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ROYAL NAVAL BIOGRAPHY.

POST CAPTAINS OF 1806, *continued.*

JOHN SYKES, Esq.

A son of the late James Sykes, Esq. Navy Agent, of Arundel Street, Strand, London.

This officer was one of Captain Vancouver's midshipmen, in the *Discovery*, during a voyage round the world, already noticed at p. 200, *et. seq.* of Vol. II. Part. I. He obtained his first commission in 1795, and was made a Commander in 1800. His post commission bears date Jan. 22d, 1806; previous to which he had commanded the *Hecla* bomb, and the *Nautilus* sloop of war. The former vessel formed part of the squadron under Captain, (now Rear-Admiral) Robert Dudley Oliver, at the bombardment of Havre, in July and Aug. 1804, on which occasions his conduct was highly meritorious, as will be seen by the following official letters :

“ Melpomene, off Havre, July 24, 1804.

“ MY LORD.—Since my letter to your Lordship of the 17th instant, we had light and very variable winds for three days, which were succeeded by a gale from the northward, when the bombs had some difficulty to keep clear of the shore. Yesterday, the wind having got to the S.W., I stood in with the squadron, and at 11 made the signal for the bombs to try their range; they placed themselves with the utmost precision immediately off the pier-heads, and at a quarter past 11 began a most tremendous fire of shells and carcasses, which was continued without intermission for an hour and a half; in a very few minutes the town was observed to be on fire, and as the pier was very full of vessels, it is impossible but they must have suffered considerably. The vessels which had been outside the pier during the bombardment of the 16th, were so much annoyed as to retire, some into the pier, and some up the river; one of them was towed on shore under the batteries, and has since been taken to pieces. The enemy's mortar-batteries have been very considerably increased since the attack of the

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16th ; and although the fire from them on the bombs was as great as, I will venture to say, was ever experienced, they being considerably within range, yet it is with the most inexpressible pleasure I acquaint your Lordship, that not a man has been hurt. A shell passed through the mizen stay-sail of the Zebra, another carried away the spare top-sail-yard and two chain-plates of the Merlin, and grazed her side; and a 42-pound shot cut the spare top-mast and some other spars, and lodged in the booms of the Hecla; this is all the damage done. It is impossible for me to find words to express my admiration of the conduct of Captains Sykes, (Joseph) James, (Robert) Paul, and (William) Beauchamp*, and the other officers and crews of the bombs, for the able manner in which they placed and managed their vessels; and also of the officers and men of the royal artillery embarked on board of them, for the judicious manner in which they fired the shells."

"Melpomene, off Havre, Aug. 2, 1804.

"The wind having changed yesterday to the N.E. I determined to make another attack on the numerous vessels in Havre pier, as well as those which were moored outside, amounting to twenty-eight brigs and as many luggers; and stood in with the squadron as per margin†. At 7^h 30' P.M., the bombs were well placed off the pier-heads, when they began a well-directed fire, which was kept up with great spirit for an hour and a half. The town was very soon observed to be on fire in two places; and seven brigs, which were on the outside of the pier, found it necessary to move; one lost her main-mast. As the wind came more off the land, and a strong ebb-tide setting out, I ordered the bombs to discontinue firing. At 9^h 30', we anchored with the squadron about five miles from the light-houses. As the Explosion had fired away all her shells, and the Zebra most of her powder, I had them supplied from the Meteor; and at 5^h 30' this morning got under weigh, and stood in with the squadron again: before 8, the bombs took up their position near the pier-heads, and kept up a constant fire for near three hours with shells and carcasses: so many shells burst on and about the piers, that the enemy's fire was observed latterly to slacken considerably, and it was evident they were in the greatest confusion; some brigs and luggers, however, got under weigh, and came out to endeavour to annoy the bombs, but all the other ships and vessels of the squadron were so well placed as to give chase to them immediately; and it was only by cutting away their boats, which were astern, and retreating very speedily into shoal water, that they escaped, but not before they had run the gauntlet of all the ships and cutters, and were very closely engaged for a considerable time by the Merlin, Favorite, Locust, and Hope; and on this occasion I feel parti-

* The present Captain William Beauchamp Proctor.

