



Buzzard's Bay, Massachusetts
**RECAPTURE OF FALCON'S PRIZES:
FIRST NAVAL ACTION OF THE WAR**
IN BUZZARD'S BAY
14 May 1775

HM Sloop *Falcon* (Commander John Linzee) was anchored in Holme's Hole on 11 May 1775. At 1100 *Falcon* stopped a schooner from Boston, and, in the afternoon stopped another sloop. At 1800 Linzee¹ sent his barge out² and took a wood sloop,³ returning from Nantucket⁴ in ballast,⁵ for having no clearance.⁶

This vessel was owned by Simeon Wing of Sandwich, Massachusetts and was skippered by his son, Thomas Wing. For years past she had been used to take wood to Nantucket Island. It was the usual practice for them to settle with the Customs officers once a year, they paying twelve pence a trip. This was the usual practice for craft engaged in this trade. When Wing returned from Nantucket, going through Vineyard Sound, the barge from the *Falcon* came out and captured the sloop.⁷

Brought over to the *Falcon*, Wing was told his vessel would be released if he would inform Linzee of any vessels recently arrived from the West Indies.⁸ Wing apparently acted ignorant, but finally "an indian Fellow on board" the sloop informed Linzee that a vessel owned by Jesse Barlow

¹ NDAR, "Journal of His Majesty's Sloop *Falcon*, John Linzee, Commanding," 1:311-312

² NDAR, "Nathaniel Freeman to the Massachusetts Provincial Congress," 1:558-559

³ NDAR, "*Massachusetts Spy*, Wednesday, May 24, 1775," 1:515; "Nathaniel Freeman to the Massachusetts Provincial Congress," 1:558-559

⁴ NDAR, "Journal of His Majesty's Sloop *Falcon*, John Linzee, Commanding," 1:311-312

⁵ NDAR, "*Massachusetts Spy*, Wednesday, May 24, 1775," 1:515

⁶ NDAR, "Journal of His Majesty's Sloop *Falcon*, John Linzee, Commanding," 1:311-312

⁷ NDAR, "Nathaniel Freeman to the Massachusetts Provincial Congress," 1:558-559

⁸ NDAR, "*Massachusetts Spy*, Wednesday, May 24, 1775," 1:515

had recently brought in a cargo from the West Indies. She was now laying in Buzzard's Bay with a cargo of provisions, bound back to the West Indies.⁹ Eventually Wing, apparently, confirmed that there was a sloop at Bedford or Fairhaven, in Dartmouth that had just arrived from the West Indies.¹⁰

Instead of releasing the wood sloop, *Falcon* armed and manned her, to send her in search of the West India sloop.¹¹ This was done on the morning of 12 May, while *Falcon* was anchored in Holme's Hole. *Falcon* sent her gunner's mate, surgeon's mate, and 11 men,¹² under Midshipman Richard Lucas,¹³ on board the sloop captured the previous day.¹⁴ According to other sources, fourteen,¹⁵ fifteen,¹⁶ or twenty-three¹⁷ men were put on Wing's sloop and they set off up Buzzard's Bay after Jesse Barlow's vessel, with Wing still aboard.¹⁸

The British found the West India sloop, whose cargo had been landed by now.¹⁹ The British seized the sloop²⁰ and her master²¹ and put a prize crew and some guns and ammunition aboard.²² The master was apparently put on Wing's sloop. Both vessels with all the crew, passengers, and

⁹ NDAR, "Nathaniel Freeman to the Massachusetts Provincial Congress," 1:558-559

¹⁰ NDAR, "*Massachusetts Spy*, Wednesday, May 24, 1775," 1:515

¹¹ NDAR, "*Massachusetts Spy*, Wednesday, May 24, 1775," 1:515. Linzee's motives are variously given for this enterprise: (1) to use the sloop to haul livestock off the Elizabeth Islands or; (2) to capture the West India sloop.

¹² NDAR, "Journal of His Majesty's Sloop *Falcon*, John Linzee, Commanding," 1:322 and notes

¹³ From R.C. Brooks e-mail May 2008; also, as "Richard Luckus," in Lincoln, William (ed.), *The Journals of Each Provincial Congress of Massachusetts in 1774 and 1775*, Boston: Dutton and Wentworth, 1838, p 306, dated 7 June 1775, concerning disposal of the prisoners.

