Portsmouth

Saturday, August 13

Head quarters, Portsmouth

August 13, 1803

The Volunteer Companies will Parade to-morrow evening at 6 o’clock on the Glacis, in open column. Camp colours will be placed, on which they will form.

Martin White, Acting Aid-de-Camp

Sunday last afforded two successive scenes, in this town and neighbourhood of peculiar interest. At six in the evening, the Volunteers of the Island of Portsea, amounting to nearly two thousand, were assembled on the Glacis, and formed into companies, after which, they were addressed by General Whitelocke, in a very appropriate and impressive speech. The Portsdown Cavalry kept the field. Most of the distinguished Naval Officers in this port, the Military Officers in garrison, and at the camps, Sir C. Saxton and the principal officers of the dockyard, etc, a very great assemblage of ladies, and a prodigious concourse of other persons, rendered still more affecting the solemn spectacle of men *pledging themselves* (for so it is to be considered) *to dedicate their persons and lives to the service of the country, if the enemy should ever make his way into this happy land*. In the midst of this awful, yet pleasing ceremony, before the General had entirely concluded what he wished to communicate, a signal was made from St. Catherine’s, Isle of Wight, that an enemy, consisting of men of war, gun boats, and troops, was off the coast. *(This signal was repeated twice.)* The General dismissed the Volunteers, with an order to hold themselves in readiness, to assemble on the Grand Parade, at the signal of three guns, to be fired from the Platform in quick succession. He then returned to Town, with his Staff, to give such orders as exigencies should require. Some of the Portsdown Cavalry were sent with dispatches to Fareham, Havant, and other neighbouring places; the guns on the walls, and other works, were loaded; all the troops in garrison and camp were under arms; and one regiment struck their tents, and reinforced Fort Monckton. The Naval department acted with equal vigour: Admiral Holloway sailed in the Magnificent, with other ships; Admiral Montagu’s flag was shifted to the Puissant, from the Orpheus, to permit the latter to go to sea. The Sea Fencibles were assembled with uncommon alacrity, being outside of the entrance of the Harbour in their gun boats (nineteen in number) in less than an hour. All Naval Officers on shore, repaired on board their ships. In a word certainly nothing was omitted to give the enemy a warm reception.

The roads leading to Portsmouth and the neighbouring villages were crowded with Volunteers, assembled, or repairing to their respective posts. In Cosham, there were not less than six hundred, cavalry and foot. Mr Lindegren’s corps, and the Forest of Bere Volunteers, cavalry and foot, waiting the expected signal at that place. The Havant Corps, 300 strong, commanded by Mr. Garrett, did the same at their station. The Portsdown Cavalry were in detachments, in 3 or 4 important stations. That fine corps executed their orders with their usual good discipline. We witnessed much of these scenes; and can say they promise a most happy issue, in case of attack.

The alarm was occasioned by several coasters and 3 or 4 American vessels not answering a signal. An enquiry into this affair, it is said, is set on foot. Certainly, it would be of the most dangerous consequence is such mistakes should be repeated. For this once, we feel more gratified that otherwise, because of the opportunity afforded of shewing the eager yet steady spirit of the country. But we trust more precision will be practised in the most important matter of signals.

On Monday General Whitelocke was pleased to cause the following to be inserted in General Orders, which we give with extreme pleasure:

*Head Quarter, Portsmouth, August* 8 1803

Major General Whitelocke has the honour to thank the Volunteers of the Island of Portsea for their manifest willingness to face the danger that threatened last night, and had their further services been required, he is certain that they would have exemplified an ample proportion of good spirit and of good order, both so essentially necessary upon such occasions. The uncommon alacrity shewn by Colonel Hood, and every part of the Corps of Cavalry under his command deserves the highest praise. Major General Lord Charles Somerset speaks in the warmest terms, of the detachment of them, that acted under his Lordship’s orders, in the vicinity of Gosport. The Major-General is confident Admiral Montague will bear testimony to the meritorious conduct of the Sea Fencibles; notwithstanding which, he cannot refrain from saying, that he never witnessed more zeal and alacrity.

A. Legertwood, Captain and A. D. C.