

RALEIGH, (N. C.) PRINTED WEEKLY, BY LUCAS & HARVEY. Terms of Subscription: Three dollars per year, in advance. No paper to be sent longer than three months after a year's subscription becomes due, and notice shall have been given.

Biographical.

BIOGRAPHY OF COM. DECATUR.

Commodore STEPHEN DECATUR is of French descent by the male line. His grandfather was a native of La Rochelle, in France, and married a lady of Rhode-Island. His father Stephen Decatur, was born in Newport, [Rhode-Island] and when a very young man removed to Philadelphia, where he married the daughter of an Irish gentleman by the name of Pate. He was bred to the sea, and commanded a merchant vessel out of the port of Philadelphia until the establishment of the navy, when he was appointed to command the Delaware sloop of war. He remained in her until the frigate Philadelphia was built, when the command of that ship was given to him, at the particular request of the merchants, who had built her by subscription. In this situation he remained until peace was made with France when he resigned his commission, and retired to his residence a few miles from Philadelphia, where he resided until his death, which happened in November, 1808.

His son, STEPHEN DECATUR, the present commodore, was born on the 5th January, 1779, on the eastern shore of Maryland, whilst his parents had retired, whilst the British were in possession of Philadelphia. They returned to that city when he was a few months old, and he was there educated and brought up.

He entered the navy in March, 1795, as midshipman, and joined the frigate United States, under the command of Commodore Burey, who had obtained the warrant for him. He continued for some time with that officer, and he was promoted to the rank of lieutenant. The United States at that time required some repairs, and not wishing to remain in port, he requested an order to join the brig Norfolk, then bound to the Spanish Main. He performed one cruise in her, on the coast of the United States, and returned to port, resumed his station on board the United States, where he remained until peace was concluded with France.

He was then ordered to the Essex as first lieutenant, and sailed with Commodore Dale's squadron to the Mediterranean. On the return of that squadron, he was ordered to the New York, one of the second Mediterranean squadron, under the command of Commodore Morris.

When he returned to the United States he was ordered to take command of the Argos, and proceed in her to join Commodore Preble's squadron, then in the Mediterranean, and on his arrival here to resign the command of the Argos to Lieutenant Hull, and take the sloop Enterprise, then commanded by that officer. After making that exchange he proceeded to Bayonne, where the squadron was to rendezvous. On his arrival at that port he was informed of the fate of the frigate Philadelphia, which had run aground on the Barbary coast, and fallen into the hands of the Tripolitans. The idea immediately presented itself to his mind of attempting her recapture or destruction.

On Commodore Preble's arrival, a few days afterwards, he proposed to him a plan for the purpose, and volunteered his services to execute it. The wary mind of that veteran officer at first disapproved of an enterprise so full of peril; but the risks and difficulties that surrounded it, only stimulated the ardour of Decatur, and imparted to it an air of adventure, fascinating to his youthful imagination.

The consent of the commodore having been obtained, Lieutenant DECATUR selected for the expedition a ketch (the intercept) which had captured a few weeks before from the enemy, and manned her with seventy volunteers, chiefly from his own crew. He sailed from Syracuse, on the 1st of February 1804, accompanied by the U. S. brig Syren, Lieutenant Stewart, who was provided with his boats, and to receive the crew of the ketch, in case it should be found expedient to use her as a fire ship.

After fifteen days of very tempestuous weather they arrived at the harbour of Tripoli, a little before sunset. It had been arranged between Lieutenants DECATUR and Stewart, that the ketch should enter the harbour about ten o'clock that night, attended by the boats of the Syren. On arriving off the harbour, the Syren, in consequence of a change of wind, had been thrown 6 or 8 miles to the leeward. The wind at this time was fair, but fast declining, and Lieutenant DECATUR apprehended that, should he wait for the Syren's boats to come up, it might be too late to make the attack that night. Such delay might be fatal to the enterprise, as they could not remain longer on the coast, their provisions being nearly exhausted. For these reasons he determined to adventure into the harbour alone, which he did about eight o'clock.