¹⁴ NDAR, "Journal of His Majesty's Sloop *Falcon*, John Linzee, Commanding," 1:322 and notes

¹⁵ NDAR, "Nathaniel Freeman to the Massachusetts Provincial Congress," 1:558-559

¹⁶ NDAR, "Extract of a Letter from Newport, Rhode Island, dated May 10 [1775]," 1:303

¹⁷ *The New York Gazette, and the Weekly Mercury*, Monday, May 22, 1775

¹⁸ NDAR, "Nathaniel Freeman to the Massachusetts Provincial Congress," 1:558-559

¹⁹ NDAR, "*Massachusetts Spy*, Wednesday, May 24, 1775," 1:515

²⁰ NDAR, "*Massachusetts Spy*, Wednesday, May 24, 1775," 1:515; "Nathaniel Freeman to the Massachusetts Provincial Congress," 1:558-559

²¹ NDAR, "Nathaniel Freeman to the Massachusetts Provincial Congress," 1:558-559

²² NDAR, "*Massachusetts Spy*, Wednesday, May 24, 1775," 1:515

masters then sailed off.²³ They proceeded to Martha's Vineyard where they anchored about three miles apart.²⁴

Jesse Barlow, irked at losing his sloop, now applied to his friends ashore in Dartmouth for help.²⁵ As it happened there were two companies of Massachusetts troops (later taken into Continental service) being raised in the area, commanded by Captains Daniel Egery [Egry] and Nathaniel Pope. The officers agreed to furnish men for the expedition. An old 40-ton sloop, the *Success*,²⁶ was collected, and Egery took command of her, with Pope as his lieutenant.²⁷ Barlow financed half the cost of the expedition.²⁸ This sloop²⁹ was armed with two swivel guns³⁰ and manned with thirty men.³¹

Meanwhile, Lucas, the prize and the tender (another prize) had sailed off to rendezvous with the *Falcon*. The night was foggy³² and the wind was light,³³ and Lucas didn't get very far. Both sloops anchored during the night,³⁴ perhaps to the east of West Island in Buzzard's Bay,³⁵

²³ NDAR, "Nathaniel Freeman to the Massachusetts Provincial Congress," 1:558-559

²⁴ NDAR, "*Massachusetts Spy*, Wednesday, May 24, 1775," 1:515

²⁵ NDAR, "Nathaniel Freeman to the Massachusetts Provincial Congress," 1:558-559

²⁶ Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, *Lineage Book*, vol. XVII:1:Washington: 1904, 29 ; Hurd, Duane Hamilton, *History of Bristol County, Massachusetts With Biographical Sketches of Many of Its Pioneers and Prominent Men*, J. W. Lewis & Co: Philadelphia, 1883, 269; Peffer, Randall, *Logs of the Dead Pirates Society A Schooner Adventure Around Buzzards Bay*, Sheridan House: 2000, 103

²⁷ *Lineage Book*, vol. XVII:1:29; Hurd, *History of Bristol County*, 269

²⁸ NDAR, "Nathaniel Freeman to the Massachusetts Provincial Congress," 1:558-559

²⁹ NDAR, "Extract of a Letter from Newport, Rhode Island, dated May 10 [1775]," 1:303, says two sloops and dates the incident a week ahead.

³⁰ NDAR, "*Massachusetts Spy*, Wednesday, May 24, 1775," 1:515

³¹ NDAR, "*Massachusetts Spy*, Wednesday, May 24, 1775," 1:515; "Extract of a Letter from Newport, Rhode Island, dated May 10 [1775]," 1:303

³² Peffer, Randall S., *Logs of the Dead Pirate's Society: A Schooner Adventure Around Buzzard's Bay*, Dobbs Ferry, New York: Sheridan House, 2000, p. 103

