

August 24th - Sep 8 1782

On the 21st in the afternoon we got a fair wind, which carried us through the gulph, in the course of the night, but at daylight we lay too continued laying too till noon, and afterwards went only under Bar Topsails, because a little Polacca was missing, which astonishes every one that has called upon me, and leads them to conclude the Fleet has been Delayed, from a consideration to a few hundred pounds. When I took the liberty of suggesting to Admiral Pigot a long while ago, whether it was not advisable to leave a ship to bring the prizes on, his answer was, they will never get to New York, if they are not towed, why far better would it be, my dear general, they never should, than that the fleet should be delayed a single day, on their account. Fortunately yesterday afternoon we fell in with a small schooner from Charles Town, with dispatches from General Leslie to General Campbell at Jamaica; upon which I got a note from the Admiral to say the French Squadron had been seen ten days ago, in latitude of the Delaware, steering to the northward, supposed for Rhode Island; why not for New York? for though I do not think it very probable, yet it is possible, particularly, as we are told the Island is invested, by an American Army. The Idea is distressing, when we might have been ahead of the Enemy, with a far superior Squadron, and had a very fair chance for intercepting them. It is pretty evident Vaudreuil has cruized for the Jamaica Convoy for the ~~the~~ fixed time
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positively
for its sailing was the 10th of July, which was printed in all the newspapers, and they knew it as well at the Cape, as the merchants and planters at Jamaica did, and probably to the end of the first week in this month, for having been seen entering the windward passage on the evening of the 5th of last month, he cannot have made the best of his way. We might have had six or seven & twenty of the Line at Sea, so soon as the combined Fleet left the Cape, which we should have had, between that & the 10th. But for the information received of Admiral Pigot's coming which so disturbed the Commander in Chief, he knew not what he did, and upon finding the Spanish Squadron at the Havanna, six or eight Ships might have been left off Cape Antonio to wait for the convoy, which would ^{have} sufficiently strengthened Admiral Graves, and insured him safety into the Latitude of Bermuda; and even late as Admiral Pigot sailed, 16 or 18 Ships of the Line, might have been at New York a fortnight ago, with full protection for the Convoy left behind.

This information from the Express boat, brought Admiral Pigot to a determination to wait no longer for the Prizes; and in order to take good care of them, he left the *Endymion* of 40 Guns, the *Southampton* of 32, and the *Sybil* of 28, for their protection when the former, and the *Little Germain* Sloop, would have been a sufficient safeguard to them; but this proves how very intent the Admiral is, on securing his property in the prizes; but if Officers cannot be found, that will make the glory of their King and country, to take place of every other consideration, there
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is no salvation for us, the labour and toil of a few, cannot effect it, the principle must be adopted in common, and strictly attended to, by men in authority and command or all is over with ^{poor old England as a great nation} ~~confess~~ to you. I like the aspect of things less, in the west Indies, than before the 12th of April; for if Vandrenil is come this way, just to shew himself, and wear away the hurricane months, I fear he will have the start, and be gone back again, long before us, unless we use very alert indeed! God grant my apprehensions may be groundless, and that on our getting to New York, I may have good reason to see things in a more favourable light. In answer to the note Admiral Pigot sent me, I took the liberty of hinting the necessity of his sending a frigate immediately to reconnoitre the Chesapeake, that he might not be unnecessarily delayed an hour off Cape Henry; I also suggested another frigate to be immediately detached to New York, to announce his near approach, and to desire Admiral Digby, would cause a sufficient number of Pilots to be collected on board the Guardship at the Hook, with two small Sloops, or Schooners, to buoy the Bar, so soon as the fleet appeared, as the loss of a tide, may occasion a delay of many days; and that Admiral Digby, may likewise be desired to order the contractor to have as many Bullocks ready to kill, and as much Spruce Beer brewed as possible, that the poor Seamen may not be a day, without all the refreshments, that can be procured them, or otherwise they will probably wait

wait a week without receiving any.

