

Alfred

Frigate
Continental Navy Ship

- (1) Captain Dudley Saltonstall
7 December 1775-8 September 1776
- (2) [First Lieutenant Jonathan Pitcher]
[8 September 1776-22 October 1776]
- (3) Captain John Paul Jones
22 October 1776-19/20 January 1777
- (4) Captain Elisha Hinman
19/20 January 1777-9 March 1778

Commissioned/First Date: 3 December 1775/30 October 1775
Out of Service/Cause: 9 March 1778/captured by HM Frigate *Ariadne* and HM Sloop *Ceres*

Tonnage: 275-350, 380, 440

Battery: Date Reported:
Number/Caliber Weight Broadside
20/9-pounders 180 pounds 90 pounds
10/6-pounders 60 pounds 30 pounds
Total: 30 cannon/240 pounds
Broadside: 15 cannon/120 pounds
Swivels:

Date Reported: 11 October 1777
Number/Caliber Weight Broadside
20/9-pounders 180 pounds 90 pounds
Total: 20 cannon/180 pounds
Broadside: 10 cannon/90 pounds
Swivels: [some on forecastle, cohorns in tops]

Date Reported: 4 December 1777
Number/Caliber Weight Broadside
20/9-pounders 180 pounds 90 pounds
6/4-pounders 24 pounds 12 pounds
Total: 26 cannon/204 pounds
Broadside: 13 cannon/102 pounds
Swivels:

Date Reported: 9 March 1778



Forum

Date Reported: 9 March 1778
Number/Caliber Weight Broadside
20/9-pounders 180 pounds 90 pounds
Total: 20 cannon/180 pounds
Broadside: 10 cannon/90 pounds
Swivels:

Crew:

- (1) 3 December 1775: 9 [total]
- (2) 31 December 1775: 65 [total]
- (3) 4 January 1776: 148 [total]
- (4) 17 January 1776: 210 [total]
- (5) 1 February 1776: 215 [total]
- (6) 18 February 1776: 229 [total]
- (7) 4 March 1776: 228 [total]
- (8) 16 March 1776: 222 [total]
- (9) 6 April 1776: 220 [total]
- (10) 30 April 1776: 184 [total]
- (11) 31 May 1776: 112 [total]
- (12) 30 June 1776: 101 [total]
- (13) 31 July 1776: 89 [total]
- (14) 31 August 1776: 53 [total]
- (15) 30 September 1776: 46 [total]
- (16) 23 July 1777: 120 [total]
- (17) 11 October 1777: 160 [total]
- (18) 4 December 1777: 160 [total]
- (19) 9 March 1778: 181 [total]

Description:

- (1) Built in 1774 in Philadelphia, square sterned, yellow and black sides, white bottom with a broad brown band, figurehead of a man in armor drawing a sword, gun ports very low and near water line
- (2) ninety-two feet long on her main deck, had a beam of about twenty-seven feet, and drew eighteen feet of water [modern]
- (3) Was a former merchant ship of lofty build, with a figurehead much like the *Raleigh's* (*Raleigh's* figurehead was that of a "yankey Head with a feather in his Cap, a Sabre in his right Hand . . ."). Her yards were not square and she had two topgallant masts, long royal masts, with large studding sails. Her waist cloths were black with white borders at the top. She had a five and a half foot breastwork on the quarterdeck, which was going to be lowered in France. She sailed poorly, particularly on a wind. She had a top lantern and a poop lantern. Her colors consisted of thirteen stripes with a blue field with thirteen white stars. [11 October 1777]



(4) Square-sterned, without quarter galleries or badges. Her figurehead was painted yellow, with a large feather plume painted white on the helmet. She was painted plain black and yellow with a white bottom. She was very taunt, but not square-rigged. Her top armor and quarter cloths were blue with white stars, the same as the upper corner of her colors. She had no name on her stern. When her guns were housed and her ports lowered she scarcely resembled a warship. [4 December 1777]

Officers:

- (1) First Lieutenant John Paul Jones, 7 December 1775-10 May 1776
- (2) First Lieutenant Jonathan Pitcher, [10 May] 1776-[15 January] 1777
- (3) First Lieutenant John Peck Rathbun, [25] October 1776-[31] December 1776
- (4) First Lieutenant Peter Richards, [25 January] 1777-9 March 1778

- (5) Second Lieutenant Benjamin Seabury, [7] December 1775-1 May 1776
- (6) Second Lieutenant Jonathan Maltbie, 10 February 1776-[8] September 1776
- (7) Second Lieutenant Robert Sanders, 20 August 1776-
- (8) Second Lieutenant Peter Douville [Deville], -9 March 1778

- (9) Third Lieutenant John Fanning, [7] December 1775-30 January 1776
- (10) Third Lieutenant Peter Deville
- (11) Acting Third Lieutenant George Lovie
- (12) Third Lieutenant Charles Bulkey [Bulkley], -9 March 1778

- (13) Master John Earle, 7 December 1775-7 August 1776
- (14) Master Walter Spooner, 20 August 1776-
- (15) Master Charles Bulkley, 20 August 1776-
- (16) Master Zebulon Whippy
- (17) Master Edward Revely, -9 March 1778

- (18) First Mate George May, 11 December 1775-27 May 1776
- (19) First Mate John Margeson
- (20) Second Mate Thomas Vaughan, 29 November 1775-26 August 1776
- (21) Second Mate James Bachope
- (22) Third Mate Philip Alexander, 3 January 1776-7 August 1776

- (23) Surgeon Joseph Harrison, 18 November 1775-
- (24) Surgeon Henry Tillinghast, [20 October] 1776-
- (25) Surgeon Amos Windship, -9 March 1778



- (26) Captain of Marines Samuel Nicholas, 20 November 1775-[25 June] 1776
- (27) Captain of Marines Edmund Arrowsmith, [20] October 1776-[20 January] 1777
- (28) Captain of Marines John Welsh, [June] 1777-9 March 1778

- (29) First Lieutenant of Marines Matthew Parke, 20 November 1775-26 May 1776
- (30) First Lieutenant of Marines William Hamilton, [20] October 1776-9 March 1778

- (31) Second Lieutenant of Marines John Fitzpatrick, 20 November 1775-6 April 1776
- (32) Second Lieutenant of Marines Alexander Nelson, [11] October 1776-[20 January] 1777
- (33) Second Lieutenant of Marines Nathaniel Richards, [20 January] 1777-9 March 1778

- (34) Midshipman Peter Arnold, -9 March 1778
- (35) Midshipman Joseph Hitchman, -9 March 1778

Cruises:

- (1) Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to Liberty Island, Pennsylvania, 4 January 1776-4 January 1776, with Continental Navy Ship *Columbus*, Continental Navy Brig *Andrew Doria*, and Continental Navy Brig *Cabot*

- (2) Liberty Island, Pennsylvania to Reedy Island, Pennsylvania, 17 January 1776-17 January 1776, with Continental Navy Ship *Columbus*, Continental Navy Brig *Andrew Doria*, Continental Navy Brig *Cabot*, Continental Navy Sloop *Providence*, and Continental Navy Schooner *Fly*

- (3) Reedy Island, Pennsylvania to Whorekill Roads, Delaware, 11 February 1776-11 February 1776, with Continental Navy Ship *Columbus*, Continental Navy Brig *Andrew Doria*, Continental Navy Brig *Cabot*, Continental Navy Sloop *Providence*, and Continental Navy Schooner *Fly*

- (4) Whorekill Roads, Delaware to Hole-in-the-Wall, Grand Abaco Island, Bahama Islands, British West Indies, 17 February 1776-1 March 1776, with Continental Navy Ship *Columbus*, Continental Navy Brig *Andrew Doria*, Continental Navy Brig *Cabot*, Continental Navy Sloop *Providence*, Continental Navy Schooner *Fly*, Continental Navy Sloop *Hornet*, and Continental Navy Schooner



Wasp

(5) Hole-in-the-Wall, Grand Abaco, Bahamas to New Providence, New Providence Island, Bahamas, 2 March 1776-3 March 1776, with Continental Navy Ship *Columbus*, Continental Navy Brig *Andrew Doria*, Continental Navy Brig *Cabot*, Continental Navy Sloop *Providence*, and Continental Navy Schooner *Wasp*

(6) New Providence, Bahamas to New London, Connecticut, 17 March 1776-8 April 1776, with Continental Navy Ship *Columbus*, Continental Navy Brig *Andrew Doria*, Continental Navy Brig *Cabot*, Continental Navy Sloop *Providence*, and Continental Navy Schooner *Fly*, Continental Navy Sloop *Hornet*, and Continental Navy Sloop Transport *Endeavour*

(7) New London, Connecticut to sea and return, 19 April 1776, with Continental Navy Ship *Columbus*, Continental Navy Brig *Andrew Doria*, Continental Navy Sloop *Providence*, Continental Navy Schooner *Fly*, Connecticut Navy Brig *Defence*, and Connecticut Navy Schooner *Spy*

(8) New London, Connecticut to Providence, Rhode Island, 25 April 1776-26 April 1776, with Continental Navy Ship *Columbus*, Continental Navy Sloop *Providence*, Continental Navy Schooner *Fly*, and Connecticut Navy Brig *Defence*

(9) Newport, Rhode Island to sea and return, 27 October 1776, with Continental Navy Brig *Hampden*

(10) Newport, Rhode Island to Tarpaulin Cove, Massachusetts, 1 November 1776, with Continental Navy Sloop *Providence*

(11) Tarpaulin Cove, Massachusetts to Boston, Massachusetts, 2 November 1776-16 December 1776, with Continental Navy Sloop *Providence*

(12) Boston, Massachusetts to Portsmouth, New Hampshire, [25] July 1777-[1] August 1777

(13) Portsmouth, New Hampshire to L'Orient, France, 22 August 1777-6 October 1777, with Continental Navy Ship *Raleigh*

(14) L'Orient, France to Senegal River, Senegal, 29 December 1777-[4] February 1778, with Continental Navy Ship *Raleigh*



(15) Senegal River, Senegal to sea, 6 February 1778-9 March 1778, with Continental Navy Ship *Raleigh*

Prizes:

(1) Sloop [unknown], 1 March 1776, with Continental Navy Ship *Columbus*, Continental Navy Brig *Andrew Doria*, Continental Navy Brig *Cabot*, Continental Navy Sloop *Providence*, and Continental Navy Schooner *Wasp*

(2) Sloop [unknown], 1 March 1776, with Continental Navy Ship *Columbus*, Continental Navy Brig *Andrew Doria*, Continental Navy Brig *Cabot*, Continental Navy Sloop *Providence*, and Continental Navy Schooner *Wasp*

(3) HM Schooner Tender *Hawke* (Lieutenant John [James] Wallace), 4 April 1776

(4) HM Brig *Bolton* (Lieutenant Edward Sneyd), 5 April 1776

(5) Brigantine *Active* (Isaac Fox), 11 November 1776, with Continental Navy Sloop *Providence*

(6) British Transport Ship *Mellish* (Joseph Stevenson), 12 November 1776, with Continental Navy Sloop *Providence*

(7) Snow *Hetty* [*Kitty*] (Charles Ross), 15 November 1776, with Continental Navy Sloop *Providence*

(8) British Transport Brig [unknown], 22 November 1776

(9) Schooner [unknown], 22 November 1776

(10) British Transport Ship *Betty* [*Betsey*] (James Sutton), 24 November 1776

(11) British Transport Ship *Molly* [*Polly*] (James Lash [Lush, Lusk]), 24 November 1776

(12) British Transport Ship *Surprize*, 24 November 1776

(13) Ship *John* (Edward Watkins) 25 November 1776

(14) Schooner [unknown] (Athens), 25 August 1777, with Continental Navy Ship *Raleigh*

(15) Brig [Snow] *Nancy* [*Nanny*] (Anthony Hooper), 2 September



1777, with Continental Navy Ship *Raleigh*

(16) Brigantine [Brig] *Sally* (Edward Marshall), 28 September 1777, at 49°35'N, 13°13'W, with Continental Navy Ship *Raleigh*

(17) Ship *Jamaica* [*Jamaican*] (David Watt [Watts]), 30 September 1777, at 49°13'N, 10°56'W, with Continental Navy Ship *Raleigh*

(17) Ship *Anna Susannah* [*Ann Susannah, Anna and Susannah*] (John Taylor [Johnson]), 30 September 1777, at 49°13'N, 10°56'W, with Continental Navy Ship *Raleigh*

(18) Brig *Eagle* (J. Morgan), 30 December 1777, near the French coast, with Continental Navy Ship *Raleigh*

(19) Sloop *Granville* (Renne), [2] February 1778, in The Senegal River, Senegal, with Continental Navy Ship *Raleigh*

Actions:

- (1) Battle of Nassau (New Providence Expedition), 3-4 March 1776
- (2) Action with *Bolton* and *Hawke*, 5 April 1776
- (3) Battle off Block Island, 6 April 1776
- (4) Action of 9 December 1776
- (5) Convoy Action of 4-8 September 1777, with Continental Navy Ship *Raleigh*
- (6) Action of 9 March 1778, with Continental Navy Ship *Raleigh*

Comments:

-I-

On 30 October 1775, in response to a growing need for a naval force, the Continental Congress authorized the creation of a Continental Navy. A Naval Committee of seven members was set up to organize and administer the Navy. The fourth vessel authorized that day was one to mount “not exceeding 36 guns.” This was the vessel that subsequently became the Continental Navy Ship *Alfred*.¹

The vessel that was to become the *Alfred* had been obtained by 4 November 1775. She was the trans-oceanic merchant ship *Black Prince*, a large (280² to 300-ton, 380 or 440-ton)³ square-sterned

¹ NDAR, “Journal of the Continental Congress,” 2:647 and note

² DANFS, I, 28

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NDAR, “A Letter from Philadelphia, dated December 6, 1775,” 2:1305-1307 and 1307 note. The actual tonnage of the *Alfred* is subject to dispute. She is listed as 380 tons in *Lloyd's Register of Shipping 1776*, and as 440 tons in British service in 1780.



vessel built in Philadelphia, and launched about September 1774.⁴ *Black Prince* measured “some ninety-two feet long on her main deck, had a breadth of about twenty-seven feet, and drew eighteen feet of water.”⁵ *Black Prince* was owned by a group of Philadelphia merchants including John Nixon, Thomas Willing (a member of Congress), Robert Morris (a member of Congress), Thomas Morris, and John Wharton.⁶ *Black Prince* had sailed for England on 28 December 1774 under master John Barry,⁷ arriving at Bristol on 31 January 1775.⁸ She sailed for Philadelphia on 14 March 1775 and anchored off that city on 25 April 1775.⁹ She sailed for London on 10 May 1775, made Falmouth on 17 June 1774, and proceeded to London, arriving 27 June.¹⁰ She sailed again on 10 August 1774,¹¹ and arrived in early October 1775 at Philadelphia.¹² Among the cargo that the *Black Prince* brought from England were late newspapers and private letters which contained information which eventually helped lead to the formation of the Continental Navy.¹³

Conversion of the *Black Prince* to a warship began on 4 November under the supervision of Joshua Humphreys¹⁴ as she lay alongside the Willing & Morris Wharf at Philadelphia. John Barry, her former master, was employed to supervise her re-rigging and Nathaniel Falconer, another Philadelphia sea captain, her provisioning and arming.¹⁵ *Black Prince* was renamed *Alfred* on 8

Winfield indicates this is the tonnage by measure, but gives no dimensions. Winfield, *British Warships in the Age of Sail 1714-1792*, 272.

⁴ Clark, William Bell, *Gallant John Barry, 1745-1803, The Story of a Naval Hero of Two Wars*, The MacMillan Company: New York, 1938, pp. 38-40

⁵ McCusker, John J., *Alfred: The First Continental Flagship 1775-1778*, Smithsonian Institution Press: Washington, 1973, p. 1. To the best of my knowledge there are no contemporary measurements of the *Alfred*. Another modern estimate of her dimensions is a length of 140', length on the deck of 118', length of the keel of 100', beam of 32', depth in the hold of 15', and a tonnage of 550 tons. [estimates from Millar, *The Early American Ship*, according to www.schoonerman.com, accessed 4 April 2007] According to the second edition of the DANFS she measured 440 tons. Online [here](#).

⁶ NDAR, “Deposition of John Nixon Regarding Merchant Ship *Black Prince*, 1:36 and note

⁷ Clark, *Gallant John Barry*, 42

⁸ NDAR, “Richard Champion to Willing, Morris & Co.,” 1:422-424 and 424 note

⁹ Clark, *Gallant John Barry*, 46-47

¹⁰ Clark, *Gallant John Barry*, 50-52

¹¹ Clark, *Gallant John Barry*, 56

¹² NDAR, “Diary of Christopher Marshall,” 2:363

¹³ Clark, *Gallant John Barry*, 61-62

¹⁴ NDAR, “Dr. Solomon Drowne to his Parents,” 2:1010 and 1010-1011 note; “Chandlery Supplied to the Continental Fleet,” 3:1377-1391

¹⁵ Clark, *Gallant John Barry*, 65



November, after the “founder of the greatest navy that ever existed.”¹⁶

Another young former merchant skipper, John Paul Jones, also assisted in her conversion. All told over six hundred hours of work by carpenters, joiners, sawyers, caulkers and laborers was put in on the *Alfred*. Her keel and sides were strengthened with three thousand feet of planking, fifty-four pounds of oakum and eight barrels of tar.¹⁷

While the work on the *Alfred* had just begun the Naval Committee selected the senior officer of the new navy. On 5 November Esek Hopkins of Rhode Island (brother of Stephen Hopkins)¹⁸ was chosen as commodore of the nascent fleet. Esek Hopkins was born in 1718 on a farm near Providence (now the site of Scituate, Rhode Island) and reared there. He went to sea in 1738 and retired to the farm in 1772. A prominent man in Rhode Island affairs, with thirty years’ experience in the merchant service, and some naval experience (he had commanded a privateer in the Seven Years’ War), his patriotic credentials were well established. In his prime he had been a

¹⁶ NDAR, “Dr. Solomon Drowne to his Parents,” 2:1010 and 1010-1011 note; “Autobiography of John Adams,” 2:1305; “Chandlery Supplied to the Continental Fleet,” 3:1377-1391; “*Dunlap’s Maryland Gazette*, Tuesday, December 19, 1775,” 3:173 and note. Alfred the Great, King of the West Saxons (871-899) was considered to be the founder of the English Navy. DANFS, I, 28.

¹⁷ “Chandlery Supplied to the Continental Fleet,” 3:1377-1391

¹⁸ NDAR, “John Adams’ List of Persons Suitable for Naval Commands, November 1775,” 2:1162 and 1162-1163 note





Alfred at the waterfront of Philadelphia, being converted from a merchant vessel into a warship. An excellent painting by Nolen Van Powell. The moment of her commissioning ceremony is shown.



The only known authentic portrait of Commodore Esek Hopkins, a detail from Greenwood's *Sea Captains Carousing in Surinam*. The painting was made by John Greenwood between 1752-1758. A very large view is on [Wikipedia](#).

tall, strong man, energetic, aggressive and dominant.¹⁹ Hopkins took an active part in Rhode Island politics and had been elected to the General Assembly several times.²⁰ At age 57 he had slowed down considerably. Like brother Stephen, Esek was a noted drinker, the only known authentic portrait of him being set in a tavern in Surinam with other carousing sea captains. When the war began, he was in the Rhode Island militia, being appointed a Brigadier General on 4 October 1775.²¹ Hopkins had served against Captain George Wallace's small British squadron in the complex affairs at Newport and was one of the men on John Adams' short list of potential naval commanders.²² Hopkins was informed of his appointment ("... they have pitched upon you to take the Command of a small fleet") the next day, in a letter from his brother, who urged him to accept the appointment. Hopkins was free to enlist officers and men, who would enter pay from their first enlistment.²³

On 27 November,²⁴ at the solicitation of Silas Deane,²⁵ the Naval Committee offered the post of senior captain to Deane's brother-in-law, Dudley Saltonstall of New London, Connecticut. Saltonstall was born in 1738 in New London, the descendent of an old Massachusetts family. He entered the merchant service and commanded

privateers in the Seven Years' War. Saltonstall was a captain in the merchant service before the

¹⁹ Boatner, Mark Mayo III, *Encyclopedia of the American Revolution*, David MacKay Company, Inc.: New York, 1974, p. 512

²⁰ Morgan, William James, *Captains to the Northward: The New England Captains In The Continental Navy*, Barre Gazette; Barre, Massachusetts, 1959, p. 23

²¹ NDAR, "Rhode Island Recess Committee to Esek Hopkins and William West," 2:295-296

²² NDAR, "John Adams' List of Persons Suitable for Naval Commands, November 1775," 2:1162 and 1162-1163 note

²³ NDAR, "Stephen Hopkins to Esek Hopkins," 2:907-909

²⁴ NDAR, "Naval Committee of the Continental Congress to Dudley Saltonstall," 2:1163

²⁵ NDAR, "Autobiography of John Adams," 2:1305



war started. He took charge of the fort at New London when the war began.²⁶ He had sandy hair, a light complexion, hazel eyes and was thick set, being 5'9" tall; a big man in other words.²⁷ He was popular in Connecticut, it was said, but was much less popular in the Continental Navy.



Captain Samuel Nicholas. A painting made by Donna J. Neary USMCR in 1989, from miniatures. It hangs in the house of the Marine Commandant.

The Naval Committee had anticipated final approval of a Marine corps by issuing the first commission in the Continental Marines to a well-known local citizen, Samuel Nicholas. Nicholas was born in Philadelphia in 1744, the only son of Anthony and Mary Shute. His father was a blacksmith. Nicholas was raised in the Philadelphia area and attended school at the Academy of Philadelphia from 1752-1759. His father died in 1751. Nicholas joined the exclusive Schuykill Fishing Company in 1760 and made the acquaintance of numerous local gentry. In 1766 he joined the Gloucester Fox Hunting Club, a similar institution. He was reputed to be an innkeeper and had sailed as a supercargo for Robert Morris before the war.²⁸

Nicholas was joined in early December by Lieutenants John Fitzpatrick and Matthew Parke.²⁹ Fitzpatrick was another Philadelphian, possibly a laborer or tanner before the war. It is probable that he was a friend of Nicholas.³⁰ Matthew Parke was born in Ipswich, England in 1746. His grandfather was a British army colonel, former aide to the Duke of Marlborough, and served as Governor of the Windward Islands. When the grandfather left the

²⁶ Boatner, *Encyclopædia of the American Revolution*, 967-968

²⁷ Morgan, *Captains to the Northward*, 25

²⁸ Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 12-13, 459-460

²⁹ Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 13

³⁰ Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 443



IN CONGRESS.

The DELEGATES of the UNITED COLONIES of New-Hampshire, Massachusetts Bay, Rhode-Island, Connecticut, New-York, New-Jersey, Pennsylvania, the Counties of New-Castle, Kent, and Suffex on Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North-Carolina, South-Carolina, and Georgia, to,

Samuel Nicholas Esquire

WE reposing especial Trust and Confidence in your Patriotism, Valour, Conduct and Fidelity,
DO by these Presents, constitute and appoint you to be *Captain of Marines*

~~of the Armed~~ ~~called the~~ _____ in the service of the Thirteen United Colonies of North-America, fitted out for the defence of American Liberty, and for repelling every hostile Invasion thereof. You are therefore carefully and diligently to discharge the Duty of *Captain*

of Marines by doing and performing all Manner of Things thereunto belonging. And we do strictly charge and require all Officers, Marines and Seamen under your Command, to be obedient to your Orders as *Captain of Marines* And you are to observe and follow such Orders and Directions from Time to Time, as you shall receive from this or a future Congress of the United Colonies, or Committee of Congress, for that Purpose appointed, or Commander in Chief for the Time being of the Navy of the United Colonies, or any other your superior Officer, according to the Rules and Discipline of War, the Usage of the Sea, and the Instructions herewith given you, in Pursuance of the Trust reposed in you. This Commission to continue in Force untill revoked by this or a future Congress. *Philadelphia Novem. 28. 1775*

By Order of the Congress

John Hancock

PRESIDENT.

Attest. *Chas. Thomson Secy*

The commission of Captain Samuel Nicholas, signed by John Hancock. Note that no vessel is assigned on this commission.

islands he traveled to Virginia, taking his grandson with him. When the grandfather moved to England he left Matthew behind. Parke moved to Philadelphia where he was commissioned on 28 November.³¹ Technically he was a Virginian, and may have owed his appointment to Southern pressure, as did John Paul Jones. The two may have known each other in Virginia.

Esek Hopkins arrived in Philadelphia around the end of November 1775, accompanied by his youngest son, Esek Hopkins, Jr., and a young friend, Rufus Jenckes. While the boys were inoculated for smallpox and roamed the streets of Philadelphia, seeing the sights, the elder Hopkins looked over his command and conferred with the Naval Committee. It was by no means certain that he would accept the command of the fleet, for he still thought the prize shares too low.³² But the Committee prevailed and his acceptance gave “universal Satisfaction.”³³

On 3 December Hopkins boarded the *Alfred* where he met his future senior First Lieutenant, John Paul Jones. In a small ceremony, Jones raised the Grand Union flag with his own hands, more or less putting the fleet in commission.³⁴



Detail from the W. Nowland Van Powell painting above, of the commissioning ceremony for the *Alfred*.

John Paul Jones was born in 1747 in Kirkcudbrightshire, Scotland, the son of a gardener. At age 12 he was apprenticed to a shipowner of Whitehaven and made a voyage to Virginia. He stayed there for a time with his brother William, a successful tailor at Fredricksburg. When he returned to Whitehaven, Jones found his employer had gone bankrupt and he was released from his

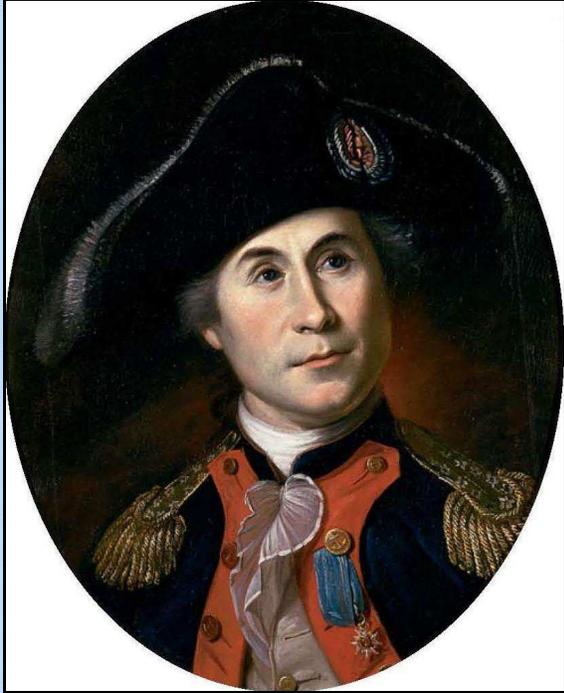
³¹ Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 13-14, 463-464

³² NDAR, “Rhode Island Committee of Accounts to Nicholas Cooke,” 2:1233

³³ NDAR, “Samuel Ward and Stephen Hopkins to Nicholas Cooke,” 2:1233-1234 and 1234 note

³⁴ NDAR, “A Letter from Philadelphia, dated December 6, 1775,” 2:1305-1307 and 1307 note





John Paul Jones, by Charles Willson Peale, between 1781-1783.

apprenticeship. He signed on a slaver as third mate, on the *Guinea* to Jamaica route. At age 19 he signed on another slaver as first mate, but quit soon after, disgusted with the business. He was offered passage home in the sloop *John*. En route the master and mate died and Jones brought her in safely, being rewarded with her command. He sailed her and a larger craft in the West Indies trade for several years, but was plagued by two unsavory incidents, the last of which resulted in the death of a mutineer at Tobago. Jones fled to America in 1774 and showed up at Philadelphia in the fall of 1775, where he may have helped in *Alfred's* conversion. He was appointed the senior First Lieutenant in the fleet for one reason only: he was friendly with Joseph Hewes, who absolutely insisted on a Southern lieutenantcy. Jones was available, although technically a Virginian.³⁵

On 7 December Saltonstall “cheerfully” accepted the command offered by the Naval Committee. He notified the Committee he would be somewhat delayed in reporting to Philadelphia, as he planned to recruit sailors before leaving. To do so he needed the articles of enlistment, which had not yet arrived.³⁶ It is obvious that Saltonstall was also under the impression he was to appoint his own officers.³⁷

“Brother Dudley” was becoming a “much disappointed” man. He had found a fair number of men willing to enlist in the Navy, but had still not received the recruiting papers, and the men would not sign on without knowing the terms. On 14 December Saltonstall turned the recruiting over to officers he had appointed³⁸ and set out for Philadelphia³⁹ on 17 December.⁴⁰ At New London, Nathaniel Shaw, Jr., and Thomas Mumford were fitting out vessels (one of which was the sloop *Lizard*) to take Saltonstall’s recruits to Philadelphia. Mumford was in hopes of recruiting many of the soldiers who were just returning from Washington’s army, their time having expired there.

