Table Annexed to Article: Admiral Cochrane's Dispatches from the Chesapeake Campaign in RC Text Format (1814)

Peter J. Aschenbrenner, Purdue University
Vice Admiral Sir Alexander F.I. Cochrane, R.N.,
To
Secretary of State for War and the Colonies
Earl Bathurst

His Maj Ship Tonnant
The Pawtuxent River
August 28, 1814

Private
My Lord [Bathurst]

I trust by the public dispatches that your Lordship will find that I was not ever sanguine in my expectation of the results I expected from a joint operation of Army and Navy, upon this coast. The destruction of Washington will bear me out in all I advanced, and much more is to be done if four thousand additional troops or marines can be sent immediately out in fast sailing ships without waiting for tonnage, Genl Ross with whom it is a pleasure to act will no doubt state his wants.

I have not yet seen him as the army have not reached the shore, but in my opinion a few troops of dismounted dragoons with spare accoutrements – a rifle corps with spare rifles (the latter will be of great use here as well as with the Indians who your Lordship will see by my public dispatches to the Admiralty are in great force and hearty in the cause, and they have come forward and in full confidence of being supported. I trust their sincerity will not be forgotten when peace is concluded.

The President of the United States had summoned the Congress to meet at Washington about the middle of September. A new proclamation will now be necessary, which must be most humiliating to him the more so
as he was in the field of battle and fled with the rest before 1200 of our troops, the whole that were engaged.

Upon leaving the Chesapeake, we mean to attempt at the Reduction of Rhode Island and then striking upon the enemy until the beginning of November after which our efforts will be directed to the southwards and preparations to means we have for acting agst the Enemy.

Baltimore may be destroyed or laid under a severe contribution but our present force is not adequate to the attempt without incurring more risk than it would be prudent to do. The destruction of the enemy’s flotilla has been a severe stroke and their sufferings in point of national property at Washington has been immense, but one or two good black regiments would be of great use, even a few companies of picked men would lead the way to an extensive enlistment.

Half the regiments now at Providence may be spared and I recommend their being taken to Lt. Col. Nichols with the Indians or employed upon the coast of Georgia under my directions, another division of black troops to attend the army. The Sixth Reg. of which Lt. Col. Brown now belongs with me will be in much more use in raising recruits than all the recruiting parties (which consist of *men only* exclusive of officers from each ship) an arrangement very contrary to your Lordships intentions.

I have only to offer to your Lordships my congratulations upon what has already taken place and I have the honor to be

With the highest regard,
Your Lordship’s most obedient and honorable Servant
Alexr. Cochrane
Vice Admiral Sir Alexander F.I. Cochrane, R.N.,
To
Secretary of State for War and the Colonies
Earl Bathurst

Mouth of the Patuxent River
2 Sept 1814

Private
My Lord [Bathurst]

Since I had the honour to address your Lordship upon the fall of Washington on the evening of the 24th ult[imo] I have had a conversation with Major General Ross on the advantages to be derived from Black troops, and we both concur in opinion that the black companies of the regiments in the West Indies and in Providence will both be a more effective reinforcement and form the best recruiting parties for their respective regiments, Lt Col Brown will return to Barbados with the officers and men now here amounting in all to persons or numbers totally inadequate to the service they were sent to perform.

Sir George Beckwith must have greatly misinterpreted your Lordships wishes when he ordered them to join me. Should your Lordship approve of the black companies being sent, the General is of opinion that Lt Col Brown is a fit person to command, he has been in all the late services, and being upon the spot in the West Indies he can organise the battalion before they are embarked.

The worst enemy we have to contend with is the climate, this obliges us to proceed to the northward, by possessing Rhode Island we will draw the attention of the enemy to that quarter and as they expect the arrival of Lord Malcolm with a large Army, they will consider that place as the general rendezvous, for an attack on New York, which your Lordship will see by the newspapers I have sent to Lord Melville they are preparing for by fortifying the Heights of Brookline and Gov’nrs Island.

