

Suppression of Piracy on Johanna Island, August 1851

In an episode seemingly plucked from today's headlines, Captain Charles C. Mooars of the whaling brig *Maria* was taken hostage in August 1851 by King Selim on Johanna Island (part of the Comoro Islands, near Madagascar). Commander William Pearson's U.S. Navy sloop *Dale* was already in the vicinity on anti-slave patrols, and with a detachment of 27 Marines, immediately proceeded to the island.

Upon the *Dale*'s arrival, Commander Pearson informed King Selim of his demands, which were promptly refused. After receiving the refusal, Commander Pearson ordered his Marines and Sailors to open fire on the fort. After six guns had been fired, the fort quickly threw up the white flag. Pearson dispatched Acting Lieutenant Reginald Fairfax in an unsuccessful attempt to win the release of Captain Mooars.

The white flag was lowered and Commander Pearson opened fire once again. After a battering of 26 round shot and 13 round shells, firing ceased. Again, Pearson dispatched a party to shore. No sooner had the party left, they returned with the captured Americans and a payment of \$1,000 from King Selim.

The *Dale* remained in the area and later in the month of August, while at anchor near the American bark *Paulina*, witnessed the nearby ship lowering the American flag. Suspecting something was amiss, Commander Pearson dispatched a party of Marines and Sailors to board her. Part of the crew of the *Paulina* were about to mutiny and were quickly, and easily, apprehended by the Marines and Sailors of the *Dale* and placed in confinement.

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