An idea may be formed of the extreme hazard of this enterprise from the situation of the frigate. She was moored within half a gun-shot of the Barbary's batteries, and of the principal battery. Two of the enemy's cruisers lay within two cables' length, on the star-board quarter, and their gun-boats within half gun shot, on the star-board bow. All the gulls of the frigate were mounted and loaded. Such were the immediate perils that our hero ventured to encounter with a single ketch, beside the other dangers that abound in a strongly fortified harbor.

Although from the entrance to the place where the frigate lay was only three miles, yet, in consequence of the lightness of the wind, they did not get within hail of her until 11 o'clock. When they had approached within 200 yards, they were hailed and ordered to anchor or she would be fired on. Lieutenant DECATUR, who was on board the ketch, to answer that they had lost their anchor in a gale of wind on the coast, and therefore could not comply with their request. By this time it had become perfectly calm, and they were about fifty yards from the frigate. Lieutenant DECATUR ordered a small boat that was alongside of the ketch, to take a rope and make it fast to the frigate's fore chains.—This being done they began to warp the ketch alongside. It was not until this moment that the enemy suspected the character of their visitor, and great confusion immediately ensued. This enabled our adventurer to set alongside of the frigate, when Decatur immediately sprang aboard, followed by Mr. Charles Morris, midshipman. These two were nearly a minute on deck, before their companions could succeed in mounting the side. Fortunately, the Turks had not sufficiently recovered from their surprize to take advantage of this delay. They were crowded together on the quarter deck, perfectly astonished and agast, without making any attempt to oppose the assailing party. As soon as a sufficient number of our men had gained the deck, to form a front equal to that of enemy, they rushed in upon them. The Turks stood the assault but a short time, and were completely overpowered. About 20 were killed on the spot, many jumped overboard, and the rest fled to the main deck, whither they were pursued and driven to the hold.

After entire possession had been gained of the ship, and every thing prepared to set fire to her, a number of launches were seen rowing about the harbor. This determined Lieutenant DECATUR to remain in the frigate, from whence a better defence could be made than from on board the ketch. The enemy had already commenced firing upon them from their batteries and castle, and from two corsairs. The launches did not attempt to approach, he ordered that the ship should be set on fire, which was done, at the same time, in different parts. As soon as this was completely effected, they left her, and such was the rapidity of the flames, that it was with the utmost difficulty they preserved the ketch. At this critical moment a most propitious breeze sprang up blowing directly out of the harbour, which, in a few minutes, carried them beyond the reach of the enemy's guns, and they made good their retreat without the loss of a single man, and with but four wounded.

For this gallant and romantic achievement, Lieutenant DECATUR was promoted to the rank of post captain, there being at that time no intermediate grade.—This promotion was particularly gratifying to him, inasmuch as it was done with the consent of the officers over whose heads he was raised.

In the ensuing spring, it being determined to make an attack upon Tripoli, Commodore Preble obtained from the King of Naples the loan of six gun-boats and two bombards, which he formed into two divisions, and gave the command of one of them to Captain DECATUR, the other to Lieutenant Somers. The squadron sailed from Syracuse, consisting of the frigate Constitution, the brig Syren, the sloop's Nautilus and Arizen, and the gun-boats.

Having arrived on the coast of Barbary, they were for some days prevented from making the attack, by adverse wind and weather; at length, on the morning of the 3d of August, the weather being favorable the signal was made from the commodore's ship to prepare for action, the light vessels towing the gun-boats to windward. At nine o'clock the signal was made for bombarding the town and the enemy's vessels. The gun-boats were cast off, and advanced in a line ahead, led on by Captain DECATUR, and covered by the frigate Constitution, and the brig and schooners. The enemy's gun-boats were moored along the mouth of the harbour under the batteries, and within musket-shot. Their sails had been taken from them, and they were ordered to sink, rather than abandon their position. They were aided and covered likewise by a brig of 16 and a schooner of 11 guns.

Before entering into close action, Captain DECATUR went alongside each of his boats, and ordered them to unscrew their bowsprits and flow him, as it was his intention to board the enemy's boats.—Lieutenant DECATUR commanded one of the boats belonging to Lieutenant Somers' division, it being farther to windward than the rest of his division he joined and took orders from his brother.

