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Edited by James Stanier Clarke and John McArthur

Excerpt

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MEMOIR OF THE PUBLIC SERVICES  
OF THE LATE  
CAPTAIN JOHN STEWART, R.N.

COMMANDER OF H.M.S. SEAHORSE.

“ PEACE TO EACH MANLY SOUL THAT SLEEPETH !  
BEST TO EACH FAITHFUL BARE THAT WEEPETH !  
LONG MAY THE FAIR AND BRAVE  
SIGH O’ER THE HERO’S GRAVE.”

(Anacreon Moore.)

**T**HE friends of this distinguished officer and excellent man, have, in justice to his professional merit, determined, that a memoir of his public services should thus be given to his country : Lest it should be said of him, as Johnson once asserted of a most distinguished character, “ His contemporaries, however they revered his genius, left his life unwritten ; and nothing, therefore, can be known, beyond what casual mention and uncertain tradition have supplied.”

Mr. John Stewart, the second son of William Stewart, Esq. of Castle Stewart,\* in the shire of Galloway in Scotland, was born on the 21st of December, 1774. His mother was the sixth daughter of Lord Fortrose ; to whose eldest son the title of Earl of Seaforth was restored, which had been forfeited in the year 1715.

Mr. Stewart was educated in Scotland until the year 1788 : when, shewing an inclination for the sea service, he was sent to the Naval Academy, at New Cross, Deptford, where his attention to the scientific objects of his profession was conspicuous. During the ensuing year (1789), he embarked as a midshipman on board the *Rose* frigate, † Captain Waller, on the 9th of May, 1789 ;

\* This family was very ancient and respectable, and was an early branch from the Earls of Galloway. Captain Stewart had two paternal uncles, who died in the service of their country and were generals. He had also a brother in the engineers, and one in the artillery, who lost their lives, at an early period, in the West Indies.

† A brother officer, and intimate friend, observes in a letter—“ I think he has told me, that he was on the books, and had been on board (though never regularly at sea before), with his relation, the late Commodore Keith Stewart :” but the dates do not appear to confirm this idea.

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but availed himself of an opportunity of returning to his academy, which had been removed to Eltham, while the *Rose* was in port.

After two voyages to Newfoundland and America in that frigate, he left her on the 16th of April, 1790, and was entered on board the *Discovery*, Captain Vancouver, on the 16th of January, 1791. During her tedious and perilous voyage, Mr. Stewart's talents for nautical astronomy were soon observed by Mr. Whidbey,\* the skilful master of that ship; who then commenced an intimate friendship with our young seaman, which ended only with his death. Mr. Stewart often took the lead in every branch of service on which the ship was sent, as appears from many pages in Vancouver's Voyage, the principal part of which was executed under circumstances extremely hazardous, since the examination of the N. W. coast of America, could only be performed in small open boats, that were often absent from the ship at the distance of 30, and even 40 leagues; during which, the boats were constantly harassed and often attacked, by Indians of a most savage and ferocious character. In these dangerous expeditions, Mr. Stewart always accompanied Captain Vancouver, to assist him in surveying; and the extraordinary escape which they both one day had from being murdered, and probably devoured by a very large tribe of the natives, has been preserved by some friends of Captain Stewart, in the following interesting memorandum of his own conversations relative to that event:—

-----“ We generally landed at some sequestered spot to cook our dinner; and upon one occasion, we were certainly in the most imminent danger of being murdered. Our boat was in the mouth of the river, now called Mackenzie's river—(and, by the bye, on comparing my journal with Sir A. Mackenzie's narrative, I find we left the coast on the very day he came in sight of the ocean.) We had been employed in taking soundings; and the other boat which had been in company during the morning, had separated to survey a small bay, at a little distance. A point of land lay between us, and we thought it might take them a considerable time to rejoin. We, therefore, determined to land, and dine at a spot which seemed sheltered and free from any savages. However, on nearing it, a few were discovered; but, from them, Vancouver thought there was nothing to fear. We accordingly neared the shore, and landed, when

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\* Master Attendant at Woolwich, now conducting that great national work, the Breakwater, at Plymouth; one of the ablest and most upright characters in the navy. See preceding Vol. p. 485.

