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Maine Historical Society (Local Code: Coll. 1157, p.17-20)
Creation date: Oct. 19, 1775
Description: Dispatch from Capt. Henry Mowatt to Vice
Admiral Graves about the destruction of Falmouth (Port-
land)

Canceaux in Casco Bay 19th October 1775

Sir,

The fluctuating state of the winds and weather since my departure from Boston have occasioned the delay of this Letter, as will appear in the following part of it. The morning after leaving the harbor, the Canceaux with the other Vessels were brought too off the entrance of Cape Ann Harbour, with an intention of going in the moment that the day appeared, but to my no small mortification a strong gale from the Northward reduced the Vessels under their low Sails, so much so, that the Symmetry [transport] and Spitfire [armed sloop] went almost broadside to Leeward finding myself in this situation, I judged it expedient to secure Harbour and accordingly directed the course for Cape Cod, where we anchor'd in the evening of that day. The next morning the wind shifting to the Southward of the West we got under Sail and at day break the following morning, we were close in with Cape Ann. Upon viewing the Town, Mr. Grant, the Artillery Officer, gave it as his opinion that the houses stood too scattered to expect success with the Ordnance and Stores of his department and in particular from the small number of Carcasses and the uncertainty of their goodness. On considering

the ill consequences of a disappointment in the first attempt of this expedition, and the advantage and encouragement it would afford the Rebels, I thought it most prudent to make choice of an object, where the certainty was more secure, tho' it was not without reluctance I passed this port, as your orders directed me there first, as well as the favourable opportunity of attempting Squam [?] at the same time, which I certainly should have done, had the number of troops been sufficient to have landed. The proceeding morning the wind carried us off Cape Elizabeth, where we again were saluted with a second Northwester, which obliged us to take shelter in the evening of that day, under Squirrel Island in Townsend bay, here we were detained a part of two days, and in the evening of the third, anchored at Hog Island road in Canco bay. At four in the afternoon of the day following, the Vessels were all placed before the town of Falmouth without the least resistance: finding the people so disposed, I wrote them a letter (a copy of which I transmit with this) and sent Mr. Fraser the acting lieutenant on shore to deliver it, which he did, and heard it read in the town house before a large number of the inhabitants: upon its being read, there was a profound silence, and it was desired to be read a second time, after which the Chairman with many of the principal people, in particular those who had never joined in any part of the Rebellion, lamented and
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judged by the stile of the letter, that the punishment was very severe; and more so still, as the time limited was so very short, and that too with the night approaching. Mr. Fraser seeing a general distress increase, among the women and children in the Streets; he gave to understand, that if they had any proposal to make to me, he would be the bearer of it, at the same time he could not take upon him to say that it would be received: Upon which they observed that upon his going on board if the boat did not return again in a few minutes, a Committee in the name of the Town would wait upon me, which they did; by name Brigadier Pribble, Doctor Coffin and Mr. Pegan merchant; deputed to know the nature of the chastisement, and to request that a longer time might be allowed them, as it was then just upon chundown. I replied that from the nature of their crime they had not the least right to expect any lenity, and that the power in me vested, authorized me to distinguish those only who I was certain had never aided or assisted in their rebellious proceedings but notwithstanding that, the known humanity of the British Nation encouraged me, to take so far upon me, that on condition that the people of Falmouth in general would in the course of the time that I had given them, deliver up all their Arms and Ammunition with such of themselves as I should make
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destroying the Town until the determination of
the Commanders in Chief of the King's forces
at Boston should be known. To this the Committee
replied, that they would make my demand
known to the people immediately, but that
it would be impossible to accomplish it, without
a certain time being granted for the purpose of
assembling them: I observed, that if it was
not in their power to do it completely this
night, they surely could do a part, and
therefore, if the town expected a longer time,
so many of their Arms must be delivered
on board the Canceaux before light o'clock with
the Five Guns that I knew to be on Carriages
in the Town, also the rest of the arms
with Brigadier Pribble and such others as
I should make choice of, to be forth coming in
the morning: at the same time considering
this and every other indulgence void upon
the least hostile appearance of any kind
whatsoever. The Committee declared that the
guns on carriages were removed out of the town
on the first appearance of the shipping, but
that they would do their utmost in bringing
off as many arms as could be brought together
in so short a time; on this promise I
suffered them to go on shore, and before the
hour of light they returned with Ten stand
only, delivering them as a pledge of the
faith of the Town in general, that nothing
hostile should be offered; and that if my
demand was not fully complied with by nine
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The next morning (which they beseeched me to grant them) as it would be impossible to clear the town of the women and children before ~~that~~ that hour in case of a noncompliance. This request I agreed to, and desired a Committee to ^{be} with me half an hour before the time limited, to which they were punctual; when they declared that to their no small astonishment, they found that no part of the Inhabitants assembled in the morning, and that the whole town was then in the greatest confusion with many women and children still remaining in it; as to themselves, they had only to implore time to go on shore and get out of the way; on which they took leave of the Ship with expressions of thankfulness for the lenity that had been shown. Perceiving women and children still in the town, I made it forty minutes after nine before the Signal was hoisted, which was done with a gun, at the same time the cannonade began from all the vessels, and continued till six, by that hour the body of the town was in one flame, which would have been the case much sooner, had the Wind favored in the forenoon as it did in the evening, and altho' a regular cannonade was kept up all the time, numbers of armed men were employed extinguishing the fire before it became general which made it absolutely necessary for some men to be landed, in order to
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set fire to the vessels, wharfs, storehouses, as well as to many parts of the town that escaped from the shells and carcasses, notwithstanding they were executed with the greatest dexterity to the no small credit of Mr. Grant the artillery Officer, who employed his people not only on board, but on shore also, with a certain number of seamen from each of the Vessels, and a party of Marines, all under the command of Mr. Fraser whose spirited conduct, and activity in the execution of that duty, do him every credit that could be expected from such a service, and indeed every man that was with him. And with equal justice I can say, that all the Officers and men on this command shew'd the greatest readness, and acted with the greatest composure and harmony in their respective duties; and with no less satisfaction I acquaint you Sir, that notwithstanding the vast numbers of armed men that assembled in, and near the town on the occasion, Falmouth with the Blockhouse and battery, the principal wharfs and storehouses, with eleven sail of vessels, at and near this town several of which with cargoes, all laid into ashes, including a fine distillery, four vessels taken, all without the loss of one person, and only two slightly wounded, Mr. Larkin Midshipman of the Canceaux and one Marine. At the same time I am sorry to say, that had we not been situated close to the town, we should without a doubt have found
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North America
Bombardment
of Falmouth
1779 to 1781

