

Partly duplicate of No. 680 but longer

Battle off Guadaloupe April 13. 1782

Rejoice my dear General rejoice and give God thanks; His Majesty's fleet has given such a beating to that of France as no great fleet ever had before.

On the 9th my Division had two actions, at a little space of time distant one from the other, with the whole of the Enemy's Van & center, between the Islands of Guadaloupe and Dominique, while the greatest part of our center, and every ship of the rear, were becalmed under the latter wind had DeGrasse known his duty, he might have cut us up, by a succession of fresh ships; but being very warmly received, and to windward, they hauled off, and our fleet joined - The next morning the French ships were very far to windward. Sir George Rodney carried a stiff sail all day, neared them very much by sunset, and intended to have carried a plain sail all night; but by some mistake of Sir Charles Douglas, by making the signal for the leading ship to shorten sail, which was under her topsails only with the mizen topsail aback the fleet lay too the whole night, at least the center and rear did so - Capt^m Byron can best tell, what the Van did, as he was employed the whole night, in carrying
measures

engages, between the Chief and third in command

At daylight, only a few of the Leeward most part of the French fleet, could be discerned from the mast head — we again worked to windward, and the next morning we could look up, by a fortunate shift of wind, to a few of the Enemy's ships, this brought the whole down to their succour, and they formed upon the contrary tack of our fleet — Every ship on both sides was engaged — Sir George Rodney cut through a part of the French line. So soon as my Division (which was then the rear one) had beaped the Sternmost of the Enemy which it was a considerable time in doing, being almost calm — The signal for the line was hauled down; upon which I got my boats out, & towed the ship about, made all the sail I could, and ^{for we had soon after a little breeze} threw out the signal for every ship of my Division, to do the same; and we took the Caesar, Ardent, & Ville De Paris observing the Ville De Paris, to edge towards the Barfleuv I concluded the Count De Grape, had an inclination to be my prisoner, and therefore met his wishes & ^{stood towards him} so soon as I got within random shot, he began to fire

fire upon me, which I totally disregarded, till I was satisfied by firing a single gun from the quarter deck, that I was fairly within point blank, when I opened such a tremendous fire against him, as he could not stand more than ten minutes, and down came his own flag, and that from the Ensign staff, with all signal ones together. This was just at sunset, and my boat had scarcely got on board, when Sir George made the signal to bring too, and continued to lay too the whole night.

After the glorious business of yesterday, I was most exceedingly disappointed & mortified at the Commander in chief, in the first instance for not making the signal for a general chase, the instant he hauled that down for the line of battle, which was about one o'clock; had he so done, I am confident we should have had twenty sail of the enemy's ships of the line, before dark. Instead of that, he pursued only under his topsails though the flying ships had all the sail set, their very shattered state would permit - In the next that he did not continue to pursue, under that easy sail, so as never to have lost sight of the enemy in the night, which
would

would clearly, and most undoubtedly have enabled him to have taken almost every ship this day. But why he should bring too, because the Ville De Paris, had struck, I cannot I comprehend. At sun rise I went on board the formidable to pay my compliments, and to try to remedy the mistake that had been made if possible, and so far prevailed upon Sir George as to leave as many of his own ships as were most disabled, to take care of the Prizes, and carry them to Jamarica, and to push on in search of the Enemy, with the rest of his fleet, first by looking into Mafetteve Point & St. Kitts, & St. Sasthus and the enemy not being at either of those places to hasten off St. Domingo

Had I my dear General have had the honor of commanding His Majesty's noble fleet, yesterday I may without the imputation of much vanity say that the flag of England, would at this hour have braced the sterns of upwards of twenty sail of the enemy's ships of the line - I always express to
you

you my inmost thoughts - and to prove, what strict obedience I have paid to your very salutary and wholesome advice - I enclose you a short correspondence between Sir George & me; and, ^{had} he been my father, my brother, or the nearest & best friend I had, I could not have seconded him with more eager zeal, or have been more open candid & sincere, in all I have suggested to him, from my ardour for our Royal and most gracious masters service, and my extreme veneration & love for this sacred person; in competition with which, no consideration in this world can ever stand.

I lamented to Sir George this morning, that the signal for a general chase was not made, when that for the Line was hawled down; and that he did not continue to pursue so as to keep sight of the enemy all night - to which he only answered, we have done very handsomely - I could therefore say no more upon the subject - I said the same afterwards to Sir Charles Douglas, on his making me compliments upon my managing my Division - his answer was

was

was, Sir George, chose to pursue in a body. Why Sir Charles said I, the signal for a general chace, was the only way of doing it, with proper attention - because if a ship is too wide, upon the starboard wing, you have a signal to make her alter her course to Port; if a ship is too wide upon the Larboard wing, you have a signal to make her alter her course to Starboard if a ship is too far a head, you can by signal make her shorten sail; if a ship is too far a stern, and has not all her sail sett, you have a signal for her to make more sail; and if Sir George was unwilling to have his ships engage in the night, for fear of their firing into one another, The White Flag at the Foretop gale, must be hoisted before dark calls every ship in, and that signal followed, by the one for the form of sailing the Fleet might have gone on, in sight of the Enemy in the most compact, and safe order, for completing the business most gloriously - upon which he said not another word, and walked off. Sir George is so vastly civil, that in the humour I am in at present, I find it a difficult task to keep pace with him. This is pretty
much

much a duplicate of what I wrote you by the Andromache
April 16th —

My Patience my dear General is now fairly exhausted for notwithstanding Sir George Rodney appeared most perfectly satisfied, from what I took the liberty of suggesting to him on the morning of the 13th of the very great propriety of pursuing with all possible celerity and gave orders accordingly to Sir Charles Douglas in my hearing, adding, he would wait for nothing, and upon my leaving him made sail; in less than four hours after, he changed his mind, and brought the fleet too — and here we are in the same spot, off Guadaloupe, it has indeed been calm part of the time, but we might see this have been above twenty Leagues farther to the westward.

