Mary

Armed Sloop
Pennsylvania Privateer Sloop

Commander James Le Maire

Commissioned/First Date: [17] June 1777
Out of Service/Cause: 4 July 1777/burned during British raid on Chincoteague Inlet

Owners: Robert Morris of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Oliver Pollock of New Orleans, Louisiana; and James Le Maire

Tonnage:

Battery: Date Reported:
Number/Caliber Weight Broadside

Total:
Broadside:
Swivels:

Crew:

Description:

Officers:

Cruises:

Prizes:

Actions:

Comments:

Some time in mid-summer 1777 a vessel arrived at Chingoteague Inlet, Virginia from New Orleans. Sloop Mary was skippered by one William Le Frame and had aboard as a passenger one John Le Maire. These men were carrying dispatches and letters for Congress and for Robert Morris, which had been sent by Oliver Pollock on 4/5 May. Le Maire went up to Philadelphia and met with the Secret Committee and with Robert Morris. The intent of these letters was that the new Spanish
governor, Don Bernardo de Galvez, was highly disposed towards the commercial interest of the United States. Among the information passed along was that plenty of blankets and other articles were available at New Orleans; items much needed by the Continental Army. Congress directed the Secret Committee to take steps to acquire the needed articles.

The Secret Committee had no funds available and certainly expected no credit at New Orleans. In stepped Willing & Morris. This company had a balance due them of over $40000 at New Orleans. An arrangement was made: Willing & Morris would advance the Secret Committee $30000 at New Orleans, to be repaid by the Secret Committee in good bills of exchange in Europe. On 12 June 1777 the Secret Committee wrote to Oliver Pollock and officially appointed him the Commercial Agent (Continental Agent) at New Orleans. Detailed instructions were given Pollock for the purchase of various goods, to the extent of $40-50000. He was to send the shipments back in four shipments, valued at $10-12000 each, chartering the vessels if possible, insuring them if needed, purchasing them only if necessary. Le Maire was to be used in the business, as he was familiar with the coast. Two drafts of $15000 each were drawn up. These were given to Le Maire, along with his instructions.

A second, private letter was written to Pollock by Robert Morris, on 19 June. Morris had obtained two blank privateer commissions, one of which he used for the sloop Mary, with Le Maire as commander. The other he sent to Pollock. Morris had agreed with Le Maire to buy two thirds of the Mary for $2000. Ownership was to be split evenly, three ways, between Pollock, Morris and Le Maire. Pollock was to arm and equip her. Mary was then to receive a cargo for Congress. After returning with the cargo she would either return to New Orleans or go on a cruise. Mary could also cruise on the Mississippi River while awaiting her cargo at New Orleans. The blank commission was to be used to either fit out a privateer at New Orleans.

Le Maire then set out to return to his vessel at Chingoteague. While he was en route, on 4 July 1777, two British tenders, the Stanley (Whitworth) and Delaware (Rogers), both tenders to the Roebuck, went to Chincoteague Inlet. The tenders flew French colors and drew out a pilot boat, entered the Inlet, and found and captured nine vessels. Sloops Polly (Richard Wells), Mary (William Le Frame), and Sally, owned by the Maryland Committee of Safety, and all bound to Martinique in ballast; and an unidentified sloop (William Earles), owned by Willing & Morris and bound to St. Eustatius in ballast, were burned. Brig Hero (William Paul), bound for Martinique; brig Sally (Anthony Hill), bound for St. Martin; sloop Jenny (Robert Tuille), bound for Curacao,  

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1 NDAR, “Secret Committee of the Continental Congress to Oliver Pollock,” 9:94-97 and 97-98 note

2 NDAR, “Robert Morris to Oliver Pollock,” 9:144-145


4 NDAR, “Colonel Zadock Purnell to Governor Thomas Johnson,” 9:216. Zadock dates the raid to 2 July. All other sources to 4 July.

5 NDAR, “Colonel Zadock Purnell to Governor Thomas Johnson,” 9:216; “News from New York City,” 9:285-286 and 286 notes. Eight vessels are mentioned here, to which Liberty must be added.
all laden with flour and tobacco; and schooner *Polly* (John Ellis), bound for Dunkerque in ballast, were captured and sent to New York, under escort of the *Stanley*. Forty prisoners were landed at New York.⁶

When Le Maire returned to Chingoteague he discovered that the British had raided the place, burning the *Mary*. Le Maire immediately bought another vessel and proceeded on his voyage, but never reached New Orleans, “nor has been heard of since…”⁷

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⁶ NDAR, “News from New York City,” 9:285-286 and 286 notes. See also “Purdie’s *Virginia Gazette, Friday, July 18, 1777*,” 9:295-296