If the commander in chief of a great fleet does not upon every occasion === Look forward, the crews of it will be often disappointed of what they stand so much in need of, we entitled to, and might have. I have had the misfortune to bury thirty nine men, since the day the Barfleur anchored at Port Royal, exclusive of the badly wounded, which were found room for in the Hospital, brought 140 to sea in fevers & fluxes, most of which got about again, but I have now within ten of that number in the scurvy very bad, and must be put on shore as soon as possible, or they will die. If a man strikes one leg against another, or by any other accident breaks the skin, an ulcer soon forms, and a mortification very rapidly follows, without the greatest care, the blood of the poor fellows is in so sad a state. I stand in much need of refreshments also, but flatter myself the smell of the earth, and constant exercise mornings and evenings on Long Island, if it is safe to ramble there, will so far set me up, as to enable me to hold out this campaign. To see things go so slack & untoward, cannot but affect a man in the highest health, and it is impossible for one, afflicted as I am with strong bodily complaints, to bear up against them. Since I wrote my sheet on the 21st, I find my wife must have been under great trouble for the loss of her good old father. I will not close my letter till we reach New York, till then adieu

August 25

The Fortunes parted for the Chesapeake and the Jupiter for New York last night, which they ought to have done many days ago, and there is no accounting why it was not so, but for the indolence & dilatoriness, which prevail on board the Formidable. There is doubtless something very wonderfully mysterious in the Chiefs conduct, which I own, I have not penetration to fathom, and the more I think of it, the more I am bewildered. Strange as it may seem, it is no less true, though we have been at sea six weeks & loitering the whole time, not one single manœuvre has been practiced no, not even spreading in a line abreast / since we came through the gulph / at a mile or two distant in the day, and closing a little in the evening, by way of exercising the fleet which surely is highly necessary, if only for the better chance of procuring intelligence of the enemy, and how matters stand at New York &c. August 29th in Latitude of Cape Henry

We had not parted with the prizes many hours, before I saw reason to suspect, that the appearance only of dispatch in getting forward was meant. Circumstances have justified my suspicions, the prizes were in sight every day, and at daylight in the morning of yesterday, one of the frigates with a Polacca in tow, was a head of the fleet, the others not far behind. This proves most strongly, the different frames of mens minds, some are full of anxiety, impatience and

apprehension

apprehension, while others, under similar circumstances, are perfectly calm, tranquil, and not easily moved; mine is of the former cast, and I confess, that from the moment I heard a french fleet was a head, I should have considered the whole fleet in chace, till it got off Sandy Hook, not from any expectation of overtaking the enemy, but that not a moment might be lost in putting His Majesty's Ships in a condition to go to sea again. Having now one third of my Ships company in the scurvy, and a hundred very bad indeed, and six or eight falling down every day I thought it very much my duty to make a report to the Admiral, and to desire his permission to make the best of my way to New York, that my poor fellows may be put ashore as soon as possible, as a single day may be saving the lives of many. But it is doubtless very singular, that an account of the state & condition of the fleet, has not been called for, since the day the Commander in Chief left Port Royal, upwards of six weeks ago; many Ships are I know in that condition as to be unfit for sea, and as things are circumstanced it would be far better they were in port. It is really mortifying to see the whole fleet kept out, doing nothing, and nothing to be done, that half would not be equal to. I parted, at 8 last evening, and shall push to Sandy Hook

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as expeditiously as I can.

August 30th

This morning I spoke with the *Jupiter* in her way to New York. Captain Pasley, having thrown out the signal for the purpose, after making the private one, taking my flag for Admiral Digby's, not thinking it possible for the *Barfleur* to be ahead and to windward of the *Jupiter* when he came on board, he told me among other circumstances, that he had been informed by the master of the *Polacca*, he took in the night of the 5th near the Havanna, that he received intelligence the day before by a boat which came off to him, that an express was arrived from Cape Corrientes, with an account that the English Convoy was in sight from thence and that all the men of war at the Havanna, were preparing to sail, and indeed their appearance plainly shewed it. So that you see my dear General, what a chance we have lost, by our so injudiciously shewing our force to Don Salano, instead of keeping to the westward, to have fallen into the rear of the Convoy and sending frigates to reconnoiter the Havanna.