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other savages were observed to make their appearance from behind a small eminence, that had hitherto concealed them; and on their approach, we perceived that many of them had put on their war dress, and were armed with spears, bows, and war clubs. By this time our boat had got into shoal water, and was close to the beach, within reach of their arrows. Vancouver began to talk of retreating, yet did not like to shew any symptom of fear: he ordered the arm chest to be opened, and that every man should arm himself. The moment the savages saw this, they rushed towards the boat, and plunging into the sea, got under our oars, so that they could not be used; others laid hold of the boat, and endeavoured to haul it on shore. Vancouver in vain endeavoured to hold a parley with them, and to explain that no harm was intended; they every minute became more insolent and audacious, and I saw clearly that they intended mischief. We looked round at that instant, for our companions in the other boat, but they could not be seen.

“The savages had now put themselves into threatening attitudes. My station was in the stern sheets, where providentially lay a pair of large horse pistols. I took one of them, and a midshipman, who stood by me, took the other. We had scarcely done this, when two tall, strong, horrid looking savages, rushed into the water, within a few feet of us, dressed in their war dress of buffalo hide; each armed with a long spear, and their faces painted with all sorts of colours. The savage who was opposed to me, threw himself back a little, elevated his spear, and seemed in the very act of hurling it through my body: when suddenly his eye caught mine, and he observed that the muzzle of my pistol was directed to his breast. He instantly was horror struck, and remained fixed in his terrific attitude. Aware of the efficacy of fire arms, he dreaded instant death, if he made his intended throw at me. I had sat down in the stern sheets to avoid their arrows: but my pistol was rested on the gunwale of our boat, and my eyes were sternly rivetted on his. I acknowledge I was frightened, but I thought not of death. I thought of nothing, but the horrid savage before me, and whether it were possible, that my pistol might fail in going off, or the ball in penetrating the buffalo hide which he had on. I resolved to sell my life as dear as I could; and in this state of awful suspense we remained a considerable time, utterly regardless of any thing that passed around us.

“At this critical instant, and when Vancouver had been knocked down by a war club, and several of our boat’s crew had been wounded severely\* with their spears, our shipmates in the other boat hove in sight! They immediately saw what was going on, and fired upon the savages. The Indians then retired in consternation; and, with the assistance of our companions, we pushed into deep water and rowed off.

During this voyage, Mr. Stewart became intimately acquainted with a distinguished young officer, whom he much regarded, and

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\* One man was speared through the thigh by the savages, with such force, as to be pinioned to the side of the boat.

whose keen feelings he always sedulously loved to abate,—the much injured and ever to-be lamented Lord Camelford. The pages of our CHRONICLE must use the language of truth, however at variance with popular and received opinions. We sincerely trust that the future naval historian will do justice to the memory and liberal zeal of this unfortunate seaman; and, like the Monk in Sterne, will gather the nettle which should never have been suffered to grow on the tomb of one, who was beloved and is now regretted, by many leading characters in the British navy.

Mr. Stewart served as midshipman and master's mate on board the *Discovery*, until the 3d of November, 1795. Captain Vancouver, on his arrival at St. Helens, strongly recommended his young companion to Mr. Stewart's relation, Lord Keith, then Sir G. K. Elphinstone; who patronised him in a conspicuous manner, and placed him in situations where his great abilities might appear.

On the 3d of November, 1795, Mr. Stewart passed his examination as lieutenant, with great credit, and was appointed second in the *Arab*, on the 6th of that month. After a voyage to New York, and whilst cruising off the French coast, the *Arab* struck on a rock in hazy weather, and in less than twenty minutes became a mere wreck. Perceiving there was no hope of saving the ship, Lieutenant Stewart had thrown himself into the sea, but without the precaution of taking off his shirt; which had nearly proved fatal to him, from its gathering round his shoulders and arms, and thus nearly preventing his swimming. Providentially he reached a spar, which he had thrown overboard, and swam with it to clear the eddy that was occasioned by the sinking of the ship: when hearing voices that proceeded from the jolly boat full of people, he called out for assistance. His voice was recognized by a seaman of the name of Johnson, who called out, "that is Lieutenant Stewart, let us stop and take him in at all events." He then put back to the floating wreck of the *Arab*, and saved four persons more. Captain Seymour's voice was once thought to have been heard in the water, amidst the fog, but they could not find him. He was lost with the surgeon and 23 of the crew. The survivors, many of whom were picked up by fishermen, on reaching the French coast were infamously treated, and even marched naked into

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the country, to Quimper, where they received much kindness and assistance from a Miss Coppinger, who had been a Nun.

