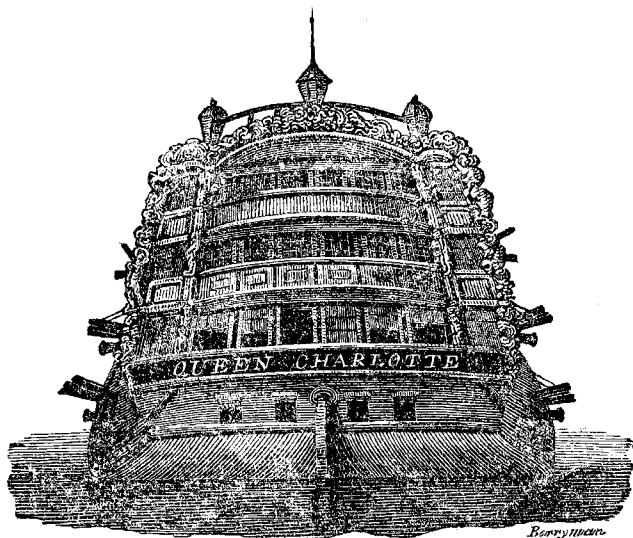


Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-01849-4 - The Naval Chronicle, Volume 10

Edited by James Stanier Clarke and John McArthur

Excerpt

[More information](#)

BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS OF
THE RIGHT HON. LORD KEITH, K. B.
 ADMIRAL OF THE BLUE SQUADRON.

— Albion, round her rocky coast
 While loud the rage of battle roars,
 Deridés invasion's haughty boast,
 Safe in her wave-encircled shores;
 Still safer in her *dauntless band,*
Lords of her seas, or guardians of her land,
 Whose patriot zeal, whose bold emprise,
 Rise as the storms of danger rise.

PVE.

IF at any time the British Navy was an object of more peculiar concern to the country than at another, it is at the present, when an implacable enemy threatens us with invasion, and possesses the means of carrying his threats into execution to a greater extent than the political state of Europe ever before allowed of. According to the enemy, “the line of coast hostile to Great Britain will soon extend from where the ocean forms the Baltic, to where it forms the Mediterranean,” and “armies after armies are destined to perish, till the Republicans triumph, and Britain is subdued.” This statement, which is gathered from the

Nav. Chron. Vol. X.

B

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-01849-4 - The Naval Chronicle, Volume 10

Edited by James Stanier Clarke and John McArthur

Excerpt

[More information](#)

enemy's own declarations, rests, as must be obvious to every one who considers the present state of the continent, and the character of the French Government, on better foundations than French vanity and exaggeration. The great powers of the continent are overawed or conquered by France, and therefore the First Consul may make his line of coast hostile to Britain as extensive as may suit his ambition; and of his disposition to sacrifice armies after armies till his purpose of invading this country is effected, no one can doubt who has read of his exploits in Egypt, of his invariable and wanton prodigality of human life whether of his enemies, or of his countrymen.

Under these circumstances, the exorbitant power of the enemy, the numerous points from which she can attack us, and the personal character of the chief of the republic, it is not hazarding too much to affirm. that Britain is placed in a position of greater danger than any to which she has hitherto been exposed. But, as our danger is greater than it ever was at any former period, so our means of defence are more formidable. The vast extent of coast from which Bonaparte threatens to pour his myriads of plunderers and assassins upon Great Britain and her sister island, may afford additional employment for the vigilance of our navy, and render strong measures of precaution at home, necessary and laudable: but of the event of the contest the most timid need not fear, while Great Britain is guarded by such heroes as her seamen. and while their energies are directed by the skill, experience, and valour, of those distinguished Officers to whose care and zeal her fleets are committed.