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great difficulty in accomplishing this piece of service, as we soon experienced the insufficiency of the artillery stores, not only in goodness, but in quantity; the particulars of which shall at a more convenient opportunity be laid before you Sir, which I am sorry to observe will not reflect great credit on the ordnance store at Boston: And with equal concern I observe, that the want of a sufficient number of troops, has prevented an effectual sweep being made of all the arms and ammunition not only belonging to the town of Falmouth but also of many Islands and villages in Casco Bay, which I am very certain could have been completely done with five hundred men - as well as numbers of Cattle and other fresh provisions equally usefull, and not less distressing to this part of the country.

Our Carcases excepting a few belonging to the Howitzers are all expended; and these are rendered useless by the carriages being disabled which happened early in the Bombardment. The Spitfire Sloop is also much shattered, so that I shall be under the necessity of repairing to Nantasket to have these wants supplied before I can attempt any other place. The troops are also in great distress for want of necessaries, many of them having embarked without a second shirt, from which cause they are rendered incapable of their duty, and are falling sick very fast. My intention was to

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dispatch the Halifax immediately with this Letter,
but having four vessels to man and take
care of, I consider it most prudent to keep our
small force together till we are nearer.
I have the honor to be with the highest
respect,

Sir,

your most Obedient
Humble Servant
H Mowat

Samuel Graves Esq. &c. &c. &c.

Endorsement

Copy of a Letter from Lt. Mowat
to Vice Admiral Graves.
dated Casco Bay 19th Octr '75.

No. 2.
in Lt. A. Graves's
Lre. 8 Novr.

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