The surviving officers, who were nine in number, being without money, and no rations being allowed whilst on parole, were compelled to go to prison with their men. They were afterwards marched to Brest, and Morlaix, and exchanged. A French captain, named Bergeret, gave them money; and the relations also of those for whom they were exchanged were very kind. Lieutenant Stewart arrived at Plymouth in July, 1796; and, after paying a visit to his family in Scotland, on the 5th of the ensuing September, he was appointed to the Revolutionnaire frigate, and joined her at Falmouth.

In 1797, Lieutenant Stewart joined Lord Keith on board the Queen Charlotte, having left the Revolutionnaire on the 20th of July, in that year. When his Lordship's flag was struck, Lieutenant Stewart served in the Formidable; and afterwards successively with the noble Admiral, on board the Tonnant, Foudroyant, Barfleure, and Queen Charlotte.

He joined the Foudroyant on the 19th of November, 1798, at Plymouth, and had previously continued in the Channel fleet. Lord Keith's flag was on board, going out second in command in the Mediterranean. The Foudroyant joined Earl St. Vincent at Gibraltar in December; who, being severely indisposed, gave charge of our fleet off Cadiz to Lord Keith, with his flag on board the Barfleure: and in that ship Lieutenant Stewart remained employed on the blockade of the Spanish fleet,\* until the beginning of the month of May, 1799: when the French fleet, under Admiral Bruix, consisting of 24 sail of the line, and nine smaller vessels, being overawed by the imposing attitude which the British fleet had assumed, consisting only of 15 sail of the line, one frigate, and one sloop, abandoned the project of attempting to enter the port of Cadiz; and, passing through the Straits in the night, made the best of their way towards Toulon. Lord Keith having ascertained that fact, returned with his squadron to Gibraltar to receive the instructions of the commander-in-chief.

During all the preceding service, as well as in the subsequent

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\* Consisting of twenty-two ships of the line, and a correspondent number of smaller vessels, ready to put to sea at a minute's notice.

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pursuit of the French fleet by Earl St. Vincent, and of the combined fleets by Lord Keith, Mr. Stewart continued to do the duty of that Admiral's flag lieutenant; and by his prompt conception of all public applications, his immediate attention to the object of them, his respectful but manly demeanour to his superiors, his kind and liberal behaviour to his brother officers, and the habitual urbanity of his manners to all; he conciliated the respect, and secured the esteem of all ranks and degrees, confirming the favourable impression which his valuable talents and amiable disposition had originally made upon his patron's mind.

On Lord Keith's return to England, Lieutenant Stewart remained attached to the Channel fleet, for about three months: but returned with that Admiral to the Mediterranean, on his receiving orders to repair thither as successor to the Earl of St. Vincent; when his flag was again hoisted on board the Queen Charlotte, which sailed about the middle of November, 1799, from Spithead. Having been foiled in his design of entering the port of Lisbon by the weather, Lord Keith successively visited Gibraltar, Minorca, Leghorn, Palermo, and the canal of Malta, for the purpose of distributing and stationing his ships; and of holding communications with his Majesty's military officers, and those of his allies, as also with the King's ministers at Florence, Naples, and Palermo, and with the Sicilian Court. Lieutenant Stewart being in the habitual confidence of his Admiral, was thus afforded frequent opportunities of access on public business, to foreign ministers, military officers, and other persons of distinction; for intercourse with whom he had laboured to qualify himself, by the acquisition of the Italian language.