³³ Peffer, *Logs of the Dead Pirates Society*, 103

³⁴ NDAR, "*Massachusetts Spy*, Wednesday, May 24, 1775," 1:515

³⁵ Peffer, *Logs of the Dead Pirates Society*, 103; Hurd, *History of Bristol County*, 269

about three miles apart.³⁶

The Americans sailed in the evening from Fairhaven, in chase of the “royal pirates.”³⁷ Steering mostly by tide and with light winds, the Americans more or less drifted out of the harbor and along Sconticut Neck. The night was long and foggy. The two commanders were on deck, with some twenty-five of the militia below decks. At sunrise one of the sloops was sighted. The wind was calm but the tide carried the *Success* close to the sloop.³⁸

As the two vessels closed the watch on the captured sloop hailed the *Success* and warned her off, as she was on a collision course. Pope replied “Aye, Aye,” but continued closing. He stamped his foot on the deck, warning the militia to prepare for action. The watch on the captured sloop called out again to sheer off. Pope again answered “Aye, Aye” as he lay the *Success* alongside.³⁹

At this point the militia drummer beat out a roll and the militia swarmed aboard the prize sloop. The watch was intercepted while trying to cut the anchor cable with an axe, and eleven armed men sleeping below were awakened as prisoners.⁴⁰ Not a shot was fired⁴¹ Pope and two other men went aboard the sloop and sailed her and the prisoners into Fair Haven.⁴²

³⁶ NDAR, “*Massachusetts Spy*, Wednesday, May 24, 1775,” 1:515. Note the location given here is Martha’s Vineyard, but they probably didn’t get so far.

³⁷ NDAR, “*Massachusetts Spy*, Wednesday, May 24, 1775,” 1:515

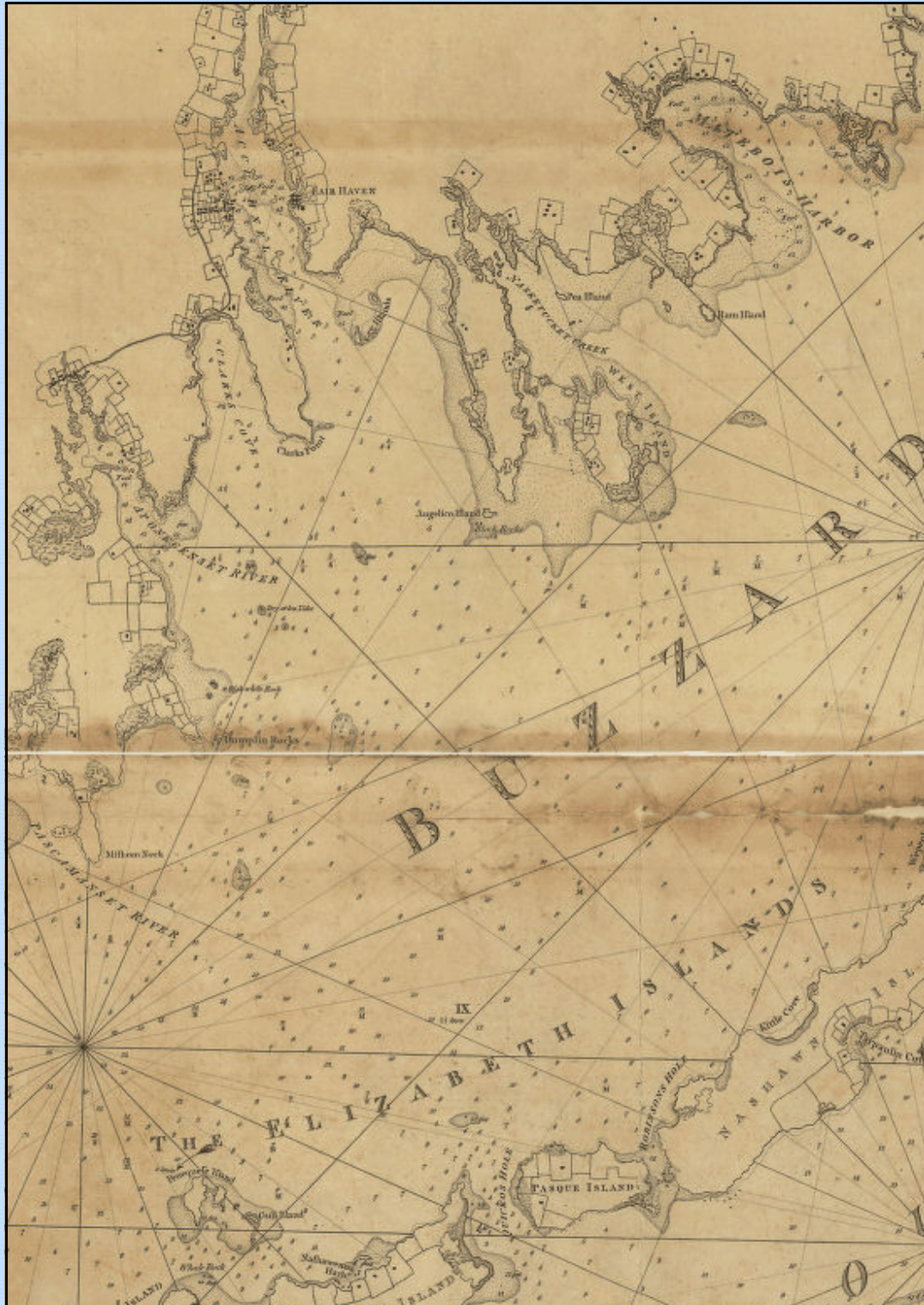
³⁸ Peffer, Randall S., *Logs of the Dead Pirate’s Society*, 103