³⁵ Boatner, *Encyclopædia of the American Revolution*, 565-568

³⁶ NDAR, “Dudley Saltonstall to the Continental Marine Committee,” 2:1234

³⁷ NDAR, “Gurdon Saltonstall to the Connecticut Committee of the Pay Table,” 2:1234

³⁸ NDAR, “Adam Babcock to Silas Deane,” 3:128

³⁹ NDAR, “Gurdon Saltonstall to Silas Deane,” 3:100

⁴⁰ NDAR, “Thomas Mumford to Silas Deane,” 3:153



Captain Elisha Hinman, a merchant skipper, was expected to arrive any day, and it was thought he would gladly sign on as Saltonstall's first lieutenant.⁴¹

The Naval Committee was also looking for recruits in Philadelphia. On 18 December the Committee cast a covetous eye on one source of sailors: the Pennsylvania Navy. The Committee decided to request permission to enlist men from the Pennsylvania fleet, as many as would be permitted and wished to enlist.⁴² Stephen Hopkins called on the Pennsylvania Committee of Safety, with this request, the next day.⁴³ The type of recruit that the Continental Navy was likely to get from this sort of request was demonstrated on 19 December. One William Green, a seaman in the Pennsylvania Navy, had been placed in jail for breaking regulations. After five weeks in "Gaol" he petitioned the Pennsylvania Committee of Safety for release, so that he could enter the Continental Navy.⁴⁴ The Committee of Safety accepted this request with alacrity.⁴⁵

The recruiting for the Continental Marines, in contrast to that for the Navy, was going pretty well in Philadelphia. By 19 December First Lieutenant Isaac Craig had signed up thirty-four men in his company, and had discharged one man. These men were chiefly immigrants and a great many were Irish. Craig signed up eleven more by 22 December.⁴⁶

Congress was also asking Pennsylvania for help in fitting out the Navy. On 19 December that body requested the loan of four tons of gunpowder and four hundred stand of small arms from Pennsylvania, promising to use "their whole influence and authority" to repay these items by 1 February 1776. A more significant item passed in Congress that day involved a change in the prize rules. Vessels carrying cargo for the British Army and Navy had been liable to seizure, with the vessels to be released and only the cargo condemned. By resolution, and in response to letters from Washington, Congress now allowed the vessels to be condemned in addition to the cargo.⁴⁷

Stephen Hopkins called on the Pennsylvania Committee of Safety with the requests for assistance from the Naval Committee and Congress. Pennsylvania agreed to give all the powder available, except the "Battle" powder, and as many small arms as possible. Further, the Naval Committee could enlist one hundred sailors from the Pennsylvania fleet, and the men were to be gathered in

⁴¹ NDAR, "Thomas Mumford to Silas Deane," 3:153

⁴² NDAR, "Minutes of the Continental Naval Committee," 3:162

⁴³ NDAR, "Minutes of the Continental Naval Committee," 3:172

⁴⁴ NDAR, "Petition of William Green to the Pennsylvania Committee of Safety," 3:172

⁴⁵ NDAR, "Minutes of the Pennsylvania Committee of Safety," 3:172-173

⁴⁶ NDAR, "Muster Roll, Lieutenant Isaac Craig's Company of Marines," 3:174-175 and 175 note

⁴⁷ NDAR, "Journal of the Continental Congress," 3:171



barracks, partly to facilitate this recruiting.⁴⁸ The Naval Committee then found itself in the position of asking that the fleet surgeon, Dr, Joseph Harrison of *Alfred*, be furnished with thirty-six pounds of saltpeter by Pennsylvania. To sweeten this request it was coupled with a generous thank you for past loans.⁴⁹

Congress took up naval matters again on 22 December, when the Naval Committee presented a list of officers it had appointed. Congress accepted the list and ordered the officers commissioned, with those under the rank of Third Lieutenant to be warrant officers. These men were to take seniority as listed. The pay of the Commander-in-Chief was fixed at \$125 per month,⁵⁰ after some fractious debate, many thinking the figure was too high. Hopkins had offered to serve without pay. When the question of paying for the Commodore's table rations came up, it was at once voted down.⁵¹ Congress also ordered the Naval Committee to devise how the prize shares assigned to the fleet were to be divided and instructed them to draw up sailing orders for the Commodore.⁵²

On 22 December the officers received their official commissions from Congress: Esek Hopkins as Commander-in-Chief, Saltonstall as Captain and Jones as First Lieutenant. Second Lieutenant on the *Alfred* was Benjamin Seabury and Third Lieutenant was John Fanning.

Sam Adams closed a letter to cousin John on 22 December with these words: "Our Fleet . . . will be ready to put to Sea in two or three days, and it is left to the Board of Admiralty [either the Naval Committee or the Marine Committee] to order its Destination—May Heaven succeed in the Undertaking—Hopkins . . . I dare promise . . . will on all Occasions distinguish his Bravery . . . and do honor to the American Flag."⁵³ Cousin Sam had the right sentiments but was a little in advance of the facts. The fleet stayed tied up at the wharves for nearly two more weeks.

One of the problems was manpower. Sailors were indeed raising slow in Philadelphia. A close examination of the *Alfred's* muster roll, which shows where each man was shipped, indicates that, counting officers and the men from Rhode Island, there were fifty-three men aboard on 22 December. This includes the Commodore, his secretary, and such other types. Twenty-five of these men were from Philadelphia and twenty more had been recruited out of the Pennsylvania Navy, eight being the Rhode Islanders from the *Katy* or the Hopkins family. However, the scarcity may have been due to the excellence of the Marine recruiting effort: counting officers, there were sixty

⁴⁸ NDAR, "Minutes of the Pennsylvania Committee of Safety," 3:185-186

⁴⁹ NDAR, "Continental Naval Committee to the Pennsylvania Committee of Safety," 3:185

⁵⁰ NDAR, "Journal of the Continental Congress," 3:207-208 and 208 note

⁵¹ NDAR, "Diary of Richard Smith," 3:209

⁵² NDAR, "Journal of the Continental Congress," 3:207-208 and 208 note

⁵³ NDAR, "Samuel Adams to John Adams, 3:209-210

signed up by 22 December, all enlisted at Philadelphia.⁵⁴ A similar examination of the muster roll of the *Columbus* is less instructive, for the origin of the sailors is not listed. However there were sixty-one Marines signed up for the *Columbus* by the 22nd.⁵⁵

Although it had not occurred yet, Hopkins was considering the problem of desertion, along with the Naval Committee. The latter requested permission (on 23 December) from the Pennsylvania Committee of Safety (through Gadsden) to allow the Continental officers to search outward bound shipping for deserters. The Committee of Safety agreed “cheerfully,” but recommended a “Discreet Exercise of this Power” and the use of an officer with “prudence.”⁵⁶

John Langdon returned to Philadelphia from a mission to Canada at some time before 23 December, thus making the Naval Committee six members again,⁵⁷ and another notable arrived. Dudley Saltonstall finally saw his command, and took up rooms with brother-in-law Silas Deane. Silas was explaining to his wife that he would not be home soon, for the fleet was “stopped up by the ice.”⁵⁸ The weather that winter was very severe and accounts from all over mention the cold and ice.

The only thing really hindering the fleet from sailing, or at least dropping down the river, was the weather. There was ice in the river. One correspondent reported that two or three of the fleet were to have sailed on 24 December, but the “plenty of ice” stopped that movement.⁵⁹ On Saturday there had been a storm and on Sunday, the day the vessels were to sail, four inches of snow had fallen, mixed with hail.⁶⁰ Large amounts of drift ice formed in the Delaware River, stopping all traffic.⁶¹ Even so, the *Alfred* made a “formidable appearance,” and the *Columbus* was a “noble Ship.”⁶² But it was not the day to be moving large ships with green and tender crews.

The Marines were still recruiting in Philadelphia, going through the immigrant quarters and raising men there. A drummer would parade, beating his Marine drum, with the rattlesnake emblem and the words “Don’t Tread On Me.” The recruiting officers gathered at a convenient tavern or inn. Rounds of beer, ale and grog, promises of advance pay, warm clothing, and full bellies, and that

⁵⁴ NDAR, “A Roll of all the Officers and Men . . . [of] . . . Ship *Alfred*,” 6:696-705

⁵⁵ NDAR, “Muster Roll . . . [of] . . . Ship *Columbus*,” 3:142-154

⁵⁶ NDAR, “Minutes of the Pennsylvania Committee of Safety,” 3:216

⁵⁷ NDAR, “Journal of the Continental Congress,” 3:216

⁵⁸ NDAR, “Silas Deane to Elizabeth Deane,” 3:263-264

⁵⁹ NDAR, “Solomon Drowne to William Drowne,” 3:264

⁶⁰ NDAR, “*Pennsylvania Journal*, Wednesday, December 27, 1775,” 3:266

⁶¹ NDAR, “*Philadelphia Journal*, Wednesday, December 27, 1775,” 3:266

⁶² NDAR, “Letter from Philadelphia,” 3:266-268



ever elusive pot of gold, a share of the prizes, helped to fill up the muster rolls.⁶³ Near the end of the year the various Marine officers and their companies were assigned to the vessels.

Assigned to the *Alfred* were Captain Nicholas, First Lieutenant Parke, Second Lieutenant John Fitzpatrick, and Nicholas' company of Marines.⁶⁴

About the first of January 1776 the weather turned warmer and a thaw set in,⁶⁵ and Hopkins expected and hoped he could get his fleet away; or at least down to Reedy Island. The Committee of Safety was requested to allow three pilots to be used for that purpose. More embarrassing, the Committee was requested to loan sailors from the Pennsylvania Navy, so the fleet could move. The Committee of Safety agreed to both requests. The Naval Committee was to arrange return of the men.⁶⁶

By 4 January 1776 the day finally came. The Naval Committee had ordered all sailors and Marines to report to the vessels of the fleet to "avoid being deemed deserters."⁶⁷ As the men gathered from town and boarded the two brigs and two ships, the Naval Committee passed a resolution that all officers and men who did their duty, but were taken prisoner, would have their pay continued until released.⁶⁸ At 1400 First Lieutenant James Josiah opened the journal of the *Andrew Doria*: ". . . Cast off from the Warf In Company with the Commodore Ship *Alfred*, *Columbus* & *Cabot*, Light airs from the Westward & much Ice in the River . . ." ⁶⁹ The fleet did not go far, just out to Liberty Island, where they tied up at the piers about 1800.⁷⁰ Meanwhile there was constant boat traffic between the Willing & Morris Wharf and the fleet as straggling sailors reported aboard.⁷¹

By now the British intelligence service had extremely accurate information regarding this fleet, and had developed a speed previously lacking. As Lieutenant Josiah was looking over his journal entries, Captain Hyde Parker, Jr., commanding HM Frigate *Phoenix*, began a report with these words: "This day about one o'clock sailed the Ship *Alfred* and the Ship *Columbus* . . ." ⁷² Parker then

⁶³ NDAR., "Letter from Philadelphia," 3:266-268

⁶⁴ NDAR, "Marines On Board Commodore Esek Hopkins' Fleet," 3:302-304

⁶⁵ NDAR, "Intelligence from Philadelphia, Transmitted by Governor William Tryon," 3:558-560

⁶⁶ NDAR, "Minutes of the Committee of Safety," 3:562-563

⁶⁷ NDAR, "Continental Naval Committee Order," 3:613

⁶⁸ NDAR, "Continental Naval Committee Resolution," 3:612-613

⁶⁹ NDAR, "A Journal of a Cruise In the Brig *Andrew Doria* . . .," 3:615 and note

⁷⁰ NDAR, "A Journal of a Cruise In the Brig *Andrew Doria* . . .," 3:615 and note

⁷¹ NDAR, "Continental Naval Committee Order," 3:613

⁷² NDAR, "Intelligence from Philadelphia, Transmitted by Captain Hyde Parker, Jr., R.N.," 3:615-617 and 617 note



passed along a detailed report on the fleet, with the battery and crew strength, descriptions, and tactical information. Hopkins planned, according to Parker, to exchange a few shots and then get close aboard, so that his green crews could board. Parker did not certainly know the fleet's destination, but thought it was to Europe or Virginia. Soon after the fleet tied up at Liberty Island, Parker knew, and added it as a footnote to this letter.⁷³ There have hardly ever been more timely intelligence reports than this one.

From the intelligence reports we can get a good picture of these vessels. *Alfred* had yellow and black sides,⁷⁴ and a white bottom, with the figurehead of a man drawing a sword.⁷⁵ She carried her battery on two decks, mounting twenty 9-pounders on the lower deck and ten 6-pounders on the upper deck. The important note was added that *Alfred's* lower deck gun ports were only eighteen inches above the water.⁷⁶ Fighting her lower battery would be difficult in a heavy sea. She was reported to have 140 sailors and sixty Marines aboard.⁷⁷ Parker also provided the information that the American colors were like the English, "but more Striped."⁷⁸

With the movement of the fleet out to Liberty Island, the subject of what to do with the fleet was being discussed in the Naval Committee. That body was in the process of producing standing and sailing orders for Hopkins. It was generally supposed that the fleet would strike at Lord Dunmore in Chesapeake Bay. On New Year's Day, Dunmore had bombarded and burned the town of Norfolk, Virginia, and the rage of the southern delegates in Congress against the Royal Governor can be readily understood. The British intelligence services usually reported that the fleet's target was Virginia.

The succession of intelligence reports from James Brattle to Governor Tryon details this knowledge. Dunmore and the fleet are mentioned in the same letter on 12 December,⁷⁹ and Captain Parker's letter of 18 December implies that he knew the destination of the fleet.⁸⁰ In fact, on 25 December, Admiral Graves had ordered HM Frigate *Roebuck* (Captain Andrew Snape Hamond), a forty-four, to Virginia from Halifax,⁸¹ although it would be some time before she arrived there.

⁷³ NDAR, "Intelligence from Philadelphia, Transmitted by Captain Hyde Parker, Jr., R.N.," 3:615-617 and 617 note

⁷⁴ NDAR, "Intelligence from Philadelphia, Transmitted by Captain Hyde Parker, Jr., R.N.," 3:615-617 and 617 note

⁷⁵ NDAR, "Intelligence from New York, Transmitted by Governor William Tryon," 3:558-560 and 560 note

⁷⁶ NDAR, "Intelligence on the Continental Navy," 3:616 and notes

⁷⁷ NDAR, "Intelligence on the Continental Navy," 3:616 and notes

⁷⁸ NDAR, "Intelligence from Philadelphia, Transmitted by Captain Hyde Parker, Jr., R.N.," 3:615-617 and 617 note

⁷⁹ NDAR, "Governor William Tryon's Intelligence from Philadelphia," 3:77 and note

⁸⁰ NDAR, "Captain Hyde Parker, Jr., R.N., to Vice Admiral Samuel Graves," 3:154-155; also "Captain George Vandeput, R.N., to Captain Hyde Parker, Jr., R.N.," 3:157-158

⁸¹ NDAR, "Vice Admiral Samuel Graves to Captain Andrew Snape Hamond, H.M.S. *Roebuck*, Halifax," 3:235



So general was the knowledge of the fleet's destination that it was common table talk in the Continental Army encampment around Boston by 12 December. A succession of letters from the camp notified the Naval Committee and Congress of the danger. On Christmas Day Washington wrote Colonel Joseph Reed that the destination was so generally known that the purpose of the fleet's going there was in doubt. It was thought, correctly, by Washington that reinforcements had been sent to Virginia.⁸² On 26 December, in a letter to Richard Henry Lee, a member of the Naval Committee, Washington said that he had heard the destination of the fleet mentioned in "common conversation" a "fortnight" ago.⁸³ A similar warning was repeated on 4 January 1776.⁸⁴ From New York, on 24 December, Colonel Alexander McDougall gave his opinion that the fleet would be "ruffly handled" if it went to Virginia.⁸⁵

On 5 January 1776 the Naval Committee communicated two sets of orders to Hopkins, one more or less public, and one secret. In the public orders Hopkins was enjoined to insure good discipline and order in the fleet, make proper returns of stores and men on a timely basis, and to inform Congress, the appropriate Committee, and the "Commander in chief of the Continental forces in America," of his movements and actions. He was empowered to fit out, officer, and man such vessels as he took prize which might be made into warships, transmitting such information to Congress so the officer appointments could be confirmed, or the officers replaced. He was to look out for the health of the sailors, fix signals for the vessels, keep arms in good condition, and take care of his prisoners, handing them over to the care of local committees if necessary. He was to appoint a place of fleet rendezvous for those units that became separated.⁸⁶

The second set of orders was more specific: "As a part, and a most important part of defense, the Continental Congress have judged it necessary to fit out several Armed Vessels . . . under your Command . . . that . . . our unnatural Enemies may meet with all possible distress on the Sea—For that purpose you are instructed with the utmost diligence to proceed with the said Fleet to Sea . . . directly for Chesapeake Bay in Virginia." Hopkins was to send forward a swift vessel for intelligence when near the Virginia Capes, and if the force of the enemy was not "greatly" superior, he was to "Enter the said bay, search out and attack, take or destroy all the Naval Force of our Enemies." If he completed this mission "successfully," he was to move to the Carolinas and do the same, and then proceed to Rhode Island for similar operations. However, "if Bad Winds, or Stormy Weather, or any other unforeseen accident or disaster disable you to do so You are then to follow such Courses as your best Judgment shall Suggest." Hopkins was again empowered to fit out vessels, calling on various local committees to assist, and was authorized to draw on the

⁸² NDAR, "General George Washington to Colonel Joseph Reed," 3:233

⁸³ NDAR, "General Washington to Richard Henry Lee," 3:253

⁸⁴ NDAR, "General Washington to Colonel Joseph Reed," 3:599-600

⁸⁵ NDAR, "Colonel Alexander McDougall to John Jay," 3:225-226

⁸⁶ NDAR, "Naval Committee to Commodore Esek Hopkins," 3:636-637

Treasury for money for the fleet.⁸⁷

This order demonstrates that the original plan of using a concentrated force to attack isolated detachments of the Royal Navy was still holding forth in the Naval Committee. It was a reasonably good idea, except that everybody knew the fleet was going to Virginia, and the British were reinforcing that station. It was not an urgent problem at the moment, for the ice had closed in around the fleet again, locking it to the piers at Liberty Island.

About the same time that Hopkins issued these orders the Naval Committee notified the Virginia Convention that he was coming, opening the letter with these words: “The Congress attentive to the safety and security of every part of the united Colonies . . . “ This was a definite statement to the southerners that they were going to get what they had voted for. The Naval Committee then suggested ways in which Virginia could cooperate. A coast watcher was to be stationed at Cape Henry to pass along the latest intelligence, and two hundred riflemen kept ready to board the fleet upon arrival, and at once, for speed and surprise were essential once the fleet arrived. The Naval Committee hoped the “apprehension” of the enemy was not “awakened.” Surely, even the Naval Committee knew by now that word had leaked out of its plans.⁸⁸

No sooner had the fleet gotten into the river and frozen into the ice than the problem of desertion began to appear. The first newspaper advertisement for a deserter was for Continental Marine Peter M’Tegart, who ran away from brig *Cabot*. A reward of \$2 was offered for his capture (9 January).⁸⁹ M’Tegart was the first of many.

The weather improved a bit about 10 January and the Commodore planned to bring the fleet down river to Reedy Island, and pass through the fortifications there. Robert Morris noted however, that the naval reinforcements recently received by Lord Dunmore meant that “we dare not look at him by Sea.” The destination of the fleet was being kept secret by the Naval Committee, at least in theory.⁹⁰ Christopher Gadsden hoped that the fleet would soon be calling at South Carolina, and sent Hopkins a list of the officers of the South Carolina regiments.⁹¹ But the ice closed in again, freezing the river completely over, and bringing out the ice skaters from the city.⁹²

Sometime after 15 January Christopher Gadsden took passage home in a schooner of the South Carolina Navy that had been sent to Philadelphia. Before he left, Gadsden requested Hopkins to fix a signal to show off Charleston, so that the Carolinians would know a friend was off the bar.

⁸⁷ NDAR, “Naval Committee to Commodore Esek Hopkins,” 3:637-638

⁸⁸ NDAR, “Naval Committee to the Virginia Convention,” 3:640-641 and 641 note

⁸⁹ NDAR, “Advertisement for a Deserter from Continental Brig *Cabot*,” 3:700

⁹⁰ NDAR, “Robert Morris to Major General Charles Lee,” 3:719

⁹¹ NDAR, “Christopher Gadsden to Commodore Esek Hopkins,” 3:720-721

⁹² NDAR, “Autobiography of Charles Biddle,” 3:803-805



Hopkins devised the signal: a striped flag halfway up the flying stay.⁹³ With Gadsden's departure (Langdon had left again) the Naval Committee was reduced to four men. Meanwhile, on 14 January, a shipload of recruits from Rhode Island had joined the fleet.

It will be recalled that Stephen Hopkins had set in motion the recruiting of sailors by a letter to the Brown brothers, sent by the sloop *Fly*. *Fly* arrived at Providence on 21 December with Hopkins' letter and the Browns set to work at once. The *Fly* sailed about 5 January and arrived at Philadelphia about 14 January with the recruits, which "highly pleased" the Naval Committee and gave "fresh Spirits to the whole Fleet." The next day the *Fly* took her forty sailors down to the fleet at Reedy Island.⁹⁴ Hopkins was so pleased with this sloop that he asked the Naval Committee to take her into Continental service as a tender. Congress so ordered on the 16th.⁹⁵ The next day her civilian master, Munroe, was drawing a few items of chandlery.⁹⁶

On 18 January the schooner *Unity* (Phineas Potter) sailed from Providence with about forty more recruits for the fleet, and a small cargo of whale oil and candles.⁹⁷

No sooner had *Fly* been taken into service than she joined the fleet at Liberty Island, still under her civilian master, Munroe. She began fitting out there, drawing more chandlery.⁹⁸ Her commander was left to Hopkins, and he offered it to John Paul Jones, who declined, thinking she was too small to have any future. Finally, First Lieutenant Hoysted Hacker of the *Cabot* was assigned to command the *Fly*, on 20 January 1776.⁹⁹ Apparently most of her crew were sailors enlisted in Rhode Island who sailed down to Philadelphia in the sloop. Her master was Robert Robinson, who enlisted on 3 January.¹⁰⁰ Third Lieutenant John Fanning was transferred to the *Fly* from the *Alfred* on 30 January.¹⁰¹

More good news was coming on the breeze for the weather was warming up. Warm enough for the fleet (now including sloops *Providence* and *Fly*) to drop down the river. The fleet cast off at

⁹³ NDAR, "Christopher Gadsden to Commodore Esek Hopkins," 3:805-807

⁹⁴ NDAR, "Samuel Ward to Governor Nicholas Cooke," 3:820 and note; "*Andrew Doria* Journal," 3:838-839

⁹⁵ NDAR, "Diary of Richard Smith," 3:820 and note

⁹⁶ NDAR, "Chandlery Supplied to the Continental Fleet," 3:1377-1391

⁹⁷ NDAR, "Nicholas Brown to Josiah Hewes," 3:915-916. This item was to Joseph, not Josiah, Hewes.

⁹⁸ NDAR, "Chandlery Supplied to the Continental Fleet," 3:848, 1377-1391; "Nicholas Brown to Stephen Hopkins," 3:238-239. The master's name is also spelled Munrow or Morrow.

⁹⁹ NDAR, "Articles of Enlistment for the Continental Navy," 3:888-891 and 891 note; "A List of the Seamen . . . [crew list of *Fly*]," 5:426-427

¹⁰⁰ NDAR, "A List of the Seamen . . . [crew list of *Fly*]," 5:426-427

¹⁰¹ NDAR, "A List of the Seamen . . . [crew list of *Fly*]," 5:426-427

0900 on 17 January, with a fresh wind from the northwest, and ran down through chunks of ice to Reedy Island. Here the river was still closed by ice. The fleet tied up at the piers at Reedy Island. Hopkins promptly put his crews to wooding and watering the vessels.¹⁰²

And here began a very bad time for the fleet. The desertion rate absolutely soared while the fleet was at Reedy Island. A contest developed between the lieutenants, forced to stand anchor watch; the crews, trying to escape the vessels; and the weather, which closed in again around lieutenants and crews alike. Now Jack Tar was used to bad weather, but the one thing which would tempt any man to desert was sickness aboard ship; and there was sickness in this fleet.

One of the first to be ill was Captain Whipple, who was being solicited after even before the fleet dropped down river.¹⁰³ There is the possibly revealing notice in *Alfred's* muster roll that two Marines were "left" at Philadelphia—they may have been ill. Another is listed as "dead" without a date being given. One Marine deserted on 29 January, one on 8 February, and a breath-taking twenty-two are simply listed as "Run at Reedy Island." The fleet remained at Reedy Island until 11 February, which meant that a man a day was leaving the *Alfred*.¹⁰⁴

The day after the fleet dropped down to Reedy Island the Naval Committee passed along the latest intelligence to Commodore Hopkins, noting there was no late information from Virginia, "except what you are well acquainted with." The Committee added "Should it be your fate to go Southward as far as Savanna," then Hopkins might capture three Royal Governors, as Martin, Campbell and Wright (North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, respectively) were reported to have collected there. There were no orders as such in this letter, which was signed by only three members of the Committee.¹⁰⁵ Although the Naval Committee had largely completed its business, except for paying the bills and presenting its accounts to Congress, it was left in charge of the fleet by a resolution of Congress on 26 January.¹⁰⁶

While the fleet lay at Reedy Island any remaining stores had to be carted down to it from Philadelphia. Powder was delivered in this way before 23 January.¹⁰⁷ *Fly* was with the fleet but was not completely fitted out. On 27 January Hopkins requested the Naval Committee to send the most essential of her supplies down by cart, for the river was still full of ice. Hopkins wanted her ready to sail if the fleet moved.¹⁰⁸ Three cartloads came down on the 30th, including swivel guns

¹⁰² NDAR, "Andrew Doria Journal," 3:838-839

¹⁰³ NDAR, "Christopher Gadsden to Commodore Esek Hopkins," 3:805-807

¹⁰⁴ NDAR, "A Roll of all the Officers and Men . . . [of] . . . Ship *Alfred*," 6:696-705

¹⁰⁵ NDAR, "Continental Naval Committee to Commodore Esek Hopkins," 3:847

¹⁰⁶ NDAR, "Journal of the Continental Congress," 3:979 and note

¹⁰⁷ NDAR, "Journal of the Continental Congress," 3:944

¹⁰⁸ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to the Naval Committee," 3:1017-1018 and 1018 note

for the *Fly*.¹⁰⁹

About 10 February Hopkins received some cheering news. A party of recruits for the Navy had arrived on the New Jersey shore of Delaware Bay. These men were from Connecticut. When Saltonstall left for Philadelphia he turned over the recruiting of sailors to his brother, Gurdon Saltonstall. Gurdon was assisted by Thomas Mumford and Nathaniel Shaw, Jr. of New London, who began fitting out vessels to carry the prospective recruits to the fleet. Mumford felt that there were good prospects for recruiting, for the Connecticut troops in the Continental Army were returning home (their time having expired on 8 December).¹¹⁰

The recruiting agents were also awaiting the return of Captain Elisha Hinman. He had been selected as First Lieutenant under Saltonstall.¹¹¹ Hinman had sailed for the French West Indies in July 1775, commanding a vessel of Nathaniel Shaw's, to obtain a cargo of gunpowder. He was expected to return any day.¹¹² About 24 December Hinman arrived at Bedford, Massachusetts from Cap Francois, Santo Domingo, with two tons of that precious commodity.¹¹³ Hinman gladly accepted the proffered lieutenantcy under Saltonstall. Gurdon Saltonstall was busily recruiting by 23 December.¹¹⁴ Meanwhile Deane had applied to the Connecticut authorities for use of the Connecticut Navy Schooner *Spy* to bring the recruits down to the fleet. The Connecticut Council of Safety turned down this request on 5 January.¹¹⁵ By 10 January Saltonstall had chartered the sloop *Lizard*, owned by Meredith Stewart (Joshua Hempstead, Jr., master) to take the recruits to Reedy Island. Stewart ordered his captain to proceed to New Bern, North Carolina after dropping off the sailors, unless Captain Saltonstall wanted to buy or lease the sloop for Continental service.¹¹⁶

On 13 January the men boarded the *Lizard*. First Lieutenant Hinman had raised forty-eight men, including one Samuel Slack, who was left behind ill with a fever and died on 23 January. Joining him aboard was Second Lieutenant Jonathan Maltbie with sixteen men and Master David Phipps with eighteen. Among these men were Charles Bulkeley and Peter Richards, who became midshipmen aboard the *Alfred*. The *Lizard* was equipped with six weeks provisions. Saltonstall

¹⁰⁹ NDAR, "Nathaniel Falconer to Commodore Esek Hopkins, Reedy Island," 3:1051-1052

¹¹⁰ NDAR, "Thomas Mumford to Silas Deane," 3:153 and note

¹¹¹ NDAR, "Thomas Mumford to Silas Deane," 3:153 and note; "Nathaniel Shaw, Jr., to Joseph Trumbull," 3:241

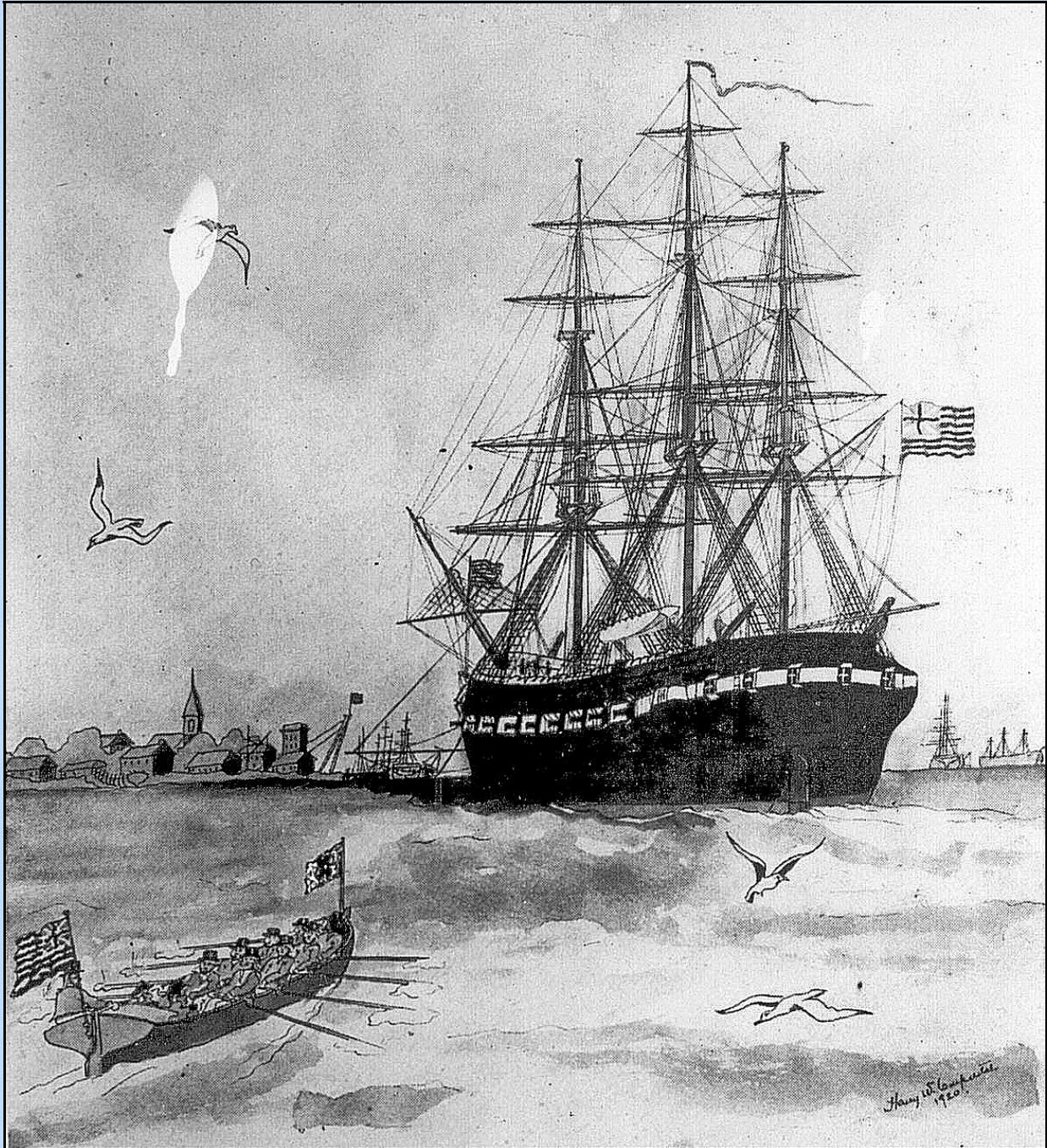
¹¹² NDAR, "Nathaniel Shaw, Jr., to Joseph Trumbull," 3:241; "Minutes of the Connecticut Council of Safety," 3:634

¹¹³ NDAR, "Minutes of the Connecticut Council of Safety," 3:634

¹¹⁴ NDAR, "Gurdon Saltonstall to the Connecticut Committee of the Pay Table," 3:215

¹¹⁵ NDAR, "Minutes of the Connecticut Council of Safety," 3:634

¹¹⁶ NDAR, "Meredith Stewart to Joshua Hempstead," 3:716



Alfred in the Delaware River, preparing to drop down the river. Painting by Harry W. Carpenter, 1920. National Archives.