The neighbourhood of our armies will keep their troops at home, and prevent reinforcements going to their armies in Canada. I hope that reinforcements will reach here before the first of December. By the beginning of November we will be leaving Rhode Island and returning towards this quarter. I am leaving with Sir Thomas Hardy who commands
here during my absence about 500 marines including my black recruits, which with the Marines of the Squadron will keep the very enemies upon the alert. About the middle of December our Northern campaigns must clear North and South Carolina – and Georgia and Louisiana and N Orleans all lay open to attack.

My opinion is that about one thousand men, half black troops ought to be employed upon the coast of South Carolina and Georgia – that possession be taken of Cumberland Island and works thrown up to contain 250 or 300 men. This will give us the command of their Inland navigation and cut off their communication with Amelia Island. The Northern extremity of the Floridas, a force so situated acting upon the flanks of the enemy on their Southern boundary will operate much in favour of the Indians and oblige the Georgians to recall their troops for their internal defence – while this is going on thereupon proceeding with the Army to Mobile and to take the most prompt measures for conveying them in boats by Lake Pontchartrain to N Orleans in this we will be joined by some thousand Indians and by their assistance after the fall of the city to drive the Americans out of Louisiana and beyond the Spanish boundary. All this may be accomplished before the month of March and the keys of the Mississippi placed in the custody of G. Britain.

I have the honour to be
your Lordship’s most obedient and humble servant Alex’ Cochrane.

Mouth of the Patuxent 2 Sept 1814
Admiral Sir A Cochrane
Private Received by Capt Smith.
Vice Admiral Sir Alexander F.I. Cochrane, R.N.,
To
First Secretary of the Admiralty John W. Croker

*Tonnant*, in the Patuxent, 2nd. September 1814.

Sir,

I have the honor to acquaint you, for the information of my Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, of the proceedings of His Majesty’s combined Sea and Land forces since my arrival with the Fleet within the Capes of Virginia, and I beg leave to offer my congratulations to their Lordships upon the successful termination of an Expedition in which the whole of the Enemy’s Flotilla under Commodore Barney ahhs been captured or destroyed—his Army, tho’ greatly superior in number and strongly posted with Cannon, defeated at Bladensburg—the City of Washington taken—the Capitol with all the public buildings, Military Arsenals, Dock Yard and the rest of their Naval Establishment, together with a vast quantity of Naval and Military Stores, a Frigate of the largest Class, ready to launch, and a Sloop of War afloat, either blown up or reduced to Ashes.

Such a series of Successes in the centre of an Enemy’s Country, surrounded by a numerous population, could not be acquired without loss and we have to lament the fall of some valuable Officers and Men; but considering the difficulties the Forces had to contend with, the extreme heat of the Climate and their coming into Action at the end of a long march, our Casualties are astonishingly few.

My Letter No. 77 of the 11th August will have acquainted their Lordships of my waiting in the Chesapeake for the arrival of Rear Admiral Malcolm with the Expedition from Bermuda.

The Rear Admiral joined me on the 17th, and as I had gained information from Rear Admiral Cockburn, whom I found in the Potowmac, that Commodore Barney with the Baltimore Flotilla had taken shelter, at the head of the Patuxent, that afforded a pretext for ascending that River to attack him near its source, above Pig point, while the ultimate destination of the combined Force was Washington, should it be found that the attempt might be made with any prospect of Success. To give their Lordships a more correct idea of the plan of attack I send a Sketch of the Country upon which the movements of the Army and Navy are portrayed. By it their Lordships will observe that the best approach to Washington is by Port Tobacco upon the Potowmac and Benedict upon the Patuxent, from both of which are
direct and good Roads to that City, and their distances nearly alike: the Roads from Benedict divide about five Miles inland—the one by Piscataway and Bladensburg, the other following the course of the River although at some distance from it, owing to the Creeks that run up the Country: this last passes through the Towns of Nottingham and Marlborough to Bladensburg, at which Town the River called the Eastern branch that bounds Washington to the eastward is fordable and the distance about five Miles. There are two Bridges over this River at the City, but it was not to be expected that the Enemy would leave them accessible to an invading Army.