It is much to be lamented, that Sir Charles Douglas is weak and irresolute to a degree, which will never do and is no more fitt for the station he fills, than I am to make a Bishop: In a great fleet, the duty of a first
captain

Captain to a Commander in Chief, is that of being
an honest & candid counsellor & adviser to him
and there ought to be, a perfect good understanding with
and confidence in, each other, which I am sorry to
say, from what I have seen and heard, is by no means
the case on board the *Formidable*; and sure I am, that
if Sir George Rodney, from whim & caprice, should
give orders, for any signal to be made, that would
inevitably throw the fleet into confusion, or even
into danger, Sir Charles has not fortitude & resolution
sufficient, to open his lips, in remonstrance, but
would most implicitly obey it. I have several
times been witness to Sir Charles's receiving orders,
that appeared most clearly to be big with absurdity
and has gone upon deck to direct their execution;
upon which I have more than once said: "I
believe Sir George you are unacquainted with some
circumstances, respecting the orders you have given
to Sir Charles Douglas, which I have related; and
he has immediately acknowledged it, sent for

Sir

Sir Charles, asked why he had not mentioned the
circumstances he had just heard from me, which
made the orders he had given highly improper, &
they have been put a stop to. Now what I did
was most certainly the bounden duty of the first
Captain. But all is confusion in the formidable
and not the least attention paid to method & order.
Things that require to be immediately done are
neglected, and others, that are of no consequence
whether they are done to day or tomorrow, these
is often the greatest hurry about, though of a very ^{trifling}
nature. In short I not only see them, but am constantly
tired about them, as often as a Captain comes
near me, which I cannot remedy, to any real
advantage, for whenever I attempt it, & bring
things a little to rights, it is but for the moment
as it were, for they soon return into their former
irregularity & confusion. Sir George requires a
constant monitor at his elbow, as much as a
Howard

forward child - My health has suffered exceedingly from
seeing things go as they do, and I shall in a very short
time be tossed overboard, if I continue in my present
situation, for I am of that frame & texture, that it is
totally impossible for me to be indifferent, where
the service of my King & country is so materially
affected. Sir George seems to be satisfied, with having
done enough, as probably to save Jamaica, and keep
his popularity alive; But good God, not avail himself
of the manifest advantage, which his compleat
victory gave him; one cannot think of it, with
any degree of temper - we might as easily have
taken the whole of the french fleet, as we did the
five sail I probably a ship or two might have gotten
off, but I am confident, not more than three could
possibly have escaped; which would most effectually
and substantially have retrieved the misfortunes
of poor old England; - have set her on tiptoe,
and have humbled France in the extreme: what
a glorious turn ~~would have been given~~ to our

Royal

royal, and most gracious masters affairs, might
have been given, not only in this country, but every
where else, with common management, and most
shamefully neglected! I find all this waiting here
is to take the Ville de Paris with her to Jamaica
such is the vanity of the man; would to god she
had sunk, the instant she had yielded to the
arms of His Majesty. What think you, of Sir
George Rodney, and his first Captain, to suffer so
great a fleet to put to sea, without a rendezvous
and in pursuit of an enemy, when either a
victory or a defeat, must unavoidably have
occasioned a separation. Strange as it may
appear, it is no less true - not a rendezvous
was given out till the 13th. The Royal oak
Blonde & Centaur, with the prizes Glorieux and
Pector^{had they} parted company; very luckily the blessed
Brig by accident fell in with them; whose cap[?]
having

Captain having heard Sir George Rodney say that
he should proceed to Jamaica with his whole fleet
told Captain Burnett of Royal Oak of it, and I
believe they are gone for that Island - what we
we to expect under such conduct, unless we are
aided, by the all powerfull hand of Providence!
Indeed it has pleased the almighty to be beneficent
and assisting to us in many instances, since we left
St. Lucia on the 8th, and if ever I have the pleasure
of seeing you again, I am very sure you will most
readily acknowledge. I am grieved for that truly
Gallant, and amiable young Nobleman, Lord Robert
Manners - one Leg gone, and the other wounded, and
his right arm broke; I think his habit of body is good
and therefore hope & trust he will do well. his Lordships
embarked for England in the Andromache
Capt. Payne, & Cap^t Blair were killed, & Cap^t Savage
wounded, but not badly. Mr. Stirlingfleet, behaved
as you & his best friends could wish him, is perfectly well
and a fine youth, and will be an honor to his profession
when, my dear General most affectionately yours

Jos. Rodd