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reported the recruiting cost \$1049. *Lizard* sailed from New London on 19 January.¹¹⁷

Apparently the voyage was rough and the *Lizard* landed her recruits in New Jersey. From there word was sent to the fleet. Hopkins ordered the men to report aboard the *Fly* on 10 February 1776, which he had sent down for the purpose of picking them up. They joined the fleet about 13 February. Hinman was assigned to the *Cabot* to succeed Hacker, and, possibly, Phipps was assigned to the same brig. Maltbie went to the *Alfred*.¹¹⁸

Hopkins got another grand gift about 10 February. The private recognition signals for British transports and warships had been captured off Boston in December 1775. Congress passed copies along to Hopkins as soon as they were received, on 9 February.¹¹⁹

The weather was breaking again and the fleet could move. The ships, brigs, and sloop cast off from the piers at Reedy Island at 1000 on 11 February, and the pilots took them through the chevaux-de-frise blocking the river. The fleet fell down the river through the last of the ice, and into the more open waters of Delaware Bay. They anchored at Whorekill Road, inside Cape Henlopen, Delaware.¹²⁰ Here the *Fly* rejoined from her mission to collect the Connecticut men.

Another reinforcement arrived at Whorekill Road on 13 February. The two vessels of the little Baltimore squadron, sloop *Hornet* and schooner *Wasp*, under command of Captain William Stone of the *Hornet*, arrived and joined the main fleet.¹²¹

On 14 February Hopkins issued very detailed signals for the fleet,¹²² and a formal order to each captain to keep company with the fleet, observe the signals, and, if separated, attempt to rejoin the fleet. If, after four days, the captain did not rejoin the fleet, he was to make for the southern part of Abaco, in the Bahama Islands.¹²³

About 16 February the captains of the fleet got together and signed an agreement¹²⁴ that, in effect, modified the laws established by Congress regarding prize shares. The captains agreed that all prizes taken were to be shared by the entire fleet, and captures by the fleet were to be shared

¹¹⁷ NDAR, "Colonel Gurdon Saltonstall to Silas Deane," 3:939-940 and 940 note

¹¹⁸ NDAR, "Narrative of Charles Bulkeley," 3:1088 and note; "Commodore Esek Hopkins to Lieutenant Elisha Hinman and Other Officers," 3:1206 and note

¹¹⁹ NDAR, "Journal of the Continental Congress," 3:1184-1185; "Diary of Richard Smith," 3:1185 and note

¹²⁰ NDAR, "*Andrew Doria* Journal," 3:1219

¹²¹ NDAR, "*Andrew Doria* Journal," 3:1219

¹²² NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins' Signals for the First Continental Fleet," 3:1287-1289 and 1289 note

¹²³ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to Captain Nicholas Biddle," 3:1291 and note

¹²⁴ NDAR, "Captain Nicholas Biddle to his Brother, James Biddle," 3:1307 and note

with separated vessels. If a vessel were lost in any way it was to share “equally” with the rest. Equally apparently meant vessel for vessel, without consideration of strength or number of crew involved. This agreement was to remain in effect for twelve months, and had to be endorsed by every crew member of every vessel.¹²⁵ This agreement was to cause no end of difficulties in the later distribution of prize money. John Paul Jones later said that “No man or private Society of men hath a Right to add to the Established laws of the land Yet . . . Individuals in the Navy have Assumed that Authority.”¹²⁶

As the fleet lay at anchor under Cape Henlopen on the night of 16 February, preparing to sail, the sailors and Marines were thinking the deep thoughts of men about to go out, perhaps to fight, perhaps to die. The stars were out and it was a “fine evening . . . quite calm.” There was no wind; Biddle likened the weather to summer. The young captain wrote a letter to his brother with his goodbyes and revealed a little of his apprehensions. However, Biddle said “I well know the Glorious Cause I am engaged in. And if ever I disgrace it May My Kind father who gave me being instantly Blast me in Mercy to me. I mean not to be desperate beyond measure. But to do my duty to the utmost of My Ability . . . And Never in my Life was better pleased with a trip I was going to take than I am with this.”¹²⁷

Biddle left a few comments about his brother officers that are worth noting. Hazard he thought “A Stout Man Very Vain and Ignorant—as much low cunning as Capacity.” Stone was a “Very Stout and Very Good kind of Man;” John B. Hopkins a “Good Naturd Man;” and Saltonstall “a Sensible indefatigable Morose Man.” He considered himself “a Mighty good Young Man.”¹²⁸

On the verge of sailing the fleet was as reasonably well manned and equipped as might be expected. Recruits and officers had been shifted about, and the deserters caught or escaped, as the case might be. The sickness aboard, smallpox according to later reports, continued to stalk the fleet. *Alfred* had a man die the day the fleet sailed, which put her crew, including officers and men, at 229 (168 sailors and 61 Marines).¹²⁹ The *Columbus* had a total crew of 151 officers and men (94 sailors and 57 Marines).¹³⁰ *Andrew Doria* reported 104 officers and men,¹³¹ but her muster roll indicates that there were 107 men aboard (71 sailors and 36 Marines).¹³² The *Cabot* perhaps had 133

¹²⁵ NDAR, “Articles of Enlistment for the Continental Navy,” 3:888-891 and 891 note

¹²⁶ NDAR, “Articles of Enlistment for the Continental Navy,” 3:888-891 and 891 note

¹²⁷ NDAR, “Captain Nicholas Biddle to his Brother, James Biddle,” 3:1307 and note

¹²⁸ NDAR, “Captain Nicholas Biddle to his Sister, Mrs. Lydia McFunn,” 3:1305-1306 and 1307 note

¹²⁹ NDAR, “A Roll of all the Officers and Men . . . [of] . . . Ship *Alfred*, 6:696-705

¹³⁰ NDAR, “Muster Roll . . . [of] . . . Ship *Columbus*,” 3:142-154

¹³¹ NDAR, “*Andrew Doria* Journal,” 3:1349

¹³² NDAR, “Account of Officers and Men Belonging to the Brigante *Andrew Doria* 1776,” 9:1007-1011

men aboard (90 sailors and 43 Marines) and *Providence* had a crew of 83 (62 sailors and 21 Marines).¹³³ *Hornet* had about 70 men,¹³⁴ and *Wasp* had a crew of 49 (44 sailors and 5 Marines).¹³⁵ Schooner *Fly* had no Marines in her crew of 25 sailors.¹³⁶ Approximately then, Hopkins had a total force of 847 men (including 223 Continental Marines) aboard his eight warships.

On 18 February 1776, the Commodore gave the signal for weighing anchor and the capstans began turning in the fleet. By 1300 the fleet was underway, going out past the American coast watchers on Cape Henlopen and meeting the open sea. The Naval Committee had consumed three and a half months in getting its fleet to sea.

Part II begins on the next page

¹³³ Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 45

¹³⁴ Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 45

¹³⁵ NDAR, "Watch List for Continental Schooner *Wasp*," 3:849 and note

¹³⁶ NDAR, "A List of the Seamen . . . [crew list of *Fly*]," 5:426-427



Part II, The New Providence Expedition

1. Hopkins's Plan: Blundering Wisdom, 17 February 1776

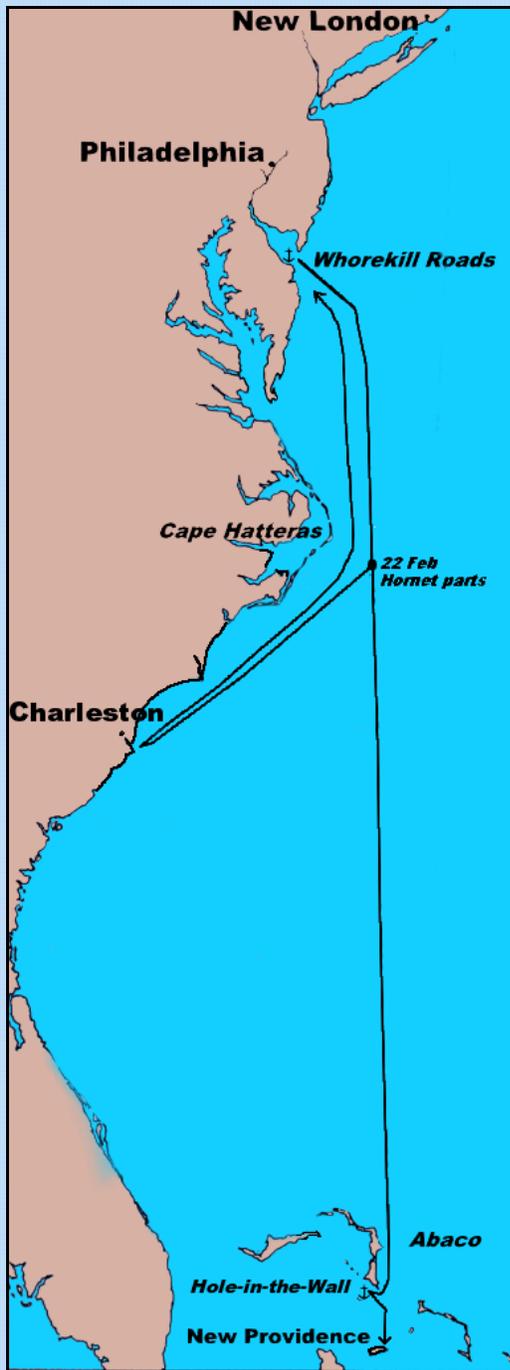
When Commander-in-Chief Esek Hopkins led his little converted fleet out to sea in the afternoon of 17 February 1776 he knew where he was going and why he was going there, but, except for the captains of the fleet, who were told to rendezvous at Great Abaco in the Bahama Islands in case of separation, no one else knew where or why. The Naval Committee thought he was going to Virginia, which is where he had been ordered to go. If he did not go there the Committee expected him to sail to the Carolinas or to Georgia, just as long as it was somewhere in the southern colonies. Action in the south was being demanded by all the southern delegates to Congress.

But that was not where Esek Hopkins was going. He was not going to Virginia, and probably just as well for his fleet: the British had collected two frigates and two sloops-of-war there, in addition to Dunmore's vessels. This concentration was at least partly the result of the many notices the British had received of the fitting out of the Continentals. Hopkins certainly knew the strength of the British at Virginia, and, from a strictly military point of view, wisely stayed away.

Long before Commodore Hopkins sailed, on 24 December 1775, Colonel Alexander McDougall of New York had written a letter of great interest to one of the New York delegates in Congress, John Jay. McDougall pointed out that the Americans, when fighting on land, and protected by fortifications against British discipline, had fared rather well. McDougall attributed this to their familiarity with musketry. However, it was different at sea: “. . . the Saylor's we have picked up for our Vessels, do not understand the use of Cannon, equal to those who are continually exercised with them on board the King's Ships, nor are they so attached to the Country, from connexions as our Soldiers are, besides many of the Saylor's have been taught, the Superiority of the British Navy officers, to all others in the world. Sir, There is no entrenching or covering behind Trees at Sea. Superior force or address only must determine the victory . . . You are not to measure your expectations of the Success of this Fleet, against the men of war, by the Success of our Troops against the King's, or the Success of our Cruizers against Transports . . . are we then never to send our armed Vessels against the men of war . . . Yes, But the first experiment, should not be made, where there is danger of the force being equal, before your officers and men are practised in Sea engagements . . . so much depends on address & preparation founded on experience, that I tremble for the consequences.”

McDougall then listed three things necessary for the fleet at the stormy time of year when it was setting out: (1) the vessels must have the ability to “carry a stiff sail;” (2) they must not be too





The Approach to New Providence, 1776.

deeply loaded; and (3) the officers and crew must be trained on the use of the cannon with powder (“One Ton of Powder however scarce it may be, properly expended in this way, will save Five in an engagement, if not save the Fleet . . .”). Finally, “New and hasty sea armaments meet cruising Ships, of near their Force on very unequal ground. The former is generally all confusion and not properly arranged; the Latter in order, and ready for action.”¹³⁷

It is possible, perhaps probable, that Hopkins shared some of these sentiments. If he did he saw fit not to disclose them. There was no military cost in avoiding the British force at Virginia, but there certainly was a political one. Officers who attain the rank of Admiral or Commodore, in any Navy, including a brand new one, are expected to be aware and cognizant of larger political factors and interests. Part of the price for southern support in creating a Continental Navy was that it would be a *national* force; that it would be used against the British naval forces in the south *first*, specifically Virginia. Hopkins could hardly have been ignorant of this fact. He steered straight for the Bahama Islands.

In his later report to John Hancock, Hopkins listed his reasons for going to the Bahamas: he had many sailors sick with smallpox, the storms at sea and their winds blew hard from the northeast, and “I did not think we were in a Condition to keep on a Cold Coast.” Hopkins made it seem he put to sea to avoid the lee shore (wind from the northeast). He stated he assigned the Great Abaco rendezvous after the fleet sailed (it was before), and ran down to the rendezvous after *Hornet* and *Fly* parted company. He said he went there to wait for the appointed fourteen days for the missing vessels to join him (he waited two), and decided to attack New Providence after he arrived.¹³⁸

It has been suggested that Hopkins may have had verbal orders to proceed to New Providence. That is

¹³⁷ NDAR, “Colonel Alexander McDougall to John Jay,” 3:225-226

¹³⁸ NDAR, “Commodore Esek Hopkins to John Hancock,” 4:735-736



unlikely: Adams, Langdon and Gadsden had departed Philadelphia before he sailed, but Hewes and R. H. Lee were still in town, in addition to brother Hopkins and Deane. That Lee of Virginia would have endorsed a change in orders for a fleet destined to punish Lord Dunmore seems very, very unlikely indeed. Moreover, in all the political fracas following the New Providence raid, Hopkins never once mentions a change in orders. However, there was knowledge available to Hopkins that made New Providence an attractive target: (1) there was much discussion in Philadelphia about the need for gunpowder which was in critically short supply, and (2), there was known to be a large supply at New Providence. In fact, a Congressional committee was studying methods of obtaining this powder. Hopkins then, in a wise and compelling military move, avoided the British squadron in Virginia to attack the relatively unprotected town of New Providence in the Bahamas, and committed a political blunder.

2. South to Grand Abaco, 17 February-1 March 1776

As the fleet sailed out between Cape Henlopen and Cape May and turned south the smallpox continued to stalk the fleet indeed. *Alfred* buried a man at sea on 18 February and the *Columbus* did the same the next day.¹³⁹ And the wind did continue strong from the northeast. By 19 February a large storm was blowing up, sending the fleet scudding in “Hard gales & thick Weather.”¹⁴⁰ Lieutenant Jones said the wind was a “Smart North East Wind.”¹⁴¹ In the fog and darkness night signals were set and the fleet continued south.

In the night of the 19th the storm picked up.¹⁴² When dawn came on 20 February, the *Fly* and the *Hornet* were no where to be seen.¹⁴³ These two straggled on after the fleet for two more days¹⁴⁴ when *Fly* and *Hornet* collided with one another in the tempestuous weather, and *Hornet* carried away her masthead and boom.¹⁴⁵ Stone broke off and headed for America to repair the damage, while *Fly*

¹³⁹ NDAR, “A Roll of all the Officers and Men . . . [of] . . . Ship *Alfred*,” 6:696-705; “Muster Roll . . . [of] . . . Ship *Columbus*,” 7:142-154

¹⁴⁰ NDAR, “Journal of Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle,” 4:134

¹⁴¹ NDAR, “Lieutenant John Paul Jones to Joseph Hewes,” 4:815-818 and 818 note; “Extract of a Letter from the Captain of Marines [Samuel Nicholas] on board the Ship *Alfred*, dated at New London, April 10, 1776,” 4:748-752 and 752 note

¹⁴² NDAR, “Lieutenant John Paul Jones to Joseph Hewes,” 4:815-818 and 818 note

¹⁴³ NDAR, “Journal of the Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle,” 4:134

¹⁴⁴ NDAR, “Journal of the Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle,” 4:373

¹⁴⁵ NDAR, “Henry Laurens to the North Carolina Council of Safety,” 4:431 and 431-432 note



The Continental Fleet at sea. From Left to right: brigs *Cabot* and *Andrew Doria*, ship *Alfred*, sloops *Hornet* and *Fly*, ship *Columbus*, sloop *Providence*, and schooner *Wasp*. Modern painting by Nowland Van Powell, from *The American Navies of the Revolutionary War*, 1975. For a larger image click [here](#).

steered for the rendezvous.¹⁴⁶

Stone steered for the nearest port that he thought was open: Charleston, South Carolina. The weather was still exceedingly stormy and the little sloop had a hard time of it, cruising off the Carolina coast and trying to land a boat to get a pilot. Finally a boat was sent off, upon which another storm broke and the *Hornet* was driven off the coast. Stone forgot the boat's crew and headed for the Delaware. His boat's crew got safely ashore, running into Santee River, and eventually up to Charleston. The colony treasurers paid to have the boat piloted up to town on 26 March.¹⁴⁷



Southwest Point, Grand Abaco. Hole-in-the-Wall used to be at the tip.

Nothing of further moment occurred as the fleet sailed south, down past the numerous Bahama Islands, low-laying brush covered sand spits with coral-fringed coastlines. The weather improved, becoming warm and typically sub-tropical; quite a

change from the ice and snow of the Delaware River.

The fleet was approaching the southwest portion of Grand Abaco on 1 March 1776, when *Columbus* dolefully buried another sailor.¹⁴⁸ The smallpox was still raging in the fleet, Hopkins reporting that four vessels were infected.¹⁴⁹ As the fleet was sailing down the coast two small vessels were sighted. Flagship *Alfred* quickly ran them down and secured them: the first prizes of the Continental fleet. They proved to be two sloops from New Providence.¹⁵⁰ By afternoon the fleet anchored in seventy-two feet of water on the southwest side of Grand Abaco,¹⁵¹ at a place

¹⁴⁶ NDAR, "Journal of the Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle," 4:373; "Henry Laurens to the North Carolina Council of Safety," 4:431 and 431-432 note

¹⁴⁷ NDAR, "Henry Laurens to the North Carolina Council of Safety," 4:431 and 431-432 note

¹⁴⁸ NDAR, "Muster Roll . . . [of] . . . Ship *Columbus*," 7:142-154

¹⁴⁹ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to John Hancock," 4:735-736

¹⁵⁰ NDAR, "Journal of Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle," 4:153; "John Brown to Lord George Germain," 4:1386-1387; many other references in NDAR, volume 4.

¹⁵¹ NDAR, "Journal of the Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle," 4:134

called Hole-in-the-Wall.¹⁵² Captain of Marines Nicholas described the voyage as a “pleasant passage” of fifteen days.¹⁵³

Hole-in-the-Wall has not changed much in the last two centuries. In 1776 there were no people, and in now there are very few. The place is named for a sailor’s landmark, a natural formation of a rock wall running into the sea, with a hole cut in it. Ashore the land was covered with scrubby looking pines and flocks of parrots. It looks the same today, but the hole has been carried away by the sea.



Hole-in-the-Wall as it used to look.

At Hole-in-the-Wall Hopkins interrogated the skippers of the captured sloops. They informed him that there were no troops at New Providence. Hopkins, according to his own statement later, and supported by the statements of others, now formed a plan to assault and capture New Providence town (Nassau).¹⁵⁴

3. *New Providence and the Bahama Islands, 1775*

From Southwest Point on Great Abaco the town of New Providence (known today as Nassau) lies fifty-five miles to the southwest, by passage through the Northeast Providence Channel. New Providence was (as Nassau now is) the capital of the Bahamas, located on the northern side of eighty square mile New Providence Island. The island was broken by lakes and swamps, and covered by pine forests and brush, with a low range of hills in the northern part.

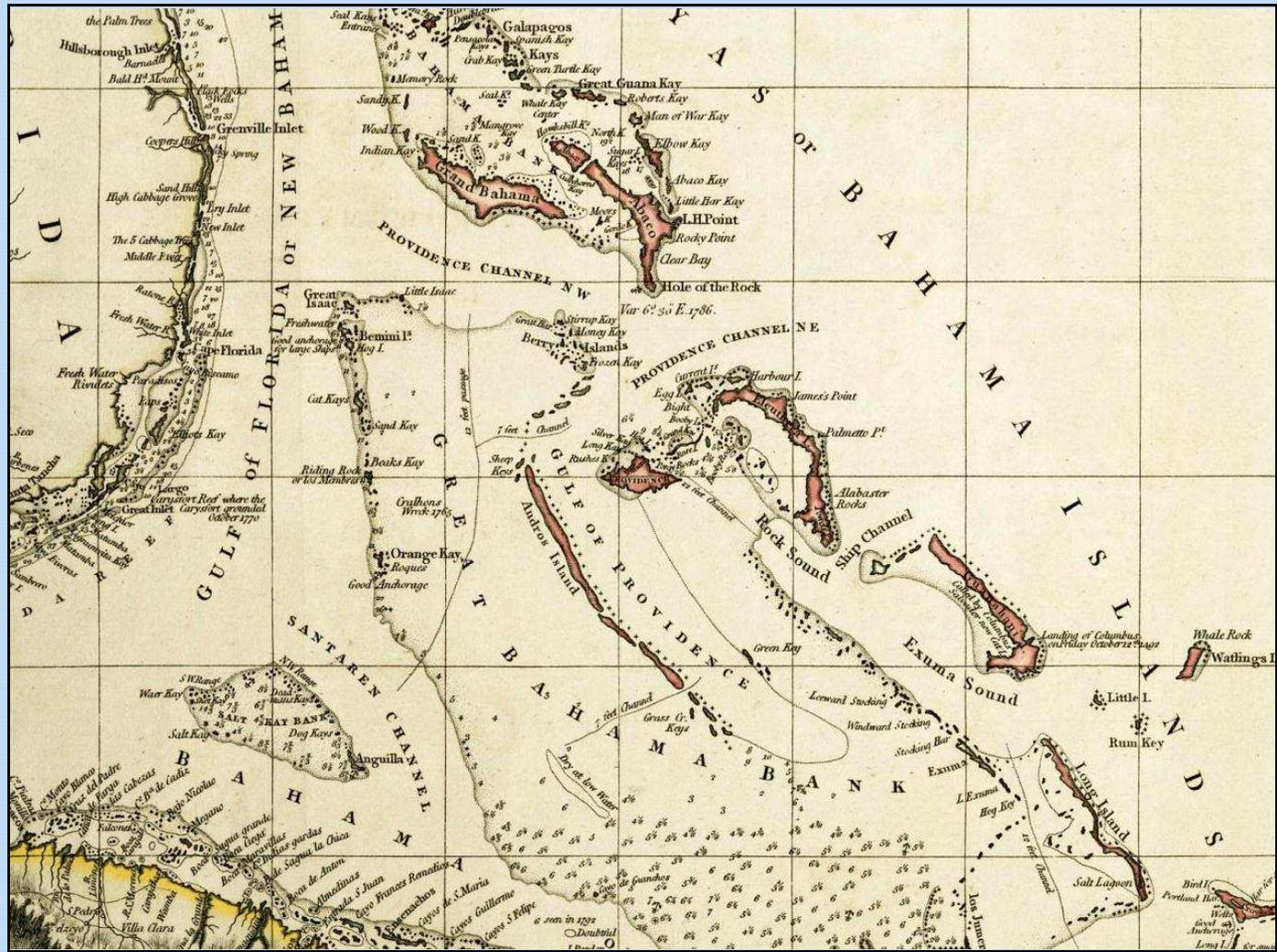
¹⁵² Morison, *John Paul Jones*, 45

¹⁵³ NDAR, “Extract of a Letter from the Captain of Marines [Samuel Nicholas] on board the Ship *Alfred*, dated at New London, April 10, 1776,” 4:748-752 and 752 note

¹⁵⁴ NDAR, “Journal Prepared for the King of France by John Paul Jones,” 4:133-134; “Extract of a Letter from the Captain of Marines [Samuel Nicholas] on board the Ship *Alfred*, dated at New London, April 10, 1776,” 4:748-752 and 752 note



New Providence was a tiny place in 1775, built of wooden houses scattered along a single street next to the water. The houses were surrounded by trees, shrubs and gardens. The only public buildings were the Assembly house, jail, and church. The inhabitants consisted of a few planters, government officials, and many merchants



Detail from an 1803 map of the Bahama Islands. Hole in the Wall is shown as Hole in the Rock. Directly across the Northeast Providence Channel is New Providence Island and the town of Nassau.

and others associated with fishing, boat-building and shipping.¹⁵⁵

The harbor was excellent, located behind the long Hog Island (now Paradise Island) and thus protected from northern and southern winds. Two passages led to the anchorage off the town, one from the west, and another from the east, through a passage called The Narrows, between Hog and Athol Islands. Two forts protected these passages: Fort Nassau to the west, a square, palisaded stone fort with two bastions; and Fort Montagu to the east, a small, square, stone redoubt. These forts were both in great disrepair. Although Nassau mounted forty-six cannon it was feared that if they were fired the walls would collapse. Montagu mounted seventeen guns, and was in better condition than Nassau.¹⁵⁶

As for other defenses there were almost none. British Army troops had been withdrawn to North America., leaving only the local militia, perhaps two or three hundred men, for land operations. Half of these men were usually absent on daily occupations.¹⁵⁷ The only Royal Navy force was HM Schooner *St. John* (Lieutenant William Grant), which was being cleaned and repaired in the harbor,¹⁵⁸ and only mounted six cannon and twelve swivels, with a crew of thirty men.¹⁵⁹ The Bahamas were a typical British colony, with a Royal Governor, Montfort Browne, a Council, and an Assembly. Browne was rather lacking in leadership. The people of the islands included many American sympathizers, but not very many active ones.

Early in the war both Graves and Gage became concerned about the munitions stored at New Providence. On 5 September 1775 HM Sloop *Falcon* (Captain John Linzee) sailed from Boston with two British Army transports, bound to New Providence with the mission of removing the munitions¹⁶⁰ and withdrawing the garrison of one company of the 14th Regiment.¹⁶¹ Linzee brought a letter from General Gage, reporting that the Americans were planning an expedition to the island to seize the powder and ordnance store there.¹⁶² When the three ship task force arrived the governor was absent. The president of the Council, with the Council's concurrence, declined (28 September) to permit the stores to be shipped.¹⁶³ The Council cited the vulnerability of the town to Spanish and French incursions, and (the real reason, one suspects) possible "dangerous

¹⁵⁵ Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 48

¹⁵⁶ Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 48-49

¹⁵⁷ Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 48

¹⁵⁸ NDAR, "Journal of H.M. Schooner *St. John*, Lieutenant William Grant," 4:173-175

¹⁵⁹ NDAR, "List of British Ships of War at or Going to America," 4:1090-1093

¹⁶⁰ NDAR, "Vice Admiral Samuel Graves to Philip Stephens," 2:29-31

¹⁶¹ NDAR, "John Brown to Vice Admiral Clark Gayton," 4:461-464

¹⁶² Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 46

¹⁶³ NDAR, "John Brown to Captain John Linzee, H.M.S. *Falcon*," 2:236



Insurrections among our Slaves.”¹⁶⁴ By 18 October 1775 the three vessels were back at Boston.¹⁶⁵ Meanwhile the Admiralty became concerned and ordered, on 19 October, that Graves station one of the small vessels of his fleet in the islands.¹⁶⁶ Graves received these orders on 30 December.¹⁶⁷ This order was repeated to Vice Admiral Molyneux Shuldham on 16 January 1776.¹⁶⁸

The Americans in Philadelphia knew of the visit of the three ships, that the garrison had been withdrawn, and that the munitions were still there, by 8 November 1775, when that information was published in the newspapers.¹⁶⁹ Enough interest was found for obtaining the powder at New Providence to cause Congress to order the Secret Committee to come up with a plan for getting hold of it. On 16 January 1776 the Secret Committee reported that a sloop, the *Lady Catherine*, had been furnished with a cargo valued at \$3233.20 by Willing, Morris & Co. (on Continental account). Congress told the Secret Committee to give the skipper any necessary orders.¹⁷⁰ Apparently the Secret Committee was going to attempt to purchase the gunpowder.