Previously to my entering the Patuxent I detached Captain Gordon of His Majesty’s Ship *Seahorse*, with that Ship and the Ships and Bombs named in the Margin, up the Potowmac, to bombard Fort Washington (which is situated on the left bank of that River about ten or twelve miles below the City) with a view of destroying that Ford and opening a free communication above, as well as to cover the retreat of the Army should its return by the Bladensburg Road be found too hazardous from the accession of Strength the Enemy might obtain from Baltimore. It was also reasonable to expect that the Militia from the Country to the northward and westward would flock in, so soon as it should be known that their Capital was threatened.

Captain Sir Peter Parker in the *Menelaus* with some small vessels was sent up the Chesapeake above Baltimore to divert the attention of the Enemy in that quarter and I proceeded with the remainder of the Naval force and the Troops up this River and landed the Army upon the 19th. and 20th. at Benedict.

So soon as the necessary Provisions and Stores could be assembled and arranged Major General Ross with his Army moved on towards Nottingham while our Flotilla, consisting of the armed Launches, Pinnaces, Barges and other Boats of the Fleet, under the command of Rear Admiral Cockburn passed up the River: being instructed to keep upon the right flank of the Army, for the double purpose of supplying it with Provisions and, if necessary, to pass it over to the left bank of the River into Calvert County, which secured a safe retreat to the Ships should it be judged necessary.

The Army reached Nottingham upon the 21st. and on the following day arrived at Marlborough; the Flotilla continued advancing towards the Station of Commodore Barney, about three Miles above Pig point, who, altho’ much superior in Force to that sent against him, did not wait an attack, but at the appearance of our Boats set fire to his Flotilla, and the whole of his Vessels, excepting one, were blown up.
For the particulars of this well executed Service I must refer their Lordships to Rear Admiral Cockburn’s Report No. 1, who, on the same Evening conveyed to me an account of his success and intimation from Major General Ross of his intention to proceed to the City of Washington, considering, from the information he had received, that it might be assailed if done with alacrity; and in consequence had determined to march that Evening upon Bladensburg. The remaining Boats of the Fleet were immediately employed in conveying up the River Supplies of Provisions for the Forces upon their Nottingham, agreeably to an arrangement made by the Rear Admiral, who proceeded on in company with the Army.

The Report No. 2 of Rear Admiral Cockburn will inform their Lordships of the brilliant successes of the Forces after their departure from Marlborough, where they returned upon the 26th, and having reached Benedict upon the 29th, the Expedition was reimbarked in good order.

On combined Services, such as we have been engaged in, it gives me the greatest pleasure to find myself united with so able and experienced an Officer as Major General Ross, in whom are blended those qualities so essential to promote success where cooperation between the Army and Navy as I have also in stating to their Lordships that Major General Ross has expressed his full approbation of the conduct of the Officers, Seamen and Marines acting with the Army.

I have before had occasion to speak of the unremitting zeal and exertions of Rear Admiral Cockburn during the time he commanded in the Chesapeake under my Orders—the interest and ability which he has manifested throughout this late arduous Service justly entitle him to my best thanks, and to the acknowledgements of my Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty.

Rear Admiral Malcolm upon every occasion and particularly in his arrangement for the speedy re-embarkation of the Troops rendered me essential assistance, and to him as well as to Rear Admiral Codrington, Captain of the Fleet, I am indebted, for the alacrity and order with which the laborious duties in the conveying of Supplies to the Army were conducted.

For the conduct of the Captains and Officers of the Squadron employed in the Flotilla and with the Army I must beg leave to refer their Lordships to the Reports of Rear Admiral Cockburn, and to call their favorable consideration to those whom the Rear Admiral has had occasion
to particularly notice. While employed immediately under my eye, I had every reason to be perfectly satisfied with their zealous emulation, as well as that of every Seaman and Marine, to promote the Service in which they were engaged.

Captain Wainwright of His Majesty’s Ship *Tonnant* will have the honor to deliver this Dispatch to you and as he was actively employed both with the Flotilla and the Army, in the whole of their proceedings, I beg leave to refer their Lordships to him for any farther particulars.

I have not yet received any Returns from the Ships employed in the Potowmac, the winds having been unfavorable to their coming down; but by the information I gain from the Country people—they have comple[tely] succeeded in the capture and destruction of Fort Washington, which has been blown up. I have the honor to be, Sir, Your most obedient humble Servant.