Our naval superiority was never greater than it is at the present moment; and never were our fleets commanded by Officers of greater capacity, valour, and patriotism. Voltaire, a writer by no means disposed to speak favourably of the English nation, nor at all times remarkable for a scrupulous adherence to truth, in treating of the events of Europe in the year 1759, acknowledges the superiority of the English at sea. and confesses that they have at all times had

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-01849-4 - The Naval Chronicle, Volume 10

Edited by James Stanier Clarke and John McArthur

Excerpt

[More information](#)

the advantage over the French on that element. “The naval force,” says he, “of France they destroyed in the war of 1741; they humbled that of Lewis XIV. in the war of the Spanish succession; they triumphed at sea in the reigns of Lewis XIII. and Henry IV., and still more in the unhappy times of the league. Henry VIII. of England had the same advantage over Francis I. If we examine into past times, we shall find, that the fleets of Charles VI. and Philip de Valois could not withstand those of Kings Henry V. and Edward III. of England*.” Had Voltaire lived to our times he would have seen that Britain not only maintained her former superiority over the fleets of France, but, in every war in which she has been engaged, and with every foe she has encountered, added lustre to her triumphant arms, and multiplied the disgraces of her enemies. He would have seen a confederacy formed of all the great maritime powers of Europe, whose avowed object was to wrest from her hands the sceptre of the ocean; he would have seen this formidable and threatening confederacy dissolved by the thunders of the British Navy; while, an awful lesson to Princes who engage in measures inimical to the rights of nations! one of the heads of it beheld from the windows of his palace his fleet destroyed, and, trembling for the safety of his capital, submitted to the terms which were dictated to him by his victors.

If at former periods the nation had reason to rely with confidence on the superiority of its navy, how greatly must that confidence be strengthened by a consideration of the events of the late war, in which we had not only to encounter the navies of France, Spain, and Holland, but the fleets of those very countries from whence we are supplied with the greatest part of our naval stores. High and satisfactory as was our confidence before, we feel it increased, from a firm persuasion, that our naval power has been put to the severest test it can ever experience, and having triumphed in every

* Voltaire, *Siecle de Louis Quinze*.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-01849-4 - The Naval Chronicle, Volume 10

Edited by James Stanier Clarke and John McArthur

Excerpt

[More information](#)

4

BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS

instance, and in the most complete manner, we have little to fear from any attempts of the enemy.

But, while we express it as our firm belief, that not a Frenchman will land in England but in the condition of a prisoner, we feel it a duty which we owe to our country, to declare, that in a war like the present, a war on which the fate of the civilized world depends, nothing should be left to chance, but every exigency should be guarded against with provident caution. Our Officers and seamen will not act with less vigilance, or fight with less courage, because they know their countrymen at home are prepared to receive the enemy, should they not fall into their hands, or be defeated; but, on the contrary, it will spare them some moments of anxiety to be assured, should the enemy, shrowded by darkness, or favoured by tempests, escape them, that Britons will fight for them by land, as they have fought for Britons on the seas. What British seaman is there who has not a large stake in the welfare of his country? They leave their homes, their families, and all the endearing connections of life, to fight her battles; but home, family, and connections, are not less dear to them than to those who pass their lives in the peaceable enjoyment of them; and should they at any time perceive with anguish that the enemy's fleet has escaped their vigilance, it will afford them consolation to reflect, that their countrymen's bosoms are warmed with the same spirit which animates their breasts, and Britons will never endure that British ground should be polluted and disgraced by the presence of a French army.

Our readers will excuse these observations, which the peculiar complexion and circumstances of the times have drawn from us. It can do no harm to exaggerate our danger, because that will lead us to be better prepared to repel it; but much confusion and mischief might ensue, if we under-rated it, and thereby became languid in our preparations to avoid it. Independent of the love which we bear our country, and the deep veneration in which we hold its admirable constitution and equitable laws, it is impossible

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-01849-4 - The Naval Chronicle, Volume 10

Edited by James Stanier Clarke and John McArthur

Excerpt

[More information](#)

OF THE RIGHT HON. LORD KEITH, K. B.

