

THE BORNEO PIRATES

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(From the *Singapore Free Press* of June 21.)

Yesterday afternoon her Majesty's ship *Royalist*, Lieutenant Gordon, from Labuan the 4th inst., arrived here, bringing accounts of a very severe action having taken place between the hon. Company's steamer *Nemesis* and a number of piratical prahus on the 30th ult. We are in possession of full particulars of this affair, and, as the details will no doubt be of great interest to our readers, we issue an extra at once, instead of waiting for our regular issue. As the admiral will probably by this time be at Labuan, we may expect soon to hear of decisive measures being resolved upon against the pirates. We now subjoin the narrative of the brilliant action of the 30th ult. :—

Early on the morning of the 30th of May the hon. Company's steamer *Nemesis*, with Mr. Brooke and Captain Grey aboard, and having in tow a cutter of her Majesty's ship *Columbine*, left the town of Brunei to cross over the new British port of Labuan. Information was received on the way down the river that some fishermen had been chased at daylight, and on rounding the point of the island of Moarra the look-out of the *Nemesis* descried a fleet of Balanini or Sulo pirates, in full chase of a trading prahu in the offing. Immediately the steamer appeared the pirates, quitting the chase, pulled in shore to the westward, and at the same time cut away the small boats they had in tow, whilst the steamer, pursuing at full power, lost much ground by having to round the extensive shoal which stretches from Moarra Toint (Ujong Sapo) to the islet of Pilonng Pilonng.

The Balanini were first descried at half-past nine o'clock, a.m., and, about mid day, finding the steamer gaining upon them, came to an anchor.

At one o'clock, p.m., the pirate fleet was plainly made out from the *Nemesis*—11 large prahus, anchored in line, at a distance of 10 yards one from another, along a sandy beach, with their heads to the sea, their sterns (fast by stern warps ashore) in the surf, and with a hawser passing along from boat to boat. The bows of the prahus were protected by ampilans, formed of musket-proof planks; they appeared well armed, crowded with men, and in this formidable position awaited the approach of the steamer.

At 1 30 the pirates opened fire on the steamer, and the action commenced in earnest at a distance of about 200 yards, the steamer being in two fathoms water, and rolling heavily in a ground swell.

For two hours a heavy fire was kept up from the *Nemesis*, and the fire from the pirates being nearly silenced, and their prahus evidently greatly damaged, Captain Grey, with three cutters (one belonging to her Majesty's ship *Columbine*, and two to the hon. Company's steamer *Nemesis*), resolved to make a dash at the left of the pirate's position, whilst the steamer poured in grape and canister upon the centre and right to prevent their rendering aid to their comrades.

On the advance of our three small boats, the pirates, casting loose the hawser which attached their prahus together, pulled away to the eastward in a crippled state, leaving two prahus in possession of our boats, and numbers of men on the beach or jungle. The *Nemesis* pursued to the eastward, and, one after another, drove six of the flying enemy ashore, all of which were for the time abandoned by their crews, but could not be taken possession of owing to the small number of our boats in the action.

In the meantime, whilst Captain Grey was securing the two prizes already mentioned to the westward, and the *Nemesis* in full pursuit of the last three prahus to the eastward, five out of the six deserted boats were remanded, and with a resolution praiseworthy in a better cause bore down to the attack of our three cutters. Captain Wallace, commander of the *Nemesis*, perceiving their manœuvre, anxious for our over-matched boats, and convinced that these prahus must at all events escape to the westward, returned in that direction, while the sixth deserted prahu being remanded, and favoured by a breeze, crowded all sail to the eastward after her three consorts, and thus the four escaped. The five pirate prahus now advancing boldly towards our three cutters, perceiving the retrograde movement of the *Nemesis*, made every effort to escape to the westward, and a severe action took place between the sternmost prahu and the boats, the enemy defending himself with the utmost resolution, and inflicting a severe loss on our party. Whilst Captain Grey was engaged in the capture of this large prahu, the *Nemesis* pursued the four to the westward, two of which were captured, while the remaining two escaped in the darkness in a completely shattered state, after having been several times deserted, and as often remanded.

Thus concluded this successful action with a pirate force consisting of 11 prahus—two of the largest size, four somewhat smaller, with crews of fully 50 men each, and five with a complement of 35 or 40 hands. The force of the pirates, at a moderate computation, must be reckoned at 500 men, exclusive of captives, and these, on the testimony of some rescued Chinese, were above 100 persons.

It is difficult to form a correct estimate of the killed and wounded on the enemy's part, but, as 40 to 50 men were dead on the beach, 10 men killed found in the captured prahus, and the like number in the prahus which escaped, besides those which may have died in the jungle, we may reckon the killed at 80 or 100 men, and the wounded at double that number. The loss on the British side was one man killed, and seven men wounded—two mortally, and most severely. Ten brass guns, varying in size from nine-pounders to "lelas," and five iron guns (three to six-pounders), were captured.

Five prahus were taken, and the escape of the rest is to be attributed to the small number of our boats, as at one time eight prahus were lying on the beach abandoned by their crews, and, had our boats been sufficient to secure them, the other three would have been overtaken by the *Nemesis*.

At the close of the engagement the sandy beach was covered with captives flying from their captors, and by pirates abandoned in a hostile country, who to the last sought some means of revenge. The night closing prevented any measures being taken in favour of the liberated captives, and when the morning broke they were no longer to be seen, having taken to the jungle from fear of the Borneons sent by the Sultan to our assistance. It is to be hoped, however, that the measures now pursuing to save these poor people will be attended with success, and that many of them may be restored to their native country.