The British had, on the outbreak of the war, two vessels stationed to cover the Bahama Islands and East Florida. Both spent most of their time at New Providence. In late August 1775 HM Sloop *Savage* was withdrawn to Boston, leaving the *St. John* to cover the sleepy settlement.

4. Warnings and Plans, 25 February-2 March 1776

On 25 February 1776 (eight days after the Continental fleet sailed from the Delaware), a Captain Andrew Law arrived at New Providence. He was associated with the British Army in some way and brought information for the governor: a “considerable squadron,” assembling in Delaware Bay, was destined for New Providence. Browne urged Law to keep the information secret until the Council was assembled. Browne never called the Council together. Who was Law, and where did he get his information, which was uncannily correct and timely? Perhaps he knew of the plans in Congress concerning New Providence and connected them with the fitting out of the fleet. Perhaps he heard sailor’s talk in the lower Delaware while he was waiting to sail.¹⁷¹

Nor was Law’s message the only warning. The American fleet had been sighted on the

¹⁶⁴ Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 46

¹⁶⁵ NDAR, “Narrative of Vice Admiral Samuel Graves,” 2:519

¹⁶⁶ NDAR, “Lords Commissioners of the British Admiralty to Vice Admiral Samuel Graves,” 2:758-760

¹⁶⁷ NDAR, “Vice Admiral Samuel Graves to Philip Stephens,” 3:573-574

¹⁶⁸ NDAR, “George Jackson to Vice Admiral Molyneux Shuldham,” 3:510-511

¹⁶⁹ NDAR, “*Pennsylvania Gazette*, Wednesday, November 8, 1775,” 2:940

¹⁷⁰ NDAR, “Journal of the Continental Congress,” 3:818

¹⁷¹ Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 46

afternoon of 28 February as it stood in to the land from the northeast. Captain George Dorsett had been bound on a whaling cruise, passing near Great Abaco, when he sighted the fleet of eight sail. Dorsett thought they were bound to New Providence and immediately put about to warn the town. He arrived in the morning of 1 March and informed Browne. Once again the bearer of the news was asked to keep silent until the Council was called. Once again the Council was never summoned.¹⁷²

HM Schooner *St. John* was anchored in the harbor off Fort Nassau when another warning arrived. A vessel came in from Great Abaco on the morning of 2 March with news that the fleet was under sail and standing for New Providence. Grant recorded that the fleet consisted of two ships, two brigs, three sloops and a schooner, and that they were supposed to be en route to New Providence to obtain the munitions there. This was a very precise report.¹⁷³ Still, nothing was done.

The Americans had meanwhile made their plans: the Marines would be transferred to the prize sloops, and be kept below decks. The total landing force would be about 230 Marines.¹⁷⁴ The prize sloops would enter the harbor at New Providence, anchor near the forts, and, when opportunity presented itself, “land Instantly & take possession before the Island could be Alarmed,”¹⁷⁵ for the forts were not garrisoned. The fleet would provide distant cover, so as not to alarm the town.¹⁷⁶ The transfers began on the evening of 2 March,¹⁷⁷ the *Andrew Doria* putting Craig’s Marines aboard the sloop *Providence* and the other Marines of the fleet going aboard the captured sloops.¹⁷⁸

5. Invasion, 3-4 March 1776

The fleet sailed from Great Abaco in the darkness of early morning on 3 March,¹⁷⁹ steering southeast and south southeast for New Providence Island. *Andrew Doria* seems to have gotten in front of the fleet, and sighted New Providence Island at a distance of nine miles, bearing south

¹⁷² Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 48

¹⁷³ NDAR, “Journal of His Majesty’s Schooner *St. John*, Lieutenant William Grant,” 4:173-175

¹⁷⁴ NDAR, “Extract of a Letter from the Captain of Marines [Samuel Nicholas] on board the Ship *Alfred*, dated at New London, April 10, 1776,” 4:748-752 and 752 note

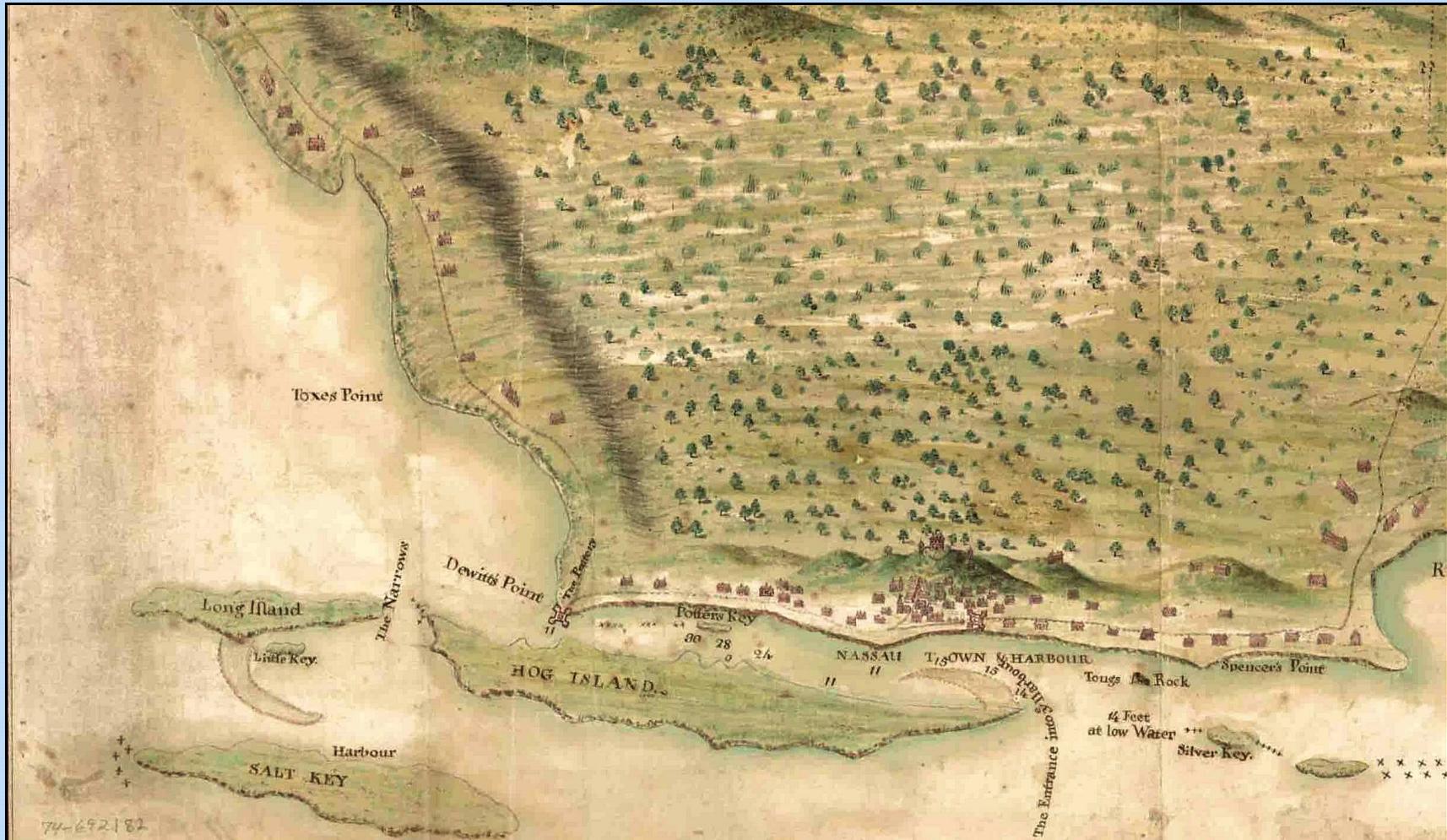
¹⁷⁵ NDAR, “Lieutenant John Paul Jones to Joseph Hewes,” 4:815-818 and 818 note

¹⁷⁶ NDAR, “Journal Prepared for the King of France by John Paul Jones,” 4:133-134

¹⁷⁷ NDAR, “Extract of a Letter from the Captain of Marines [Samuel Nicholas] on board the Ship *Alfred*, dated at New London, April 10, 1776,” 4:748-752 and 752 note

¹⁷⁸ NDAR, “Journal of the Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle,” 4:153; “Extract of a Letter from the Captain of Marines [Samuel Nicholas] on board the Ship *Alfred*, dated at New London, April 10, 1776,” 4:748-752 and 752 note

¹⁷⁹ NDAR, “Journal of the Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle,” 4:153; “Extract of a Letter from the Captain of Marines [Samuel Nicholas] on board the Ship *Alfred*, dated at New London, April 10, 1776,” 4:748-752 and 752 note



Detail from a map of New Providence between 1700 and 1750. North is to the bottom. Fort Montague was marked as the Battery, Fort Nassau is on the beach in town. Government House is on the hill overlooking the town.

southeast. Biddle lowered sail and cruised about, waiting for the fleet to catch up.¹⁸⁰

The two sloops and the *Providence* were sent ahead to enter the harbor, but, unfortunately for the Americans, the fleet's big vessels were sighted in the distance, when they appeared suddenly¹⁸¹ to windward "of the Bar of the Harbour."¹⁸² Grant's sailors saw them from the masthead,¹⁸³ and alarm guns were fired from the forts.¹⁸⁴ Surprise was now impossible.

Lieutenant Jones had been interrogating the New Providence pilots picked up from the two captured sloops. They informed Jones that there was a good anchorage nine miles to the windward under the shelter of a small key. Jones informed Hopkins, who expressed distrust of these British pilots. Jones took the pilots up to the fore-topmast head, from which the immediate danger of the coral reefs could be clearly seen. From here the squadron was safely guided to the anchorage,¹⁸⁵ Hanover Sound (or Bay).¹⁸⁶ By 0700¹⁸⁷ the fleet had anchored in twenty-four feet of water, close by Rose Island.¹⁸⁸ To the British it seemed that the fleet "suddenly tacked, and made to the Eastward."¹⁸⁹

Hopkins called a council of war to determine the next move.¹⁹⁰ He suggested sailing around to the western side of the island and landing the Marines there, allowing them to march on the town from the back. There was however, no road to the town from the western side of the island, and a landing there would give the militia time to collect and resist the landings or march.

¹⁸⁰ NDAR, "Journal of the Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle," 4:153

¹⁸¹ NDAR, "John Brown to Lord George Germain," 4:1386-1387

¹⁸² NDAR, "John Brown to Vice Admiral Clark Gayton," 4:461-464; "John Brown to Lord George Germain," 4:1386-1387

¹⁸³ NDAR, "Journal of His Majesty's Schooner *St. John*, 3:173-175; "Journal Prepared for the King of France by John Paul Jones," 4:133-134

¹⁸⁴ NDAR, "Journal Prepared for the King of France by John Paul Jones," 4:133-134; "Lieutenant John Paul Jones to Joseph Hewes," 4:815-818 and 818 note; "John Brown to Lord George Germain," 4:1386-1387

¹⁸⁵ NDAR, "Journal Prepared for the King of France by John Paul Jones," 4:133-134

¹⁸⁶ NDAR, "John Brown to Vice Admiral Clark Gayton," 4:461-464; "Journal of H.M. Schooner *St. John*, Lieutenant William Grant," 4:173-175

¹⁸⁷ NDAR, "Journal of H.M. Schooner *St. John*, Lieutenant William Grant," 4:173-175

¹⁸⁸ NDAR, "Journal of Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle," 4:153 and note

¹⁸⁹ NDAR, "John Brown to Lord George Germain," 4:1386-1387; "John Brown to Vice Admiral Clark Gayton," 4:461-464; "Lieutenant John Paul Jones to Joseph Hewes," 4:815-818 and 818 note

¹⁹⁰ NDAR, "Journal Prepared for the King of France by John Paul Jones," 4:133-134



There was also no anchorage on the western side.¹⁹¹

Meanwhile, there was uproar in New Providence. When the American fleet appeared off the harbor in the dawn, the harbor pilot had run to Governor Browne's residence, Government House. Hastily Browne, standing in his nightshirt, looked out the door and saw the fleet off the harbor. He ordered the Council assembled at once, to meet him at Fort Nassau. About a quarter of an hour later, with most of the Council collected at Fort Nassau,¹⁹² the Governor ordered three alarm guns sounded:¹⁹³ two of the three gun carriages collapsed on firing, but it was enough to alarm Hopkins.¹⁹⁴

At 0700, just as the fleet was anchoring in Hanover Bay, the highly respected Council member Samuel Gambier rode into Fort Nassau. He found the drummers beating the long roll to assemble the militia and the Governor, still wearing only his nightshirt, conferring with Captain William Chambers of the *Mississippi Packet*, a merchant vessel anchored in the harbor with a cargo of lumber. Browne was considering shipping off the colony's powder in the *Mississippi Packet*. Gambier suggested that the powder was necessary to defend the forts and the town and that preparations for defense should be begun, as time was short.¹⁹⁵ The majority of the militia assembled at Fort Nassau, with their commander, Major Robert Sterling.¹⁹⁶

Next, Gambier suggested sending Chambers out to reconnoiter the American fleet; an idea that was quickly adopted. Chambers hurried away to perform this task. Gambier proposed that a detachment of militia occupy Fort Montagu and the militia roll be called to inspect arms and ammunition. Fewer than thirty men had gathered as yet, most without arms or with unfit weapons.¹⁹⁷ By this time Lieutenant Grant had arrived to participate in the Council. After much discussion he was ordered to get his equipment and stores aboard and bring *St. John* down to the town.¹⁹⁸ By 0900 a detachment of thirty men¹⁹⁹ under Lieutenant John Pratt was on its way to Fort Montagu. Chambers had returned, unable to get the *Mississippi Packet* out of the harbor because

¹⁹¹ NDAR, "Journal Prepared for the King of France by John Paul Jones," 4:133-134

¹⁹² Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 49

¹⁹³ NDAR, "Thomas Atwood to Lord Dartmouth," 4:464-467 and 467 note

¹⁹⁴ Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 49

¹⁹⁵ Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 49

¹⁹⁶ NDAR, "John Brown to Lord George Germain," 4:1386-1387; "John Brown to Vice Admiral Clark Gayton," 4:461-464; "Lieutenant John Paul Jones to Joseph Hewes," 4:815-818 and 818 note; Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 48-49

¹⁹⁷ Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 49; NDAR, "Thomas Atwood to Lord Dartmouth," 4:464-467 and 467 note

¹⁹⁸ NDAR, "Journal of H.M. Schooner *St. John*, Lieutenant William Grant," 4:173-175

¹⁹⁹ NDAR, "Thomas Atwood to Lord Dartmouth," 4:464-467 and 467 note



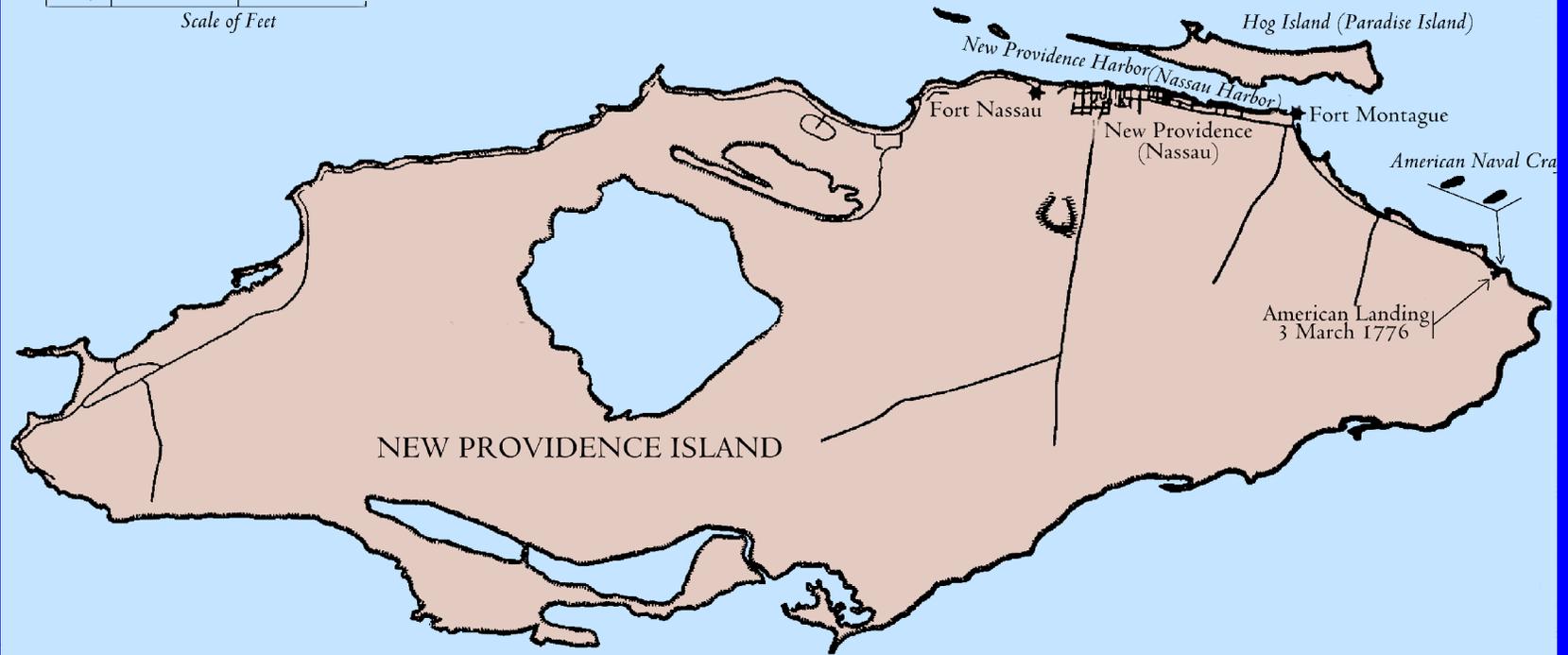
New Providence Raid, March 1776. Oil painting on canvas by V. Zveg, 1973, depicting Continental sailors and Marines landing on New Providence Island, Bahamas, on 3 March 1776. Their initial objective, Fort Montagu, is in the left distance. Close off shore are the small vessels used to transport the landing force to the vicinity of the beach. They are (from left to right): two captured sloops, schooner *Wasp* and sloop *Providence*. The other ships of the American squadron are visible in the distance. Courtesy of the U.S. Navy Art Collection, Washington, D.C. U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command Photograph Photo #: NH 79419-KN (color). For a much larger image click [here](#)



Another version of the first landing by Marines. This one by Charles Waterhouse, titled "Landing at New Providence, 3 March 1776." From Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 38-39. For a larger vesion click [here](#).

THE ASSAULT ON NEW PROVIDENCE

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Scale of Feet



of adverse winds and swells.²⁰⁰ As more men had arrived the Council dispatched another thirty militia under Lieutenant Burke to Fort Montagu, and these arrived about 1000.²⁰¹ Browne excused himself, to return home and get dressed.²⁰²

Hopkins's council had by now come up with another landing plan. A landing on the eastern shore of the island, followed by the seizure of Fort Montagu, the "back door" to New Providence, was suggested. The Marines were reinforced by fifty sailors under Second Lieutenant Thomas Weaver of the *Cabot*, who was familiar with the area.²⁰³ The two captured sloops and the *Providence* would land the men, under cover of the *Wasp*.²⁰⁴

Just as Grant was getting *St. John* under way to take his station he received a letter from Governor Browne. The anchorage of the American fleet suggested a landing attempt to the east, and Grant was directed to place the *St. John* so as to "Stop the Channel Off the East Fort." Grant found the going difficult as the wind and tide were against him, but finally got in position about 1200. While Grant was getting his schooner in position his lookouts reported the American sloops schooners were under sail.²⁰⁵ The four bigger vessels remained anchored in Hanover Bay.²⁰⁶

About this time Grant received another letter from the Governor directing him to drop down to the town, and moor *St. John* near the upper end of the town, "Head and stern within Pistol shot of the Shore." Grant's crew started filling powder cartridges, loading muskets and bringing up hand grenades. At 1300 Grant saw the four American small craft head into the eastern channel and come to, about seven miles east of Fort Montagu.²⁰⁷ The *Providence* and *Wasp* anchored²⁰⁸ and began off loading the Marines into whaleboats.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁰ NDAR, "John Brown to Vice Admiral Clark Gayton," 4:461-464

²⁰¹ Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 50; NDAR, "Thomas Atwood to Lord Dartmouth," 4:464-467 and 467 note

²⁰² Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 49

²⁰³ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to John Hancock," 4:735-736

²⁰⁴ Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 50; NDAR, "Journal of Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle," 4:153 and note; "Journal Prepared for the King of France by John Paul Jones," 4:133-134

²⁰⁵ NDAR, "Journal of H.M. Schooner *St. John*, Lieutenant William Grant," 4:173-175; "Journal of Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle," 4:153 and note

²⁰⁶ NDAR, "John Brown to Lord George Germain," 4:1386-1387

²⁰⁷ NDAR, "Journal of H.M. Schooner *St. John*, Lieutenant William Grant," 4:173-175

²⁰⁸ NDAR, "John Brown to Lord George Germain, 4:1386-1387

²⁰⁹ Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 50; NDAR, "Extract of a Letter from the Captain of Marines [Samuel Nicholas] on board the Ship *Alfred*, dated at New London, April 10, 1776," 4:748-752 and 752 note

The Americans were a little closer than Grant estimated they were. About 1400²¹⁰ the landing party came ashore in the whaleboats at “The Creek,”²¹¹ two miles east of Fort Montagu, and near the small village of New Guinea, inhabited by free blacks and mulattoes. These people thought the invaders were Spaniards and panicked, having visions of being sold into slavery. The “inhabitants . . . were soon undeceived, after our landing,”²¹² and the Marines quickly formed up for the march to Fort Montagu.²¹³ First Lieutenant Trevett took command of one company,²¹⁴ and First Lieutenant Dayton of another.²¹⁵



Manuscript map dated 1779. From *Marines in the Revolution*, 1974.

When the American landing force was sighted in the whaleboats, making for the beach, Pratt ordered Burke and Lieutenant Judkin to take their party of men down to the beach, reconnoiter the situation, and prevent the landing, if possible. When the British militia arrived at the beachhead the Americans were ashore in strength, so Burke sent a flag of truce to them to find out what they wanted.²¹⁶ The reply was that the Americans had come by order of “the Congress

²¹⁰ NDAR, “Extract of a Letter from the Captain of Marines [Samuel Nicholas] on board the Ship *Alfred*, dated at New London, April 10, 1776,” 4:748-752 and 752 note

²¹¹ NDAR, “Thomas Atwood to Lord Dartmouth,” 4:464-467 and 467 note

²¹² NDAR, “Extract of a Letter from the Captain of Marines [Samuel Nicholas] on board the Ship *Alfred*, dated at New London, April 10, 1776,” 4:748-752 and 752 note

²¹³ Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 50

²¹⁴ NDAR, “Journal of Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle,” 4:153 and note

²¹⁵ NDAR, “Journal of Lieutenant John Trevett,” 4:175

²¹⁶ NDAR, “Extract of a Letter from the Captain of Marines [Samuel Nicholas] on board the Ship *Alfred*, dated at New London, April 10, 1776,” 4:748-752 and 752 note

of the United Colonies, in order to possess themselves of the Powder and Stores belonging to His Majesty." Thus informed, Burke retreated back toward Fort Montagu.²¹⁷

Meanwhile, *St. John* had finally gotten a pilot aboard, at 1400, and was moving to the upper end of the town. She anchored within pistol shot of the only road that entered the town on that side, and the road down which the invaders must march. Grant called all hands to quarters, and loaded up with double round and grape shot. He was ready to fight.²¹⁸

When the Americans landed at The Creek, the Governor still had not returned to Fort Nassau. The Council ordered Major Sterling to march to Fort Montagu with the additional men collected, about eighty all together. As the men assembled to march the Governor arrived, apologizing for being late, and claiming he had been detained by a "violent fit of Cholick." A brief Council session was held and the letter to Grant was issued. Then the Governor took command of the militia column and set out for Fort Montagu.²¹⁹

When Browne arrived at Fort Montagu he was informed of the reconnaissance party down the beach. He sent a reinforcement of forty men and three officers after them. This group moved off down the beach and soon encountered Burke and Judkin retreating, upon which the whole group fell back to the fort. The Governor now ordered three guns fired upon the advancing Americans,²²⁰ "which did no execution." It was thought advisable to withdraw from Fort Montagu to Fort Nassau. While spiking the guns²²¹ and removing the powder²²² Burke was sent out again to inquire of the invaders who they were and what their business was.²²³

As the Americans marched down the beach and approached the fort, Fort Montagu opened fire. About fifteen or twenty cannon, 18-pounders, were fired at the Americans, perhaps at extreme range, producing no casualties of any sort.²²⁴ Nicholas says the fort fired three 12-pounders as the Americans approached within a mile. The march at that point was hazardous: there was a very dense thicket above the beach and a detour around a deep cove exposed the Marines in full view of the fort. Nicholas called a halt to send in a flag of truce to again state the object of the

²¹⁷ Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 50; NDAR, "Thomas Atwood to Lord Dartmouth," 4:464-467 and 467 note

²¹⁸ NDAR, "Journal of H.M. Schooner *St. John*, Lieutenant William Grant," 4:173-175

²¹⁹ Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 50

²²⁰ Other reports indicate five guns were fired: NDAR, "A Letter from St. Kitts, dated April 20," 3:1183; "Commodore Esek Hopkins to John Hancock," 4:735-736

²²¹ NDAR, "John Brown to Vice Admiral Clark Gayton," 4:461-464; quote from "Thomas Atwood to Lord Dartmouth," 4:464-467 and 467 note; "Extract of a Letter from the Captain of Marines [Samuel Nicholas] on board the Ship *Alfred*, dated at New London, April 10, 1776," 4:748-752 and 752 note

²²² NDAR, "John Brown to Vice Admiral Clark Gayton," 4:461-464

²²³ NDAR, "John Brown to Vice Admiral Clark Gayton," 4:461-464

²²⁴ NDAR, "Journal of Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle," 4:153 and note



expedition.²²⁵ About this same time Lieutenant Trevett saw an officer coming down the beach: "I went up to him to know what he wanted. He informed me that Gov. Brown would wish to know who we were what our business was. we soon gave him his answer, and the first fort stopped firing . . ." ²²⁶



Fort Montague as restored today.

It was just now that most of the Governor's later critics claimed that the Americans could have been stopped. An ambush along the road down which the Americans were marching, and defensive earthworks blocking the road would have stopped the column, according to the critics. Several Americans stated later that they would have surrendered if fired on from the woods. Another observer noted they were ill prepared for attack: no field-pieces, battering cannon, or scaling ladders, "nor so much as an Ax to have made a gap in our Pallisades . . . nor one armed vessel had

they steering along shore to cover them." This observer also noted "the miserable figure the Enemies did Cut."²²⁷ But perhaps the latter comment was imposed by the result. Another observer later said the Marines marched "as regular and made as fine an Appearance as any Troops he ever saw."²²⁸

After withdrawing from Fort Montagu, Browne returned to Government House on the only available saddled horse, where he remained for several hours. The militia moved out and then scattered to their homes. Only about half collected later at Fort Nassau.²²⁹ Grant was stunned when, at 1500, he "saw the Rebel Army take Fort Montagu and the Malitia march out."²³⁰

6. Council Meeting and Surrender, 3-4 March 1776

As the evening darkened and the light fled from golden beaches and the green scrub on the hills of the island the final steps to close the day's activities were taken. The Continental Marines in Fort Montagu posted their sentries, and sat down to refresh themselves, having been crammed

²²⁵ NDAR, "Extract of a Letter from the Captain of Marines [Samuel Nicholas] on board the Ship *Alfred*, dated at New London, April 10, 1776," 4:748-752 and 752 note

²²⁶ NDAR, "Journal of Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle," 4:153 and note

²²⁷ Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 51-52 quoting William Taylor to Lord Germain.