5

for a moment to reflect on the state of Europe, and more especially of those parts of Europe which have fallen under the merciless dominion of France, and are bent down and degraded under the most atrocious and oppressive military tyranny that ever existed, without being convinced, that all that is dear to man, the lives, liberties, and property, of the human species, are no where secure, except in the little spots called Great Britain and Ireland, and their dependent dominions. On ourselves it depends that we should continue to enjoy these blessings transmitted to us from our forefathers. If we are protected by our seamen, as we have hitherto been (and who for a moment can entertain a doubt on the subject?) it is hardly probable that the inauspicious day will ever arrive when British freedom is to be fought for on British ground; but should that hour unhappily come, Frenchmen will find that the gallant natives of these islands are not degenerated from what their ancestors found them on the plains of Cressy, Poitiers, and Agincourt; and few of them will return to describe the features of the land which they invaded, much less will any of them remain to enjoy its wealth.

To the superiority of our navy in point of numbers over that of France and her allies, and probably of all Europe, it is an additional source of pride and exultation to us to reflect, that at the conclusion of the late war the characters of our naval Officers stood in a higher degree of estimation than they had done at the termination of any former war. Not one Officer of rank held for any length of time an important command in which he did not some way or other distinguish himself; so that it now happens, that the Admirals who command our fleets are Officers of tried courage, and approved experience, whose reputation in arms has shone forth to the world. Of this description is the noble person whose achievements furnish the subject of our present biographical sketch, and who, happily for the interests of his country, though he might have remained in a state of inactivity, content with his well-earned honours, has again accepted an

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-01849-4 - The Naval Chronicle, Volume 10

Edited by James Stanier Clarke and John McArthur

Excerpt

[More information](#)

6

BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS

important command, and probably may soon have an opportunity of gaining additional laurels.

The Hon. George Keith Elphinstone was born in the year 1747*. Of the early part of his professional career we are constrained to be silent, as no particulars have come to our knowledge sufficiently authentic to be relied on. His promotion as Post Captain bears date May 11, 1775; and the following year, we believe, he was appointed to the Pearl frigate, of 32 guns, in which vessel he served in America under the orders of Lord Howe; and afterwards in the Perseus frigate, under Admiral Arbuthnot, at the reduction of Charleston, on which occasion he commanded a detachment of seamen on shore, and received the official praise of General Clinton, the Commander of the land-forces, for his gallantry and spirited exertions. On his return from America Captain Elphinstone was appointed to the Warwick, of 50 guns, in which vessel, being on a cruise in the Channel, he fell in with and captured, on the 5th of January 1781, a Dutch man of war of equal force.

Copy of a letter from the Hon. Captain Keith Elphinstone, of the Warwick, to Mr. Stephens, dated at Spithead, January the 7th, 1781.

SIR,

I have the honour to inform the Board of the arrival of his Majesty's ship under my command, and of my having cruised in company with the Edgar and Maidstone, on the station pointed out by

* George Keith Elphinstone was a son of Charles Lord Elphinstone (a Scotch Peer), by Clementina only daughter of John Earl of Wigtoun, who died the 1st of January 1799. He was created an Irish Peer on the 7th of March 1797, by the title of Baron Keith, of Storchaven-Marischal. The 15th of December 1801 his Lordship was created a British Peer, by the same title; he married, on the 9th of April 1787, Jane, daughter and sole heiress of William Mercer, Esq. of Aldie and Meekelem, in the county of Perth, and by her (who died December 12, 1789,) he had issue Margaret, on whom and her heirs male (in default of male issue,) the barony is entailed.

His Lordship is the grand nephew to George Keith, Earl Marischal, and his brother Marischal Keith, whose titles were forfeited in 1715. He is also a Knight of the Bath; Chamberlain to His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales; Treasurer to the Duke of Clarence, and F. R. S. He is uncle to Lord Keith, lately elected to sit in the British House of Peers as one of the representatives of the Peerage in Scotland. See *Debrett's Peerage*.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-01849-4 - The Naval Chronicle, Volume 10

Edited by James Stanier Clarke and John McArthur

Excerpt

[More information](#)

OF THE RIGHT HON. LORD KEITH, K. B.

7

my orders; also that, on the 5th instant, having parted company from the above ships, I fell in with, engaged, and took, a two-deck ship under Dutch colours (after having admonished her Commander to surrender, without effect). She is the Rotterdam, belonging to the States General, of 50 guns, and 300 men, commanded by Mynheer Volbergen, eleven days from Holland, bound to the West Indies. They had been twice attacked before this period. I had the good fortune to lose no men. The sails, masts, and rigging are cut to pieces. I have great satisfaction in acknowledging the obligation I am under to the Officers of each class. The ship's company, notwithstanding their being young in service, and reduced in number by the several Dutch vessels we had manned and sent into port, conducted themselves with becoming activity and spirit. I am, &c.