† Melpomene frigate, Trusty of 50 guns, Magnanime 44, Ariadne 20, Merlin and Favorite sloops, four bombs, one gun-brig, and four cutters.

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cularly indebted to Captains Brenton and Foote, and Lieutenants Lake and Dobbin, whose vessels were often during the action in very shoal water, with a falling tide ; indeed nothing but the bad sailing of the *Merlin* prevented Captain (Edward Pelham) Brenton from cutting off the sternmost brig.

“The *Locust* lost her main-top-mast, but I have not heard of any other loss. The conduct of Captains Sykes, James, Paul, and Beauchamp, commanding the bombs on both these occasions, was highly meritorious ; and although their ships were frequently struck, it gives me great pleasure to add that no lives have been lost. What damage may be done to the enemy by near 500 shells and carcasses thrown into the town and basin last evening and this morning, it is impossible to calculate ; but I may, without vanity, say, that if the exertions of the enemy’s flotilla be not much greater on our shore than on their own, we have little to dread from them. I cannot conclude without expressing my obligations to every officer and man employed in this squadron. I have the honor to be, &c.

(Signed)

“R. DUDLEY OLIVER.”

“*Right Hon. Lord Keith, K. B.*”

Since his promotion to post-rank, Captain Sykes has successively commanded the *Diomedé* of 50 guns, *Ardent* 64, *Adamant* 50, and *Ocean* 80 ; the former bearing the flag of Sir Edward Nagle, when commander-in-chief at Guernsey ; and the latter, the flag-ship of Lord Amelius Beauclerk, now in the river Tagus.

Captain Sykes married, in 1811, a daughter of Edward Earl, Esq. Chairman of the Board of Customs in Scotland : one of his sisters is the lady of Captain Richard Byron, C. B. *Agents.*—Messrs. Stilwell.

JAMES WATSON, Esq.

Entered the naval service in 1776 ; received his first commission in May 1782 ; and was wrecked on Yarmouth Sands, while commanding the *Mastiff* gun-brig, Jan. 5, 1800. Being honorably acquitted of all blame on that occasion, he was immediately afterwards appointed to the *Kent* 74, bearing the flag of Lord Duncan ; and at a subsequent period to command the *Saxe Cobourg* cutter, on the North Sea station, in which vessel he continued until his promotion to the rank of Commander, in Jan. 1801. During the remainder of the French revolutionary war he successively commanded the *Volcano*

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bomb, and *Hermes* sloop. On the renewal of hostilities he was appointed to the *Sea Fencibles* at Hartlepool, where he remained until May 1804. His subsequent appointments were to the *Epervier* and *Alonzo* sloops, and he appears to have been constantly employed in the North Sea till his advancement to post-rank, Jan. 22d, 1806. In 1807 and the three following years we find him regulating the impress service at Dundee.

 CHARLES JONES, Esq.

WAS made a Lieutenant in 1793; and obtained post-rank, Jan. 22d, 1806. Towards the close of the late war he served as flag-captain to Sir Harry Neale, Bart. in the *Boyne*, a second rate, and *Ville de Paris*, of 112 guns.

Captain Jones married, first, Feb. 16th, 1818, Anne, daughter of the late Rev. Mr. Newcombe, Vicar of Gresford, in Denbighshire; and 2dly, Mar. 4, 1824, Louisa, youngest daughter of the late Rev. Mr. Morgan, of Bath, and of Deane, in the county of Northampton.

Agents.—Messrs. Stilwell.

 JOHN HANCOCK, Esq.

A Companion of the Most Honourable Military Order of the Bath.