When Captain DECATUR who was in the leading boat, came within range of the fire from the batteries a heavy fire was opened upon him from them and from the gun-boats. He returned their fire, and continued advancing until he came in contact with the boats.—At this time Commodore Preble, seeing Decatur approach, ordered that he should proceed on or

dered the signal to be made for a retreat; but it was found in giving the signals for the boats, the one for a retreat had been omitted. The enemy's boats had about 27 men each; ours an equal number, forty of whom were Americans, and thirteen Neapolitans. Decatur, on boarding the enemy, was instantly followed by his countrymen; the Neapolitans remained behind. The Turks did not sustain the combat, hand to hand, with that firmness they had obtained a reputation for; in ten minutes the deck was cleared; eight of them sought refuge in the hold; and the rest, some fell on the deck, and others jumped into the sea.—Only three of the Americans were wounded.

As Decatur was about to proceed on with his prize the boat which had been commanded by his brother came under his stern, and informed him that they had engaged and captured one of the enemy's boats; but that her commander, after surrendering had treacherously shot Lieutenant James DECATUR, and pushed off with the boat, and was then making for the harbour.—The feelings of the gallant Decatur, on receiving this intelligence, may more easily be imagined than described. Every consideration of prudence and safety was lost in his eagerness to punish so dastardly an act, and to revenge the death of a brother so basely murdered. He pushed within the enemy's line with his single boat, and having succeeded in getting alongside of the retreating foe, boarded her at the head of eleven men, who were all the Americans he had left. The fate of this contest was extremely doubtful for twenty minutes.—All the Americans except four were severely wounded. Decatur singled out the commander as the peculiar object of his vengeance. The Turk was armed with an espionoon, Decatur with a cutlass—in attempting to cut off the head of the weapon, his sword struck on the iron and broke close to the hilt. The Turk at this moment made a push, which slightly wounded him in the right arm and breast. He immediately seized the spear and closed with him. A fierce struggle ensued, and both fell, Decatur uppermost. By this time the Turk had drawn a dagger from his belt, and was about to plunge it in the body of his foe, when Decatur caught his arm, and shot him a pistol, which he had taken from his pocket. During the time they were struggling on the deck, the crew rushed to the aid of their commanders, and a most sanguinary conflict ensued inasmuch, that when Decatur had despatched his adversary, it was with the great difficulty he could extricate him from the killed and wounded that had fallen around him.

It is with so common a feeling of admiration that we record an instance of heroic courage, and loyal self devotion, on the part of a common sailor. During the early part of Decatur's struggle with the Turk he was assailed in the eye by one of the enemy, who had just aimed a blow at his head with his sabre;—must have been fatal; at this fearful juncture, a noble hearted tar, who had been so badly wounded as to lose the use of his hands, seeing no other means of saving his commander, rushed between him and the uplifted sabre, and received the blow on his own skull.—We have to pause and honour great actions in humble life, because they speak well for human nature. Men of rank and station in society often do gallant deeds, in a manner from necessity.—Their conspicuous situation obliges them to do so; but a man of glory obliges them on; but an act like this we have mentioned, so desperate, yet so disinterested, done by an obscure, unambitious individual, a poor sailor, arising from nothing but innate nobleness of soul. We are happy to add that this generous fellow survived, and now receives a pension from government.

Decatur succeeded in getting with both of his prizes to the squadron, and the next day received the highest commendation, in a general order, from Commodore Preble. When that able officer was superseded in command of the squadron, he gave the Constitution to Captain DECATUR, who had, some time before, received to the Congress, and returned home in her when peace was concluded with Tripoli.—On his return to the United States, he was employed in superintending gun-boats, until the affair of the Chesapeake, when he was ordered to supercede Commodore Bar on in the command of that ship, since which period he has had the command of the southern squadron. When the U. States was again put in commission, he was removed from the Chesapeake to that frigate.