G. K. ELPHINSTONE.

During the remainder of the war Captain Elphinstone continued in the Warwick, and was, for the most part, employed on the North America station, where, on the 11th of September 1782, being on a cruise off the Delaware, in company with the Lion, of 64 guns, the Vestal frigate, and the Bonette sloop of war, after a chase of several hours, he came up with, and captured, a large French frigate, l'Aigle, of 40 guns, twenty-four-pounders on the main-deck, and 600 men.

From the peace of 1783, Captain Elphinstone appears to have remained unemployed, till the commencement of hostilities with France, in the beginning of the year 1793, when he was appointed to command the Robust, of 74 guns, one of the squadron under Lord Hood, which sailed for the Mediterranean in the month of May. The first object of Lord Hood, on his arrival in the Mediterranean, was to obtain possession of Toulon; and the necessary arrangements being made for that purpose, the troops were landed at Fort la Malgue, under the direction of Captain Elphinstone, who was appointed by the Admiral to act as Governor of the fort, and commander of the troops. In this arduous and difficult post, Captain Elphinstone displayed not only the greatest personal intrepidity and exertion, but a consummate knowledge of military tactics. To avoid repetition, however, we must refer our readers for an account of the proceedings which took place at Toulon, to

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-01849-4 - The Naval Chronicle, Volume 10

Edited by James Stanier Clarke and John McArthur

Excerpt

[More information](#)

our Life of the Commander in Chief*, and the Toulon Papers †, where Captain Elphinstone's services are stated at length, and cannot fail to impress on every mind the highest opinion of his courage, zeal, and abilities. When it became unavoidably necessary that Toulon should be evacuated, the care of embarking the artillery, stores, and troops, was committed to Captain Elphinstone, who, in the execution of this service, merited and received the most liberal encomiums of the Commander in Chief, as also the thanks of General Dundas, who, in his official dispatch, spoke of him in terms of the most flattering approbation; and on his return to England he was honoured with the Order of the Bath.

On the 11th of April 1794, our hero received his first promotion as a Flag-Officer, by being made Rear-Admiral of the Blue; and on the 4th of July the same year, he was farther advanced to be Rear-Admiral of the White Squadron, and hoisted his flag on board the *Barfleur*, of 98 guns, one of the ships attached to the Channel fleet, which, on the glorious 1st of June, was commanded by Rear-Admiral Bowyer, but who, having unfortunately lost a leg on that memorable occasion, was obliged for a time to retire from the service. Our Admiral continued in the Channel fleet during the remainder of the year, in which nothing material took place; but early in 1795, hostilities having broke out between Great Britain and the republic of Holland, he shifted his flag from the *Barfleur* to the *Monarch*, of 74 guns, and sailed from Spithead for the Cape of Good Hope, on the 2d of April, having the following ships under his command:—

Monarch, - - 74	} Sir G. K. Elphinstone, K. B. Rear-Admiral of the White. Captain J. Elphinstone.	
Victorious, - - 74		——— W. Clark.
Arrogant, - - 74		——— Richard Lucas.
Sphynx, - - 20	——— George Brisac.	
Rattlesnake, - 16	——— J. W. Spranger.	

* Vide Life of Lord Hood, Naval Chronicle, Vol. II. page 25.

† Toulon Papers, Naval Chronicle, Vol. II. page 108.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-01849-4 - The Naval Chronicle, Volume 10

Edited by James Stanier Clarke and John McArthur

Excerpt

[More information](#)

OF THE RIGHT HON. LORD KEITH, K. B.

9

Early in the month of July Admiral Elphinstone arrived with the squadron under his command in Simon's Bay, near the Cape of Good Hope, where he was joined by the *America* and *Stately*, of 64 guns each, the *Echo* sloop, and some Indiamen with troops, and immediately sent proposals to the Governor of the Cape to surrender that settlement to his Majesty's arms, which being refused, the necessary measures were taken to reduce the place by force. The proceedings of the fleet which led to the capture of this important settlement will best appear from the Admiral's official letter, which we subjoin.

