

Copy of a letter from
Sir Sam^l. Hoody to
Sir G. B. Rodney
May 1th 1781

Sir

At 7 AM on Saturday the 28th of last Month His Majesty's Ship Amazon being to Windward of Point Saline's, discovered a very large Fleet and at 9 her Signal of it was repeated to me by the Russel which Ship I had just ordered to St. Lucia, having One hundred & thirty Sick on board; And she came back again to me I immediately made the Sig. for a General Chace to the SE in order to bring all the Ships well up to Windward, and at 10 I formed the Line a Head at two Cables length asunder, On opening Rock Diamond saw nothing of the Fleet but from the Masthead which were then upon a Wind to the Southward, Captain Finch very properly soon as he saw his Signal repeated stood back to reconnoitre the Fleet, at 12 he returned near enough for me to see his Signal for an Enemy of Superior Force, and upon my desiring to know how many Ships of the Line there were, He answered Nineteen; a little before two Captain Finch came on board and informed me that he saw 19 Sail of the Line very distinctly, and two others of two Decks that he thought were Armed in Flute, the Number of Frigates he could not ascertain, as three only were drawn out from the Convoy, that the Convoy was very numerous, and the whole standing to the Northward, which was the Situation we saw part of them in at Sun-set, from the Masthead, most of them being to the Northward of Point Saline's; I sent Captain Finch immediately

to

to tell Rear Admiral Drake, I desired to see him, upon
his coming on board, I told him I should continue the
Line a Head and get to Windward as much as I could,
by carrying all my plain Sails and be close in with
Fort Royal at Day-light, As it was uncertain which
way the Enemy would come, which He was pleased to
say was the best I could do;

I ordered Captain Finch to Windward again to
endeavour to get sight of the Enemy, & upon distinctly
seeing them, to make certain Signals I gave him,
that I might know whether they were upon the
Starboard or Larboard Tack, or coming before the Wind.
Just after Sun set, I Tacked the Squad on all-to-
gether, stood to the Northward and kept close in with
Fort Royal all Night, Saw nothing of the Enemy
or Amazon at day-light, a little before 9 the
Amazon joined me, the Enemy then in sight coming
down between Point Salines and the Diamond Rock;
made the Signal for a close line and to prepare for
Action; at 9 the Enemy appeared forming the Line
of Battle 20 Minutes past 9 the Prince William
joined me from Gros-Islet Bay, and as I sent for
her but the Night before Captain Douglass exer-
tion must have been great and does him much
Credit, to be with me so soon; having the greatest
part of his Crew to collect in the Night 21 Minutes
past Nine, hoisted our Colours as did the French Ad-
miral and his Fleet, at 15 Minutes past 10
made

made the Shrewsbury's Signal to alter her Course to
Windward she being the leading Ship but soon perceived
the Wind had shifted and that she was as close to the
Wind as she could lay, at 35 Minutes past 10 Tacked the
Squadron all together, ~~at 40 Minutes~~ the Van of the
Enemy ^{being} almost abreast of our Center and at 11 began to
fire which took no notice of; at this time the Ships
in Fort Royal Bay, slipped their Cables and got
under Sail, at 20 Minutes past 11 Tacked the
Squadron all together and repeated the Signal for a
close order of Battle, at 25 Minutes past 11 finding
the Enemy's Shot to go over us hoisted the Signal for
Engaging and in passing, Our Van and the Enemy's
Rear exchanged some Broadides, at 40 Minutes
past 11 the Enemy Tacked, 45 Minutes past 11
made the Signal for the Rear to close the Center, at
55 Minutes past 11 finding it impossible to get up
to the Enemy's Fleet, I invited it to come to me by
bringing the Squadron too under their Topsails, At
12 past the French Admiral in the Bretagne
began to fire at the Barfleus which was immediately
returned and the Action became General; But at too
great a Distance, and theelve never was more Powder &
Shot thrown away in one day before, but it was with
Monsieur De Grasse the option of distance lay, and
he preferred that of long Shot. It was not possible for me
to go nearer; At 13 made the Sig. for the Van to fill
the

