

My dear General Buxfear of the Delaware Sept: 16 1781

On the 3rd instant about 10 am one of the look
out frigates made the signal for a fleet, and
at 12 we plainly discovered 24 sail of french
ships of the line and 2 frigates at anchor
about Lynnhave Bay, with their topsail yards
hoisted aloft, & a signal for getting under
sail, soon after they began to come out,
in a line of battle a head, but by no means
regular & connected, which afforded the
British fleet a most glorious opening for
making a close attack to advantage, but
it was not embraced; and as the french fleet
came out upon close upon a wind, and
the english line steer'd large, the action
commenced

commenced in the Van, pretty near, that part
of the enemy's fleet being to windward of their
center, and the center to windward of their
Rear; our center then ~~was~~ upon a
wind began to engage at the same time, but
at a most improper distance, though the
London had the signal for close action flying
as well as the signal for the Line to head at
half a cable, and lay with her maintopmast
to the mast the whole time, notwithstanding
the french ships were pushing on, and our
rear, being barely within random shot, did
not fire at all, while the signal for the Line
was out. No 1 contains my sentiments upon
upon the unfortunate day, as committed

to

to writing the next morning, which I mentioned
to M^r. Graves when I attended his first Summons
On the 6th it was calm all day, and in the
evening M^r. Drake & I were sent for on board
the London, when M^r. Graves communicated
Intelligence he had received from the Captains
of the Medea & Iris, who had reconnoitered
the Chesapeake, which was as follows. "That
" 2 ships of the Line, one of 40 guns & a frigate,
" were at anchor, between the Horse Shoe Shoal
" and York river, and that they saw three
" large ships coming down the Bay, which
" they thought were of the Line — M^r. Graves
" also communicated to us, a letter from Sir
" Henry Clinton, to General Earl Cornwallis, which
" he

He was desired to gett conveyed to his Lordships
if possible, — The Richmond & Iris, had just before
been detached upon that Service — on the 7th & 8th
the enemy being to windward with a commanding
Breeze, had an opportunity of attacking us, if they
pleas'd, but they shew'd no inclination for it —
On the 9th. The french fleet carried a press of sail
which prov'd to me, De Grape had other views
than those of fighting us, and I was much concern'd
to see Mr Graves did not make all the sail he
could also, and endeavour to gett off the Chesapeake
before him; it appear'd to me, to be a measure
of the utmost importance to keep the french out,
and if they did gett in, they should first beat us.
Instead of that Mr Graves put His Majesty's fleet
on

a contrary course just at dark, and at 8 o'clock
made the signal & lay to. At daylight next
morning, nothing was seen of the French fleet
from the Barfleur, which alarmed me exceedingly
and I debated with myself some little time, whether
I should venture to write Mr Graves a few
Lines, or not, as it is rather awkward and
unpleasant, to send advice to a senior officer;
however, I at last concluded to do it, and
having made the signal for my repeating frigate
to come under the Barfleur's stern, sent her with
the letter of which No. 2 is a copy - This occasioned
another summons to Mr Drake & me, on board
the London, when I found to my great astonishment
Mr Graves was as ignorant as myself, where
the

the french fleet was, and that no frigates had been particularly ordered (though we had several with us) to watch, and bring an account of, the enemy's motions — The question was put to me what was most proper to be done? to which I replied, that I thought the letter, I had taken the liberty to send, had most clearly & fully expressed what my sentiments were, but if it was wished I should say more, it could only be, that we should gett into the Chesapeake to the succour of Lord Cornwallis, if possible, but that I was afraid it was out of our power, as doubtless DeGrasse would most effectually bar the entrance against us, which was what human prudence suggested, we ought to have done, against him —

or

On the 13th early in the morning, I received the
note n^o. 3 from R. G. Graves, n^o. 4 is my answer
to it, which again called m^r. Drake & me
on board the London, when the resolution
contained in n^o. 5 was taken. — There was
nothing else left to be done, is some & much
to be lamented as the alternative was.

When the Terrible was in this country last
year with Sir George Rodney, who had he now
led His Majesty's fleet from the West Indies
The 5th of this month, would I am confident
been a most glorious day for England/
She was twice ashore, and has been very
leaky ever since, and her leaks were last
Spring increased, by another ship running on
board

board of her at sea - and the firing of her guns
the other day, had so affected her, that she was
scarcely to be kept above water, in the finest
weather, and had she met with the least bad
weather, or one of her chain pumps failed
she must inevitably have gone down, and as
there was reason to expect a gale of wind
every day; all her men, & such of her stores
as were serviceable were ordered to be taken
out on the 13th and the ship left fire to. She
was commanded by the Hon^{ble} William Clement
Finch, who behaved most nobly in action
and I very much regret the losing so excellent
and amiable an officer, whom under my command
I have the honor to me my dear General

we are now
endeavouring by all
to new York

Your most faithful and much
obeyed humble servant
Thos Mordaunt