Extract of a letter from Vice-Admiral the Hon. Sir G. K. Elphinstone, K. B. to the Secretary of the Admiralty, dated on board his Majesty's ship Monarch, Simon's Bay, Cape of Good Hope, August 18, 1795.

I had the honour of informing you, in a former dispatch, that the Dutch were entrenched in a strong position at Muysenberg, and well-furnished with cannon, having a steep mountain on their right, and the sea on their left, difficult of approach on account of shallow-water, with high surf on the shore, but which the absolute necessity of the post rendered requisite that we should possess, and made it obvious to Major-General Craig and myself that it ought to be attempted.

For this service I secretly prepared a gun-boat, and armed the launches of the fleet with heavy cannonades, landed two battalions of seamen, about one thousand, under the command of Captains Hardy, of the *Echo*, and Spranger, of the *Rattlesnake*, and sent ships frequently round the Bay, to prevent suspicion of an attack, when any favourable opportunity might offer.

On the 7th instant a light breeze sprung up from the north-west, and at twelve o'clock the preconcerted signal was made, when Major-General Craig, with his accustomed readiness and activity, instantly put the forces on shore in motion, and at the same moment Commodore Blanket, equally zealous, in the *America*, with the *Stately*, *Echo*, and *Rattlesnake*, got under weigh, whilst the gun-boats and armed launches preceded the march of the troops about 500 yards, to prevent their being interrupted.

About one o'clock, the ships being abreast of an advanced post of two guns, fired a few shot, which induced those in charge to depart; and, on approaching a second post of one gun and a royal mortar or

Nav. Chron. Vol. X,

c

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-01849-4 - The Naval Chronicle, Volume 10

Edited by James Stanier Clarke and John McArthur

Excerpt

[More information](#)

howitzer, the effect was the same. On proceeding off the camp the confusion was instantly manifest, although the distance from the ships was greater than could have been wished, but the shallowness prevented a nearer approach.

The Echo led, commanded by Lieutenant Tod, of the Monarch, and anchored in two and a half fathoms, followed by the America, which anchored in four and a half, then the Stately and Rattlesnake, which anchored nearer, in proportion to their lesser draughts of water, off the enemy's works, which began to fire, and the fire was returned by the sloops; but an increase of wind prevented the large ships from acting until they had carried out heavy anchors. This duty was performed by the Commanders with great coolness, much to their own honour and their country's credit.

In a few minutes after the fire opened, which obliged the Dutch to abandon their camp with the utmost precipitation, taking with them only two field-pieces, and at four o'clock the Major-General took possession of it, after a fatiguing march over heavy sandy ground. To him I beg leave to refer for the particulars of what was taken therein, as the sea ran so high that no person from the ships or gun-boats could venture to land.

In transmitting you the proceedings of the fleet under my command, I shall at all times feel great satisfaction in doing justice to the merits of the several Officers. To their judgment and good conduct in the present instance, is to be attributed the immediate success which attended the attempt; it is, therefore, my duty to recommend to his Majesty's notice Commodore Blanquet, Captain Douglas, Lieutenant Tod, of the Monarch, commanding the Echo, and Lieutenant Ramage, also of the Monarch, commanding the Rattlesnake, and Mr. Charles Adam, of the Monarch, Midshipman, who commanded the gun-boat. I am sensibly obliged to them, each of them individually, for their steady and correct discharge of my orders.

I must further beg leave to add, that it was universally agreed the Echo's fire was superiorly directed and ably kept up; and particular acknowledgments are also due to the Officers and men for the general zeal and activity which appeared in every countenance, of which I was enabled to judge with more precision, as the Commodore obligingly permitted me to accompany him, and to visit the other ships employed under his directions upon this service.

In this attack the America had two men killed, and four wounded, and the Stately only one man wounded. On board the other vessels the enemy's shot did some damage, but none were killed or wounded. In the bay were five