²²⁸ NDAR, "*Public Advertiser*, Wednesday, May 15, 1776," 3:1127

²²⁹ Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 51, 52

²³⁰ NDAR, "Journal of H.M. Schooner *St. John*, Lieutenant William Grant," 4:173-175

in small vessels for a day and a half, then landing on the beach, and marching to the fort, all without a chance to sleep or eat.²³¹ Nicholas sent out an intelligence report to Hopkins that some 200 men were gathered at Fort Montagu. Seeking to undermine resistance, Hopkins caused a manifesto to be circulated.²³² The manifesto stated that the Americans had come after the military stores and “. . . if I [Hopkins] am not Opposed in putting my design in Execution the Persons and Property of the Inhabitants Shall be Safe. Neither shall they be Suffered to be hurt in Case they make no Resistance.”²³³ Not long after this the British saw Hopkins’ manifesto being “handed about amongst the People to the Eastward of the Town . . . which induced several of the Inhabitants to refuse coming to defend the Fort & others to join the Rebels.”²³⁴

Governor Browne recovered his courage about 1500 and returned to Fort Nassau. Here he apparently set about trying to secure a feasible military position. It was remembered that Government House was fortified with two 4-pounders, which commanded Fort Nassau and the town. From a position there musketry could sweep the fort’s guns and prevent men from operating them.²³⁵ A detachment of forty men under Captain Thomas Hodgson and Ensign Barrett was sent off to occupy Government House. A proclamation was also issued offering a free pistol to every free black and any others who would rally to Fort Nassau.²³⁶

Once again the Council requested Grant to move the *St. John*, dropping back to cover the entrance to Fort Nassau. Grant obligingly slipped his cable and sailed down to Fort Nassau. In trying to anchor there the schooner got ashore. A tedious warping job followed before the schooner floated. Conditions were not good, ashore or afloat: “The Vessels being all in confusion and deserting, the inhabitants of the Town all took refuge in the Fort in the utmost confusion.” By 2230 the *St. John* was moored, broadside to the gates of the fort, and within “half a Pistol shot.”²³⁷

Meanwhile, Hopkins’ manifesto was having the desired effect: “a Spirit of Disaffection shewed itself amongst the Inhabitants many of them declaring they wo’d not fight against the Americans.” By 2000 there were no more than a hundred men in the fort, including Governor, Council, officers and slaves.²³⁸

²³¹ NDAR, “Extract of a Letter from the Captain of Marines [Samuel Nicholas] on board the Ship *Alfred*, dated at New London, April 10, 1776,” 4:748-752 and 752 note

²³² NDAR, “Commodore Esek Hopkins to John Hancock,” 4:735-736

²³³ NDAR, “Copy of the Manifesto Sent Onshore at New Providence,” 4:152

²³⁴ NDAR, “John Brown to Vice Admiral Clark Gayton,” 4:461-464

²³⁵ NDAR, “Thomas Atwood to Lord Dartmouth,” 4:464-467 and 467 note; Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 52

²³⁶ NDAR, “Thomas Atwood to Lord Dartmouth,” 4:464-467 and 467 note

²³⁷ NDAR, “Journal of H.M. Schooner *St. John*, Lieutenant William Grant,” 4:173-175

²³⁸ NDAR, “John Brown to Vice Admiral Clark Gayton,” 4:461-464

A Council session was now called (at 2000) to decide the fate of the resistance. Browne found the “Majority of the Council rather Backward,” so he joined the principal inhabitants and the militia officers to the Council. The first question was put: whether the fort was defensible in the face of American strength, and the lack of provisions and munitions. Browne put it another way: “And that upon proposing to them whether they would assist me to defend His Majesty’s Fortresses & Stores,” the Council voted 14-10 against fighting,²³⁹ citing the defective gun carriages, the lack of various kinds of shot and the shortage of other stores.²⁴⁰

The next question was what to do with the gunpowder. Browne decided to charter the *Mississippi Packet*, load most of the gunpowder on her, and ship it to St. Augustine in East Florida,²⁴¹ a decision the Council concurred in.²⁴² Some powder was to be retained for it “was the visible opinion of the whole Community, that sending away the whole of it might enrage a disappointed enemy.”²⁴³

Lieutenant Grant was sent for about 2300, to wait upon the Governor and Council.²⁴⁴ He was ordered to escort the *Mississippi Packet*, both to protect her and to “prevent his Vessel falling into the Hands of the Enemy.,” as she was not “in any Condition fit for Service.”²⁴⁵ When informed of the Council’s decision regarding the powder, Grant declined to remove it, pointing out that it was “impracticable but that I would defend it to the utmost of my power . . .”²⁴⁶ Browne told Grant the purpose of the rebel attack, adding that the destruction of the *St. John* was one objective. Grant said that he was prepared to fight, and had moved the schooner several times at the Council’s request. Browne told Grant that Fort Montagu was in utter confusion and would fall without powder, which finally convinced Grant.²⁴⁷

Chambers, loaded with timber for Jamaica, was busily throwing overboard the lumber to make room for the powder, which was hustled aboard with help from *St. John*’s boats and crew.²⁴⁸ The

²³⁹ NDAR, “Governor Montfort Browne to Lord George Germaine,” 7:48-51; “Thomas Atwood to Lord Dartmouth,” 4:464-467 and 467 note

²⁴⁰ NDAR, “John Brown to Lord George Germaine,” 4:1386-1387

²⁴¹ NDAR, “Governor Montfort Browne to Lord George Germaine,” 7:48-51

²⁴² NDAR, “Thomas Atwood to Lord Dartmouth,” 4:464-467 and 467 note

²⁴³ NDAR, “Governor Montfort Browne to Lord George Germaine,” 7:48-51

²⁴⁴ NDAR, “Journal of H.M. Schooner *St. John*, Lieutenant William Grant,” 4:173-175; “Thomas Atwood to Lord Dartmouth,” 4:464-467 and 467 note

²⁴⁵ NDAR, “Thomas Atwood to Lord Dartmouth,” 4:464-467 and 467 note

²⁴⁶ NDAR, “Journal of H.M. Schooner *St. John*, Lieutenant William Grant,” 4:173-175

²⁴⁷ NDAR, “Journal of H.M. Schooner *St. John*, Lieutenant William Grant,” 4:173-175

²⁴⁸ NDAR, “Journal of H.M. Schooner *St. John*, Lieutenant William Grant,” 4:173-175



gunpowder was stowed anyplace room could be found for it.²⁴⁹ The loading began about midnight,²⁵⁰ and Grant and Chambers sailed about 0200 on 4 March.²⁵¹ Course was set for the northwest, the two vessels passing not too far away from where the Continental fleet was anchored. By 0400 *St. John* was six miles northwest of the bar at New Providence and at 0600 she was thirty-three miles southeast of the Berry Islands. The *Mississippi Packet* was “to deep and in distress,” so Grant hove to and waited for her. At 1030 he transferred forty-three barrels of powder to the *St. John*, anchoring near Sherrop’s Key. At 1600 the flight to St. Augustine resumed.²⁵²

Why this eventuality was not foreseen is a good question. Hopkins could have stationed one or two of his vessels off the harbor exits to intercept the fleeing shipping. According to Grant there was much shipping going out of the harbor. Lieutenant Jones later said that “sending the two brigantines to lie off the bar” would have prevented the escape.²⁵³ Lieutenant Grant had expected to find such guard vessels when he sailed.²⁵⁴

As soon as the Council had resolved to send off the powder, the Speaker of the Assembly, James Gould, “mutiny’d” and took off with eighty of the militia, returning to their homes.²⁵⁵ This was about three fourths of the available men. The Council was now asked to determine if the detachment at Government House should be recalled, and agreed to do so.²⁵⁶

Browne went over to Government House to secure the detachment. When he returned he found most of the remaining men gone. The forty men under Hodgson and Barrett now asked permission to leave, as they were insufficient in number to fight the fort and preferred not to be taken as prisoners. This permission was granted, but Browne begged some to stay with him, as he preferred to fight. The men, not being swayed by this lunacy, left. Only the Governor and the Council were left. They gave up and returned to Government House²⁵⁷ just as the sun was rising.²⁵⁸

²⁴⁹ NDAR, “Governor Montfort Browne to Lord George Germaine,” 7:48-51

²⁵⁰ Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 53

²⁵¹ NDAR, “Governor Montfort Browne to Lord George Germaine,” 7:48-51; “Journal of H.M. Schooner *St. John*, Lieutenant William Grant,” 4:173-175

²⁵² NDAR, “Journal of H.M. Schooner *St. John*, Lieutenant William Grant,” 4:173-175

²⁵³ NDAR, “Journal Prepared for the King of France by John Paul Jones,” 4:133-134

²⁵⁴ NDAR, “Journal of H.M. Schooner *St. John*, Lieutenant William Grant,” 4:173-175

²⁵⁵ NDAR, “Governor Montfort Browne to Lord George Germaine,” 7:48-51

²⁵⁶ NDAR, “Thomas Atwood to Lord Dartmouth,” 4:464-467 and 467 note

²⁵⁷ NDAR, “Thomas Atwood to Lord Dartmouth,” 4:464-467 and 467 note

²⁵⁸ NDAR, “John Brown to Vice Admiral Clark Gayton,” 4:461-464

Sunrise over New Providence roused the Marines in Fort Montagu. It was now 4 March. The Marines assembled, no doubt many anticipating a fight. Nicholas led them out on a march to the town,²⁵⁹ about four miles from Fort Montagu.²⁶⁰ As they approached within a mile of the town they were met by a messenger from the Governor. Nicholas called a halt to conduct the negotiation.²⁶¹ The messenger repeated the question concerning the purpose of the raid and Nicholas made the, by now, standard reply. The messenger then told Nicholas that Fort Nassau was “ready for his reception and that he might march his Force in as Soon as he Pleased.”²⁶² Nicholas marched into the town, “drafted a guard, and went up to the Governour’s, and demanded the keys of the fort, which were given to me immediately.”²⁶³ The Marines went up to Fort Nassau, “the British col hauled down, and we took possession.”²⁶⁴

From Fort Nassau the fleet could clearly be seen at anchor below Rose Island, a few miles distant. Within two hours *Alfred* and an escort²⁶⁵ got underway, coming up behind Hog Island and anchoring there²⁶⁶ while waiting for a pilot to bring them into harbor. The Commodore soon came ashore in his barge. As he was landing, Lieutenants Trevett and Dayton saw Browne and some members of his Council walking the grounds at Government House and horses tied up nearby, with servants in attendance. Fearing the Governor intended to flee, the two Lieutenants approached Nicholas and asked him for “liberty [to] take him. The Major informed us he had no orders from the [Commodore to] take him, but we may do as we pleased.”²⁶⁷ Trevett, Dayton and another officer called on the Governor and told him he must go to Fort Nassau. Browne objected, feeling it was beneath his dignity. Trevett told him he “must go, then he says it must be the force of arms, We told him it was by the force of arms!”²⁶⁸ He was kept prisoner in Fort Nassau (“in a place without food, water, bed, table, or chair”)²⁶⁹ until Hopkins arrived.²⁷⁰ After a time Hopkins

²⁵⁹ NDAR, “Extract of a Letter from the Captain of Marines [Samuel Nicholas] on board the Ship *Alfred*, dated at New London, April 10, 1776,” 4:748-752 and 752 note

²⁶⁰ NDAR, “Journal of Lieutenant John Trevett,” 4:175

²⁶¹ NDAR, “Journal of Lieutenant John Trevett,” 4:175

²⁶² NDAR, “Lieutenant John Paul Jones to Joseph Hewes,” 4:815-818

²⁶³ NDAR, “Journal of Lieutenant John Trevett,” 4:175

²⁶⁴ NDAR, “Journal of Lieutenant John Trevett,” 4:175

²⁶⁵ Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 54

²⁶⁶ NDAR, “Journal of Lieutenant John Trevett,” 4:175

²⁶⁷ NDAR, “Journal of John Trevett,” 4:175

²⁶⁸ NDAR, “Journal of John Trevett,” 4:175

²⁶⁹ NDAR, “Governor Montfort Browne to Lord George Germain,” 7:48-51

²⁷⁰ NDAR, “Extract of a Letter from the Captain of Marines [Samuel Nicholas] on board the Ship *Alfred*, dated at New London, April 10, 1776,” 4:748-752 and 752 note

sent for Trevett and detailed him to secure Browne in Government House with a proper guard.²⁷¹

7. Occupation, 4-16 March 1776

The *Andrew Doria* and the remainder of the fleet remained at the Rose Island anchorage until 0600 on 6 March, when they weighed anchor and sailed down to the bar off the harbor. Here pilots were obtained and the fleet got safely into the harbor, anchoring off Fort Nassau. The work of loading the captured stores now began. To make more room the rock ballast in the vessels was unloaded, being replaced by captured shot.²⁷² *Cabot* loaded ten of the heaviest cannon²⁷³ and the other vessels loaded assorted munitions stores.

The amount of munitions captured was astounding. A full inventory listed eighty-eight cannon (9-pounders to 36-pounders), fifteen mortars (4 inch to 11 inch), 5458 shells, 11071 round shot, and assorted other stores, but only twenty-four casks of gunpowder (a little over a ton).²⁷⁴ So much stores and ammunition was captured that Hopkins was forced to charter a 150-ton Bermuda built sloop,²⁷⁵ called the *Endeavour*, from a local citizen, to take on a cargo of cannon.²⁷⁶ Hopkins also promised to send her back to her owner,²⁷⁷ Charles Walker.²⁷⁸ Lieutenant Elisha Hinman was assigned to command the transport.²⁷⁹

Meanwhile, the *St. John* arrived at St. Augustine on 7 March, anchoring four miles off the bar, long enough for Grant to notify the British naval commander at Savannah and Governor Patrick Tonyn of East Florida of the raid. The *Mississippi Packet* had parted company the night of the 6th, but was expected to arrive soon. Grant nervously predicted the American fleet would soon be at St. Augustine, for he thought they were in pursuit of him, as perhaps they should have been.²⁸⁰ The next day Grant notified Vice Admiral Shulldham, suggesting an attack upon the American

²⁷¹ NDAR, "Journal of John Trevett," 4:175

²⁷² NDAR, "Journal of the Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle," 4:373

²⁷³ NDAR, "*Providence Gazette*, Saturday, April 20, 1776," 4:1174-1176

²⁷⁴ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to Governor Jonathan Trumbull," 4:711-712. A partial inventory is in NDAR, "Journal of Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle," 4:171

²⁷⁵ NDAR, "Governor Jonathan Trumbull to John Hancock," 5:1154 and note

²⁷⁶ NDAR, "Journal of the Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle," 4:373 and note

²⁷⁷ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to John Hancock," 4:735-736

²⁷⁸ NDAR, "Journal of the Continental Congress," 5:412-413 and 413 note

²⁷⁹ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to Lieutenant Elisha Hinman," 4:403

²⁸⁰ NDAR, "Journal of H.M. Schooner *St. John*, Lieutenant William Grant," 4:225; "Lieutenant William Grant, R.N., to Governor Patrick Tonyn," 4:225

squadron.²⁸¹ Governor Tonyn suggested the same line of operations to the British naval commander at Savannah.²⁸²

The immediate response to these advices was less than overwhelming. Captain Andrew Barkley (HM Frigate *Scarborough*), temporarily the senior British officer at Savannah, had received his letters by 13 March. A council of war was called. The council determined that the mission *Scarborough* was on was of sufficient importance not to chase after the American fleet, which “by the Information we have, in all probability have quitted Providence by this time.” The council of war took note of reports that the Americans intended to come to Savannah next. If so the British warships would be needed to protect the transports and merchant ships there. Barkley then passed this information along to Commodore Sir Peter Parker at North Carolina.²⁸³

Hopkins was not only occupier, but had to be law-giver for a time. On 7 March one Joseph Hinson, master of a merchant brigantine, the *Christianna*, petitioned Hopkins. Hinson had put into New Providence in a leaking condition with a cargo from St. Thomas in the Danish West Indies. Under British law he was allowed to land his cargo, but not sell it. Now he asked Hopkins for permission to sell, and the Commodore quickly approved the request.²⁸⁴ A shortage of provisions for the Marines and sailors ashore was covered by arranging a small contract with one Nathaniel Harrison, a local merchant.²⁸⁵

Several of the American officers pressured Hopkins to permit looting, but Hopkins had given his word and would not bend. Hopkins behaved with “humanity” towards the citizens, and prevented looting mor by “perswasions than Authority.”²⁸⁶ Yet another observer indicated that quite a bit of authority was shown: Hopkins almost immediately had a triangle erected “and if the Inhabitants made the least Complaints against any of his people, they were punished immediately . . . the

²⁸¹ NDAR, “Lieutenant William Grant, R.N., to Vice Admiral Molyneux Shuldham,” 4:249-250; “Governor Patrick Tonyn to Captain Andrew Barkley, R.N.,” 4:250-251 and 251 note

²⁸² NDAR, “Governor Patrick Tonyn to Captain Andrew Barkley, R.N.,” 4:250-251 and 251 note

²⁸³ NDAR, “Minutes of a Council held on board His Majesty’s Ship *Scarborough*, Savannah River in Georgia this 14th March, 1776—,” 4:343-344

²⁸⁴ NDAR, “Petition of Joseph Hunson to Commodore Esek Hopkins,” 4:227 and note

²⁸⁵ Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 55

²⁸⁶ NDAR, “John Brown to Vice Admiral Clark Gayton,” 4:461-464



Continental Marines formally withdrawing from Fort Montague. Although possible, it seems unlikely that the Commodore's personal Rattlesnake flag would be carried. Sailors are still busy loading cannon. A nice painting if not all that likely.

Number of Lashes few, but very severely given.”²⁸⁷ Hopkins was cultivating the sympathies of the Bahamians in every possible way.

The occupation was largely uneventful for the fleet. At 1000 on 11 March the *Fly* sailed into harbor, pushed by fresh sea breezes under clear skies.²⁸⁸ *Fly* brought news of the *Hornet* and of her own adventures, as well as intelligence that Hacker had collected en route. The most interesting bit of news to Hopkins would have been the intelligence concerning HMS *Experiment* and her convoy of seven troop transports. This convoy had been approaching Boston in winter, had been driven off the coast by stormy weather, and had gone to Antigua. This convoy was now working its way north, and was due in St. Augustine in March, according to Hacker.²⁸⁹

Schooner *Wasp* was kept busy chasing vessels seen off the harbor. At 1600 on 11 March a sail was seen and *Wasp* was sent out to investigate. By 1800 she had brought the stranger to, and apparently found her harmless. On 12 March, another clear day, *Wasp* was ordered out to chase a schooner, sighted to windward at 0900. The schooner was forty-two days out of Hispaniola, and had lost a mate and a sailor. *Wasp* brought her into harbor at 1100 and put three men aboard as a guard. The next day one of *Wasp*'s hands took advantage of the closeness of the land to jump overboard and swim ashore.²⁹⁰

The presence of the fleet in the warmer climate of the Bahamas had not stopped the sickness aboard the vessels. *Andrew Doria* reported her crew was “takeing very Sickly with the fever,” although care was taken to prevent the fever’s spread.²⁹¹ *Alfred* had a sailor die on 4 March, even before the island was secured, and another listed only as “dead” with no date.²⁹² *Columbus* listed a sailor as having died at New Providence.²⁹³ Again, as in the Delaware, the smallpox and fever produced desertions: *Alfred* had three sailors and a Marine run away on 13 March,²⁹⁴ and ship *Columbus* lost four men on the 15th,²⁹⁵ with two more from the *Alfred*.²⁹⁶

Vessels kept arriving in the harbor. Two sloops from Turks Island came in on 14 March, and two

²⁸⁷ Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 55, quoting William Taylor to Lord George Germain.

²⁸⁸ NDAR, “Journal of the Continental Schooner *Wasp*, Captain William Hallock,” 4:373-374 and 374 note

²⁸⁹ NDAR, “Intelligence Received at New Providence by the Continental Sloop *Fly*,” 4:304-306 and 306 note

²⁹⁰ NDAR, “Journal of Continental Schooner *Wasp*, Captain William Hallock,” 4:373-374 and 374 note

²⁹¹ NDAR, “Journal of the Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle,” 4:373 and note

²⁹² NDAR, “A Roll of all the Officers and Men . . . [of] . . . Ship *Alfred*,” 6:696-705

²⁹³ NDAR, “Muster Roll . . . [of] . . . Ship *Columbus*,” 7:142-154

²⁹⁴ NDAR, “A Roll of all the Officers and Men . . . [of] . . . Ship *Alfred*,” 6:696-705

²⁹⁵ NDAR, “Muster Roll . . . [of] . . . Ship *Columbus*,” 7:142-154

²⁹⁶ NDAR, “A Roll of all the Officers and Men . . . [of] . . . Ship *Alfred*,” 6:696-705



ships arrived on 15 March.²⁹⁷ American vessels also called in at the harbor. One, from Dartmouth, in Massachusetts, was used by Hopkins to send away some of the captured cannon.

Governor Browne was kept closely guarded by Lieutenant of Marines Trevett. When the fleet was nearly ready to sail, Trevett was ordered to “wait him down to the barge,”²⁹⁸ and he was taken (“dragging him by Violence” according to one witness)²⁹⁹ to the *Alfred*. Two other men were removed as prisoners: Lieutenant James Babbidge (a retired or half-pay officer) and Thomas Irving (a Royal official from South Carolina).³⁰⁰ This occurred about 12 March.³⁰¹ Although closely guarded, Browne managed to smuggle out a letter dated 17 March, to Lord Dartmouth.³⁰²

7. *Homeward Bound, 16 March-3 April 1776*

Finally the fleet was loaded. The Marines were withdrawn from the forts and town and Hopkins issued orders for getting underway. At 1600 on 16 March, in clear weather with fresh breezes, the fleet sortied from New Providence harbor.³⁰³ Accompanied by at least one American merchant vessel (commanded by a man named Jennings),³⁰⁴ the fleet reversed its approach course, heading back toward Abaco. *Andrew Doria* sighted Abaco the next morning, bearing southwest at twenty to twenty-five miles distance in beautiful sailing weather: breezy, fresh and clear. The fleet was in company with the brig. The next day *Andrew Doria*'s officers listed between thirty and sixty of her crew sick with fever. On 19 March the commodore's barge came aboard with Hopkins' sailing orders for the voyage.³⁰⁵

The fleet was to stay with *Alfred*, but, in case of separation, was to rendezvous in Block Island Channel, and cruise there for six days in “30 fathom Water South from Block Island.” If the fleet was not found by then the captains were free to either cruise or go into port.³⁰⁶ The *Endeavour* was ordered to proceed to Providence, the Sekonnet Channel, or New London, in case of separation, and Hinman was to apply to Governor Cooke of Rhode Island or Governor Trumbull

²⁹⁷ NDAR, “Journal of the Continental Schooner *Wasp*, Captain William Hallock,” 4:373-374 and 374 note

²⁹⁸ NDAR, “Journal of the Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle,” 4:373 and note

²⁹⁹ NDAR, “Thomas Atwood to Lord Dartmouth,” 4:464-466; Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 55

³⁰⁰ NDAR, “John Brown to Vice Admiral Clark Gayton,” 4:461-464; “Thomas Atwood to Lord Dartmouth,” 4:464-466

³⁰¹ NDAR, “Thomas Atwood to Lord Dartmouth,” 4:464-466; Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 55

³⁰² NDAR, “Governor Montfort Browne to Lord Dartmouth,” 4:387-388 and 388 note

³⁰³ NDAR, “Journal of Continental Schooner *Wasp*, Captain William Hallock.” 4:373-374 and 374 note; “Journal of Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle,” 4:373; “John Brown to Vice Admiral Clark Gayton,” 4:461-464

³⁰⁴ NDAR, “Commodore Esek Hopkins to the Dartmouth Committee,” 4:403-404

³⁰⁵ NDAR, “*Andrew Doria* Journal,” reproduction, 1489-1503

³⁰⁶ NDAR, “Commodore Esek Hopkins' Sailing Orders from New Providence,” 4:403

of Connecticut for further directions.³⁰⁷ No mention was made of inquiring after the Naval Committee, under whose orders the fleet was operating.

Hopkins now added injury to insult by attempting to dispose of the cannon as if they were his personal property. In a letter of 18 March to the Committee of Safety of Dartmouth, Massachusetts, he let the Committee know that he, Hopkins, had heard that they needed some cannon. He was therefore sending them two 9-pounders and some shot, aboard Jennings's vessel. He asked the Committee to forward to Rhode Island any shot that did not fit the cannon.³⁰⁸

The fleet continued to sail north in generally good weather until 23 March, when the first big storm hit. The next morning *Wasp* parted company from the fleet. Operations continued despite the storm. A sail was sighted to windward on the 25th. At 0800 *Andrew Doria* and *Providence* were ordered to chase. *Providence* ran her down at 1400, but she proved to be a friend: a schooner out of Carolina, bound for France.³⁰⁹

The sickness continued in the fleet. *Andrew Doria* had lost a Marine on 2 March and another on 28 March.³¹⁰ *Alfred* listed a man as died on 28 March, and another as "dead" with no date given.³¹¹ Perhaps this was the man who died on *Andrew Doria* on 28 March, who was noted as being transferred from the *Alfred*.³¹² *Alfred* lost another sailor on 28 March.³¹³ There is also an oddity on *Andrew Doria*'s muster roll: the Marine fifer is listed as deserted on 27 March.³¹⁴ Just where he deserted to in the broad ocean is a mystery.

The weather continued very bad on 27 March: *Andrew Doria* had the men working at the pumps because she was shipping so much water. At 0800 she was ordered to chase a sail with the *Fly*. At 1400 *Andrew Doria* fired two guns to stop the vessel, a French schooner six days out of New London. From the French Biddle learned the electrifying news that the British had evacuated Boston. The next day was calm and Biddle had his yawl hoisted out to row over to *Alfred* with the news about Boston. He was back on the 30th, in time for the weather to become blowing with a big sea. *Providence* parted from the fleet in the storm.³¹⁵

³⁰⁷ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to Lieutenant Elisha Hinman," 4:403

³⁰⁸ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to the Dartmouth Committee," 4:403-404

³⁰⁹ NDAR, "*Andrew Doria* Journal," reproduction, 1489-1503

³¹⁰ NDAR, "Account of Officers and Men belonging to the Brigante *Andrew Doria* 1776," 9:1007-1011

³¹¹ NDAR, "A Roll of all the Officers and Men . . . [of] . . . Ship *Alfred*," 6:696-705

³¹² NDAR, "*Andrew Doria* Journal," reproduction, 1489-1503

³¹³ NDAR, "A Roll of all the Officers and Men . . . [of] . . . Ship *Alfred*," 6:696-705

³¹⁴ NDAR, "Account of Officers and Men belonging to the Brigante *Andrew Doria* 1776," 9:1007-1011

³¹⁵ NDAR, "*Andrew Doria* Journal," reproduction, 1489-1503



On 3 April 1776 the *Andrew Doria* lost her sergeant of Marines to the fever, and *Columbus* parted from the fleet. Biddle sighted Long Island at 1100, forty-eight miles to the north northwest. At 1700 on the evening of the 3rd *Andrew Doria* sighted a sail to leeward and ran her down: she was the sloop *Endeavour*, which had parted in the bad weather some time earlier.³¹⁶ Early on 4 April *Andrew Doria* parted from the fleet.³¹⁷ But having endured the storms, things were about to improve for the fleet.

8. Prizes, 4-5 April 1776

a. Capture of the *Hawke*, 4 April 1776

On the morning of 4 April the various vessels of the somewhat scattered fleet began to arrive off the eastern end of Long Island.³¹⁸ *Columbus* apparently got there first, where she met and captured³¹⁹ HM Schooner Tender *Hawke* (Lieutenant John³²⁰ [James]³²¹ Wallace). Wallace was a nephew of the notorious British naval commander at Rhode Island.³²² *Hawke* was armed with six cannon and eight swivels³²³ and had a crew of twenty³²⁴ or twenty-five men.³²⁵ *Hawke* had sailed from Newport on 1 April to patrol off Block Island with HM Brig *Bolton*. The fleet under Wallace was to join them there soon after.³²⁶ Instead of his uncle's command, the younger Wallace found the Continentals, just coming in from New Providence.

By afternoon the slowly collecting fleet made Block Island. Here, Hopkins detached the *Andrew Doria* to look into Newport Harbor and report on the stations of the British fleet there. *Andrew*

³¹⁶ NDAR, "*Andrew Doria* Journal," reproduction, 1489-1503

³¹⁷ NDAR, "Extract of a Letter from the Captain of Marines [Samuel Nicholas], on board the Ship *Alfred*, dated at New-London, April 10, 1776," 4:748-752 and 752 note

³¹⁸ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to John Hancock," 4:735-736; "Extract of a Letter from the Captain of Marines [Samuel Nicholas], on board the Ship *Alfred*, dated at New-London, April 10, 1776," 4:748-752 and 752 note; "Journal of Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle," 4:662 and note

³¹⁹ NDAR, "Extract of a Letter from the Captain of Marines [Samuel Nicholas], on board the Ship *Alfred*, dated at New-London, April 10, 1776," 4:748-752 and 752 note; "Journal of the Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle," 4:662 and note

³²⁰ NDAR, "Libel Against Three Prizes taken by the Continental Fleet," 5:493-494

³²¹ NDAR, "Minutes of the Committee Acting in Recess of the Rhode Island General Assembly," 6:804 and note

³²² NDAR, "*Providence Gazette*, Saturday, April 13, 1776," 4:797-800 and 800 note

³²³ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to John Hancock," 4:735-736; "*Connecticut Gazette*, Friday, April 12, 1776," 4:784-786 and 786 note

³²⁴ NDAR, "Libel Against Three Prizes taken by the Continental Fleet," 5:493-494

³²⁵ NDAR, "*Connecticut Gazette*, Friday, April 12, 1776," 4:784-786 and 786 note

³²⁶ NDAR, "Captain James Wallace, R.N., to Vice Admiral Molyneux Shuldham," 4:746-747

Doria rejoined at 0600³²⁷ on 5 April, bringing in a sloop from New York to have her papers examined. The sloop was released after inspection.³²⁸ While *Andrew Doria* was off cruising, *Columbus* and *Alfred* had made another prize.

b. Action with the *Bolton*, 5 April 1776

HM Brig *Bolton* (Lieutenant Edward Sneyd) was a part of the British naval force in Narragansett Bay in Rhode Island. She had sailed from Newport with the *Hawke*³²⁹ and was cruising in the area south of Block Island on 5 April 1776. *Bolton* was carried on the Navy list as being a six gun, twelve swivel vessel with a crew of thirty.³³⁰ She was certainly armed with six 3-pounders³³¹ although she was universally reported to have had eight guns.³³² In addition she carried two brass howitzers.³³³ Her actual crew seems to have been forty-eight men.³³⁴ *Bolton* was “well found with all sorts of Stores, Arms, Powder, &c.” according to Hopkins.³³⁵

In the early morning light *Alfred* sighted a sail to leeward, the *Bolton*, and set out in chase. *Alfred* soon closed with her and “after a few shots, took her.”³³⁶ Sneyd fought with “undaunted bravery and great conduct” firing two broadsides and two shells from the howitzers before surrendering. *Bolton* was hopelessly overmatched. The brief action was over by 0600 when *Andrew*

³²⁷ NDAR, “Journal of the Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle,” 4:669 and note

³²⁸ NDAR, “Extract of a Letter from the Captain of Marines [Samuel Nicholas], on board the Ship *Alfred*, dated at New-London, April 10, 1776,” 4:748-752 and 752 note

³²⁹ NDAR, “Captain James Wallace, R.N., to Vice Admiral Molyneux Shuldham,” 4:746-747

³³⁰ NDAR, “List of British Ships of War at or Going to America,” 4:1090-1093; swivels confirmed by “*Connecticut Gazette*, Friday, April 12, 1776,” 4:784-786

³³¹ NDAR, “Inventory of Warlike Stores found on Board the Brigg *Bolton* Edwd Sneyd Master Vizt,” 4:712 and note

³³² NDAR, “Commodore Esek Hopkins to John Hancock,” 4:735-736 and 736 note; NDAR, “Extract of a Letter from the Captain of Marines [Samuel Nicholas], on board the Ship *Alfred*, dated at New-London, April 10, 1776,” 4:748-752 and 752 note; “*Connecticut Gazette*, Friday, April 12, 1776,” 4:784-786; “*Providence Gazette*, Saturday, April 13, 1776,” 4:797-800 and 800 note

³³³ NDAR, “Commodore Esek Hopkins to John Hancock,” 4:735-736 and 736 note; NDAR, “Extract of a Letter from the Captain of Marines [Samuel Nicholas], on board the Ship *Alfred*, dated at New-London, April 10, 1776,” 4:748-752 and 752 note; “*Connecticut Gazette*, Friday, April 12, 1776,” 4:784-786; “*Providence Gazette*, Saturday, April 13, 1776,” 4:797-800 and 800 note; “Nathaniel Shaw, Jr.’s Account of Ordnance Stores Shipped to New York,” 6:144-145

³³⁴ NDAR, “Commodore Esek Hopkins to John Hancock,” 4:735-736 and 736 note; “*Connecticut Gazette*, Friday, April 12, 1776,” 4:784-786

³³⁵ NDAR, “Commodore Esek Hopkins to John Hancock,” 4:735-736 and 736 note

³³⁶ NDAR, “Extract of a Letter from the Captain of Marines [Samuel Nicholas], on board the Ship *Alfred*, dated at New-London, April 10, 1776,” 4:748-752 and 752 note

Doria spoke the *Alfred*.³³⁷

The prisoners, including several slaves from Newport (seven in number)³³⁸ were distributed among the fleet. Four of the slaves went to the *Andrew Doria*.³³⁹ Biddle also received six other prisoners. The *Alfred* kept Sneyd, seven sailors, and eleven Marines aboard. When the men refused to enlist with the Continentals they were put in irons and kept on short rations, but were inspired by Sneyd's tenacity.³⁴⁰

c. The Evening Hour, 5 April 1776

As the day wore on the fleet continued to collect. At 1700 the sloop *Providence* rejoined the squadron. At 1800 a brig and a sloop were sighted to the northward and *Columbus*, *Cabot* and *Andrew Doria* gave chase. *Columbus* got the brig and *Cabot* the sloop. Both were from New York and both were bound for London. Their papers were not clear, arousing some suspicion, and both were detained.³⁴¹

All day the fleet had cruised off Block Island. As the sun set, Captain of Marines Samuel Nicholas commented "we were twelve sail in all, and had a very pleasant evening."³⁴² After supper Nicholas might have walked on deck to look at the evening cruising formation. The Commodore had formed two columns abreast, with *Cabot* leading one and *Andrew Doria* the other, followed by *Alfred* and *Columbus* respectively. The big ships were about a hundred yards behind the brigs, with the two columns about a quarter of a mile apart. *Providence* was placed astern and between the columns, with the prizes behind her, escorted by the *Fly*.³⁴³ After a pleasant turn around deck, Nicholas went below and turned in about midnight. But it was a very short nap: at 0130 the Continental Navy's first real battle was just getting underway.³⁴⁴

Part III begins on the next page.