Alexr Cochrane
Vice Admiral and Commander in Chief
Vice Admiral Sir Alexander F.I. Cochrane, R.N.,

To

First Lord of the Admiralty Viscount
Robert Saunders Dundas Melville

Tonnant, Patuxent River
3rd. Sepr. 1814

My dear Lord,

The brilliant success that has attended our efforts upon the Continent has roused me a little from the most severe depression of Spirits I ever suffered, the recent occurrences at home of the shameful conduct of some of my near relations has hurt me beyond what I can possibly describe having brought up Lord Cochrane I had hopes of his rising to distinction & I yet see a chance of his innocence being established, but as for others I must remain mute—

To bear with such evils is no easy task, the loss of Property is nothing but the odium attending such proceedings leaves a Sting behind felt by the whole of their connections. Through life I have Steered by my own Compass & I have too high an opinion of H.M.’s Ministers for a moment to suppose that I shall suffer in their opinion by what has happened to others with neither of whom I Either agreed in Politics or opinions. Let me now congratulate your Lordship upon the destruction of all the Public property at Washington. The previous defeat of their Army at Bladensburgh & the conflagration of their flotilla fleet at the head of this River it will take some millions Sterling to replace the injury they have sustained. the short space of 8 days has accomplished all those objects & so much has been done with such a limited force I trust H. Maj’s Ministers will place a further reliance on my recommendation & at least double our force so as we may be able to act with vigour the moment the sickly season is over, say the 5th. of Novr. The reinforcements should come out direct to the Chesapeake.

If Soldiers are not to be had pray send Marines but let them be selected as many of the Battalion here are slight lads unfit for the fatigues of the Field. I beg leave to recommend that a few troops of dismounted Cavalry be sent out with spare accoutrements also a Rifle Corps with spare Rifles. We must be upon a par to meet the Enemy with their own weapons. hitherto what I promised has been effected & if Peace makers will only stay
their proceedings until Jonathan is brought to the feet of Gt. Britain, future Wars will be prevented.

As Sepr. is a fatal month even for the Inhabitants of Virginia & more so for Strangers As soon as the Army is all reembarked I mean to proceed to the Northward & if possible try to surprize Rhode Island where we will quarter upon the Enemy & the Troops as well as the Ships meet with every refreshment. About the close of October we will move to the Southward & act agreeably to the information we may receive. if the reinforcements arrive I propose an attack upon Baltimore the most democratic town & I believe the richest in the Country. As this Town ought to be laid in Ashes, if the same opinion holds with H. Maj’s Ministers some hint ought to be given to Genl. Ross as he does not seem inclined to visit the Sins committed upon H. Maj’s Canadian Subjects upon the Inhabitants of this state.

I do not mean this as any complaint for a better man nor a more zealous Officer does not exist. He is just what he ought to be & when he is better acquainted with the American Character he will possibly see as I do that like Spaniels they must be treated with great severity before you ever make them tractable. I believe his fear is that the discipline of his Army may suffer by a System to which they have not been accustomed but an arrangement may be made to obviate this evil. I am not of so savage a disposition as to conceive that measures of this sort ought to be resorted to except upon the most urgent occasions, but if you suffer their Troops to ruin your subjects in the Canadas & do not bring home your vengeance upon those the nearest to the seat of Govt. the Enemy will continue their conduct until Your North American Settlements are no longer worth holding.

As the Season advances I proposed going to the Carolinas Georgia &ca. & ending at N Orleans which I have not a doubt of being able to Subdue & thereby hold the Key of the Mississippi. Your Lordship will See by my public despatches that the Indians are coming forward in force I have supplied them with 4,000 stand of arms, & 2000 more are going with the Vessel having Presents on bd. Capt. Gordon of the Seahorse is to have the comd. In the Glf of Mexico I hope for much from his activity & zeal. Let me close this Letter by soliciting Your Lships influence that this floating Army may be supplied with a liberal & not a sparing hand. Send me flat bottomed Vessels that will act as Gun Vessels to cover landings & carry at least 100 Soldiers for a short distance this Coast requires them. abt. 25 or 30 such vessels wd. Enable me to move with celerity & go up to the sources of the Enemies Rivers which cannot be done in the Ships of War or
Transports. each Vessel shod. bring out a boat built flat but not what is called a Flat Boat. Rather similar to a Ships launch.

