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Guadaloupe, Basseterre, January 3d, '99

I wrote you on the 25th November, 1798, informing you of the loss of the United States schooner Retaliation, under my command, captured on the 20th of said month, by the French frigates La Volontaire and La Insurgente from France via Cayenne.

As I have already given you the particulars of my capture, which letter I hope has come to hand, shall omit it here. On board of the Volontaire to which ship I was removed from the schooner, came general Desfourneaux, the particular agent of the Executive Directory of Guadaloupe, to supersede the well known brute Victor Hugues.

When we were brought into this port, all the crew were imprisoned; myself and officers were ordered to share the same fate. To captain St. Laurent we are indebted for our liberty on board the different ships, except lieutenant Geddes, of maines, who met with the fate of a dungeon, and was cruelly and unjustly treated. After being confined on board twelve days, I obtained the liberty of coming ashore without uniform.

Having received a letter from capt. Murray, mentioning he had wrote to the agent concerning an exchange of prisoners, I waited on him to know whether he would agree on an exchange—His answer was, he did not consider us as prisoners; but detained us from political motives, meant to treat us as friends and allies, as such considered us. I told him I should be glad to see such treatment realized by conduct; that I considered myself a prisoner, and every American in his island, I believed did the same. Never was more cruel treatment bestowed on prisoners, than what the greater part daily experiences. His answer was, these were orders given by his predecessor, and which he could not revoke while he remained here.

A day or two after I had this conversation with him, Victor Hugues was made prisoner on board the Volontaire frigate.

Every American anxiously waited for a change of treatment, which they had a right to expect from the promise of Desfourneaux.

Hearing of the distressed situation of our citizens in gaol, who were nearly in a state of starvation, among which are many masters of vessels, under the sole direction of a rascally gaoler, who has power to insult, beat, and imprison them in a dungeon, at his caprice, will and pleasure, which power he frequently exercises to the disgrace of humanity, I waited on Desfourneaux—he promised he would give orders for a change. As I had not the liberty of going to the prison, I could not immediately hear from them—finally flattered myself those orders were given; but when I had the news, the treatment, if possible, was worse than before. On the 28th ultimo, I waited on and informed him by letter, which you have here inclosed. He then sent an officer down to the dungeon, to give orders that they should be released. There myself did I see Capt. Bacon without a shirt, only a night gown—several other captains that had been brought out of their hammocks without hat, shoe, stocking or waistcoat—A cold, muddy ground to lay on, and was informed by them all, they were allowed about two ounces of raw salt meat a day. Those unfortunate men are still in that wretched hole, cannot obtain their clothes from the gaoler, who says he put them there to punish them, and will punish them.

The La Pensee frigate at Point Petre, pressed between 20 and 30 American sailors, that had just been brought in there by privateers, taken out of American vessels captured by them.

Conceiving it my duty to demand those rascals, I did in the presence of two American masters of vessels; told the general that the captain of La Pensee had taken on board by force, and unlawfully detained, numbers of American citizens, who I now come to demand—if they were prisoners, put them in prison, and treat them as such—if neutrals, as he says he confides us, he certainly can have no claim to stop them.—But his neutrality is laughable.

He told me he would have them released. The La Pensee remained here two days then sailed for France without a single one being released. On board the La Pensee Victor is gone to France.

The general tells me he will return the schr. to me with my people, as he considers us allies, and will send all the Americans home in a flag.

He wrote our government in this manner—On his passage from France one of the frigates captured me; finding me an armed vessel belonging to the United States a-cruising.—His time would not admit to take a view of the situation of affairs between France and America; he ordered me in port; he should have immediately let me go, but political reasons obliged

him to lay an embargo, which does not now exist, and he leaves me at liberty to depart, advising me to return to my country: with me sends all the American citizens made prisoners previous to his arrival, and an invitation for the citizens of America to come and trade, they shall be respected and treated as allies.

Instead of advising me not to return, he wished to bind me by honor that I positively shall return, and not molest any French cruizers. A great part of these citizens have been made prisoners, since his arrival, and since his acting in his official capacity. If he meant to treat us as friends, why were not his prison doors opened, and the distressed citizens released?—And if not considered as prisoners, why does he compel them to go into a cartel contrary to some of their wishes, who have been robbed almost naked, and cannot obtain money or credit in this place. His not condemning the Retaliation, I conceive, is no step towards reconciliation. The only motive that I believe induces him to return her is, to kindle that party spirit that is dying in our country, on which the French republic has built their romantic ideas.

He now offers to return her, at the same time has furnished American merchantmen, since my arrival here, to be condemned to ten times the value of the schooner.

I shall endeavour to act like an officer belonging to an independent nation, should I see the spirit to preserve the national independency will be the cause.

Being well convinced in my own mind was I to accept of her and return to my country, my government would receive her in no other manner than as a cartel.

Mr. Desfourneaux mentions, he advises me to return to my country—if he will give me the authority which I received from my government, which he has got, and means to withhold from me, and returns the schooner without dictating and ordering me how to act, I will receive her. But if the commission which I received from my government is withheld, new orders from him is given, and I bound to follow the orders he gives me, this is making me a prisoner, under a cloak for him to gain the merit in America for releasing the schooner, and treating us like allies.—If I am a prisoner, which I have every right to consider myself, the vessel is a prize, commanding her would be commanding an enemy's vessel. If not considered as a prisoner, why bind me to act as they think proper.