THIS officer was born in 1766, and commenced his naval career at an early period of life, having embarked as a Midshipman on board the *Vigilant* 64, commanded by Captain (afterwards Sir Robert) Kingsmill, July 1st, 1778; from which period he appears to have been engaged in a constant series of very active services until the termination of hostilities with America, France, &c. in 1783. When only fifteen years of age, he saved the life of a young lad by jumping overboard and keeping him above water until a boat could be sent to his assistance.

The *Vigilant* formed part of Admiral Keppel's fleet, and was one of the ships principally engaged in the action off

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Ushant, July 27th, 1778*. She afterwards proceeded to the West Indies, under the command of the late Sir Digby Dent, and bore a share in the conflict between Byron and d'Estaing, off Grenada, July 6, 1779 †; as also in the whole of Rodney's actions with the Count de Guichen, in April and May, 1780‡.

From the *Vigilant*, Mr. Hancock removed with Captain Dent into the *Royal Oak* 74; and we subsequently find him serving as a Master's-Mate, on board the *Europe* 64, commanded by Captain Smith Child, in the actions off the Chesapeake, Mar. 16, and Sept. 5, 1781 §. On the former occasion he had his left leg broke at the ankle joint, and his right leg dreadfully contused by a splinter: the *Europe's* total loss is stated by Schomberg to have been 17 killed and 28 wounded ||.

Mr. Hancock next joined the *Goliath* 74, which ship had the honor of leading the van division of Lord Howe's fleet at the relief of Gibraltar, and sustained a loss of 4 men killed and 16 wounded in the skirmish off Cape Spartel, October 20, 1782 ¶.

The *Goliath* being paid off at the conclusion of the war, Mr. Hancock was again received by his first Captain as a Midshipman on board the *Elizabeth* 74, from which ship he removed into the *Phæton* frigate, commanded by the late Sir John Colpoys, with whom, and his successor, Captain George Dawson, he served on the Mediterranean station, until the autumn of 1787.

Having then no prospect of promotion, although he had passed his examination two years before, Mr. Hancock resolved to quit the service; and he accordingly remained on

* See Vol. I. note † at p. 195, *et seq.*

† See Vol. II. Part I. note † at p. 50, *et seq.*

‡ See Vol. I. note † at p. 103, *et seq.*

§ See *ib.* p. 40, and note at p. 133.

|| Captain Child fought the *Europe* with such credit as enabled him to obtain promotion for many of his officers. He afterwards attained the rank of Admiral, and died at Newfield, near Newcastle-under-Lyne, Jan. 21, 1813, aged 83 years.

¶ See Vol. I. p. 17, and Vol. II. Part I. note † at p. 42.

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shore from that period until May 1790, when the dispute with Spain, relative to Nootka Sound, revived his hopes and induced him to join Captain Colpoys in the *Hannibal 74*; want of interest, however, prevented him from being included in the very large promotion that took place in Nov. following, and determined him to retire for ever from a profession which he had embraced with ardour, and never ceased to adore.

Notwithstanding this last cruel disappointment, and his resolve never to embark again, it fortunately happened that some of Mr. Hancock's friends had sufficient influence to prevail upon him to accompany them to Portsmouth for the purpose of seeing the French republican prizes, brought thither by Earl Howe's fleet; as on the sight of those splendid trophies he could not resist the temptation of making another effort to obtain advancement, by re-entering on board the *Royal George*, a first rate, bearing the flag of Lord Bridport, from which ship he was at length promoted to the rank of Lieutenant, Oct. 24, 1794.

On this occasion, Mr. Hancock had the good fortune to be appointed third Lieutenant of the *Aquilon* frigate, commanded by that excellent officer Captain (now Sir Robert) Barlow, whose plans and regulations for the internal government of a King's ship were then universally admired, and to whom many distinguished characters have been indebted for the chief of their professional knowledge*.

