On the next day (Sunday) our Native boys disappeared, and we commenced active preparations for War, then completely. Freeman was sent for, He was told that he had decided us, and inquired whether it was his determination to enforce the measures of the Council. He gave us to understand that he should certainly do so, unless the Council withdrew their decree. He was then told that we risked his displeasure to do so, as indication of amity towards us and a positive declaration of War for which we stood prepared, told him to go home lay his head, and abolish his laws, we made up his mind to have the hill or we were too near each other to be enemies. He treated us with contempt and never returned as an answer. For three days we remained in this state our powder and lead was removed from the store, ammunition served out and rigid guard kept. Cannon loaded and pointed, and all ready, some people keeps anxious to fall on; the slightest movement on their part would have settled the question of supremacy. Their women, children and effects were secretly sent off, and messengers dispatched to hurry in Cavalla, Rock & Fish Town forces.

On the fifth day the American squadron hove in sight. We were anxious to communicate with them but had not the means, (no boats) could not get single native to go off. Our yellow Will kept out of the way. Mr Hoffman departed for the position of Mr Payne at Half Cavalla, and Mr Smith at Cavalla River, determined to board in a Canoe manned with Colonist. He got safely on board the Commodore Perry, stated to him Mr Paynes unpleasant position &c. The Decatur was immediately despatched to the alarming account (of course by his excessive fears) he gave of matters on shore induced the Commodore to send a boat ashore with a few Arms and Rocket with a promise to send a large force on shore; when a signal was made. and a promise to land a large force next day. In the Morning he came with about One Hundred & fifty men, who marched through the native Town, prince & forming before the Agency House. A salute of thirteen guns was fired. Nothing more being necessary just then, the Commodore received a petition to which they were giving heavy were.

Once a few hours had elapsed when we heard that our people were engaged with the Bush people at Mount Sulman, that two Natives had been killed &c. Our people flew to arms judging that it was a premeditated measure between the Bush, and C. Palmas people, the former had mistaken our salute to the Commodore, for the commencement of our story, and not being aware of the arrival of the squadron had come to attack us in the Town. Away went Commodore officers, Marines & sailors, helter skelter on horses, jackasses, mules and men — with Gunner in the rear, the men got there, but the affair was over. It seems a number of Bush men armed & equipped for War had come in on hearing the salute, a portion of them secreted themselves which left a few behind; these were questioned, and on expressing a wish to go in to the Cape, were required to leave their arms at Mt Sulman, this they refused to do and started to go off, one or two prepared their guns for firing, at the same moment a party were seen upon the hills stealing on of the bush, they swear the Americans sung out Run, one pulled his gun, at this moment the word was given on mine (there were only six Colonist on the Mt. at the time, the remainder had gone to town with vegetables for the squadron, apprehending no danger from the bush) three of them only fired, two Natives fell dead shot through the hills, the third wounded his man who left his gun and scampered off, the rest went off like the very d— was after them, a Cannon was hastily pointed and a load of grape sent after the distant party, it shown do not target too.

We kept our eye on our Town people, they affected much surprise and entire ignorance of the object of the Bushmen — we found no indication for communicating with them, altho our suspicions were strong very strong indeed against them!

We were forced to view the War as now commenced with every thing against us, but even under these circumstances I regretted the presence of the squadron. I was and am yet of the opinion that if any fighting must be done, we should do it ourselves, as we cannot always have the assistance from American vessels of war. But for the arrival of the squadron our position was such that we must have driven off these Natives, or have been driven off. I never set down a war with them would terminate, but judge from the first point displayed by our men that we might, may certainly, wipe them. But let me go on with my story.

The next day a palaver was held, the Members of the former Convention came together, and agreed to withdraw the blockage, and to be friends. The Commodore pelisted, I was not there, preferring the keep on my guard against the treachery of these scamps. Rassowum urged upon them that the sale of their Town on the hill. Com. Perry, left it with them to sell it is not just as suited them. We had previously determined that the evacuation or sale of their Town site was the only condition on which we would again be friends with Freeman after his treacherous conduct towards us — To this former proposal they promised a reply at some future period, after the departure of the squadron.

Com. Perry declared peace, the Natives of course agreed to it, but your superior knowledge of matters and things in Africa will give you some idea of our feelings of security. We however did not urge matters as we did not think they could be bettered either by the fighting or palavering of the Commodore either of which with a few cases I really believe he would have engaged in.

On the morning of the second day after the departure of the squadron for the leeward, as a matter of experiment a rocket was sent up, the Natives became first alarmed, then furious, they flew to arms, and kept up a war dance all night, notwithstanding our assurances that the Rocket was not intended to harm them, unless they gave us just cause to burn their town, when the rocket would most certainly be used.

Our assurances did not in the least serve to tranquilize them, they mustered strong, would run in a body towards our edge of the Town, but never advance a step beyond it. It is well for them that they did not as I had positive orders when they advanced fifty yards towards us, to fire on them.

On the same day the Governor had argued of them positively either to sell their Town, or to return us the money paid them for territory and we would abandon Palmas, as we could not be forced living in the midst of palavers, they and the rocket taken together, cause that display of preparation for war which they had previously kept concealed.

Their war dance was kept up the whole of next day, and until ten O'clock the next night, when our entire force on the Cape twenty five men felt rather tired of being kept at their guns — a Message was sent they were desired to stop their noise, and let us sleep or to prepare for action as they seemed anxious for it; they persisted the former, gave up their dance and have been quiet ever since. Here Will took the affair of the colony for a time and turn to the movements of the squadron.

As previously stated the Decatur was despatched to Half Cavalla, where Mr Payne was detained by the Natives. a force was landed, and amicable possession hostile movements on the part of Natives Mr P. lady and attendant were brought off. the natives all the while espering, limping hills and showing the strongest inclination to fight, no blow was struck however on either side, and Capt. Abbott's orders were positive with regard to shedding blood he bore their insults tamely. Payne was landed here, now lives in Town, determined not to leave us were to dwell at Mt Cerphas so much for the long mooted question of colonist protection, we are not strangers to a more striking acknowledgement.

Having done all in his power to tranquilize matters between us and the Natives, the Commodore proceeded to Leeward. Gov. Robert was on board, an invitation was given Gov. Rassowum to accompany them, he declined and then it was extended to me. I could not exactly tell what, or to be of service; as it was they likely that we would have fighting enough at home on our own hook — Rassowum & myself detailed the question, I urged him to go, and he invited on my going he feared that a row would be kicked up during his absence, for the want of forbearance, and I feared that nothing could go right in the west war during my absence, consequently both of us remained at home. I have since deeply regretted it, as there was quite a decent and stirring time of it at Berbey, such indeed as I had hardly anticipated from the mild & native response of the Commodore in relation to accounts towards the "peaceable & easy simplicity African".

Maryland Historical Society

The Maryland State Colonization Society Papers

II. Correspondence Received
A. Letter Books

8. 1843—1844

1843