³⁹ Peffer, *Logs of the Dead Pirate’s Society*, 104

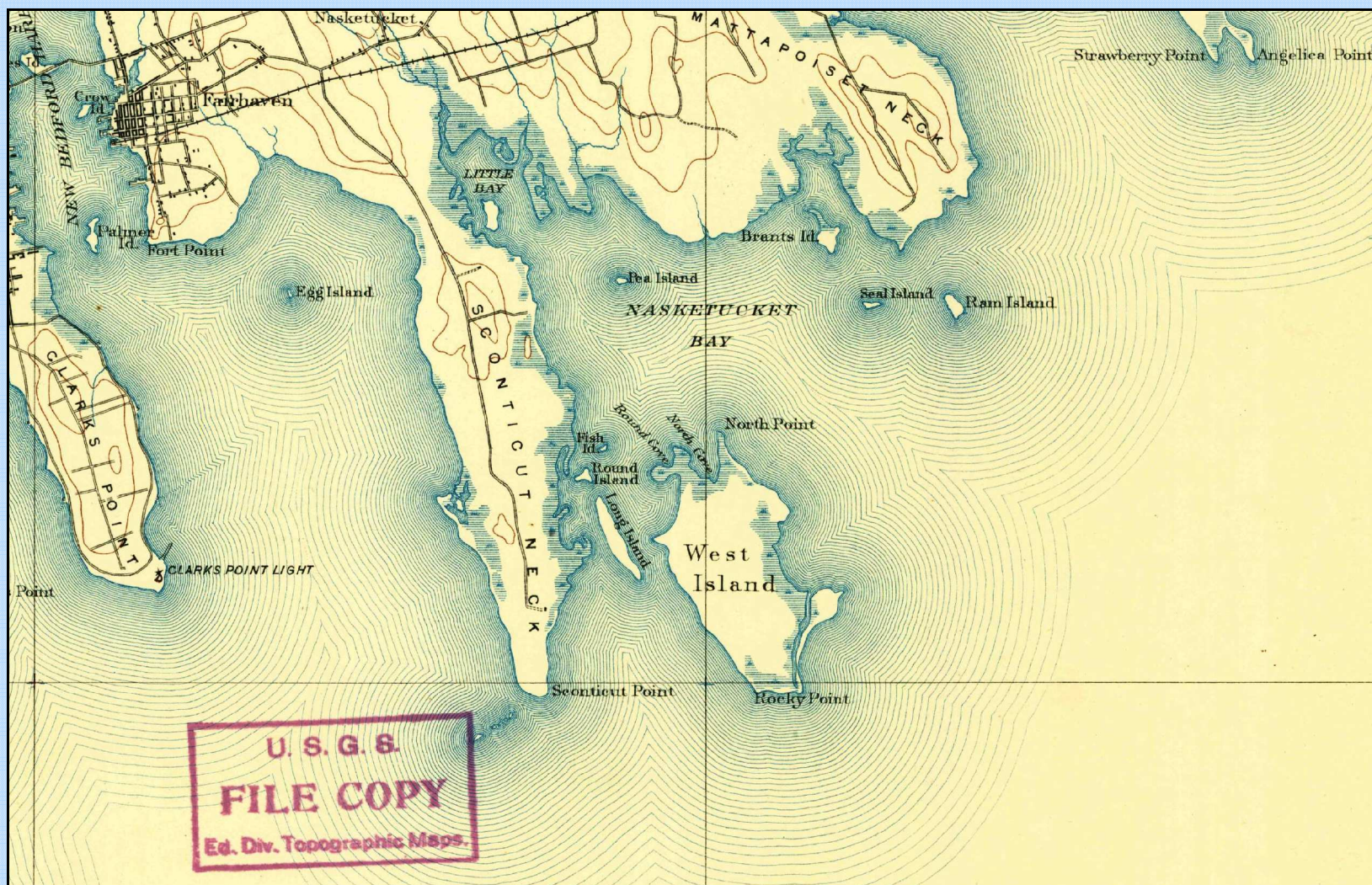
⁴⁰ Peffer, *Logs of the Dead Pirate’s Society*, 104