In the *Aquilon*, Mr. Hancock was present at the capture of three French line-of-battle ships, by the fleet under Lord Bridport, June 23, 1795 †; and in the ensuing winter he was applied for by Captain Barlow to be his first Lieutenant in the

* The high estimation in which Captain Barlow's abilities were held at the commencement of the French revolutionary war, may be inferred from the following passage in a letter written by Captain (now Sir Thomas) Pakenham, to the father of a youngster whom he had placed on board the *Aquilon* for improvement: "I am certain so fit a man as Bob Barlow is not to be found in our profession: he is the person with whom we all wish to send our young friends, and he is certainly the best officer amongst us. He will not spare his own son, nor yours, if he has any thing for him to do."

† See Vol. I. p. 246.

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Phoebe, a convincing proof that his talents were viewed in no common light by that discerning commander, to whom his general conduct must also have given great satisfaction. The Admiralty, however, did not think proper to break through a regulation then in force, by which no officer under three years standing was considered eligible to be appointed senior Lieutenant of an 18-pounder frigate, although he was allowed to become first of the *Aquilon*, two other gentlemen being appointed to her who were both his juniors in rank.

Captain Barlow was succeeded in the command of the *Aquilon* by Captain W. E. Cracraft, with whom Lieutenant Hancock continued to serve until the summer of 1798, when he exchanged into the *Valiant*, a third rate, on the Jamaica station. Previous to her proceeding thither, the *Aquilon* had a skirmish with four French gun-boats, which, taking advantage of a calm, had rowed out from under the land near Harfleur, and having long 24-pounders were enabled to annoy her very considerably, as they fired with such extraordinary precision that every shot took effect either in the hull, the masts, or the rigging: fortunately, although much cut up, she had only one man killed, and a midshipman severely wounded.

Whilst in the *Valiant*, Lieutenant Hancock assisted at the capture of *la Petite Magicienne*, a very fine French ship privateer, carrying 20 guns and 120 men, 3 of whom being recognized by him as deserters from the *Aquilon*, and found in arms against their country, were afterwards tried and executed. The first batch of the *Hermione's* mutineers, 5 in number, was also found on board the same vessel, one of whom was admitted as King's evidence; the others were hanged, and subsequently gibbeted on a prominent part of St. Domingo.

Previous to the final evacuation of that island by the British, Lieutenant Hancock volunteered to assist in dislodging a considerable body of brigands, who had established themselves at Jean Rabel, from whence, by means of small vessels and row boats, they daily committed depredations against merchantmen of every description.

To effect this essential service, it had been arranged that a detachment from the army at Cape Nicholas Mole should storm

the principal fort, which from its situation commanded the bay and adjacent country, whilst the boats of the Valiant and other ships were to make a simultaneous attack upon the batteries near the sea. The military part of the expedition to be commanded by Colonel (now Sir William) Stewart, and the naval portion by Captain John White, of the Adventure 44.

On approaching the enemy's position, a division of boats was placed under the command of Lieutenant Hancock, who received directions to land and attack the batteries on the beach as soon as the troops showed themselves on the eminence near the fort; and so admirably was the whole affair conducted, that the blacks were driven from every post with great slaughter, but not until they had made a most desperate resistance.

In the course of the same day, whilst the British were employed blowing up the fort and batteries, destroying the guns, burning the carriages, and bringing away the plundered articles, a formidable body of brigands assembled under the cover of a thick wood, and endeavoured to regain possession of the beach; but were prevented by the judicious conduct of Lieutenant Hancock, who placed the launches with carronades in so masterly a manner as to secure the embarkation of the troops and stores, which would otherwise have been a service of very great hazard and difficulty. Upwards of 10,000 barrels of beef, pork, and flour, which had been taken out of English victuallers bound to Cape Nichola Mole, formed part of the valuable property re-captured on this occasion. The loss sustained by the British appears to have been very small, considering the nature of the attack, and the circumstances under which they effected their retreat: it did not exceed 20 men killed and wounded.

