

PETER G. POWER (Marine Artist)

The Bombardment of Algiers, 27th Aug. 1816
(Just completed commission for a client in Spain
Dimensions of Painting - 36" x 66")

For a very considerable number of years piracy and Christian slave trading was practiced in the Middle East against European and American shipping, some of the worst culprits being Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli.

During the month of June, 1816, America settled her account with the pirate countries by exchanging 500 Algerian prisoners for the 10 American prisoners being held and a financial settlement of dues owed and damage done to American ships. With a guarantee that American shipping would no longer be interfered with Europe was left to resolve the matter but despite conferences and meetings no one was prepared to take the fight to where the problem lay.

Prior to America settling her account an event took place that so outraged the Christian world that, regardless of the views of others, Britain decided on a course of very positive action. On 23rd May, at Bona, near Algiers, the crews of some 300-400 small fishing vessels engaged in the coral fishery, while on their way to celebrate Mass (it being Ascension Day), were massacred by a band of 2000 Turkish, Levantine and Moorish troops. The expedition to Algiers was entrusted to Admiral Lord Exmouth who, in his flagship "Queen Charlotte" took command of five ships of the line, four frigates and nine gun and supply ships. On 28th July the fleet left Plymouth Sound for Gibraltar where they would re-supply. On 9th August the British fleet made anchor at Gibraltar alongside a Dutch frigate squadron, under the command of Vice-Admiral Baron T. van de Cappellen in his flagship "Melampus".

Admiral Pellew (Lord Exmouth) informed the Dutch admiral of his expedition to Algiers whereby the Dutch offered their services which were accepted, thus increasing the strength of the fleet.

On August 13th Capt. James Murray arrived from Algiers in the brig-sloop "Satellite" with detailed instructions and plans of the fortifications of Algiers. Admiral Pellew prepared detailed plans for the impending attack including the position that each ship was to take up and which part of the fortifications each ship was to bombard. Previous to sailing each line-of-battle ship had mounted in the bows of their launches a howitzer so that they may go close in under the walls of the fortifications and lob bombs over the parapets and amongst the guns and their crews defending Algiers. There were some 1,300 guns employed for the defence of Algiers. Unfortunately intelligence of Britain's intentions had passed to the Captain of the French frigate "Ciotat" who then sailed to Algiers and informed the authorities of Britain's intentions with the result that some 40,000 troops were moved in to reinforce those already in garrison for the defence of the city. Ciotat was still at anchor in the bay when the combined fleet arrived.

Early on 27th August the combined fleet anchored off Algiers and Admiral Pellew sent Lt. Samuel Burgess, under a flag of truce, to negotiate terms amongst which were the release of all slaves and the abolition of their practice of slave trading. The terms were presented at 11 a.m. with the promise of a reply within two hours. At 2.00 p.m. having received no reply Admiral Pellew signalled to all ships to take up their pre-arranged stations for the bombardment of Algiers but not to open fire before the Queen Charlotte. Admiral Pellew directed his ship to its allocated position just off the mole-head and so close that he actually waved to the Algerian troops as they ran to their guns and just before he ordered the starboard guns to fire their first broadside thus opening the action.

With all broadsides, gun boats, howitzers and Congreve's rockets firing shore-wards and 1300 guns returning fire devastation reigned in all quarters until the accuracy of the allied guns began to take effect. During the late afternoon the arsenal and storehouses were set on fire and blew up (as in painting).

At 10 p.m. with Algiers well alight Admiral Pellew commanded the fleet to withdraw and anchor outside the range of any remaining guns. At daybreak Lt. Burgess, under a flag of truce, repeated the demands of the previous day to the dey of Algiers who accepted without condition and with the immediate result that 1200 Christian slaves were released and within a very short time following a further 1800 were released from other parts.

During the engagement the allied fleet lost 141 killed and 742 wounded against differing reports indicating that the Algerians lost between 4000 and 7000 killed or wounded.

It is of some interest to note in this day and age that during the few hours duration of the bombardment of Algiers the allied fleet expended 243,409 lbs of powder in the delivery of 48,805 rounds of shot.

Ships in painting from left:-

Glasgow	(40 guns)	Granicus (36 guns)
Severn	40 "	Hebrus 36 "
Leander	50 "	Malampus 40 "
Queen Charlotte	100 "	(Dutch flagship)