Thus, sir, I have stated to you the terms on which she will be offered and the conditions on which I will receive her—I trust they are such as will meet your and my country's approbation.

I am well assured he will not give her on these conditions, and my non compliance to these terms I expect will exasperate him to that degree, to imprison me. But let my fate be what it will, I am ever determined to act becoming an officer of the United States.

There are from the best information I can receive, from 230 to 250 American prisoners in this island.—To-morrow or next day I shall know my fate, when I shall let him know on what conditions I will receive the schooner. Should he change his mind in sending us to our country, we trust our government will recollect they have citizens cruelly treated, not like prisoners of war, and will release us from this French bondage.

I am, with due respect, Your obedient servant,
Wm. BAINBRIDGE.
Benjamin Stoddet Esq.
Secretary of the Navy.

Guadaloupe, December 28th, 1798.

The friendly disposition which you appear to have for Americans, and of which I have had some proofs, makes me certain you are a stranger to the cruel treatment that some American citizens experienced in this place. As I do not mean to enter into an investigation of their whole treatment, I will only give a detail in part.

On Christmas night the 25th inst. some of the prisoners were making themselves as happy as their situation would admit, by singing, without making any riotous noise; the gaoler came in, and took numbers of them out and sent them to a dungeon. Had this fate fallen on them who were a singing, it would then in my opinion have been ungenerous; but not so cruel as it actually was. He took 4 or 5 American masters of vessels (who I believe, are respectable citizens) out of their hammocks, marched them down without hat, shoe, or stocking, almost without any thing to cover them, put them in a dungeon, in which place 12 persons are now confined, with only a small hole to give

them light and air, nearly in a state of starvation, and cannot obtain the liberty of having their clothes sent them.

As a proof of the captains' being innocent of the noise, as the gaoler states it, but of which, from the information I received, he was himself too much intoxicated to be a proper judge; capt. Lum was asleep, when the gaoler came in and took him out of his hammock. Capt. Bacon who was also in his hammock, knowing capt. Lum to be asleep at the time of the noise, got out of his hammock, to inform the gaoler that capt. Lum was innocent; for which information he was obliged to accompany capt. Lum to this dreadful place, where they are now confined.

With confidence that you will release these unfortunate men from their present situation.

I am with due respect,
Your obedient servant,
WILLIAM BAINBRIDGE.

General Desfourneaux,
particular agent of the
executive directory of
Guadaloupe.

Basse Terre, Guadaloupe, January 6th, 99.

After what you told me yesterday relative to the United States schooner Retaliation, you seem disposed to return her to my command, with the commission and power I received from my government. I take the liberty of laying before you some reflections I have made since, which proceed from my duty as an officer of the United States, and from the gratitude I owe to your politeness.

In being established in the command of this vessel, I cannot dispense with the orders I received from my government; if you will be pleased to observe them, you will see they order me to seize all French vessels—in doing it, I expose myself to the punishment a court martial may see proper to inflict, and fail in my duty as an officer.

On the other part, can I permit myself, after the treatment I have received from you, in going out of your harbor, and especially after I had given you my parole of honor not to do it? It would be contrary to honor and humanity. My situation, general, you will judge yourself, is very delicate.

The way to conciliate is to send her as a flag of truce; and putting on board a French officer who will have the command of her, I will lend every assistance in navigating her. I trust you will not receive this refusal of mine against my wishes of seeing the affairs between America and France amicably settled. No man wishes more to see it than I do; but my duty as an officer will make me act conformable to that character.

I am, general, Your most obedient servant,
Wm. BAINBRIDGE.
General Desfourneaux, particular agent of the
executive directory of Guadaloupe.

TRANSLATION,
Of a letter from Desfourneaux "to lieut. Bainbridge, commander of the armed schooner of the United States, the Retaliation."

SIR,
I have given an account to the President of the United States of the observations contained in your letter of the 6th of January, 1799. I have told him that you have been forced by me to resume your command, tendering you responsible for the consequences which might result from your refusal. I have acquainted him that I have reduced your crew to forty men, and that I have required that you take your route for the United States in concert with the Roman and James, flags of truce, carrying citizens of your nation, hitherto considered as prisoners.

The season does not permit me to fix positively upon a particular part of America for your destination: if that of Philadelphia be free from ice, it will undoubtedly command your preference. I am persuaded, that your conduct in these circumstances will be that of a man of honour, and that you will not lose sight of the manner in which I have conducted myself towards you.

Receive my adieux, the prayers sincere which I offer, that your passage may be happy, and the assurance of the desire I have to see amicably terminated the differences of your nation with Guadaloupe.

DESFOURNEAUX.

Basseterre, Guadaloupe, 7th January, '99

SIR,
I wrote to you on the 3d inst, informing you that Mr. Desfourneaux, who has superseded Victor Hugues in the command of this island, meant to return the

Accept, for the assurances of my tries will be kept up by their respective consuls.
Ch. MAU. VALLEYRAND. Accept, citizen minister, the al-

happy issue of the negotiations concerning the district judges acting under the au-

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113
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