On the following morning, Lieutenant Hancock had the gratification of finding that Colonel Stewart and Captain White had made a most favorable report of his gallant and able conduct to the commander-in-chief, Sir Hyde Parker, under whom he had served as midshipman in the Goliath, and whose lasting friendship he had now the good fortune to obtain.

In Oct. 1798, a vacancy occurring on board the flag ship*, Lieutenant Hancock was removed into her, agreeably to a promise which Sir Hyde had made immediately after the brilliant exploit at Jean Rabel; but it unluckily happened that that officer was recalled from the Jamaica station without having an opportunity of promoting him according to his expressed intention.

Mr. Hancock had not been long in the Queen before he became first Lieutenant; and it was principally through his exertions that she was brought to Port Royal in safety, after grounding on a shoal called the Three Fathom Bank, where she remained beating with great violence for 72 hours. It is scarcely necessary to add, that the preservation of such a ship from destruction must ever be considered a service of the highest importance, and as such it was viewed by Sir Hyde Parker and his Captain, both of whom expressed the most perfect approbation of Mr. Hancock's meritorious conduct on this trying occasion.

Sir Hyde Parker was relieved by Lord Hugh Seymour, in August 1800; and from that period we find Mr. Hancock serving as his first Lieutenant in the Trent, Royal George, and London, until promoted to the rank of Commander, April 2, 1801. We should here remark, that those ships were severally commanded by the present Sir Robert Waller Otway, than whom no officer was ever more capable of rightly appreciating professional merit, and that he was pleased to bestow the warmest encomiums upon Lieutenant Hancock for the expeditious manner in which the London was got ready to act against the Northern Confederacy, he himself being absent on Admiralty leave during the greater part of the time that she was in the course of equipment.

At the celebrated battle of Copenhagen, Lieutenant Hancock was honored with the command of more than one hundred and fifty flat-bottomed and other boats, containing nearly 2000 seamen and troops, who were intended to storm the Trekroner battery the instant that the cannonade from

* The Queen, of 98 guns, Captain (now Rear-Admiral) Man Dobson.

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the ships should silence its fire; a most striking evidence of the great confidence reposed in him by the Admiral, who had previously appointed one of the ablest captains in his fleet to conduct that service*.

Lieutenant Hancock left the London with orders "to keep as near to the Elephant as possible, but out of the line of fire, and to be ready to receive the directions of Lord Nelson." To obey both these orders was quite impossible, as the enemy's shot fell more than a mile outside of the British line: he therefore directed all the boats to row towards the ships engaged, and keep on their off sides, where they remained with only room to use their oars until the Danish floating batteries had ceased to make resistance. Lieutenant Hancock, who had led in and taken his station abreast of the Elephant, was then called on board by Nelson, who ordered him to select a sufficient number of boats and hasten to take possession of the ships that had surrendered; which service was performed under a tremendous fire from the Trekroner battery, but happily without any serious loss.

On this occasion, the London's barge, under the immediate command of her first Lieutenant, and a flat-bottomed boat containing part of the 49th regiment, boarded the Holstein of 60 guns, from which ship the Danish commander-in-chief had recently retreated to the Trekroner, but not before he had caused all her guns on the inshore side to be spiked, and thus prevented the British from using them against that battery, which otherwise would have been soon cleared, as it was quite open (*en barbette*), and the Holstein not more than 200 yards distant†.

* "The land forces and a body of 500 seamen were to have been united under the command of Captain Freemantle and the Hon. Colonel Stewart, and as soon as the fire of the Crown battery should be silenced, they were to storm the work and destroy it." See Clarke and M'Arthur's *Life of Nelson*, 4to. edition, Vol. II. p. 267. N. B. This arrangement, as far as it respects Captain Freemantle, was altered in consequence of that officer's ship, the Ganges 74, being attached to Lord Nelson's division after the Danish line of defence was last reconnoitred. It will be seen by reference to the note at p. 368 of our first volume, that the ships intended to silence the Trekroner were not able to get into their stations.

† "From the uninjured state of this outwork, which had been manned