The war with Great Britain gave Commodore DECATUR another opportunity of adding to the laurels he had already won.—On the 25th October 1812, in lat. 29 N. 20 39 W. he fell in with his Britannic Majesty's ship Macedonian, mounting 49 carriage guns.—This was one of the finest frigates in the British navy, and commanded by Captain John S. Carden, one of the ablest officers. She was in prime order, two years old, and but 4 months out of dock. The enemy being at windward, had the advantage of choosing his own distance; and, supposing the U. States to be the Essex, (which only mounts carronades,) kept at first at long shot, and did not at any moment come within the complete effect

of the musketry and grape. After the frigates had come to close action the battle was terminated in a very short period by the enemy's surrender. It is not one of the least circumstances, or rather good management, that he conveyed his prize, in her shattered condition, across a vast extent of ocean, swarming with foes; and conducted her triumphantly into port; thus placing immediately before the eyes of his countrymen a noble trophy of his own skill, and of national powers.

Com. DECATUR received the warmest praises from the President and Congress, as well as the most marked testimonies of gratitude from his countrymen, for this achievement. A gold medal was voted to him by the national legislature, and the legislatures of New-York, Pennsylvania and Massachusetts, expressed their recorded thanks for his bravery. A sumptuous public ball was given to him in New-York, and the freedom of the city conferred upon him in a gold box by the Corporation.

In June, 1813, the American squadron under his command, consisting of the frigates United States and Macedonian, and the sloop-of-war Hornet, attempted to proceed far sea from New-York, but were prevented by the superior force of the two line of battle ships and a frigate of the enemy, who gave chase; but DECATUR was fortunate enough to arrive safe in New-London, in which port the fleet was strictly blockaded, during the remainder of the war.

Having been assigned to take command of the frigate President, then in New-York, DECATUR sailed thence on the 14th January, 1815, but the ship running aground on the bar, striking heavily, was much injured in her keel and rudder braces, which ruptured her sailing. He fell in, the next day, with four British ships, the *Majestic*, *Endymion*, *Pomona*, *Tenedos*, and *Despatch* (brig) from which he endeavored to escape, by starting water and using other means to lighten the ship—but he finally engaged with the *Endymion*, and after driving her out of action, the arrival of two fresh ships, the *Pomona* and *Tenedos*, obliged him to surrender. He lost one fifth of his crew killed and wounded, the force opposed to him being fourfold superior to his.—The vessel arrived at Bermuda, under jury masts, on the 29th of January—where Capt. DECATUR was treated with the highest respect and delicacy by the officers of the British squadron and the Governor of the island.

A highly respectable court martial, upon the return of Capt. DECATUR to the United States not only acquitted him of all blame for the loss of his ship, but praised his bravery and good conduct in exalted terms of expression. No circumstance further illustrates the biography of DECATUR until after the close of the war with G. Britain—when a fleet, consisting of the *Guerricke*, *Constellation* and *Macedonian* frigates, the *Ontario* and *Epervier* brigs, and four schooners was despatched to the coast of Barbary under his command, to punish the Barbarians for some violations of the laws of nations, in respect to citizens of the United States of America. War was declared against the Barbary Powers March 2, 1815.

DECATUR sailed from New York May 20 1815, and arrived at Gibraltar in 25 days, where he learned that the Algerine squadron had been out into the Atlantic, and had probably returned into the Mediterranean—upon which they proceeded without delay for Algiers, in hopes of intercepting the enemy before he could reach that port. On the 7th of June, he captured the Algerine frigate *Mazanala*, after a running fight of 25 minutes. The Algerine admiral, (Hamida) was killed in the action by a cannon ball. Two days afterwards the squadron took a brig of 22 guns, and arrived at Algiers on the 28th of June. A treaty was formed with the Dey, upon the basis laid down by the American Commissioners, by which an end was put to any claim of tribute from the U. States, under any pretext whatever.—From Algiers he proceeded to Tripoli and Tunis, an obtained an indemnity in money for suffering American vessels to be taken out of their harbours by the British, during the late war, without impediment—and in the former place he effected the release of ten captives 2 Dunes and 3 Neapolitans; the latter of whom he landed at Messina. He joined Commodore BAINBRIDGE at Gibraltar, sailed for the U. States in the *Guerricke*, and arrived the following November.