Captain Pasley yesterday spoke with the Centurion on a cruise four days from New York, and was told by Captain Clayton, the French Squadron of thirteen

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of the Line, is at Boston; if the information is correct as to the number, only ten Spanish ships, must have sailed from the Cape, and thirteen French; in place of thirteen of the former, and ten of the latter, as we were informed at Jamaica, for the whole consisted but of twenty three of the Line.

In a conversation when I delivered a certain paper I sent by the Convoy, and of which you have now a Duplicate, I suggested an alternative, that if a Squadron was not sent to precede the Convoy in quest of Vandreut, as many ships might be left to join Adm Graves, as would give him a superiority to the Spaniards at the Havanna, or to the French Squadron, in case of his meeting it, before he reached the Latitude of Bermuda; and for the rest of the Fleet, to proceed as fast as possible to New York; as it was highly probable, the good people there were full of apprehensions, and probably under serious difficulties.

Was a certain person in high office acted upon true patriotic principles, as a real friend to his poor distracted Country by, and what has he not to answer for in placing an officer so very inexperienced, at the head of so great a fleet, having never been in the command of a Squadron before, or scarce seen the Sea, since the year 1763? and who, had he acted with the least degree of foresight, and judgement, and spirit of enterprize, which

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the present moment unfortunately so much requires, would have had a very fair prospect, of destroying both the Spanish & French squadrons; his force was equal to, and clearly in my humble opinion justified, the attempt; and had we not so unaccountably loitered from the 17th to the 25th between Port Royal and the west end of the Island, we should have had the monarch with us, and the magnificent in a perfect state. But had there been a necessity for waiting at all, it should have been in sight of Port Royal, and a frigate sent in, to Lord Rodney, from the commander in chief, with a letter expressly saying, he wanted only for the Monarch & Anson to supply the places of the Warrior & Repulse, this would have been coming to a certainty at once; for though it seems his Lordship did write to Admiral Pigot, he intended to ^{send} them, yet, seeing the Admiral bear way, most likely occasioned Lord Rodney, to take them with him, through the windward Passage; but his doing so, and depriving the Convoy, of the Resolution & Montagu, can never be justified. I believe my dear General, I am too honest to live in the present times, and my mind often tells me, I express my thoughts too freely; but I cannot help it, more particularly when I am writing to one, I so much flatter myself has a real friendship for, and will not commit me.

Sept^r

Sept. 3.

I am just anchored at Staten Island, and as I will not attempt to give you a word, about matters here, will only add, that I am very much disappointed, in being deprived of the honor of seeing Prince William; His Royal Highness is on board the Warwick, which was laying just within the bar, waiting a wind to put to sea, as I entered Sandy Hook; Vanguard is arrived at Boston with 13 of the line and two frigates, which I suppose will lead ~~the~~ Admiral Boscawen, to detach a superior Squadron that way, and to water at Halifax - I suggested it to adm^r Digby, who thanked me for it, and immediately hinted to Admiral Boscawen by letter, which he sent a frigate with before he reached the bar. I will now close my letter, and am ever & most faithfully yours
Booby

Sept. 5.

Admiral Boscawen is in sight; The Dutch Packet arrived; giving an account of Lord Robingham's death, and of the alterations it has occasioned in the ministry. The papers mention Lord Howe's move, gone between Scilly & the Land's end to get without the combined Fleet till he is reinforced. A Battle must I think take place I pray god most heartily, it may be decisive one, and the Victory brilliant to the arms, of our Royal master! No servant or subject His Majesty has, has felt more, than I have done lately at what has happened at your place of residence

Sept. 8th.

All the ships are within the Hook, and are to water
here - I think I find benefit from my daily exercise
This I mean to be put into your hands by
Captain Affleck of the Southampton a nephew
of Sir Edmund Afflecks