Among the rescued captives who took refuge in our boats are several Chinese and Malays recently captured at Banka and Sinkep, a woman from Siantan, and a young man from Mengkabong, to the northward of Labuan, and these all agree in representing the extensive depredations committed by the pirates. The pirates are stated to have visited during this season the southern coasts of Borneo, the Straits of Banka, Sinkep, the Auambas, the Natunas, and the north-west coast of Borneo, and were slowly on their return to their own country, when fortune delivered them into our hands. That the severe lesson they have received may check their piratical habits we sincerely hope, but we trust that such measures may be taken by government as effectually to eradicate this piratical taint from the Malay character. Piracy has heretofore been fostered by impunity; it is to be cured by severe example; and when hundreds of innocent people are yearly led away into slavery in the vicinity of European settlements—when the native commerce along the coast of the Archipelago is entirely destroyed—we trust that active measures may shortly be resorted to to remove this curse from these shores, and the disgrace from the British name of passively witnessing or ineffectually acting for the prevention of piracy and the slave trade.

Any praise bestowed on the officers, crews, and all engaged in this action would be superfluous,—they behaved like Englishmen, and were opposed with a dogged resolution worthy of a better cause; and we sincerely trust their gallantry may meet with its fitting reward—promotion for the protectors of commerce.

The four boats which escaped to the eastward touched outside of Labuan for water on the night after the engagement, and a captive who escaped stated that these prahus were kept afloat with difficulty, being riddled with grape-shot. No tidings had been received of the other two. There were between 200 and 300 pirates in the jungle, who were being hunted out by the Sultan's people. A Dutch officer's medal was found in one of the boats, a nine-pounder, apparently of Dutch make, bags of Dutch doits, Banka tin beat into balls, &c.

The *Nemesis* was coaling, and would proceed to Sarawak with Mr. Brook, and then to Singapore, and will probably arrive here on Friday or Saturday next. The treaty with the Sultan had been concluded.

The following sequel to the account of the action of the *Nemesis* with the piratical fleet off the Borneo river, is extracted from the *Singapore Free Press* of August 5 :—

"Nine captives arrived here a day or two ago from Bruni, part of those who were on board the fleet of pirates attacked by the *Nemesis*. Their depositions had been taken by the marine magistrate, and we shall give the substance of the statements made by some of them. One of them, named Muda, states that he is a native of Lingin, from which he sailed about four months ago in a prahu, of which he was Nacondah, along with seven other men, for Pulo Sahassan. They fell in with a fleet of pirates one day's sail from Lingin, by whom they were seized. They took the men out of the boat and shared them amongst the different prahus, tying their hands and feet, plundered the boat, and cut her adrift. They then proceeded to Siantan, where they seized several persons: at Pulo Soobie they took seven men and women, and at Pulo Tambelan they seized three or four more. During their passage they saw a large schooner with raking masts, and also sighted a brig off Sarawak. At Pulo Sahassan they were fired upon by the inhabitants, on which they thought it best to shear off. They then debated whether they should touch at Sarawak river, but it was finally determined to proceed to Borneo Proper, as it was said a steamer was in Sarawak river. They anchored off Moarra river at 8 o'clock at night, and next morning seized two fishermen on the shore. Between 8 and 9 p.m. they descried the steamer coming down the Bruni river, and at noon the action commenced. The prahu in which this person was confined was the first that was sunk, after 10 out of the crew of 30 had been killed and wounded. Of the captives a woman and a boy were shot, the prisoners being made to sit on the deck during the action. The pirates and their captives swam on shore, where they were attacked by the Kadyan Dyaks, who, however, on ascertaining the captives, treated them well, and took them to the Sultan at Bruni. About forty pirates were brought in alive, and the captives were desired by the Sultan to take their revenge, and cut them up. This they declined, saying, 'God is great, and will punish the wicked.' The Sultan's people then tied the hands of the pirates, and about 200 fell on them and cut them to pieces, the Sultan undertaking to despatch half the number, while the other half were handed over to Pangeran Moormein. The captives, about 50 in all, were treated with kindness by the Sultan and his people. This man relates, that while they were at Pulo Siantan the boats were all hauled on shore to have their bottoms charred. One of the Chinese captives being sick and unable to work, they hanged him up to a tree, and then all fell on him and cut him to pieces. Another person of the name of Buwang states that he is a native of Columbo, a small island to the southward of Lingin. About four months ago, about 3 o'clock in the morning, their village was attacked by pirates. He, his mother, and two sisters, made their escape in a small boat and directed their course to Lingin, but were overtaken by the pirates and brought back. They were put on board a large prahu, their hands and feet being tied. The pirates then coasted along to the eastward, touching at several islands, such as

Tambelans, Siantan, Soobie, Sahassan, &c. They took several people at these places, men, women, and children. They several times threatened to throw his little sister, a child of 10 months old, overboard, because she cried, but at Buwang's entreaty they did not do so. Another of the captives says that he saw the sick Chinaman hung up and cut to pieces after a feast. There seems to have been from seven to ten captives in each of the pirate prahus, and it is probable, therefore, as only about 50 have been yet collected, that a number must be still in the jungle or have been killed in the engagement, or afterwards by the Dyaks on landing, being confounded with the pirates. Every fresh detail we receive only adds a new horror to the picture of pirate life, and here we find it in the pirates amusing themselves, after a feast, by hanging up and cutting a poor Chinaman to pieces."