³³⁷ NDAR, "Journal of the Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle," 4:669 and note

³³⁸ NDAR, "Prisoners taken in H. M. Bomb Brig *Bolton*," 4:669-670 and 670 note

³³⁹ NDAR, "List of People on Board the *Andrew Doria* from February 1776," 4:712-715 and 715 note

³⁴⁰ NDAR, "A Least of the Presenors on Board the Schooner, &c.," 4:719 and note

³⁴¹ NDAR, "Journal of the Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle," 4:669 and note

³⁴² NDAR, "Extract of a Letter from the Captain of Marines [Samuel Nicholas], on board the Ship *Alfred*, dated at New-London, April 10, 1776," 4:748-752 and 752 note

³⁴³ Morison, *John Paul Jones*, 47

³⁴⁴ NDAR, "Extract of a Letter from the Captain of Marines [Samuel Nicholas], on board the Ship *Alfred*, dated at New-London, April 10, 1776," 4:748-752 and 752 note

Part III, The Battle of Block Island

1. *The Battle off Block Island, 6 April 1776*

a. Approach, 0000-0230

HM Frigate *Glasgow* was a sixth rate, twenty gun ship of the smallest class normally “rated.” She carried a nominal crew of 160 men under the command of Captain Tyringham Howe.³⁴⁵ In early April 1776 *Glasgow* was at Newport, Rhode Island, with the small squadron under Captain James Wallace. Wallace was under orders to withdraw to Halifax, and *Glasgow* had dispatches for the vessels to the south, and was under orders to proceed there.

However, Wallace had a particular project in mind and wanted to keep all his vessels together long enough to accomplish that task. Wallace had sent out the *Bolton* and *Hawke* to cruise off Block Island with the promise that his fleet would soon join them. At 1200 on 5 April the British squadron got under sail exiting Newport.³⁴⁶ At 1500, some of the fleet having difficulties, the *Rose* (Wallace's flagship) bore away,³⁴⁷ and the fleet anchored off the south end of Gold Island at 1700.³⁴⁸ *Glasgow* continued out to sea,³⁴⁹ accompanied by a small tender with a crew of three men.

Glasgow steered out for Block Island, where *Bolton* and *Hawke* were supposed to be cruising. The night was very pleasant; “Light Airs & fair.”³⁵⁰ At 0200 *Glasgow* was twenty-four miles southeast of Block Island, under easy sail,³⁵¹ with the water very smooth.³⁵² *Glasgow*'s lookouts sighted a fleet of seven or eight sail on the weather beam, and Howe turned toward the strangers. He soon discovered “two, or three large ships, and other Square Rigged Vessels; Turned all hands to Quarters, and hauled up the Mainsail.” *Glasgow*, now under fighting sail, kept steering to the northwest, toward the strangers, who were coming down before the wind.³⁵³

³⁴⁵ NDAR, “List of British Ships at or Going to America,” 4:1090-1093

³⁴⁶ NDAR, “Journal of H.M.S. *Glasgow*, Captain Tyringham Howe,” 4:680; “Journal of H.M.S. *Rose*, Captain James Wallace,” 4:681-682

³⁴⁷ NDAR, “Journal of H.M.S. *Rose*, Captain James Wallace,” 4:681-682

³⁴⁸ NDAR, “Journal of H.M.S. *Glasgow*, Captain Tyringham Howe,” 4:680; “Journal of H.M.S. *Rose*, Captain James Wallace,” 4:681-682

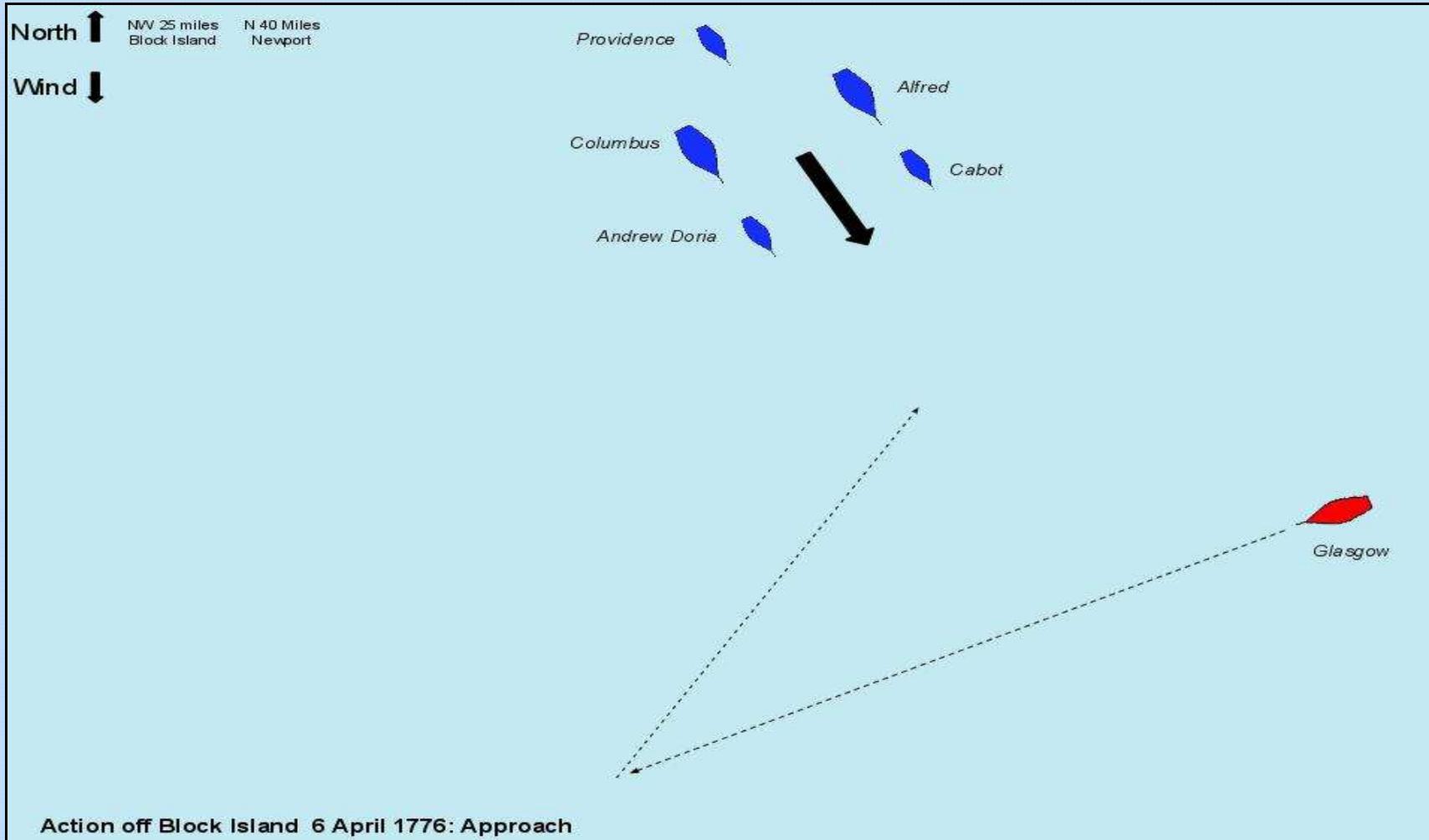
³⁴⁹ NDAR, “Journal of H.M.S. *Rose*, Captain James Wallace,” 4:681-682

³⁵⁰ NDAR, “Journal of H.M.S. *Glasgow*, Captain Tyringham Howe,” 4:680

³⁵¹ NDAR, “Remarks on board His Majesty's Ship *Glasgow* Saturday the 6th day of April 1776,” 4:680-681

³⁵² NDAR, “Remarks on board His Majesty's Ship *Glasgow* Saturday the 6th day of April 1776,” 4:680-681; “Journal of John Paul Jones,” 4:679-680; “Journal of John Paul Jones,” 4:679-680

³⁵³ NDAR, “Remarks on board His Majesty's Ship *Glasgow* Saturday the 6th day of April 1776,” 4:680-681. *Glasgow*'s journal indicates the sighting was at 0300.



Continental Navy Fleet in cruising formation. About 400 yards between columns, and 100 yards between the brigs and the ships. Glasgow tacks to investigate. About 0100-0200 6 April 1776. Original chart by Ken Kellow.

Unknown to Captain Howe, the American fleet had had the *Glasgow* and her tender under observation for an hour. At 0100 the *Andrew Doria*'s lookouts had sighted two sail to the east southeast of the fleet. Biddle was roused and came on deck. The signal was hoisted for the *Alfred* and the fleet came down.³⁵⁴ *Alfred* had noted the signal by 0130, when Captain of Marines Samuel Nicholas was awakened from his short nap by the cry of "all hands to quarters."³⁵⁵

Nicholas soon mustered his Marines on deck. The main body under First Lieutenant Matthew Parke was placed in the ship's barge, on the main deck. Captain Nicholas and the remainder, with Second Lieutenant John Fitzpatrick, took post on the quarterdeck.³⁵⁶ Aboard *Columbus* the crew was going to quarters in some confusion, for sixteen men were serving on the prizes, and some shifting around had to be done.³⁵⁷

The *Glasgow* looked large to Captain Nicholas as she bore down. *Cabot* was leading, with *Alfred* a hundred yards behind and slightly to windward.³⁵⁸ Just as the American column and the British warship closed, *Glasgow* turned to the north, cutting behind the *Cabot* and the *Alfred*,³⁵⁹ which turned parallel to her course. *Columbus* was placed behind all three by this maneuver and was forced to turn into *Glasgow*'s wake to pursue. *Glasgow* now blanketed *Columbus*'s sails so they would not draw and slowed her down considerably.³⁶⁰

About 0200 the brig *Cabot* came up with the stranger.³⁶¹ To the men on the *Glasgow* she looked "much like the *Bolton*, but larger."³⁶² The British hailed the brig, identifying their vessel,³⁶³ but

³⁵⁴ NDAR, "Journal of the Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle," 4:679 and note

³⁵⁵ NDAR, "Extract of a Letter from the Captain of Marines [Samuel Nicholas], on board the Ship *Alfred*, dated at New-London, April 10, 1776," 4:748-752 and 752 note

³⁵⁶ NDAR, "Extract of a Letter from the Captain of Marines [Samuel Nicholas], on board the Ship *Alfred*, dated at New-London, April 10, 1776," 4:748-752 and 752 note

³⁵⁷ NDAR, "Captain Abraham Whipple to Commodore Esek Hopkins," 4:1328-1329 and 1329 note

³⁵⁸ NDAR, "Extract of a Letter from the Captain of Marines [Samuel Nicholas], on board the Ship *Alfred*, dated at New-London, April 10, 1776," 4:748-752 and 752 note

³⁵⁹ NDAR, "Captain Abraham Whipple to Commodore Esek Hopkins," 4:1328-1329 and 1329 note

³⁶⁰ NDAR, "Captain Abraham Whipple to Commodore Esek Hopkins," 4:1328-1329 and 1329 note

³⁶¹ NDAR, "Journal of the Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle," 4:679 and note

³⁶² NDAR, "Remarks on board His Majesty's Ship *Glasgow* Saturday the 6th day of April 1776," 4:680-681

³⁶³ NDAR, "Extract of a Letter from the Captain of Marines [Samuel Nicholas], on board the Ship *Alfred*, dated at New-London, April 10, 1776," 4:748-752 and 752 note; "Journal of the Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle," 4:679 and note

she “seemed to hesitate about giving any answers,” and kept on standing toward the *Glasgow*.³⁶⁴ Hopkins was steering as close as possible before committing any action. The British hailed again, demanding to know what ships were in company with the brig. Hopkins replied “the *Columbus* and *Alfred*, a two and twenty Gun frigate.”³⁶⁵ Immediately after the reply a hand grenade came spinning out of *Cabot*’s fighting top, and she unleashed a broadside into the *Glasgow*.³⁶⁶ It was then about 0230,³⁶⁷ Newport bearing northeast at a distance of forty-five miles.³⁶⁸

b. Action, 0230-0600

Glasgow had one Marine killed and one wounded at the first fire,³⁶⁹ then she returned the broadside to *Cabot*,³⁷⁰ and got off another one before *Cabot*’s inexperienced gunners could reload. *Cabot* was damaged by the heavy weight of metal and Hopkins sheered off,³⁷¹ (or shot ahead to lay on the bow)³⁷² nearly fouling the *Andrew Doria*, which was forced to tack away from the action to avoid collision.³⁷³

³⁶⁴ NDAR, “Remarks on board His Majesty’s Ship *Glasgow* Saturday the 6th day of April 1776,” 4:680-681

³⁶⁵ NDAR, “Remarks on board His Majesty’s Ship *Glasgow* Saturday the 6th day of April 1776,” 4:680-681

³⁶⁶ NDAR, “Extract of a Letter from the Captain of Marines [Samuel Nicholas], on board the Ship *Alfred*, dated at New-London, April 10, 1776,” 4:748-752 and 752 note; “Remarks on board His Majesty’s Ship *Glasgow* Saturday the 6th day of April 1776,” 4:680-681

³⁶⁷ NDAR, “Remarks on board His Majesty’s Ship *Glasgow* Saturday the 6th day of April 1776,” 4:680-681

³⁶⁸ NDAR, “Captain Tyringham Howe, R.N., to Philip Stephens,” 4:1281

³⁶⁹ NDAR, “*Connecticut Courant*, Monday, May 20, 1776,” 5:168-169

³⁷⁰ NDAR, “Journal of the Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle,” 4:679 and note; “Remarks on board His Majesty’s Ship *Glasgow* Saturday the 6th day of April 1776,” 4:680-681

³⁷¹ NDAR, “Journal of the Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle,” 4:679 and note; “Extract of a Letter from the Captain of Marines [Samuel Nicholas], on board the Ship *Alfred*, dated at New-London, April 10, 1776,” 4:748-752 and 752 note

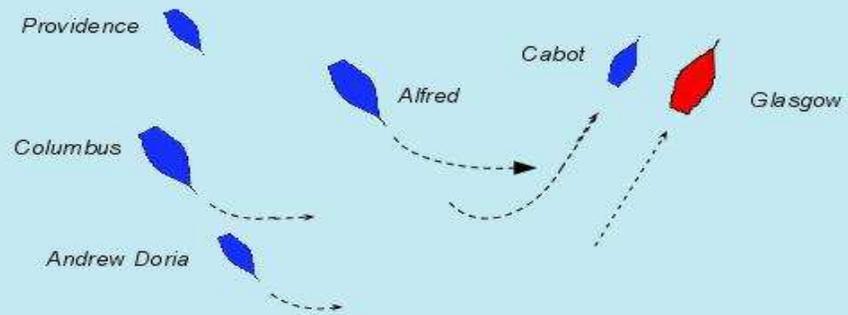
³⁷² NDAR, “Remarks on board His Majesty’s Ship *Glasgow* Saturday the 6th day of April 1776,” 4:680-681

³⁷³ NDAR, “Journal of the Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle,” 4:679 and note



North ↑

Wind ↘

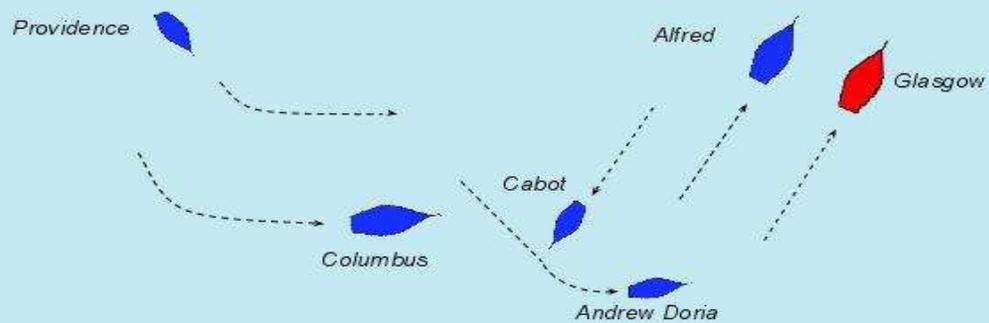


Action off Block Island 6 April 1776: Engaging Cabot

Cabot engages Glasgow. American columns breaking up as Alfred, Columbus and Andrew Doria attempt to come up with Glasgow. About 0230-0245. Original chart by Ken Kellow.

North ↑

Wind ↘

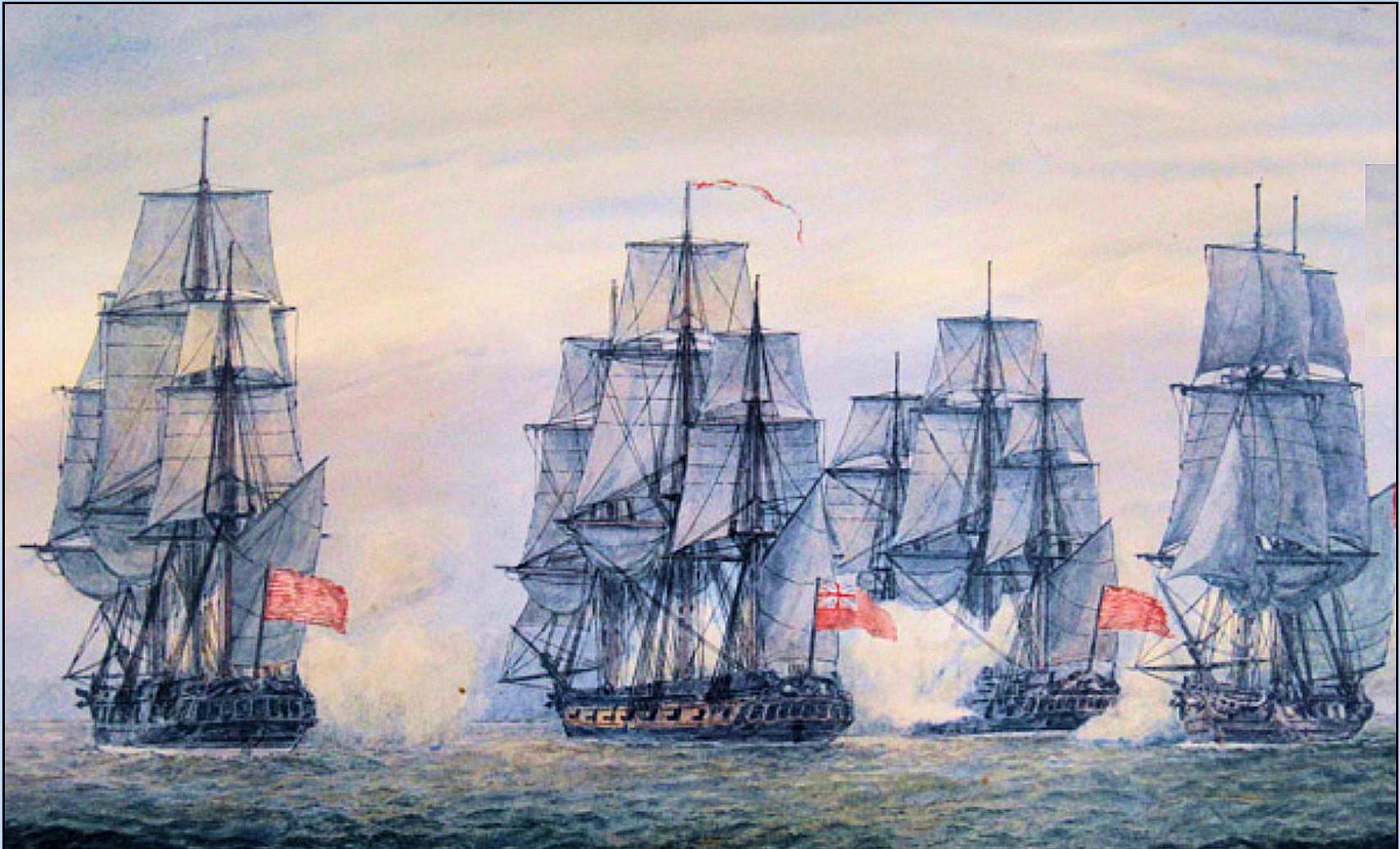


Action off Block Island 6 April 1776: Alfred Engages

Alfred replaces Cabot alongside Glasgow. Cabot drifts into path of the other American ship and brig, forcing them to bypass her. About 0245-0300. Original chart by Ken Kellow.



A fine painting by Major Charles H. Waterhouse USMCR, "A Marine Lieutenant Dies 6 April 1776. A month after the capture of New Providence, the first large sea battle of the American Revolution took place between ships of the Continental fleet and HMS *Glasgow*, off the coast of Rhode Island. This painting portrays the action, and the resultant death of Marine Lieutenant John Fitzpatrick on board the *Alfred*, showing the fight from the deck of the *Alfred*. Marine Lieutenant Fitzpatrick is just shot down, Marines firing with musketry at *Glasgow* and sailors standing to the great guns. Published in Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 58-60. For a larger view, click [here](#).



Beginning of the action. The painting is titled "The Escape of the Glasgow" by Irwin John Bevin from the Bailey Collection of the Mariner's Museum. There are two paintings with the same title. This shows the beginning of the fight, and was originally credited to Charles K. Warren. For a larger version of the image click [here](#).

Glasgow as she approached,³⁷⁴ then lay alongside the British frigate, giving and receiving broadsides.³⁷⁵ At *Glasgow*'s first broadside into *Alfred*, Marine Lieutenant Fitzpatrick was shot dead by musketry.³⁷⁶ Meanwhile *Columbus* came up astern of the *Glasgow*, turned under her stern and raked as she passed, then luffed up on *Glasgow*'s port beam.³⁷⁷ *Columbus* however, must have been at a considerable distance from the *Glasgow*.³⁷⁸ *Andrew Doria* came up on *Glasgow*'s port quarter, and *Providence* moved about astern of the *Glasgow*. Howe now ordered the clerk who had charge of the confidential despatches for the Navy vessels to the south to destroy the despatches. They were thrown overboard in a bag weighted with shot.³⁷⁹

The action continued hot until about 0330 when the *Alfred*'s tiller block was shot away and she lost control, coming up into the wind, which gave the *Glasgow* a chance to rake her.³⁸⁰ It was perhaps at this point that the American gunners (according to Governor Montfort Browne, a prisoner on the *Alfred*) reportedly left their guns.³⁸¹ No other observer records this action. The *Columbus* also dropped back on the *Glasgow*'s quarter and the *Andrew Doria* remained astern.³⁸² According to

³⁷⁴ NDAR, "Remarks on board His Majesty's Ship *Glasgow* Saturday the 6th day of April 1776," 4:680-681

³⁷⁵ NDAR, "Remarks on board His Majesty's Ship *Glasgow* Saturday the 6th day of April 1776," 4:680-681

³⁷⁶ NDAR, "Extract of a Letter from the Captain of Marines [Samuel Nicholas], on board the Ship *Alfred*, dated at New-London, April 10, 1776," 4:748-752 and 752 note

³⁷⁷ NDAR, "Remarks on board His Majesty's Ship *Glasgow* Saturday the 6th day of April 1776," 4:680-681

³⁷⁸ NDAR, "Captain Abraham Whipple to Commodore Esek Hopkins," 4:1328-1329 and 1329 note

³⁷⁹ NDAR, "Remarks on board His Majesty's Ship *Glasgow* Saturday the 6th day of April 1776," 4:680-681

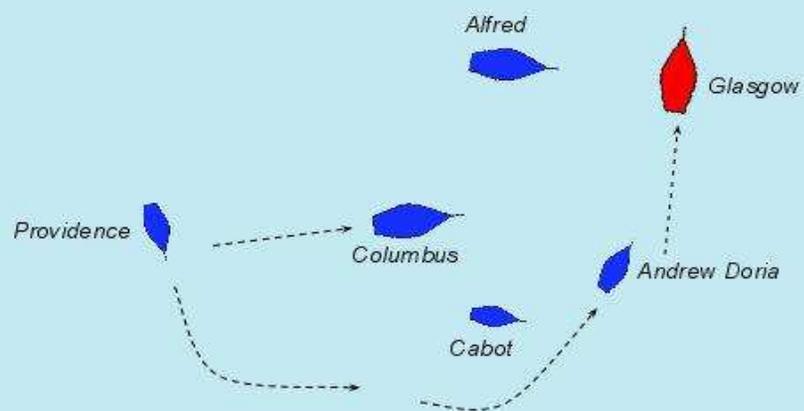
³⁸⁰ NDAR, "Journal of the Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle," 4:679 and note; "Extract of a Letter from the Captain of Marines [Samuel Nicholas], on board the Ship *Alfred*, dated at New-London, April 10, 1776," 4:748-752 and 752 note

³⁸¹ NDAR, "Governor Montfort Browne to Lord George Germain," 7:48-51

³⁸² NDAR, "Remarks on board His Majesty's Ship *Glasgow* Saturday the 6th day of April 1776," 4:680-681

North ↑

Wind ↘



Action off Block Island 6 April 1776: Alfred Raked

Alfred is disabled and falls off, raked by Glasgow. Cabot out of action. Andrew Doria in action, Columbus coming up. About 0330-034. Original chart by Ken Kellow.