On the 7th of March, 1800, Lord Keith returned to Leghorn, to co-operate with the Austrian army against the French, under the command of Massena, who at that time occupied the city and territory of Genoa. While the necessary arrangements for the service were going on, the Queen Charlotte† was unhappily destroyed by fire, on the 17th of March. Lieutenant Stewart had gone on shore on the preceding evening; but, on the first alarm in the morning, he hastened to the Mole, and cutting a tartan loose, compelled the crew to put off to give immediate assistance:

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† For a detailed account, refer to Vol. III. p. 299.

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in which gallant and dangerous enterprise, he was assisted by an old schoolfellow whom he chanced to meet on the Mole.

When the Tartan reached the Queen Charlotte, then in a perfect blaze, she was stationed by Lieutenant Stewart as near as safety would permit, under the care of his friend ; whilst he himself went in a little boat, to save people who were hanging by ropes from the bowsprit, and sprit-sail-yard, &c. Another small boat on the same service, was swamped by the numbers that dropped into her, when two men who had volunteered their assistance, were drowned.

Captain A. Duff, who was then third lieutenant of the Queen Charlotte, has favoured us with the following testimony to these humane exertions of his brother officer, who was second lieutenant :—“ To the active and intrepid conduct of that lamented ornament of the British navy, the major part of those who escaped, owe their preservation. Stewart had been early in the morning informed of the dreadful situation of our noble ship. The burning of Troy could not have been a more tremendous or awful sight to Æneas. The ship was one blaze from stem to stern, with her guns going off in all directions, from the flames. Lieutenant Stewart’s heroic conduct was followed by two other boats, and, to the honour of some American vessels, who were at Leghorn, one was directly manned by three of their men ; but too incautiously going alongside of the Queen Charlotte, she fell a sacrifice to the impetuosity of the unfortunate crew, who, urged by the flames, flocked in numbers for deliverance. She sank alongside, with all on board.

“ Lieutenant Stewart’s ardour in the cause of humanity was only equalled by his judgment in affording us relief, when he had reached the Queen Charlotte ; which lay at the distance of twelve miles from the shore. He judiciously dropped his Tartan under the bows, where almost all the remaining crew had taken refuge. Little more than an hour had elapsed, after this assistance had been given, before the ship blew up. All that had been left unburnt, immediately sunk down by the stern ; but when the ponderous contents of the hold had been washed away by the waves, she, for an instant, recovered her buoyant property ; and was suddenly seen to emerge almost her whole length from

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the deep ; and then immediately turning over, she floated on the surface, with her burnished copper glistening in the Sun. Amidst the various wonders of the deep, which are beheld by those who go down to the sea in ships, this certainly formed a most sublime and awful event. I had been roused from sleep by the going off of the guns, and had escaped from the surrounding flames by jumping from the poop, in order to swim to the launch that was astern, at that time full of men. I providentially reached the launch, just as they were in the act of casting off the tow rope ; and after some entreaties and consultation, I was taken in, and had the happiness of being afterwards conducive to the preservation of several lives. I also witnessed, whilst in the launch, the exertions of the boats under the bows of the ship, directed by Lieutenant Stewart. We had only one oar and the rudder in the launch, and were consequently at the mercy of the wind and sea."

Captain Stewart had the gratification to find, amongst the number who had been preserved by himself, his most intimate friend, the Honourable Lieutenant (now Captain) Dundas, of the *Euryalus*, and also Mr. Francis Loch, midshipman, who was under his particular care.

The Admiral, in a state bordering on distraction, had continued, after Lieutenant Stewart's going off in the *Tartan*, to use every possible effort and persuasion with the Italians belonging to the country boats in the Mole, to put to sea : but which, notwithstanding the active interference of the government of the town, and of the president of the chamber of commerce, had only an effect on a few, and on fewer still with any beneficial effect. Could the activity, energy, and humanity, that would have actuated the seamen of a British port on such an occasion, have been transferred to the drones in the Mole of Leghorn, many more valuable lives would have been saved.—The Admiral most highly appreciated Lieutenant Stewart's services on that disastrous day, as also those of Mr. Greenway, master's mate, who went off in a merchant ship's boat : as well as those of Mr. T. Parkinson, Mr. Isaac Crabb, and Mr. James Cutline, masters of transports ; and of Mr. Lewis, master of the English ship *Alexander*, of Mr. William Robinson, master of the American ship *Castor and Pollux*, with the crews of their respective vessels.



