

Lieut. J.P. Borden (- 24 Apr 1842)

The National Intelligencer, Monday, April 11, 1842

The Disaster Down The River

The following letter to the Editors, from an officer on board the Missouri Steam Frigate, did not come to hand as early as the writer kindly intended it should, but is even now the first authentic and intelligible account of it that we or our readers have had:

U.S. Steam Frigate Missouri
Potomac River, April 4, 1842

Messrs. Editors: It is with feelings lacerated with the keenest sorrow that I will herein make an attempt to give you an account of a heart-rending scene that I have this day witnessed from the deck of this ship, involving the loss of a noble-hearted, generous, and high-minded messmate and friend, Lieut. Borden, and fifteen of this ship's crew. Yesterday (Sunday) we made Cape Henry, and took on board a pilot to run us into the Chesapeake, who gave us to understand that he could not pilot us more than half-way on our course towards Washington, as he was not acquainted with the Potomac river, but at the same time assured our captain that his father had been a branch pilot on the Potomac since the last war. In consequence of this statement the ship was safely brought to anchor last evening about ten o'clock, in twenty fathoms water just after she had entered the last named river. The pilot went on shore and returned this morning at daylight, with his father, who immediately got the ship under weigh, and ran her on her course with a press of steam that carried her through the water at the rate of ten knots an hour, until about 11 o'clock a.m., when he ran her high up, with her bows almost out of water, on an oyster bed. Every effort was made on the instant to back her off, but without success, and then commenced the work of lightening her forward. The heavy Paizhan guns were transported from the forecastle aft to the main transom, the water in the forehold started, and the provisions broke out and sent to the after part of the berth deck, the bowers and one of the waist anchors let go; the boats were hoisted out, and immediate preparations made for carrying out astern the starboard waist anchor let go; the boats were hoisted out, with a sufficiency of chain cable to heave her off. Accordingly, the anchor was weighed between the launch and lifeboat, and the chain coiled away in the bottom of the launch, under the superintendence of Lieut. Borden, Midshipman Renshaw, and the boatswain. After they had gone about two hundred yards astern of the ship, and while paying out the chain in twenty fathoms water, preparatory to letting go the anchor, the heavy chain cable began to run out with such tremendous force that it carried the gunwale of the launch under water. All hands instantly sprung for the lifeboat, but she, being lashed to the launch, was likewise carried down by the combined weight of the anchor and men; and, in a moment, about twenty-five officers and seamen were struggling, and many vainly struggling, for their lives. Happy was it for those who were carried down by the massive chain, and who did not rise again to catch one last and agonizing look at the bright heavens and the coming aid, which despair whispered could not reach them in time to save them from sinking beneath the wave which must roll o'er them until that water shall give up its dead. Immediately every boat from the ship was rushing to the rescue, but unfortunately could not reach the drowning men until many had sunk to rise no more.

Commander MacKenzie, with his boat's crew, rescued Midshipman Renshaw and three men; but poor Borden, the noble, warm-hearted, dearly loved friend of all who knew him, was not a strong

swimmer and ere the boat could come up with him, he threw his arms o'er his head, and sunk to rise in life no more.

A general gloom pervades the ship, fore and aft. When it was known beyond a doubt that Borden was drowned, there was not a dry eye among his friends and associates, messmates, and brother officers assembled on the quarterdeck. However deeply we may deplore the loss of so many valuable and excellent men besides him, yet still they were as strangers to us, and it did not come so intimately home to our feelings. But, indeed, it was a dreadful scene, and one that will never be effaced from my mind's eye, as I stood on the tuffrail and saw a number of our strongest men struggling in their dying agony, bubbling the water from their lips, and throwing aloft their arms for succor ere they sunk beneath the relentless wave forever.

The National Intelligencer, April 18, 1842

The Late Lieut. Borden From the Cincinnati Republican

The news of the death of Lieut. Borden will send a pang through many hearts in Cincinnati. He was an officer hailing from among us, and of whom our city was proud as one of her representatives in the American Navy. We can only add that a most gallant and high-minded and chivalrous young officer has been lost to his country; one than whom no other could be more jealous of her reputation; one who (had not Heaven so soon ordered otherwise) must have added distinction to her naval prowess.

We are permitted to publish the following from Captain Newton to Mr. Samuel Borden of this city:

U.S. Steam Frigate Missouri
Potomac River, April 5, 1842

It is with the most painful feelings of regret that it has become my duty to acquaint you of the death of your much lamented brother, Lieut. Borden. He perished while in the faithful discharge of his duty; he was engaged in taking out one of the ship's anchors in two large boats and by some cause the boats capsized and Lieut. B. with 15 of the crew found a watery grave. The melancholy event occurred on the 4th instant.

If it can afford any consolation to the bleeding hearts of his connections and friends to say how much beloved and esteemed he was, they have it; for no one ever held a more exalted rank in the estimation of all who knew him. He was one of the most meritorious officers I ever knew. His messmates, by all of whom he was beloved, deplore deeply his untimely fate, and no one more laments it than his friend.

John Thomas Newton, Captain.

The National Intelligencer, Wednesday, April 27, 1842

Funeral of the Late Lieutenant J.P. Borden, U.S. Navy

The body of this meritorious officer having been recovered and brought up to the steam frigate Missouri on Sunday morning last, preparations were immediately made for burying him with all honors of the naval service due to the rank he held. This melancholy duty was performed by his brother officers in a manner commensurate with the high esteem they entertained for him while with them, and creditable to the service generally.

At 4 o'clock p.m. the signal gun from the Missouri announced the starting of the cortege composed of barges from her, from the Mississippi, and from the Navy Yard, which formed in the following order-- colors half-mast, and pulling minute strokes:

Barge, with Lieut. Ward, as Marshal

Barge, Marine Band
Barge, Martial Music
Barge, Company of Marines
Barge, Body of Lieutenant Borden, and
 Lieutenants as Pall-bearers
Barge, Naval Engineers of the Missouri and Mississippi
Barge, Midshipmen of Missouri and Mississippi
Barge, Lieutenants and other Ward Room Officers of the Missouri
Barge, Lieutenants and other Ward Room Officers of the Mississippi
Barge, Commander Buchanan, Capt. Salter and Aid.
Barge, Commander McKenzie, Capt. Newton and Aid.

This melancholy but beautiful aquatic procession proceeded up the "Anacostia," the Band and Martial Music playing dirges, until its arrival at the Magazine stairs, where the disembarkation took place, and, being joined by Captain Kennon and the other officers of the Navy Yard, formed in procession on foot, and proceeded in the same order to the Congressional Burying Ground, where, after the Funeral Service was performed by the Rev. Mr. Ryland, Chaplain U.S. Navy, the body was interred, and three volleys fired over the grave by the Marine Guard. The procession then returned to the boats, and thence to the ships.

We noticed Mr. Senator Allen, from Ohio, and other members of Congress, with a large concourse of citizens, in attendance on this interesting ceremony, so unusual at the seat of Government. Long may it be before we are again called upon to record so melancholy an event as that which cost this worthy officer and fifteen American seamen their valuable lives.

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