⁴¹ NDAR, “*Massachusetts Spy*, Wednesday, May 24, 1775,” 1:515

⁴² Peffer, *Logs of the Dead Pirates Society*, 104



Part of Buzzards Bay. From the Des Barres chart.



A view of the Fairhaven area from an 1893 USGS map.

Egery with the remaining men made sail for the wind had come up. The second sloop in a cove to the west, raising sail. *Success* set out after her.⁴³ As the Americans closed in the “pirates fired on them; the fire was immediately returned, by which three of the pirates were wounded, among whom was the commanding officer . . .” The Americans boarded her at once.⁴⁴ One man died within a day of his wounds.⁴⁵

Both sloops were taken into Dartmouth.⁴⁶ Captured were *Falcon*’s gunner, Surgeon’s Mate, a Midshipman (Lucas), eight sailors and three Marines.⁴⁷ The prisoners were sent first to Taunton jail,⁴⁸ then to Cambridge. Nine of the prisoners arrived at Worcester on 23 May.⁴⁹ When Wing and Barlow applied to the Dartmouth people for their vessels they were told that the two sloops would be released on Wing paying \$8 and Barlow \$10. The two paid the money but the Dartmouth people continued to hold the vessels, stating that they needed to seek the orders of Congress. Finally they offered to deliver up the vessels if Wing and Barlow paid an additional \$45 and signed bonds to indemnify the Dartmouth people. Fed up with this business Wing and Barlow requested the Committee of Correspondence of Sandwich to lay the affair before the Massachusetts Provincial Congress, which was done on 29 May.⁵⁰

The Massachusetts Provincial Congress, on 2 June 1775, ordered the Dartmouth people and Wing and Barlow to appear before the Congress for an investigation.⁵¹

Summary Table

<i>Vessel</i>	<i>Tons</i>	<i>Guns</i>	<i>Broadside</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Killed</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Wounded</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Success</i>	40	—	—	30	—	—	—	—	—	—
American Totals	40	—	—	30	—	—	—	—	—	—
[unknown] sloop	—	—	—	[7]	—	—	—	—	—	—

⁴³ NDAR, “*Massachusetts Spy*, Wednesday, May 24, 1775,” 1:515; Peffer, *Logs of the Dead Pirates Society*, 104

⁴⁴ NDAR, “*Massachusetts Spy*, Wednesday, May 24, 1775,” 1:515

⁴⁵ NDAR, “Extract of a Letter from Newport, Rhode Island, dated May 10 [1775],” 1:303

⁴⁶ NDAR, “*Massachusetts Spy*, Wednesday, May 24, 1775,” 1:515; “Nathaniel Freeman to the Massachusetts Provincial Congress,” 1:558-559

⁴⁷ NDAR, “Vice Admiral Samuel Graves to Philip Stephens,” 1:690-692

⁴⁸ NDAR, “Extract of a Letter from Newport, Rhode Island, dated May 10 [1775],” 1:303