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After this melancholy event, Lieutenant Stewart was left employed by Lord Keith on shore at Leghorn; whilst the Admiral proceeded, on the 3d of April, 1800, to the blockade of Genoa, then besieged by the Austrians. Lieutenant Stewart intercepted whatever supplies were attempted to be sent thither. Corn for that purpose having actually been embarked on board Italian vessels, which were thus immediately stopped by him, who was the only Englishman in the place. A message was in consequence sent to Lieutenant Stewart by the Austrian general, to let the vessels sail, as they had his passports, and were destined for a town occupied by the Austrian forces; but the former resolutely refused without orders from his Admiral, well knowing they were intended as a supply for the French army. The Austrian, who had received a bribe, preferred silence to any farther appeal, and the enemy were thus reduced to the utmost distress.

On the 29th of April, 1800, Lieutenant Stewart was appointed by Lord Keith to the command of the *Mondovi* sloop, of 14 guns, and continued co-operating with the squadron in the blockade, and seconding the operations of the Austrian army on the coast until the 16th of May, when he was sent to Leghorn, to arrange the conveyance of some Austrian troops to the Genoese territory. Lieutenant Stewart was at the same time confidentially instructed, to apply his attention to an object esteemed by the Admiral of the utmost importance to the ultimate success of the campaign—*The total suppression of the clandestine exportation of grain, from the ports of Tuscany.* For this important purpose, he was finally stationed at Leghorn. Where, by his judicious and temperate representations, and the prompt and decided interposition of an honest mind, he was enabled, and particularly in one case of great extent, to palsy the speculations and designs of individuals; who had been led to sacrifice both principle and duty, to the enormous profit, which was at that time to be derived from the conveyance of supplies to the nearly famished and distressed enemy in the port of Genoa. Captain Stewart fully justified the confidence that had been thus reposed in him by the commander-in-chief.

Many of the desperate and sanguinary conflicts that almost daily took place on that coast, between the Austrian and French armies,

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being within view of the British squadron, had been distinctly witnessed by Captain Stewart, before he was detached on other duty. But there was one event of considerable importance, that he did not witness, and which it is our duty as faithful Naval Chroniclers to notice—"The surrender of the important City of Genoa to the British Squadron."—The Austrians never fired a gun against that place, and its reduction was wholly caused by famine, which the vigilance and severity of our sea blockade had occasioned. This achievement in our naval annals would not have failed to have shone forth as it deserved, had not the disastrous result of the battle of Marengo, and the Convention of Alexandria, between Baron de Melas and Buonaparte, overwhelmed Europe with astonishment and dismay.—The great object of our Biographical Memoirs is, to preserve and elucidate Naval Facts, and Dates, for the future historian, and we have, therefore, thus paid the tribute that was here due, to the friend and Admiral of the distinguished subject of our present attention.

On the 25th of June, 1800, soon after the termination of the Genoese campaign, Captain Stewart was detached by Lord Keith, to cruise under the orders of the senior officer employed off Lisbon and Oporto: where, with the exception of some occasional absence at Minorca, and whilst off Cadiz, he continued employed until the commencement of the Egyptian expedition. A great debarkation had been contemplated at Cadiz, in the beginning of October, but was subsequently abandoned in consequence of the yellow fever which prevailed.

Captain Stewart sailed in the *Mondovi* on the Egyptian expedition with Lord Keith, to Marmorice, on the coast of Anatolia, December 31, 1800. That great armament consisted of about 100 ships of war, the greater part of which were ships of two decks, and frigates, with an equal number of large transports, having from 25, to 30,000 men on board. Its arrival at the appointed rendezvous, excited the astonishment and admiration of the inhabitants of the Asiatic shores, and gave a new and magnificent appearance to the extensive surface of the hitherto solitary, but beautiful and romantic Bay of Marmorice.

(1801.) Amongst the numerous difficulties, with which this extensive and important expedition had to contend; but which it