Domestic. FAYETTEVILLE, APRIL 13. The Clarendon Bridge.—The inhabitants of Fayetteville were gratified on Saturday last by a participation in the ceremonies which accompanied the opening of the passage of the new Bridge across the Cape-Fear river at this place. This is a work which in its progress had excited the interest of the

the influence it is expected to have on trade of this town, as well as from novelty and magnitude of the undertaking. We so entirely approve of every circumstance which contributes to the popular sentiment in favour of works of public usefulness, that we were pleased to observe that an intention was manifested of commemorating the event in such a manner as would stamp it on the remembrances of those for whose benefit it was particularly designed. Agreeably to an invitation given in the paper of the last week, a procession composed of the military associations, the Masonic brethren of the Phoenix Lodge, and municipal officers of the town, together with a large concourse of citizens and strangers, not less than three thousand in number, formed at the Town-House and proceeded to the river. On its arrival at the Bridge, the procession crossed over in the following order: the Battalion of Artillery, commanded by Major Hearsay—a wagon loaded with the Staple Commodities of the market—citizens and the fine company of Infantry under the command of Major Wright. The passage of the river as seen from a point lower down the stream, formed an imposing aspect, crowded as it was, through its whole extent, and suspended at an elevation of more than sixty feet above the surface of the water. At the extremity of the Bridge the procession halted, and was there joined by a large concourse of ladies; the most numerous and brilliant that we have ever seen gracing an assemblage of this nature, when an appropriate and classical address was delivered by Gen. T. Hearsay, Esq. who was received with those expressions of lively interest, which showed that the hearts of his hearers reciprocated the sentiments of the speaker. The exercises of the day were closed by John A. Cameron, Esq. who (in behalf of the President, and Stockholders of the Bridge Company,) in a few neat and pertinent remarks, returned the thanks of that body for the good wishes of their fellow citizens which had accompanied and cheered the progress of the undertaking, and the manifestation of warm feeling which hailed its completion; alluding to the name which had been given by civilized man, to the river over which they stood, and the interesting associations connected with the early history of North-Carolina, which were awakened by its repetition, he in observance of a time-tried and approved custom, scattered the contents of the broken wine bottle on its beams and timbers, and gave it the appropriate title of the *Clarendon Bridge*.

This Bridge was commenced during the past year, and does great credit to the skill and scientific genius of the Architect, *Abel Swan*, Esq. The plan we understand is founded on an invention entirely his own, and for which he has obtained a Patent. We cannot attempt to enter into an explanation of the mechanical principles on which it is constructed, and do but barely notice it as presenting to our view a remarkable union of simplicity and apparent strength. It is built entirely of wood, and the sides which together with a parallel framework extends the whole length of the bridge) constitute its strength are formed into a kind of trellis work, which gives it an airy and picturesque appearance. The timbers which form this lattice, are secured by iron fastenings, at the intersection of each beam, which are so arranged as to bring every piece into contact with five others; at these points it is, the iron bolts are inserted, and thus by continually varying the centre of gravity, and distributing the points of pressure, making it in reality a self supported pile. The central body of the bridge is 300 feet long, resting at present on piers, which are however, not essential to its stability, and raised on stone abutments some 20 feet above the surface of the banks on either side. Its elevation above the bed of the river is 80 feet. It was this unusual height above the common water mark which rendered the undertaking so difficult, but which was necessary in order to secure it against the freshets, which in this river attain a very extraordinary height, rising as they have been sometimes known to do 50 feet perpendicularly in four and twenty hours.—The whole length of the bridge is eleven hundred feet and sufficiently wide to admit two carriage ways, and a path for foot passengers on each side. The confidence of those whose opinion is entitled to respect is settled, as to its ability to withstand the assaults of the flood and the tempest, as even in its unfinished state its strength tested by the combined violence of these elements.—One great excellence of the design is said to consist in a small degree of lateral pressure it is, and the practicability of making any repairs which may be necessary, by removing each row of timber without interfering with the general stability of the whole.

We cannot conclude this *Assembly*, is prepared without expressing our warmest wishes, for the high claims which the present persons can also be said to think proper to establish. The Bridge Company, we think proper to congratulate them on the success of their enterprise.

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