The French Admiral having filled and drawing a
head, at 17 Minutes past One made the Shrewsbury's
Signal (the leading Ship) to make more sail and
set the Topgallant Sails, at 34 Minutes past I repeat-
ed the Signal for a close Line of Battle and finding
not one in ten of the Enemy's Shots reached us I
ceased firing, the Enemy did the same soon after,
but their Van and Quir, being somewhat nearer
continued to Engage and though the French Admiral
had Ten Sail astern of him and three others to Wind-
ward He was backward in making a nearer approach.

The Merchant Ships at this time were hauling
in close under the Land, attended by two Ships of two Decks
supposed to be Armed En Flute, & two frigates, at 18 Minutes
past 3 the firing ceased between our Van and that of
the Enemy - Made the Shrewsbury's Signal to make
more Sail in Order to get to Windward of the Enemy 45
Minutes past 4 sent Captain Finch to the Shrewsbury
to Order Captain Robinson to keep as near the Wind
and carry all the Sail he could so as to preserve the
Line of Battle, and to return back along the Line to
acquaint every Captain the same, at 57 Minutes
past 5 the Packet going to Antigua which had kept
Company with the Squadron came within hail to acquaint
me by Order of Rear Admiral Drake that the Russel
was in great distress having received several Shot between
Wind and Water, that the Water was over the Platform of
the Magazine and gaining upon the Pumps, and that
three

three of their Guns were dismounted; at 18 Minutes past 6 made the Russel's Signal to come within hail, which was answered: The Enemy's Fleet consisting of 24 Sail of the Line at this time about 4 Miles to Windward: At half past 7 Captain Sutherland of the Russel came on board, whom I ordered, If He could possibly by exertion keep the Ship above Water, to proceed to St. Eustatius or any other Port he could make, and acquaint Sir George Rodney of all that had passed at 45 Minutes past 9 the Sizard came within hail to inform me by the desire of Captain Sutherland that He had bore away.

On Monday April the 30th at day light found the Van and Center of the Squadron separated at some distance from the Bar fleur and Rear, owing to flattering Winds and Calms in the night which would not allow us to keep the Bar fleur's head the right way, and she went round and round two or three times while the other Ships had Light Airs, and finding the Enemy's advanced Ships steering for our Van, made all possible sail towards them and threw out the Signal for a close Line of Battle, The Enemy's Line a good deal extended and Scattered: - At 7 The Squadron under my command being pretty well formed, the Enemy's advanced Ships hawled off; At 56 Minutes past 7 made the Sig.^l for the Rear to close the Center, As the Enemy seemed to shew a disposition to attack it. At 35 Minutes past 8 having very Light Airs of Wind the

The Squadron was thrown nearly into a Line a Breast
made the Signal for continuing in that form, least
by endeavouring to regain the Line ahead, it might
become extended, At 11 made the Signal for a Line
ahead at 2 Cables length asunder, the Wind backing
to the Eastward, favoured my forming in that Order,
the better to receive the Enemy, then about three
Miles to Windward, at fourteen Minutes
past Eleven made the Signal for the Rear to
close the Center, At 12 falling little Wind again
all the Ships being thrown into a Line a Breast,
made the Signal for a Line a Breast, to keep the
Squadron as close together as possible; At 25 Minutes
past 12 the Wind blowing steady at S, made the Signal
for a General Chace to Windward, with a design of
Weathering the Enemy, which I should certainly
have succeeded in had the Breeze continued - but
the Wind dying away. At 4, I found it impracticable
to Weather the Enemy, and therefore made the
Signal for a Line ahead, and having been informed
that the Intrepid made so much Water they could
scarce keep her free, And that the Centaur was in
the same State owing to the Number of Shot between
Wind & Water, and that her Lower Masts were very
badly Wounded; which, added to the loss of the Rigel
from the Line, and from the knowledge I had of the
State of the Ships in general having upwards of 500
Men Sick and short of Complement. - I judged it
improper to dare the Enemy to Battle any longer,
Not