Captain Howe the Americans made an attempt to board about this time.³⁸³ At 0400³⁸⁴ *Glasgow* “made all the sail she possibly could” and bore away to the east for Newport,³⁸⁵ keeping up a hot running fight.³⁸⁶ The American vessels frequently yawed and raked the *Glasgow*,³⁸⁷ within musket shot on her quarters and stern.³⁸⁸ Howe's sailors wrestled two guns out the cabin windows in the stern and opened fire on the pursuit.³⁸⁹ *Columbus* was still trailing the action and trying to close, but was engaging with her bow guns and an occasional broadside.³⁹⁰

By now the running battle was within earshot of the land. As the citizens of Rhode Island rose to go about their daily chores those living on the coast could hear heavy guns far to the southeast. At daybreak eight to ten sail were sighted to the east of Block Island and “indeed the flashes of the cannon were seen by some people about daybreak.”³⁹¹

The action and chase had now been underway for seven glasses (three and a half hours)³⁹² and the fleet and *Glasgow* were approaching Newport.³⁹³ There was every chance that the British squadron at Newport would be encountered, which Hopkins

³⁸³ NDAR, “Captain Tyringham Howe, R.N., to Philip Stephens,” 4:1281

³⁸⁴ NDAR, “Captain Tyringham Howe, R.N., to Philip Stephens,” 4:1281

³⁸⁵ NDAR, “Journal of the Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle,” 4:679 and note

³⁸⁶ NDAR, “Journal of H.M.S. *Glasgow*, Captain Tyringham Howe,” 4:4:680

³⁸⁷ NDAR, “Journal of H.M.S. *Glasgow*, Captain Tyringham Howe,” 4:4:680

³⁸⁸ NDAR, “Remarks on board His Majesty's Ship *Glasgow* Saturday the 6th day of April 1776,” 4:680-681

³⁸⁹ NDAR, “Remarks on board His Majesty's Ship *Glasgow* Saturday the 6th day of April 1776,” 4:680-681

³⁹⁰ NDAR, “Captain Abraham Whipple to Commodore Esek Hopkins,” 4:1328-1329 and 1329 note

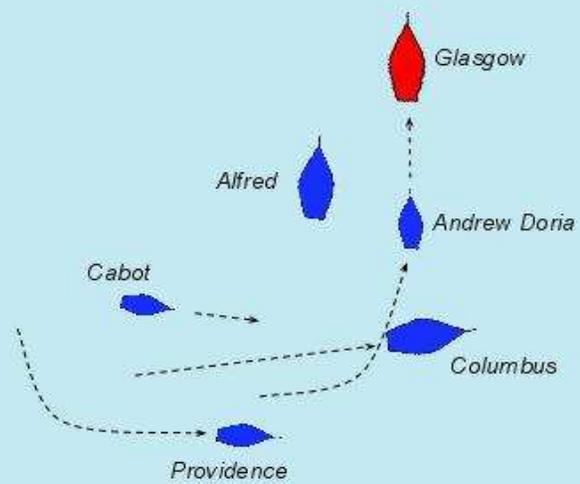
³⁹¹ NDAR, “*Newport Mercury*, Monday, April 8, 1776,” 4:707-709

³⁹² NDAR, “Journal of the Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle,” 4:679 and note

³⁹³ NDAR, “Journal of H.M.S. *Glasgow*, Captain Tyringham Howe,” 4:680; “Journal of the Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle,” 4:679 and note



North ↑
Wind ↙



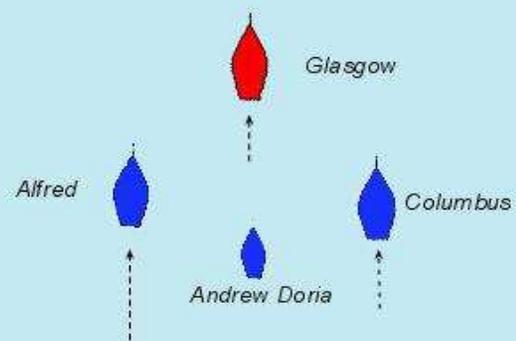
Action off Block Island 6 April 1776: Glasgow Escapes

Alfred regains control, Andrew Doria is coming up and Columbus is coming up. Glasgow runs for Newport. Original chart by Ken Kellow.



Alfred, Andrew Doria and Columbus in pursuit of Glasgow, with the rest of the fleet behind. Painting by Irwin John Bevan in the Bailey Collection of the Mariner's Museum, originally attributed to Charles K. Warren. It is the second of two titled "The Escape of the Glasgow." A larger view is [here](#).

North ↑
Wind ↙



Action off Block Island 6 April 1776: The Chase

Alfred, Andrew Doria and Columbus chasing Glasgow, which is running for Newport. About 0345-0600. Original chart by Ken Kellow.

had no desire to do.³⁹⁴ At 0600 Hopkins hoisted the recall signal,³⁹⁵ and a half hour later the Americans began to haul their wind and break off the pursuit.³⁹⁶

2. Into Port, 6-8 April 1776

At 0700 the Americans tacked and stood to the southwest.³⁹⁷ At 1200 the *Andrew Doria* caught up with the fleet. While the main battle had been underway, prize schooner *Hawke* had captured *Glasgow*'s three man tender. The fleet stood to the south and was nine miles northwest of Block Island at 1800.³⁹⁸

As for the *Glasgow* she proceeded to Newport, and began firing alarm guns to wake up the British fleet at Rhode Island about 0730.³⁹⁹ By 1100 she had come to anchor, while the other vessels were working out in pursuit.⁴⁰⁰ She came in "under all the sail she could set, yelping from the mouths of her cannon (like a broken leg'd dog) in token of her being sadly wounded."⁴⁰¹

There was considerable damage in the American fleet. *Alfred* had a shot through her main mast, one tiller block shot away, and was heavily damaged in rigging and hull.⁴⁰² *Alfred* had taken seven 9-pound shot in her hull and was leaking badly. For three days she "scarce gain on the water she made."⁴⁰³ One shot had penetrated to cockpit, killing a British midshipman (a prisoner from the *Bolton*), sitting beside Governor Browne.⁴⁰⁴ *Alfred* had six men killed and six or seven

³⁹⁴ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to John Hancock," 4:735-736 and 736 note

³⁹⁵ NDAR, "Remarks on board His Majesty's Ship *Glasgow* Saturday the 6th day of April 1776," 4:680-681; "Journal of the Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle," 4:679 and note

³⁹⁶ NDAR, "Remarks on board His Majesty's Ship *Glasgow* Saturday the 6th day of April 1776," 4:680-681; "Journal of the Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle," 4:679 and note; "Captain Tyringham Howe, R.N., to Philip Stephens," 4:1281

³⁹⁷ NDAR, "Remarks on board His Majesty's Ship *Glasgow* Saturday the 6th day of April 1776," 4:680-681; "Journal of the Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle," 4:679 and note; "Journal of H.M.S. *Glasgow*, Captain Tyringham Howe," 4:680

³⁹⁸ NDAR, "Journal of Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle," 4:679 and note

³⁹⁹ NDAR, "Remarks on board His Majesty's Ship *Glasgow* Saturday the 6th day of April 1776," 4:680-681; "Journal of H.M.S. *Glasgow*, Captain Tyringham Howe," 4:680

⁴⁰⁰ NDAR, "Journal of H.M.S. *Glasgow*, Captain Tyringham Howe," 4:680

⁴⁰¹ NDAR, "*Newport Mercury*, Monday, April 8, 1776," 4:707-709

⁴⁰² NDAR, "Journal of the Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle," 4:679 and note; "Commodore Esek Hopkins to John Hancock," 4:735-736 and 736 note

⁴⁰³ NDAR, "Governor Montfort Browne to Lord George Germain," 7:48-51

⁴⁰⁴ NDAR, "Governor Montfort Browne to Lord George Germain," 7:48-51; "*Providence Gazette*, Saturday, April 13, 1776," 4:797-800

wounded.⁴⁰⁵ Marine Lieutenant John Fitzpatrick was among those killed.⁴⁰⁶ Three of the twelve Marines on the quarterdeck were killed, and two in the barge were wounded. Fitzpatrick was a “worthy officer, sincere friend and companion, that was beloved by all the ship’s company.”⁴⁰⁷ Hopkins later stated that the “Officers all behaved well onboard the *Alfred*.”⁴⁰⁸

Cabot had four men killed and seven wounded, including Captain John B. Hopkins⁴⁰⁹ wounded in the hand and head.⁴¹⁰ Master Sinclair Seymour, “a good officer,” was killed. Marine Lieutenant James Hood Wilson was mortally wounded. Commodore Hopkins noted that “too much Praise cannot be given to the Officers of the *Cabot* who gave and Sustain'd the whole Fire for some considerable time within pistol Shot.”⁴¹¹ *Cabot* was damaged in her hull, spars and rigging.⁴¹²

Columbus had one man wounded.⁴¹³ *Andrew Doria* had taken several shots in her hull and rigging. One shot hit her quarter, smashed the netting, and demolished the arms chest before wounding the drummer in the leg.⁴¹⁴ The drummer later died of his wounds at New London.⁴¹⁵

Glasgow was heavily damaged in the long fight. The log keeper aboard HM Sloop *Swan* reported she was “much Shattd in er Riggin & Sails & her Mast Much Damaged.”⁴¹⁶ All her lower masts were shot up and almost all her standing and running rigging shot away. She had begun repairs

⁴⁰⁵ NDAR, “Commodore Esek Hopkins to John Hancock,” 4:735-736 and 736 note; “*Providence Gazette*, Saturday, April 13, 1776,” 4:797-800

⁴⁰⁶ NDAR, “Commodore Esek Hopkins to John Hancock,” 4:735-736 and 736 note

⁴⁰⁷ NDAR, “Extract of a Letter from the Captain of Marines [Samuel Nicholas], on board the Ship *Alfred*, dated at New-London, April 10, 1776,” 4:748-752 and 752 note

⁴⁰⁸ NDAR, “Commodore Esek Hopkins to John Hancock,” 4:735-736 and 736 note

⁴⁰⁹ NDAR, “Commodore Esek Hopkins to John Hancock,” 4:735-736 and 736 note

⁴¹⁰ NDAR, “*Connecticut Gazette*, Friday, April 12, 1776,” 4:784-786; “*Providence Gazette*, Saturday, April 13, 1776,” 4:797-800

⁴¹¹ NDAR, “Commodore Esek Hopkins to John Hancock,” 4:735-736 and 736 note

⁴¹² NDAR, “*Connecticut Gazette*, Friday, April 12, 1776,” 4:784-786

⁴¹³ NDAR, “Commodore Esek Hopkins to John Hancock,” 4:735-736 and 736 note

⁴¹⁴ NDAR, “Journal of the Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle,” 4:679 and note; “Commodore Esek Hopkins to John Hancock,” 4:735-736 and 736 note

⁴¹⁵ NDAR, “Account of Officers and Men belonging to the Brigante *Andrew Doria* 1776,” 9:1007-1011

⁴¹⁶ NDAR, “Journal of H.M. Sloop *Swan*, Captain James Ayscough,” 4:682

on rigging and sails after anchoring at 1100,⁴¹⁷ with the carpenters busily fishing the masts.⁴¹⁸ Observers ashore noticed *Glasgow* had all her pumps going, indicating several shots in the hull.⁴¹⁹ *Glasgow* reported one man killed and three wounded, all by musketry.⁴²⁰ Howe attributed the low casualties to a supposed American attempt to fire high in an effort to disable the ship and carry it by boarding.⁴²¹

Glasgow arrived at Halifax for repair on 18 or 19 April 1776.⁴²² *Glasgow* was in “so shattered a Condition” and would take so long to repair, that Shuldham forwarded her to England, making only temporary patches.⁴²³ Howe was commended for his actions in beating off the American fleet and was promoted to command HMS *Thames*.⁴²⁴ *Glasgow* was out of action until she sailed for the West Indies on 5 December 1776,⁴²⁵ as part of the escort for a large outward bound convoy.⁴²⁶

Following the morning battle the Continental fleet collected to the south of Block Island. Hopkins ordered the fleet to sail to New London, Connecticut, there to refit and collect. He dispatched a small sloop (perhaps the *Endeavour*) to inform Nathaniel Shaw, Jr. (later Continental Agent for Connecticut) to put lights in the lighthouse for the incoming fleet. The sloop arrived on 7 April and Shaw saw three sail off the lighthouse by evening.⁴²⁷ American coast watchers on Long Island had sighted the fleet on the evening of 6 April, far out at sea south of Block Island, about sunset. Again the next morning the fleet was sighted when the fog cleared. These Americans thought the fleet was British.⁴²⁸ During the night the weather came up foggy with rainstorms and the various vessels lost sight of one another. At dawn the *Andrew Doria* and the *Cabot* found themselves alone on the water. By 1300, when Biddle anchored the brig off New London lighthouse, several of the fleet had collected. The fog cleared at 1600, and *Andrew Doria* and the

⁴¹⁷ NDAR, “Journal of H.M.S. *Glasgow*, Captain Tyringham Howe,” 4:680

⁴¹⁸ NDAR, “Remarks on board His Majesty’s Ship *Glasgow* Saturday the 6th day of April 1776,” 4:680-681

⁴¹⁹ NDAR, “Extract of a Letter from the Captain of Marines [Samuel Nicholas], on board the Ship *Alfred*, dated at New-London, April 10, 1776,” 4:748-752 and 752 note

⁴²⁰ NDAR, “Remarks on board His Majesty’s Ship *Glasgow* Saturday the 6th day of April 1776,” 4:680-681

⁴²¹ NDAR, “Captain Tyringham Howe, R.N., to Philip Stephens,” 4:1281

⁴²² NDAR, “Captain Tyringham Howe, R.N., to Philip Stephens,” 4:1281; “Vice Admiral Molyneux Shuldham to Philip Stephens,” 4:1157-1159

⁴²³ NDAR, “Vice Admiral Molyneux Shuldham to Philip Stephens,” 4:1157-1159

⁴²⁴ NDAR, “Lords Commissioners, Admiralty, to Captain Tyringham Howe, H.M.S. *Thames*, Spithead,” 7:757-758

⁴²⁵ NDAR, “Marquis de Noailles to Vergennes,” 7:702 and note

⁴²⁶ NDAR, “Lords Commissioners, Admiralty, to Captain Thomas Pasley, H. M. S. *Glasgow*, Spithead,” 7:693-694

⁴²⁷ NDAR, “Nathaniel Shaw, Jr. to Joseph Trumbull,” 4:696-697

⁴²⁸ NDAR, “Burnett Miller to the New York Committee of Safety,” 4:697



others ran up into the harbor, anchoring at 1800. At 2000 the heavy ships, *Alfred* and *Columbus* came to off the lighthouse.⁴²⁹

At 0800 on 8 April, the *Alfred* and the remainder of the fleet got under way and sailed up to the town, dropping anchor right offshore.⁴³⁰ The Continental fleet was home from its cruise.

Part IV begins on the next page.

⁴²⁹ NDAR, "Journal of the Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle," 4:696

⁴³⁰ NDAR, "Journal of the Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle," 4:696



The chief internal problem the Continental fleet under Commodore Hopkins had when it returned to New London was sickness. A sickness pervaded the fleet, affecting all the vessels to a greater or lesser degree. Immediately after the fleet anchored in New London harbor, sick sailors began landing, 120,⁴³¹ soon increased to 140,⁴³² and then rose to 203 (seventy-two from *Alfred*, fifty-eight from *Andrew Doria*, thirty-four from *Columbus*, seventeen from *Cabot*, sixteen from *Providence*, and five from *Fly*).⁴³³ This represented about 25% of Hopkins' total crew strength. To replace these sailors Hopkins had gained permission from Washington to enlist two hundred men from the Continental Army.⁴³⁴ These had been put aboard by 14 April 1776.⁴³⁵ Hopkins had represented to Washington that he was planning an attack on the British squadron at Rhode Island after which the men would be returned.⁴³⁶ When Washington, who needed every man at New York, observed no fleet movement, he recalled the men in a letter dated 25 April.⁴³⁷

Nor was extensive illness the only crew problem. About 8 April Hopkins received a round robin from fifty-eight sailors of *Cabot's* crew requesting an advance on wages. The men cited the need to buy necessities.⁴³⁸ This was the prelude to another round of desertions. *Alfred* had eleven deserters by 17 April and eighteen recorded for the month. In addition, four sailors and Marines died. Eleven more were discharged. Eight men were recruited, including four from the prize *Bolton*. One man was transferred to *Fly*. At month's end *Alfred's* crew was down to 184 men (including the sick ashore).⁴³⁹ *Columbus* also had four men die in April; thirteen deserted and four were transferred to *Providence*. Four were discharged. Her crew at the end of the month was down to 118, including the sick.⁴⁴⁰ *Andrew Doria* discharged seven men, had seven desert, one die, and transferred one man to *Providence*, leaving her with a crew of eighty-five men at the end of April.⁴⁴¹

⁴³¹ NDAR, "Connecticut Gazette, Friday, April 12, 1776," 4:784-786 and notes

⁴³² NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to Stephen Hopkins, Philadelphia," 4:1185 and note

⁴³³ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to John Hancock," 4:1358-1360

⁴³⁴ NDAR, "Gurdon Saltonstall to George Washington," 4:710-711; "Commodore Esek Hopkins to Governor Jonathan Trumbull," 4:711; "Commodore Esek Hopkins to John Hancock," 4:735-736; "Commodore Esek Hopkins to Stephen Hopkins, Philadelphia," 4:1185 and note; "George Washington to John Hancock," 4:1196

⁴³⁵ NDAR, "Lieutenant John Paul Jones to Joseph Hewes," 4:815-818

⁴³⁶ NDAR, "George Washington to John Hancock," 4:1196

⁴³⁷ NDAR, "George Washington to Commodore Esek Hopkins," 4:1252

⁴³⁸ NDAR, "Round Robin of the Crew of the Continental Brig Cabot," 4:716-719

⁴³⁹ NDAR, "A Roll of all the Officers and Men . . . [of] . . . Ship *Alfred*," 6:696-705

⁴⁴⁰ NDAR, "Muster Roll . . . [of] . . . Ship *Columbus*," 7:142-154

⁴⁴¹ NDAR, "Account of Officers and Men Belonging to the Brigante *Andrew Doria* 1776," 9: 1007-1011

Columbus, in particular, was an unhappy ship. Not only did she lead the fleet in desertions, but there seemed to be a difficulty with Captain Whipple and his officers. Hardly had *Columbus* anchored in New London than Captain of Marines Shoemaker resigned, or tried to. Presumably Whipple refused to accept, or refused to let Shoemaker leave. Shoemaker left anyway, traveled to Philadelphia, and was discharged by the Marine Committee on 2 May 1776, being allowed pay but not rations from the time he left the ship.⁴⁴² On 11 April Marine Lieutenants Robert Cummings and John Trevett requested Hopkins to give Whipple an order to allow them to get their clothing from the ship, which Hopkins did.⁴⁴³ Evidently Cummings and Trevett were being prevented from leaving too. All three Marine officers were carried on *Columbus's* muster roll as deserters.⁴⁴⁴ What happened to Cummings is not known, but Trevett might have been temporarily put on *Alfred* pending a later transfer.

Resting in harbor was not to Nicholas Biddle's liking. He requested and received orders to sail out on patrol.⁴⁴⁵ Biddle promptly landed all forty-nine of his sick ashore (including Second Mate John Dent, Third Mate John Margeson, Midshipmen Dennis Leary, William Reynolds, Evan Bevan and William Lamb, and Surgeon Thomas Kerr). To sail with a full crew *Andrew Doria* received sailors from *Columbus* and *Providence*.⁴⁴⁶ At 1700 on 8 April the black brig raised anchor and dropped down to the New London lighthouse, where she hove to in foggy weather. On 14 April Biddle returned to New London with a prize, anchoring beside *Alfred* in the afternoon.⁴⁴⁷

Hopkins promptly turned the prize over to Shaw, thus again demonstrating either contempt or ignorance of legalities. She should have been libeled and tried in the local admiralty courts, and, upon condemnation, the captors paid a salvage value. The officers of the fleet (and not just those on *Andrew Doria*; remember the association) complained and blamed Hopkins. The Commodore finally (5 June) requested Shaw to have the value of the cargo calculated so payment could be made to the captors.⁴⁴⁸ Shaw not only sent a copy of the invoice the next day, but had the hull appraised. When the final accounting was made, in September 1776, *Andrew Doria's* crew received £344 of the £2126 valuation.⁴⁴⁹

When the sloop transport *Endeavour* entered New London harbor she brought the first report

⁴⁴² Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 469

⁴⁴³ NDAR, "Marine Lieutenants John Trevett and Robert Cumming to Commodore Esek Hopkins," 4:768-769 and 769 note

⁴⁴⁴ NDAR, "Muster Roll of the Continental Ship *Columbus*," 7:142-154

⁴⁴⁵ NDAR, "Captain Nicholas Biddle to James Biddle," 5:27-29

⁴⁴⁶ NDAR, "List of the People on Board the *Andrew Doria* from February 1776," 4: 712-715 and 715n2-4

⁴⁴⁷ NDAR, "Captain Nicholas Biddle to James Biddle," 5:27-29

⁴⁴⁸ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to Nathaniel Shaw, Jr., New London," 5:380 and note

⁴⁴⁹ NDAR, "Nathaniel Shaw, Jr.'s Account of Sales of the Schooner *John and Joseph*," 6: 834

from the Continental fleet since it had sailed from Delaware Bay in mid-February.⁴⁵⁰ Naturally the reports of Hopkins' success and his captured stores was quickly passed around. One of the most interesting subjects, arising immediately, was the disposition of the captured ordnance. Commodore Hopkins had already demonstrated a tendency to dispose of these cannons as he saw fit; a tendency that became far more pronounced at New London. The day the fleet arrived there Hopkins wrote to Governor Cooke, reporting on the expedition and asking Cooke if Rhode Island wanted any of the captured cannon. Then, after making this inquiry of Cooke, Hopkins reported to John Hancock on 9 April, giving a report of the fleet's activities since sailing. He informed Hancock of his losses in the Block Island battle and said he planned to sail in three or four days, if Washington would permit the fleet to enlist some soldiers.⁴⁵¹ No mention was made of the New Providence guns. On 10 April a delegation called on Hopkins from Connecticut. These had come to confer about prisoners, and to discuss how the captured cannon were to be used. Thus, Connecticut was now interested in claiming some of the cannon.⁴⁵²

The commodore's report to Congress of 9 April was read on the floor of that body, apparently to general satisfaction. It was later published in the newspapers. Hopkins received a letter of congratulation from John Hancock, the President of the Continental Congress. His popularity was never higher than at this time, and seemed to be genuine, both among the fleet and the public. When the Marine Committee suggested the purchase of the prize *Hawke* for the Continental Navy, it was suggested that she be named the *Hopkins*.⁴⁵³ Lieutenant John Paul Jones wrote, on 14 April, that "I have the pleasure of assuring you that the commander-in-chief is respected through the fleet and I verily believe that the officers and men in general would go to any length to execute his orders."⁴⁵⁴

During this period the Continental Army was being transferred from the scene of its recent victory at Boston, down to New York, the next potential battle zone. Washington, in making this journey, passed through New London. As his men embarked in transports there, to sail to New York, Washington took the time to meet with Commodore Hopkins. Washington knew that many heavy guns were needed at New York and asked the Commodore about the availability of those captured at New Providence. Hopkins, despite the fact that Washington had just given permission to Hopkins to draft sailors from the Army, so the crippled fleet could put to sea, had the impertinence to tell Washington "that many [cannon] were wanting for the defence of the Providence river & the Harbour at New London It was uncertain whether I cou'd have all I wanted, But that he wou'd send me all that could be spared." Washington passed this gem along to Congress on 15 April.⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵⁰ NDAR, "Nathaniel Shaw, Jr. , to Joseph Trumbull," 4:696-697

⁴⁵¹ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to John Hancock," 4:735-736 and 736 note

⁴⁵² NDAR, "Minutes of the Connecticut Council of Safety," 4:747-748

⁴⁵³ Allen, *Naval History of the American Revolution*, i, 108

⁴⁵⁴ Allen, *Naval History of the American Revolution*, i, 108-109

⁴⁵⁵ NDAR, "George Washington to John Hancock," 4:835



Meanwhile, the Continental Congress, on 16 April, directed Hopkins to land his cannon and stores at New London, and to transmit to the Congress a full list of all items captured. If he had left New London, Governor Trumbull was to provide a list of the items Hopkins had landed there. Further, New London could be fortified with “such of the cannon and wheels as Governor Trumbull shall direct . . . during the pleasure of Congress.”⁴⁵⁶ Scarcely had this resolution been passed when Washington’s letter arrived. With uncharacteristic speed Congress acted. On 19 April a resolution passed, ordering that Washington have the use of any cannon or military stores captured by Hopkins and not needed immediately by the Continental fleet. The only exception allowed was for the fortification of New London. Washington was to order the cannon and stores sent anywhere he wished. Congress sent an inventory to Washington for his information.⁴⁵⁷

Hopkins, who evidently suspected more was going to be heard on the subject of these guns, now moved with uncharacteristic speed in his turn. On 16 April he ordered First Lieutenant Elisha Hinman to take command of *Cabot* (the younger Hopkins was ashore, recovering from his wound). Ten of the heaviest guns were loaded on *Cabot*. Hinman was to sail over to Newport where he was to land the guns, so they could be used to fortify Newport Harbor. If Hinman couldn’t get into Newport he was to anchor at Howland’s Ferry or Providence.⁴⁵⁸ *Cabot* arrived at Newport on 18 April,⁴⁵⁹ and the guns were being mounted within three days. Hopkins’ “favor” was very “acceptable” to the Rhode Island authorities.⁴⁶⁰

The Congressional resolution of 16 April reached Governor Trumbull on 24 April. He inquired of Nathaniel Shaw (the fleet having sailed that day) as to what had been left at New London by Hopkins. Trumbull intended to act on the “Spirit of the Resolve.”⁴⁶¹ Shaw reported to Trumbull the following day: Hopkins had landed thirty-four cannon at New London, some of which were already in use. Certain mortars and shells that Washington had asked for had already been shipped to New York, but some cannon had been shipped to Newport and some were still aboard the vessels of the fleet, which was now en route to Newport. The Congressional resolution had arrived at New London before Hopkins had sailed. Shaw had shown it to the Commodore. Hopkins had, however, declined to remove the guns from the fleet’s holds.⁴⁶²

On 25 April Washington wrote to Hopkins recalling his men from the fleet. Washington explained the necessity for the recall, which seems unnecessarily polite under the circumstances, for as far as Washington knew the fleet had not moved. Washington also passed along the two

⁴⁵⁶ NDAR, “Journal of the Continental Congress,” 4:847-849

⁴⁵⁷ NDAR, “Journal of the Continental Congress,” 4:1165

⁴⁵⁸ NDAR, “Commodore Esek Hopkins to Lieutenant Elisha Hinman,” 4:847

⁴⁵⁹ NDAR, “*Providence Gazette*, Saturday, April 20, 1776,” 4:1174-1176

⁴⁶⁰ NDAR, “Colonel William Richmond to Commodore Esek Hopkins,” 4:1184

⁴⁶¹ NDAR, “Governor Jonathan Trumbull to Nathaniel Shaw, Jr., New London,” 4:1234

⁴⁶² NDAR, “Nathaniel Shaw, Jr., to Governor Jonathan Trumbull,” 4:1250-1251



Congressional resolutions regarding the cannon, as a reminder to Hopkins to forward them to New York.⁴⁶³ Trumbull, for his part, forwarded the Congressional resolution to Hopkins at Newport, and reported that he had done so to Congress on 27 April. It cannot then be said that Hopkins knew not the Congress' intentions in the matter.⁴⁶⁴

As might be expected the arrival of the fleet brought in prisoners and prizes and the associated problems of dealing with both. The prisoners were landed at New London and turned over to the Connecticut authorities, who eventually, on 15 April, shipped them off to Windham County for safekeeping.⁴⁶⁵ There were however, three groups who received somewhat different treatment: the men from *Bolton* and *Hawke*, the high ranking prisoners from the Bahamas, and the slaves captured in *Bolton* and *Hawke*.

Nineteen prisoners from *Bolton* were landed and placed in irons and close confinement, largely due to Lieutenant Sneyd's determined and inspiring resistance. The Americans put this group on short rations in an attempt to force some of the men to enlist with them.⁴⁶⁶ Four did enlist on *Alfred* on 12 April.⁴⁶⁷ Eventually Sneyd's group was reduced to only a few men, from *Bolton's* former crew. Sneyd broke out of prison on the evening of 8 November 1776 with three other of *Bolton's* crewmen.⁴⁶⁸ Meeting another British sailor who had been captured in a prize, the party stole a canoe at Norwich Landing on 9 November. They attempted to paddle across Long Island Sound. Near Gull Islands, at the entrance of the Race, the canoe overturned and Sneyd and all the sailors drowned, except one man.⁴⁶⁹ A prisoner exchange, involving Sneyd, was in negotiation at the time.⁴⁷⁰

The nephew of James Wallace, notorious in Rhode Island, also named James⁴⁷¹ (or possibly John) Wallace,⁴⁷² was packed off to Providence, where he arrived on 11 April. He was sent to the local jail.⁴⁷³ With him was Henry Stevenson, probably the commander of the other tender. Wallace and

⁴⁶³ NDAR, "George Washington to Commodore Esek Hopkins," 4:1252 and note

⁴⁶⁴ NDAR, "Governor Jonathan Trumbull to John Hancock," 4:1284

⁴⁶⁵ NDAR, "Minutes of the Connecticut Council of Safety," 4:832-834

⁴⁶⁶ NDAR, "A Least of the Presonors on Bord the Schooner &c.," 4:719 and 719n3

⁴⁶⁷ NDAR, "A Roll of all the Officers and Men . . . [of] . . . Ship *Alfred*," 6:696-705

⁴⁶⁸ NDAR, "*Connecticut Gazette*, Friday, November 22, 1776," 7:241-242

⁴⁶⁹ NDAR, "*Connecticut Gazette*, Friday, November 29, 1776," 7:324

⁴⁷⁰ NDAR, "Thomas Stone, Commissary of Prisoners, to the Massachusetts Council," 7:290-291

⁴⁷¹ NDAR, "Minutes of the Committee Acting in Recess of the Rhode Island General Assembly," 6:804 and note

⁴⁷² NDAR, "Libels Against Three Prizes Taken by the Continental Fleet," 5:493-494

⁴⁷³ NDAR, "*Connecticut Gazette*, Friday, April 12, 1776," 4:784-786; "*Providence Gazette*, Saturday, April 13, 1776," 4:797-800

Stevenson stayed in jail until 13 September 1776, when they were granted parole.⁴⁷⁴

The high ranking prisoners from New Providence were released on a preliminary parole on 8 April.⁴⁷⁵ Governor Montfort Browne gave considerable trouble over signing a more permanent parole, but he too was eventually packed off to Windham by the end of April. He was exchanged for Lord Stirling (Major General William Alexander) in early 1777.

Aboard the British vessels were found a number of slaves belonging to various citizens of Rhode Island. Whether these had escaped to the British or had been captured in prizes is unknown. Several were enlisted on *Andrew Doria*. Others were libeled in Rhode Island, where Commodore Hopkins bought two of them at auction.⁴⁷⁶

There was the matter of prizes. The brig and the sloop from New York, both laden with wheat and flour, were suspected of trading with the British. After a close examination they were both released at New London. The British warships were all taken into New London with the fleet. All three were libeled on 12 June 1776, and tried on 5 July, being sold soon after.⁴⁷⁷ *Hawke* brought £256, *Bolton* £387, and the unnamed sloop tender £125.⁴⁷⁸ This quick sale of *Hawke* was unfortunate, for the Marine Committee had ordered her purchased for the Continental Navy, as *Hopkins*, and assigned to the Commodore's squadron.⁴⁷⁹ Shaw apparently sold all three without orders; but acting in good faith.

