so forward and aft at this moment, the flames were bursting up each hatchway, and no hopes were entertained of saving her; our distance from the shore did not exceed three-quarters of a mile, and I hoped many of my brave crew would be able to save themselves, should the ship blow up, as I was informed the fire was near the magazine, and the explosion of a large quantity of powder below served to increase the horrors of our situation—our boats were destroyed by the enemy's shot; I, therefore, directed those who could swim to jump overboard, and endeavor to gain the shore. Some reached it—some were taken by the enemy, and some perished in the attempt; but most preferred sharing with the fate of the ship. We, who remained, now turned our attention wholly to extinguishing the flames; and when we had succeeded, went again to our guns, where the firing was kept up for some minutes, but the crew had by this time become so weakened, that they all declared to me the impossibility of making further resistance, and entreated me to surrender my ship to save the wounded, as all further attempt at opposition must prove ineffectual, almost every gun being disabled by the destruction of their crews. I now sent for the officers of divisions to consult them; but what was my surprise to find only Acting Lt. Stephen Decatur M'Knight remaining, (who confirmed the report respecting the condition of the guns on the gun deck—those on the spar deck were not in a better state). Lt. Wilmer, after fighting most gallantly throughout the action, had been knocked overboard by a splinter while getting the sheet anchor from the bows, and was drowned. Acting Lt. John G. Cowell had lost a leg; Mr. Edwd. Barnwell, Acting Sailingmaster, had been carried below, after receiving two severe wounds, one in the breast and one in the face; and Acting Lt. Wm. H. Odenheimer had been knocked overboard from the quarter an instant before, and did not regain the ship until after the surrender. I was informed that the cockpit, the steerage, the ward-room and the birth deck could contain no more wounded; that the wounded were killed while the surgeons were dressing them, and that, unless something was speedily done to prevent it, the ship would soon sink from the number of shot holes in her bottom. And on sending for the Carpenter, he informed me that all his crew had been killed or wounded, and that he had once been over the

See fourth page.