She is wanted to land Troops & Horses in shallow Water, the Gun Brigs & Gun Vessels will answer any purpose if a sufficient number are sent out & each Ship coming out ought to bring Supernumeraries, the Fleet is at least 1200 short. I want 2000 to make up for occasional losses, this Service is different from all others & therefore requires a different treatment. I ought to have at least 300 men disposeable as occasion may require. We often Acquire the Boats of the Country if they are manned by the cruizing ships I can’t send them on such Services as may be at the moment required. I therefore beg that the No. of men I have mentioned may be sent out without a moment’s delay. there are many other demands of mine which I pray your Lordship to cast an eye over— I am much at a loss for want of a Printing Press & a devil to work it with all his imps. I will now conclude & trust &ca—

A. Cochrane—
Vice Admiral Sir Alexander F.I. Cochrane, R.N., to
First Lord of the Admiralty Viscount Robert Saunders Dundas Melville

Private
_Tonnant_ off Baltimore
17 Sept 1814

My dear Lord

Your Lordship will see by My public letter that we have made an Essay at Baltimore, an attempt Contrary to My Opinion, but extremely urged by the General to which I reluctantly consented, but to preserve Unanimity between the two services; I have not stated My Objections to the measure in My letter to the Admiralty. I now exceedingly regret My deviation from My Original plan. Although the events that took place have been highly creditable to his Majestys Arms which in My Opinion could have been employ’d with greater Advantage Against Rhode Island, by Attracting the Attention of the Northern States from the Canadas. The Valuable life of the General would have been preserved; and his services continued to his Country. there never fell a More Gallant Man nor a better Officer  The only Fault was that of exposing his own Person more than was necessary for a General to do. it was in reconnoitering the Enemy’s Army that he received his Mortal Wound, by a Rifle Ball. Just before he expired he Lamented the distressed state his Family would be left in. I trust his Country will consider this as placing Them under its protection and I pray Your Lordship to let this Circumstance be known to His Majestys Ministers.

Colonel Brook his Successor is a Steady Good officer—but from his Rank I conclude that a general officer will be sent out— in a proper Selection will depend the Success or failure of our future Enterprises against the Enemy. If I was allowed to Speak My Wishes Sir Thomas would be the Man, whoever he may be he must not expect to repose upon a bed of Roses. I therefore trust that the Choice may fall upon one who has seen Much Active Service under Lord Wellington.

I need not recapitulate what Your Lordship will find in My public letter  I have no doubt that we might have had the Command of the City of
Baltimore but not without a loss beyond what our little Army could bear and be in a state to preserve its Superiority over the Enemy.— With Two Thousand Additional Troops the Enemy’s Works might have been Turned but with the force we had this measure could not have been attempted without risking the retreat of the Army being Cut off which from the Numerous Militia the Enemy had Assembled they could have done, and still keep Their Lines in a state of defence. The two Regiments that went to Halifax, when we left Bermuda would have fully Answered this purpose and Baltimore either laid in Ashes or Under a heavy Contribution.

From the Side the Town was attacked the Fort Could not be assailed nor could we without that Secure the Command of the Harbour.— If Attacked Again. I have seen sufficient of the harbor and Adjoining Country to make me prefer the Opposite or Western Side by it You have immediate Access to the City and to a hill that Commands the fort at a distance Not in my Opinion beyond point Blank range and I am told that the side of the Fort towards the Land is only defended by a Brick Wall fourteen feet high.

We labour and the Want of Many essentials, to place us upon a par with the Enemy in the stile of Warfare they pursue.