⁴⁹ NDAR, “*Massachusetts Spy*, Wednesday, May 24, 1775,” 1:515

⁵⁰ NDAR, “Nathaniel Freeman to the Massachusetts Provincial Congress,” 1:558-559

⁵¹ NDAR, “Nathaniel Freeman to the Massachusetts Provincial Congress,” 1:558-559

unknown] sloop	—	—	—	[7]	1	14%	2	28%	3	42%
British Totals:	—	—		14	1	7%	2	14%	3	21%

Time: several hours, over two days; British prisoners: 13 (one above listed as killed died of wounds)

Some Current Newspaper Excerpts:

Thursday Capt. Reynolds spoke with Capt. Lynd-
 ay, in the Falcon Sloop, of War, who acquainted
 him, that having Advice that a Sloop lay at a Place
 called Sandwich, that had carried some Provisions to
 Providence, &c. for the Use of the Boston Provin-
 cials, he dispatched his Lieutenant, with his Tender
 and 20 Men, and two other Officers, to take Pos-
 session of her; which they accordingly did. But,
 before they could carry her off, she was retaken, by al-
 the Tender, by some Boats from the Country) and the
 Lieutenant lost an Arm, the Gunner was wounded in
 the Head, and the Doctor's Mate in one of his Legs.
 The Seamen were sent Prisoners into the Country.

The New-York Gazette; and the Weekly Mercury, 22 May
 1775

The week before last the Falcon sloop of war,
 was cruising about Cape-Cod, and meeting with a wood
 sloop, in ballast, seized her, but promising the skipper
 to release him and his vessel if he would give informa-
 tion of any vessel that was just arrived from the West-
 Indies with a cargo on board, he at length told the
 Captain of the Falcon that there was a sloop at
 Dartmouth, which had just arrived; whereupon the
 Captain of the Falcon, instead of releasing the
 wood sloop, armed and manned her, and sent her in
 search of the West-Indiaman; they found the vessel
 lying at anchor, but her cargo was landed; however,
 they seized her and carried her off after putting part
 of their crew and some guns and ammunition on board.
 Notice of this getting on shore, the people fitted out a
 third sloop, with about 30 men and two swivel guns,
 and went in pursuit of these royal pirates, whom they
 come up with at Martha's Vineyard, where they lay at
 anchor at about a league's distance from each other;
 the first surrendered without firing a gun, our people
 after putting a number of hands on board, bore down
 upon the other, which by this time had got under sail,
 but the people in the Dartmouth sloop coming up with
 her, the pirates fired upon them; the fire was imme-
 diately returned, by which three of the pirates were
 wounded, among whom was the commanding officer;
 our people boarded her immediately, and having re-
 taken both sloops, carried them into Dartmouth, and
 sent the prisoners to Cambridge, from thence nine of
 them were yesterday brought to this town.

The Massachusetts Spy: Or, American Oracle of Liberty
 [Worcester], 24 May 1775]

The week before last Capt. Lindzee, of the Falcon
 sloop of war, took two sloops on the coast between this
 place and the Vineyard, without the least reasonable pre-
 tence that we can learn; upon which the people at the
 eastward manned out two other vessels, retook the sloops,
 and carried them into Fair-Haven, in Dartmouth, last
 Saturday se'nnight, with 14 of Capt. Lindzee's men, three
 of whom were wounded, which three were kept there,
 and taken good care of, and one other, who was a doc-
 tor's mate, was kept to dress their wounds; the others
 were sent to Taunton the next day. It is said the above
 sloops, being only in ballast, were to have been employ-
 ed in carrying live stock from some of the islands to Bos-
 ton, for the use of the King's troops.

The Newport Mercury, May 22, 1775

Extra of a letter from New-Port, Rhode-Island, May 15.
 "Last Friday the Falcon, Capt. Lindsey, took two
 sloops at Bedford, with intention of sending them to the
 Islands near the Vineyard, to carry from thence a
 parcel of sheep to Boston.---The Bedford people resent-
 ed this conduct in such a manner, as to immediately fit
 out two sloops with thirty men on board, and last Sa-
 turday retook them both with sixteen men on board:--

In the action there were three of the men of war sailors
 badly wounded, one of whom is since dead.---The
 other thirteen they immediately sent to Taunton gaol."

Story & Humphreys's Pennsylvania Mercury, and Universal
 Advertiser [Philadelphia], 26 May 1775

Forum

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