Not having the least prospect of beating a Fleet of
24 Sail of the Line of Capital Ships, and knowing
the consequence of my being beaten, would probably
be the loss of all His Majesty's possessions in this
Country, I thought it my indispensable duty to bear
up, and made the Signal for it at 8 o'clock - At 10
brought too for the Squadron to close, at 40 minutes
past 10 made Sail, At 5 AM the 1st Instant saw
the Enemy's Fleet astern about 8 or 9 Miles distant,
at 26 Minutes past 5 brought too for the Torbay and
Paccahunta to come up, which were within reach
of the Enemy's Guns; And the former received a good
deal of damage in her Masts and Rigging, At 45
Minutes past Seven the Enemy ceased firing
upon the Torbay. Sent the Amazon to Tow the
Paccahunta up. At 8 made the Signal for a close
Line bearing North and South of each other, At 20
Minutes past 12 made the Signal and brought
too upon the Starboard Tack and made the Signal
for the State and Condition of the Squadron, The
Enemy bearing East standing to the Northward, 33
Minutes past 3 made the Sig. for a close Line
North and South - At 4 The Enemy Tacked to the
Southward and were standing that way at Sun set.
In the Evening though it was almost Calm,
The Main topmast of the Intrepid fell to pieces
over the side - At 7 made Sail to the Northward it
being

being the opinion of the Officers of the Squadron acquainted with this Country that it was the only way of getting to Windward, as the Currents run very strong to Seeward to the Southward of S. Vincents.

I am very much concerned to acquaint you that Captain North of His Majesty's Ship Centaur and her First Lieutenant were killed in the Action, I put Captain Smith of the Paccahunta to command the Centaur, Lieutenant John Davall Burr, to command the Paccahunta, and M^r. George Bowen to be Lieutenant of the Centaur.

My present intentions are to send the disabled Ships to S. Eustatius and to proceed with those in good Condition to S. Lucia, if the French should not have made an Attack upon it and succeeded, if they have I shall then go to Carlisle Bay Barbadoes.

I send the Hon^{ble}. Captain Finch with this Letter, with Orders if he should not find you at S. Eustatius to proceed to Windward of the Islands to Barbadoes, and to put the Captains of such of His Majesty's Frigates as are Cruizing which may fall in his Way upon their Guard.

And if you should see fit, to stop me from proceeding to Windward, Captain Finch will be able to form a pretty clear judgment, where I may be met with from the Winds he may have.

I think it very much my duty to say that
the

May 4 1781

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The Zeal and Exertion of Rear Admiral Drake, and the Captains & Officers and Men I had the Honor to command were such, that if Monsieur De Grasse had thought fit to have brought His Majesty's Squadron to close Action and it should have pleased God to have given him the Victory, I trust He would not have found it an easy one, Sickly and Short of Complement by Death as the Ships in General are, and great as the Superiority of the Enemy was against us.

Herewith I transmit an Account of the State and Condition of the Squadron under my Command, a List of the Killed and Wounded and the defects of the Ships materially damaged.

Marin and Vandreuel served under De Grasse all with their Flags at the Main Topmasthead and by seeing 24 Sail of the Line on the Evening of the 29th and only 23 at Noon the Ships supposed to be Armed on Hute, are probably of the Line.

I have the Honor to be Your
Copy. I am Sir
Yours

P.S. Several Ships of the Squadron under my Command being short of Water, I have ordered them to make the best of their way to Old Toad Shirts and after taking on board as much Water as possible in Twenty-four

four

Four hours to proceed to St. Eustatius -

Barfleur at Sea 40 Leagues South
from St. Eustatius 4 of May 1784