We have neither Cavalry nor rifle Men while they have Abundance of both. The Enemy we have seen will never stand a charge, when Closed in upon they Fly and take up New Ground. then would be the time for Cavalry to Act. the Other day with 300 Horse, hardly A Man would have returned to Baltimore, and the Same at Bladensburg. Rifles we have none and for want of Troops I am obliged to bring My Seamen into the Line. The Enemy Use Three Back Shot in Addition to the Ball in each Cartridge. we ought to do the Same but I am for adding a fourth placed on the top of the Three—and these Never to be Used until Close to the Enemy. Each Soldier having about Twenty in his pouch to load with when at the proper distance. I send your Lordship two (by Capt. Crofton.) that used by the Americans is Marked N I—that I prepare N 2—and I beg that A Quantity May be sent out without delay; Also the Necesaries demanded for the Troops by frigates so as they may be here early in December— There is no carrying on any war without the Necessary Means and Government must not expect more from Us than they enable us to Accomplish. from what I can see the Ball is at Our feet.—and give me but Six thousand Men—Including a Rifle and Cavalry Regt., and I will engage to master every Town South of Philadelphia and keep the Whole Coast in such a State of Alarm, as soon to bring the Most Obstinate, upon their Marrow bones.
In Addition to a Quantity of Cartridges with four Buck Shot in each I require a number of Casks of the Buck Shot to be sent out which We can use As Occasion may require— it is necessary to remember that the American Balls are smaller than Ours. Consequently the Buck Shot Must be encreased in Size so as three May take up the Same Space with the diametre of the Ball.— Our Loss at Washington and the Other day, inclusive may be rated at 600 Men. this of Course is A Considerable reduction from our Original Numbers

Nothing Could be more Brilliant than the Manner in which Our Troops Routed the American Army drawn up under Cover of A Wood having a strong force in their front and supported by a numerous Artillery— The Attack was obliged to be made Accross Clear Ground and Contrary to the European System of Warfare. the Troops are freed to fire as they Advance Without Which the Enemy could Suffer but little as they make a Rule to turn tail the Moment they are likely to be charged. when within Fifty Yards Their whole Line Gave way and Fled in all directions—then was the time for Cavalry to Act. as it was they Suffered Severely Their fifth Regt. Composed of the Gentlemen of the Town are said to be totally destroyed. Another has Nearly shared the same fate.

The Force the Enemy had At Baltimore Consisted of 2000 Seamen and from 15 to 20,000 of Militia but few Regulars. Our little Army consisted of Only of 2500 Troops when they landed, to which was Added about 1350—Marines, and 600—Seamen making all say 4000. Bayonets. The Brigade of Seamen I placed under the Command of Capt Crofton late of the Leopard.—who Gallantly led them into Action in a Line, and with such Steadiness as drew forth the Aplause of all who saw Them— I strongly recommend him to Your Lordships Notice and beg to have him Sent back in a Ship that I may benefit by his Services upon other occasions— I care not how Small the ship may be as I can always give him another when here.

Lt. Marshal of the Diadem has been severely wounded I fear Mortally. Also Capt. Robyns of the Marines of this Ship who Commanded a Battalion of Marines Composed of part of the Marines of the Fleet. I beg leave to recommend them both to your Lordships Notice— I have appointed Several Midshipmen of different Ships to vacancies from their Conduct While acting with {291} the Army, and as we are likely to have Much of the late sort of business to perform I consider it proper to Hold out a reward for unusual exertions— Captains Sulivan Money and Ramsay, Commanded each a division of Seamen and distinguished themselves greatly— I believe they are Amongst the Oldest Commanders here.
The Midshipmen upon Your Lordships list have all been disposed Of except one or two that We cannot discover Where they Are.—I shall therefore in my Appointments, look to Merit let it be found Where it May—Mr. Keefe one of Those Now Appointed, took a Dragoon at Washington and Afterwards although Unarmed himself, disarmed An American Soldier and Made him prisoner—

One of the American Field Officers in the late affair Was Shot upon a Tree rather a Strange place for a Commander of a Regt. But I understand he went there to direct his men how to fire with Most effect, but staying there rather too long he was brought down by a Soldier—

I am sorry to say that the Gallant Conduct of the Seamen here has not been unique— two wretches Attempted to desert to the Enemy who have been Condemned and Will Suffer tomorrow. except them I know of no species of Impropriety having been Committed except such as always follows Military Movements

I have requested Capt Crofton to take Charge of a Turtle for Your Lordship and One for Lord Bathurst. I hope those I sent by the Ephegenia Arrived Safe. I ever am My dear Lord Most faithfully and Sincerely Yours

Alex’ Cochrane

I enclose for your Lordship a Sketch of our proceedings at Baltimore—in care of Capt. Crofton.