

Admiralty Office, June 3, 1800.

Copy of a Letter from Vice-Admiral Lord Keith, Commander in Chief of His Majesty's Ships and Vessels in the Mediterranean to Evan Nepean, Esq; dated on board His Majesty's Ship *Minotaur*, off Genoa, the 7th May, 1800.

SIR,

YOU will be pleased to lay before their Lordships the enclosed Copy of a Letter from Captain Dixon, of His Majesty's Ship *Lion*, to Sir Thomas Troubridge, Bart. containing a Narrative of the Circumstances attending the Capture of the *Guillaume Tell*, and a List of the killed and wounded on board His Majesty's Ship on that Occasion.

The honorable Testimony borne by Captain Dixon to the meritorious Conduct of the Officers engaged with him in the Pursuit and Capture of this Ship, cannot fail to attract their Lordships' Attention, and ensure the Honor of their Countenance and Support.

I have the Honor to be, Sir, &c. &c. &c.

KEITH.

*Lion at Sea, off Cape Passero,
31st March, 1800.*

SIR,

I Have the Honor to inform you that Yesterday Morning, at Nine o'Clock, Cape Passero bearing N. $\frac{1}{2}$ E., distant Seven Leagues, the French Ship of War *Le Guillaume Tell*, of Eighty-six Guns and One Thousand Men, bearing the Flag of Contre Amiral Decres, surrendered, after a most gallant and obstinate Defence of Three Hours and a Half, to His Majesty's Ships *Foudroyant*, *Lion*, and *Penelope*.

To detail the Particulars of this very important Capture, I have to inform you, that the Signal Rockets and cannonading from our Batteries at Malta, the Midnight preceding, with the favorable strong Southerly Gale, together with the Darkness which succeeded the setting of the Moon, convinced me the Enemy's Ships of War were attempting to effect an Escape, and which was immediately ascertained by that judicious and truly valuable Officer Captain Blackwood, of the *Penelope*, who had been stationed a few Hours before between the *Lion* and *Valette*, for the Purpose of observing closely the Motions of the Enemy; nearly at Midnight an Enemy's Ship was descried by him, when the *Minorca* was sent to inform me of it, giving Chace himself, apprizing me by Signal that the strange Ships seen were hauled to the Wind on the Starboard Tack. I lost not One Moment in making the Signal for the Squadron to cut or slip, and directed Captain Miller, of the *Minorca*, to run down to the *Foudroyant* and *Alexander* with the Intelligence, and to repeat the Signal.

Under a Prefs of Canvas I gave Chace until Five A. M., solely guided by the cannonading of the *Penelope*; and, as a Direction to the Squadron, a Rocket and Blue Light were shewn every Half Hour from the *Lion*. As the Day broke, I found myself in Gun-shot of the Chace, and the *Penelope* within Musket-shot, raking her, the Effects of whose well-directed Fire during the Night, had shot away the Main and Mizzen Top-Masts, and Main-Yard; the Enemy appeared in great Confusion, being reduced to his Head-Sails, going with the Wind on the Quarter.

The *Lion* was run close alongside; the Yard-Arms of both Ships being just clear, when a destructive Broadside of Three Round Shot in each Gun was poured in, luffing up across the Bow, when the Enemy's Jib-Boom passed between the Main and Mizzen-Shrouds; after a short Interval, I had the Pleasure to see the Boom carried away, and the Ships disentangled, maintaining a Position across the Bow, firing to great Advantage.

I was not the least solicitous either to board or be boarded, as the Enemy appeared of immense Bulk and full of Men, keeping up a prodigious Fire of Musketry, which, with the Bow Chases, she could for a long Time only use, I found it absolutely necessary, if possible, to keep from the Broadside of this Ship: after being engaged about Fifty Minutes, the *Foudroyant* was seen under a Prefs of Canvas, and soon passed, hailing the Enemy to strike, which being declined, a very heavy Fire from both Ships, Broadside to Broadside, was most gallantly maintained, the *Lion* and *Penelope* frequently in Situations to do great Execution; in short, Sir, after the hottest Action that probably was ever maintained by an Enemy's Ship, opposed to those of His Majesty, and being totally dismasted, the French Admiral's Flag and Colours were struck.

I have not Language to express the high Sense of Obligation I feel myself under to Captain Blackwood for his prompt and able Conduct in leading the Line of Battle Ships to the Enemy, for the Gallantry and Spirit so highly conspicuous in him, and for his admirable Management of the Frigate; to your discriminating Judgment it is unnecessary to Remark, of what real Value and Importance such an Officer must ever be considered to His Majesty's Service: the Termination of the Battle must be attributed to the spirited Fire of the *Foudroyant*, whose Captain, Sir Edward Berry, has justly added another Laurel to the many he has gained during the War.

Captain Blackwood speaks in very high Terms of the active and gallant Conduct of Captain Long of the *Vincejo* during the Night; and I beg to mention the Services of Captains Broughton and Miller.

The crippled Condition of the *Lion* and *Foudroyant* made it necessary for me to direct Captain Blackwood to take Possession of the Enemy, take him in Tow, and proceed to Syracuse.

I received the greatest possible Assistance from Lieutenant Joseph Patey, Senior Officer of the *Lion*, and from Mr. Spence the Master, who, together with the other Officers and Ship's Company, shewed the most determined Gallantry.

Captains Sir Edward Berry and Blackwood have reported to me the same gallant and animated Behaviour in the Officers and Crews of their respective Ships.

I am sorry to say that the Three Ships have suffered much in Killed and Wounded, and that the Loss of the Enemy is prodigious, being upwards of Two Hundred.

I refer you to the inclosed Reports for further Particulars as to the State of His Majesty's Ships, and have the Honor to remain, Sir, &c. &c. &c.

MANLEY DIXON.

P. S. The *Guillaume Tell* is of the largest Dimensions, and carries Thirty-six-Pounders on the lower Gun Deck, Twenty-four-Pounders on the