When Biddle returned from his short cruise he found the fleet preparing to sail in consequence of an express warning from Washington. John Phillips had ridden a lather spotted horse into New London with reports from New York that British battleship *Asia*, frigate *Phoenix* and sloops *Savage* and *Nautilus* were supposed to be en route to New London, to blockade the fleet. Washington also requested, again, the forwarding of the cannon, and asked Hopkins to protect the Continental Army troop transports sailing from New London.⁴⁸⁰ Hopkins asked the Connecticut Council of Safety to join the Connecticut Navy Brig *Defence* and Connecticut Navy Schooner *Spy* to his fleet for the next cruise. The Council of Safety agreed to do so on 15 April.⁴⁸¹

⁴⁷⁴ NDAR, "Minutes of the Committee Acting in Recess of the Rhode Island General Assembly," 6:804 and note

⁴⁷⁵ NDAR, "*Connecticut Gazette*, Friday, April 12, 1776," 4:784-786 and 786n3

⁴⁷⁶ NDAR, "Prisoners taken in H.M. Bomb Brig *Bolton*," 4:669-670 and 670 note; "Libel of John Cole and Commodore Esek Hopkins Against Cables, Anchors and Negro Slaves," 6:821-822

⁴⁷⁷ NDAR, "Libels Against Three Prizes Taken by the Continental Fleet," 5:493-494

⁴⁷⁸ NDAR, "A List of Prizes taken brought in & Condemned in the County of New London in the State of Connecticut," 6:1100-1101

⁴⁷⁹ NDAR, "Continental Marine Committee to Commodore Esek Hopkins," 6:271-273 and 273n2

⁴⁸⁰ NDAR, "George Washington to Commodore Esek Hopkins," 4:819 and 819 notes

⁴⁸¹ NDAR, "Minutes of the Connecticut Council of Safety," 4:832-834

The first order of business in Hopkins' mind was to ship the cannon; but not to Washington. They went, instead, to Newport with Hinman. On 16 April *Cabot* was placed under Hinman's command for that purpose.⁴⁸² While *Cabot* was preparing to sail, Hopkins had *Fly* out scouting for the reported British fleet. Hacker sighted some sail off Montauk Point at 1530 on the 17th and ran back in to New London to inform Hopkins.⁴⁸³ Since *Cabot* had already sailed, Hopkins wrote to Governor Cooke of Rhode Island, informed him of the situation, and requested Cooke send assistance to *Cabot* when she arrived. Hopkins was "Extremly Consernd for the Town of Newport."⁴⁸⁴ *Cabot* safely arrived there on 18 April, although chased in by HM Frigate *Cerberus*.⁴⁸⁵

Very little in the way of refitting had been done at New London. A visitor aboard *Alfred* about this time reported that "every thing about the ship appeared in a forlorn condition." Nothing had been repaired since the *Glasgow* battle. This man further reported that *Alfred* had captured the sloop tender.⁴⁸⁶

Hopkins now prepared to lead the remaining fleet to sea. On 19 April *Andrew Doria* received a Lieutenant of Marines and seventeen privates from *Alfred* as part of the re-shifting of men. At 1000 that day, in clear breezy weather, the fleet weighed anchor and sailed down the Thames River.⁴⁸⁷ *Alfred*, *Columbus*, *Andrew Doria*, *Providence*, *Fly*, and Connecticut Navy vessels *Defence* and *Spy* were present.⁴⁸⁸ Several merchant vessels were also present, under escort, including five sailing for the Secret Committee. None sailed far however, for *Alfred* ran aground at 1200, on submerged rocks near Fisher's Island. The whole fleet hove to while Saltonstall tried to get unstuck. *Alfred's* water was pumped out, and then her guns removed. Finally, at 1700, she was off the rocks. It was now too late and too risky to sail, so the fleet returned to harbor.⁴⁸⁹

As soon as the fleet halted, Hopkins sent out *Fly* to warn Hinman and *Cabot* that the fleet had not sailed. *Fly* arrived at Newport at 1300 on the 19th, where Hacker landed and found Hinman at Holmes Wharf. *Cabot's* crew was busily unloading the cannon. Hacker warned Hinman that there were three ships off the coast. Hinman agreed, telling Hacker he had been chased in the area off Point Judith. Hacker returned to *Fly* and dropped down the bay. *Fly* sighted a sail, which Hacker took to be an American vessel from the fleet, but the stranger's suspicious activities kept Hacker from getting too close. He was in the area of Point Judith. Remembering Hinman's

⁴⁸² NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to Lieutenant Elisha Hinman," 4:847

⁴⁸³ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to Governor Bicholas Cooke," 4:860-861

⁴⁸⁴ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to Governor Bicholas Cooke," 4:860-861

⁴⁸⁵ NDAR, "*Connecticut Gazette*, Friday, April 26, 1776," 4:1265

⁴⁸⁶ NDAR, "Diary of Samuel Richards," 4:866

⁴⁸⁷ NDAR, "Journal of Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle," 4: 1163

⁴⁸⁸ NDAR, "Minutes of the Connecticut Council of Safety," 4:832-834

⁴⁸⁹ NDAR, "Journal of Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle," 4: 1163



story of being chased, Hacker took *Fly* into Franklin's Ferry on 20 April and sent a message to Hopkins.⁴⁹⁰ Hopkins probably had Connecticut sloop *Spy* out scouting as well, while he prepared to sail again. He was well manned ("much better Mann'd now than we ever have been") and wanted to try the British fleet at Rhode Island if it was not too much stronger than his own.⁴⁹¹

In a letter to Stephen Hopkins dated 21 April, Hopkins reported the recent fleet movements and added that his son, John Burroughs Hopkins, was still ashore, recovering from his wounds in the residence of Nathaniel Shaw. Although the Commodore thought it would be three or four weeks before he was well, the son had already asked the father if he could report aboard one of the ships. Hopkins told his brother that he had forced most of the British sailors into service aboard the fleet and wondered "if that is agreeable with the Sentiments of the Congress."⁴⁹²

Hopkins sailed again on 25 April, leading *Alfred*, *Columbus*, *Providence*, *Fly*, and Connecticut brig *Defence* to sea. The *Andrew Doria* was left behind to clean and refit, with orders to take ballast out of *Bolton* if necessary. She was to convoy merchant shipping out of the harbor when ready to sail, and then report to Hopkins at Providence, Rhode Island.⁴⁹³ The fleet arrived at Newport on 26 April, and passed up to Providence.⁴⁹⁴ Connecticut brig *Defence* was dismissed there, after being loaded with shells and one mortar for Washington's army. *Defence* was to call at New London for Governor Trumbull's orders.⁴⁹⁵ Here, the fleet "landed upwards of one hundred Sick Men, and there is daily more taken down with some New Malignant Fever."⁴⁹⁶ Another long period of doldrums and inactivity now began at Providence.

Hopkins set out on a short journey to Newport on 28 April and was consequently gone when an express rider arrived from Congress on 29 April. In his absence the Committee of Safety opened the letters and then promptly forwarded them to Hopkins, for they were urgent. These letters contained Congress' congratulations on the success of the New Providence Expedition, and information concerning the appointment of Continental Agents. They also contained orders on the disposition of the New Providence cannon.⁴⁹⁷ To the Rhode Islanders this was, perhaps, what made them urgent.

The Commodore was still in Newport on business on 30 April. His son, recuperating now in Providence, where he had arrived by chaise from New London, wrote to Shaw on behalf of the

⁴⁹⁰ NDAR, "Lieutenant Hoysteed Hacker to Commodore Esek Hopkins," 4:1177

⁴⁹¹ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to Stephen Hopkins, Philadelphia," 4:1185 and note

⁴⁹² NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to Stephen Hopkins, Philadelphia," 4:1185 and note

⁴⁹³ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to Captain Nicholas Biddle," 4:1250

⁴⁹⁴ NDAR, "*Providence Gazette*, Saturday, April 27, 1776," 4:1283

⁴⁹⁵ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to Governor Jonathan Trumbull, Lebanon," 4:1295

⁴⁹⁶ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to John Hancock," 4:1358-1360

⁴⁹⁷ NDAR, "John Brown to Commodore Esek Hopkins," 4:1305

Commodore, with orders for the *Andrew Doria*. The *Andrew Doria* was to be readied for sea, with three months' provisions, as soon as possible.⁴⁹⁸ *Andrew Doria* had stayed behind, unloading stores brought from the Bahamas, and then, under orders from Hopkins, to careen and clean her bottom. This had been done by 1 May 1776.⁴⁹⁹

Biddle ran out to look around and saw HM Frigate *Cerberus* in the offing. He informed the merchant skippers but they thought they could make it out safely. So did Biddle. After he parted with the merchant vessels Biddle had to steer near *Cerberus*, but the British frigate ignored him. He arrived the same night at Newport and ran up to Providence.⁵⁰⁰ She arrived at Providence on 6 May and anchored alongside the *Alfred*.⁵⁰¹

Meanwhile Hopkins had received Washington's request for the return of the borrowed soldiers. Hopkins advised Washington on 1 May that *Providence* would soon come out to deliver the soldiers to New York City. He added "we still continue Sickly onboard all the Fleet." It would not be possible to go to sea without recruiting, "which will not easily be done."⁵⁰² In fact, crew and officer problems had come into the main view as soon as the fleet arrived at Providence.

In his report to John Hancock on 1 May, Hopkins reported that scarcely had the fleet arrived in Providence than over one hundred sick sailors had been landed. "Some New Malignant Fever" had broken out and more men came down with it every day. Hopkins said he was refitting for a three months' cruise, when Washington's recall of the soldiers had stopped him cold. He had no crews. Furthermore, he had delivered twenty-six heavy cannon to Newport. He had hoped this would raise his influence among his fellow Rhode Islanders to the point that he would be allowed to recruit from the colony's forces. The arrival of the Congressional order to give up the cannon had ruined this ploy. He "cant ask it with modesty," now. Nor was granting of such permission a certainty. Hopkins was always ready to follow orders but he doubted his power to keep the "Fleet" in service with "any Credit to my Self or the Officers . . . Neither do I believe it can be done without power to dismiss such Officers as I find Slack in their duty . . ." ⁵⁰³

The men that were not sick were not happy. A complaint from about this time was delivered to Hopkins by the crew of *Providence* concerning Captain Hazard and Midshipman Walter Spooner (on loan from *Alfred*). These two carried around sticks and rope ends (known as "starters") to beat the crew. The crew promised obedience and fidelity, but wanted a new skipper or a new

⁴⁹⁸ NDAR, "Captain John Bourroughs Hopkins to Nathaniel Shaw, Jr., New London," 4:1328

⁴⁹⁹ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to John Hancock," 4: 1358-1360

⁵⁰⁰ NDAR, "Journal of Continental Brig *Andrew Doria*, Captain Nicholas Biddle," 4: 1392

⁵⁰¹ NDAR, *Andrew Doria* Journal, 5: Appendix C, 1489-1503

⁵⁰² NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to George Washington, New York," 4:1358

⁵⁰³ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to John Hancock," 4:1358-1360

ship, for “wee are used like dogs on Board the *providence*.”⁵⁰⁴

There was discontent among the officers as well. Following the return of the fleet to New London and the receipt of the news concerning the *Glasgow* battle, the general feeling among the public had been one of victory. Cooler reflection soon deflated the euphoria. Questions were asked, one in particular: how could one twenty gun frigate escape from six well armed vessels? Before long loose talk began in the bars and coffeehouses of New London. It was suggested that cowardice had been displayed by some of the commanders, a reluctance to get into close action. Crew members from *Cabot* and *Alfred*, hardest hit of the fleet, apparently intimated that Abraham Whipple, skipper of *Columbus*, had held back. This talk soon reached Whipple’s ears.

On 30 April Whipple appealed to Hopkins requesting a court-martial on his conduct. He reported that he had heard:

“I have had the Honor to serve you in the last French War and to your satisfaction I thought, and since my Arrival at Philadelphia was appointed by the Congress to the Command of the Ship Columbus. I have strictly Obeyed your Commands and have done all in my Power for the Honor of the Fleet to the best of my Knowledge according to your Orders. . . and at our Arrival at New London I found that the report was from the Alfred and the Cabot that I was a Coward and many other ill natured things which I say was a false report, if I did not do my Duty it was not out of Cowardice but for want of Judgment, I say all the People at New London look on me with Contempt, and here like a Man not serving the Country in my Station. Therefore I having a Family of Children to be rebraided with the mark of Cowardice and my own Character now Scandalized thro’ the whole Thirteen United Colonies, It is a thing I cannot bear and if I am a Coward I have no Business in the service of this Country. Therefore I desire that there may be, by my own Request a Court Martial be called on me, and Tried by my Brother Officers of the Fleet and either acquitted with Honor or Broke for I want no favour, then if I am Broke the Publick will have a right to despise me and reflect on me and my Family, If I have no satisfaction that way I will return you my Commission and thank the Congress for the Service and Curse them that made the false Report, I have never opened my Mouth to any Body concerning the matter, If your Honor had let me come to Newport when the Scarborough Man of War lay there as I desired I would have convinced the World that I was not a Coward but now it is out of my Power.”⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰⁴ NDAR, “Crew of the Continental Sloop *Providence* to Commodore Esek Hopkins,” 4:1360

⁵⁰⁵ NDAR, “Captain Abraham Whipple to Commodore Esek Hopkins,” 4:1328-1329 and 1329 note



Hopkins was not anxious to perform this task. He felt that one court martial would “bring on some more Enquiries—but do not expect any thing which may now be done will mend what is past . . . “ The trial was arranged for on 1 May 1776.⁵⁰⁶

Whipple’s court martial sat on 6 May 1776, aboard the *Alfred*. The president was Captain Dudley Saltonstall (*Alfred*) and the other captains were Nicholas Biddle (*Andrew Doria*), and John Hazard (*Providence*). Captains of Marines on the court were Samuel Nicholas (*Alfred*) and John Welch (*Cabot*). The lieutenants were John Paul Jones (*Alfred*), Rhodes Arnold (*Columbus*), Hoysteed Hacker (*Fly*), Elisha Hinman (*Cabot*), Jonathan Maltbie (*Alfred*), and Marine lieutenants Matthew Parke and Henry Dayton.⁵⁰⁷

Whipple appeared before the court and stated that his character stood accused of cowardice for not engaging closely with *Glasgow* and demanded the court examine the matter. After hearing Whipple the court took other testimony and concluded that “his mode of attack on the *Glasgow* in our Oppinion has proceeded from Error in Judgment and not from Cowardice.”⁵⁰⁸

Whipple’s court martial was the first conducted in the Navy, the first requested by the man tried, and the first acquittal. Many writers have noted Whipple’s “toughness” in standing trial at his own request. Perhaps so: but note the fact of a Rhode Islander and relative of the Commodore being tried in a Rhode Island port, with a court composed of a current first lieutenant from his own ship (and potentially the most damaging witness against him), two other Rhode Islanders, and the president from Connecticut. With no clear evidence to the contrary, the only conclusion the court could come up with was what it did come up with: error in judgment.

Hopkins was right about one thing. Once one court martial was held more would follow. On 6 May, perhaps right after or during Whipple’s court martial, the under officers of *Providence* charged Captain John Hazard with embezzling public stores from the sloop, disobeying the orders of the Commodore on two occasions, and negligence and dereliction of duty in the Battle off Block Island. On 7 May Hopkins ordered the court martial held the next day.

The trial was again held aboard *Alfred*, at Providence, on 8 May at 1000. Captain Whipple replaced Hazard, but the other officers were the same as those who had tried Whipple. Hazard pleaded not guilty to all four charges and the board proceeded to hear the testimony. He was found guilty of disobedience of orders in the Delaware River on a minor occasion, and again on 26 April, when the fleet proceeded up to Providence. He was convicted of embezzlement and, more seriously, of not preparing *Providence* for action with *Glasgow* on 6 April. The finding was unanimous on each count. Hazard was sentenced to be cashiered, and Hopkins approved the sentence on 9 May.⁵⁰⁹ John Hazard thus became the first American naval captain to be convicted

⁵⁰⁶ NDAR, “Commodore Esek Hopkins to John Hancock,” 4:1358-1360

⁵⁰⁷ NDAR, “Proceedings of Court Martial of Abraham Whipple, Commander of the *Columbus*,” 4:1419-1421

⁵⁰⁸ NDAR, “Proceedings of Court Martial of Abraham Whipple, Commander of the *Columbus*,” 4:1419-1421

⁵⁰⁹ NDAR, “Court Martial of John Hazard, Commander of the Sloop *Providence*,” 4:1458-1459



in a court martial and the first cashiered from the service.

Hazard, naturally, did not let the matter entirely rest. Sometime between 9 May and 17 May, when the results of the trial were first published in the *Providence Gazette*, Hazard appealed to Hopkins. The trial had been unfair, Hazard said. Saltonstall deprived Hazard of many privileges. Hazard had written to Saltonstall about his partial behavior. A copy was sent to Hopkins, as was a copy of the trial with a summary of the testimony of the witnesses. Saltonstall had not yet furnished Hazard with any of the defense's papers or copies of defense testimony, nor a copy of Hazard's written defense.

Hazard made these points. He was accused of disobedience at Reedy Island, which was not delivering wood and "which I thought was settled there." The accusation of disobeying orders while going up the Providence River consisted of not coming under flagship *Alfred's* stern. This was a case of misunderstanding "as I understood you was going to Newport then when I left your Ship." Embezzlement was supposed to be, according to Hazard, the greatest of his crimes. If Hopkins inquired he would find it, however, a "Mear Triffle." As for the *Glasgow* affair, Hazard was asleep and was awakened by his mate (a defense witness who was not called). Hazard hauled up his sails waiting for *Columbus* to come alongside, and then hailed Whipple. Hazard undertook to run alongside *Glasgow* on one side if Whipple would take the other, and *Providence* "would sink by her or be on Board of her." No man on *Providence*, said Hazard, can deny this. Finally, Hazard asked Hopkins for a recommendation, as he meant to serve his country again, or at least a new trial.⁵¹⁰

In his report to John Hancock on 22 May, Hopkins sent records of the courts-martial with several comments. He had confirmed the verdict on Hazard, but awaited Congress' orders on Whipple's verdict.⁵¹¹ Hopkins said he could have overlooked the rest of Hazard's conduct "but as he was found Guilty in the affair of the *Glasgow* I could not pass it by."⁵¹² Meanwhile the verdicts had been published in the Providence papers on 19 May.⁵¹³

It may be well to follow Hazard's appeal before returning to the fleet. Congress received Hopkins' letter of 22 May on the 31st. It was turned over to a special committee, already appointed to examine the Commodore's conduct.⁵¹⁴ On 8 June, in a letter to brother Stephen Hopkins, Esek noted the two courts-martial and that he had sent copies of the proceedings to John Hancock. Hopkins goes on to say "I am very Sensible that every Officer has his Friends,

⁵¹⁰ NDAR, "Captain John Hazard to Commodore Esek Hopkins, V, 64-65 and 65 note. Forget not that one other officer from *Providence* was on the court, First Lieutenant of Marines Henry Dayton. The verdict of the court was unanimous, so Dayton did not recollect this conversation. The other man involved, Whipple, was on the court, and he also voted guilty.

⁵¹¹ Why Hopkins would wait to confirm Whipple's verdict is a question worth an answer, but I have not found an answer. It is a very good question.

⁵¹² NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to John Hancock," V, 199-200

⁵¹³ NDAR, "Lieutenant John Paul Jones to Joseph Hewes," V, 151-153

⁵¹⁴ NDAR, "Journal of the Continental Congress," V, 319

and that has had so much Weight with me as not to order a Court Martial although ever so necessary but when the Complaint came in writing and that from the principal Officers of the Fleet. I wish to God and for the good of my Country that no Officer in the Fleet depended on any Friend, but on their own Merit.”⁵¹⁵

John Hazard proceeded to Philadelphia and presented a memorial to the Marine Committee on his court martial at some date prior to 4 September 1776. An unsolicited opinion was given to Robert Morris by then Captain John Paul Jones, in a letter of that date. Jones understood from British example that the verdict of a court martial, when confirmed by a commander-in-chief, admitted no further appeal. Jones had heard with “Astonishment the Application and Complaint of the late Captn Hazard to the Marine Board after he had been found ‘Unworthy of Bearing his Commission in the Navy’ by the Undivided Voice of a Court Martial . . . If he was then Unworthy of bearing his Commission I cannot see what new Merit he can have acquired . . . “ Jones pointed out it would be unwise to reverse the sentence even if Hazard had merit on his side, for to do so would allow other officers to hold courts-martial in contempt, and might lead members of courts-martial to inflict “Personal Punishment” to which no appeal was possible.⁵¹⁶ And there the matter rested. If errors were made in Hazard’s court martial, it was still better he was gone, the Marine Committee apparently concluded.

The crews were unhappy with their officers; the officers unhappy with one another. Congress was also unhappy, and with their Commodore. As early as 26 April Congressional questions about Hopkins’ behavior were arising. After examining Washington’s report Congress approved of his assisting the Commodore with men, and let that item rest. As we have above mentioned, Hopkins released one mortar for Washington on 28 April, hardly fulfilling the spirit of the Congressional resolves.

Meanwhile, about 23 April, the Marine Committee had drafted a new set of orders for Hopkins. They communicated to him detailed information concerning the British forces in Virginia and North Carolina, pointing out the general weakness of the British. The Committee urged Hopkins to attack these forces: “. . . there is no service . . . in which you could better promote the Interest of our Country . . . “ than by destroying these forces. If he came south he was to advise the Committee as to when he would sail, so that all available naval and military forces could cooperate. Further, “As You were directed by a former Instruction . . . [to] dispatch a swift sailing Vessel . . . “ to make a reconnaissance, “we now remind You of that Instruction & desire You would send a Vessel for that Purpose . . . “ Hopkins received these orders in early May. It was the clearest intimation yet that patience with him was dwindling in Congress.

The Pennsylvania Committee of Safety now approached Congress (26 April) and requested the use of the cannon that Hopkins had delivered to Newport, offering to pay for them. Considering the amount of money already spent by Pennsylvania in fortifying the Delaware River, this was a very fair offer. After some deliberation, Congress accepted this offer. On 7 May Congress resolved to order twenty of the heaviest cannon, taken to Providence by Hopkins, to be shipped to

⁵¹⁵ NDAR, “Commodore Esek Hopkins to his Brother, Stephen Hopkins, Philadelphia,” V, 424-427

⁵¹⁶ NDAR, “Captain John Paul Jones to Robert Morris,” 6:685-687

Philadelphia and mounted there for defense of the “capital.” In passing this order along to Hopkins, John Hancock quoted the full text of the resolve. Hancock clearly wanted no misunderstanding by Hopkins.

Perhaps Hancock was being explicit because dissatisfaction with Hopkins had now come officially before Congress. On 4 May a resolution was passed calling on the Marine Committee to find the original orders to Hopkins, issued by the Naval Committee, bring them forth, and lay them on the table for the perusal of the members.

Four days later, 8 May, a copy of the orders given to Hopkins was laid before Congress and read to the assembled delegates. A motion was passed to refer the orders to a committee of seven for study. Benjamin Harrison, John Adams, Thomas McKean, James Duane, Thomas Lynch, Roger Sherman and William Livingston were selected. This committee was to examine the orders, and also consider what was to be done with the high ranking prisoners from the Bahamas. The committee was originally charged to consider the appropriation of the cannon by Hopkins, but this was deleted from the instructions. It was evident from this motion that there was considerable dissatisfaction with Hopkins’ performance. Even more ominous was the next motion: “*Resolved*, That whenever it shall appear to this Congress, that any officer or officers, bearing continental commissions, shall have departed from orders, then an enquiry shall be made.”

John Adams later reported that debates in Congress raged around the figure of Hopkins at this time. He says he could find no reason for it “but that he had done too much . . .” Adams was far too good a politician not to know the reasons. The Southern delegates had been necessary to obtain a Navy. They voted for a Navy on the condition it strike the forces around Lord Dunmore in Virginia, or some other Southern port. Those were the orders given Hopkins, and he had disobeyed them. On his return to America he had headed like a homing pigeon for New England, specifically Rhode Island. The prime booty of the raid on New Providence, the heavy cannon, had been disposed of as if they were Hopkins’ personal property. Most of those had gone to Rhode Island. A cooler look at the escape of the *Glasgow* revealed shortcomings in leadership. The Southerner’s blood was up and they meant to find out why, exactly, Hopkins had not followed orders.

Back at Providence there were a number of officer changes following the arrival of the fleet at Providence and the court martial and dismissal of Hazard. The first order of business was to find a new commander for sloop *Providence*. On 10 May, Hopkins ordered First Lieutenant John Paul Jones to take command of her, “as captain of the *Providence*.” Hopkins had no blank commission, so the “appointment was written and signed on the back” of Jones’s lieutenant’s commission.⁵¹⁷ Jones was ordered to put her in good condition and then take aboard Washington’s soldiers and deliver them to New York City. While at New York Jones was to enlist as many landsmen and sailors as possible. On the return trip Jones was to call at New London and pick up any of the men in the hospital, who were now well.⁵¹⁸

⁵¹⁷ NDAR, “Journal of John Paul Jones,” 6:209-210

⁵¹⁸ NDAR, “Commodore Esek Hopkins to Lieutenant John Paul Jones,” V, 27. This letter does not contain the phrase “as Captain of the *Providence*” in it. Jones is to “take command of the sloop *Providence*.”



Since moving Jones to *Providence* left only Second Lieutenant Jonathan Maltbie aboard *Alfred*, First Lieutenant Jonathan Pitcher was shifted to her from *Providence*. Jones therefore found aboard *Providence*, as officers, First Lieutenant William Grinnell (sent from *Columbus* on 16 April) and Second Lieutenant John Peck Rathbun. The Acting Master was Samuel Brownell, signed on at New Providence on 14 March. Other officers were Second Mate Joseph Brown, Third Mate John McNeil, and Midshipman Joseph Hardy. First Lieutenant of Marines Henry Dayton was gone, his last known service being on the court martial of 8 May. There was no Surgeon. That office was filled on 12 May, by promoting Henry Tillinghast from Surgeon's Mate on *Alfred*, to Surgeon, and assigning him to *Providence*.

Jones found thirty-four men aboard *Providence*. He managed to get three (counting himself and Surgeon Tillinghast) from *Alfred*. On 15 May he recruited one man, a clerk, Charles Short, later discharged as incompetent. Thus, there was only a skeleton naval crew of twenty-seven, in addition to seventeen Marines, aboard the sloop when she sailed.

About 10 May *Andrew Doria* was under sailing orders to go out on a patrol in company with *Cabot*. Biddle was anxious to go for he was tired of "tagging after these Dam'd Ships." *Andrew Doria* had been ready to go for a week, waiting only for orders.⁵¹⁹ *Andrew Doria* had a crew of forty-nine sailors and twenty-four Marines on the 10th, including some "New Marines" from the army. Among these was Lieutenant Joseph Wadsworth of the 23rd Continental Infantry.⁵²⁰ On 13 May a draft of seventeen men was transferred from *Alfred*, which brought Biddle's crew up to ninety men.

Cabot had, of course, no commanding officer aboard. First Lieutenant Elisha Hinman took command of her pending the return of the younger Hopkins. With the addition of First Lieutenant of Marines John Kerr, and Midshipmen John Sword, Ephraim Goldsmith, Abel Frisbie and Peter Richards she was well officered.

The first vessel to get to sea was sloop *Providence*. Jones loaded the troops being returned to Washington aboard her, including the "New Marines" from *Andrew Doria*. He was given a letter from Hopkins to Washington and sailed from Providence on 16 May. *Providence* arrived at New York on 18 May, delivering the one hundred soldiers.⁵²¹ Jones then began recruiting sailors, with very little luck. Between 20 and 24 May a total of six sailors were enlisted, and one was taken from the hospital, but exchanged two days later for a Marine. Two men were discharged, including the recently acquired Marine, on 24 May. Two sailors took the opportunity to desert on 24 May. First Mate John Margeson of *Andrew Doria* was taken up at New York as a deserter. He was not entered on the sloop's muster roll at this time, Jones apparently planning to deliver him to Biddle.

While recruiting at New York, Jones took time to write to his Congressional patron Joseph Hewes

⁵¹⁹ NDAR, "Captain Nicholas Biddle to James Biddle," V, 27-29

⁵²⁰ NDAR, "A List of People on board the *Andrew Doria* 10th May," V, 29-30 and 30 note

⁵²¹ NDAR, "Lieutenant John Paul Jones to Joseph Hewes," V, 151-153



a long letter with several interesting comments. First he recaps recent history, touching on the condition of the fleet, and the difficulty of manning it, then proceeds “The Unfortunate Engagement with the *Glascow* seems to be a general refection on the Officers of the Fleet . . . “ Jones points out that he was on *Alfred’s* gun deck during the battle, and not therefore, involved with the direction of the ship. Jones continues with his opinion of what is necessary for an officer in the Navy: “I may be wrong but in my Opinion a Captain of the Navy ought to be a man of Strong and well connected Sense with a tolerable Education, a Gentleman as well as a Seamen both in Theory and Practice—for, want of learning and rude Ungentle Manners are by no means the Characteristick of an Officer . . . “⁵²²

Jones now touches on his reasons for accepting command of *Providence*. He mentions that he was offered command of the sloop at Philadelphia, but declined it, and would not have accepted it now but for the “Rude Unhappy Temper of my late Commander.—I now reflect with Pleasure that I had Philosophy Sufficient to Avoid Quarreling with him—and that I even Obtained his blessing at Parting.”⁵²³

Jones now comes to the issue of rank, one that preoccupied him for the rest of his naval career. He has heard, he tells Hewes, that the local committees building the new frigates are to appoint all the officers except the captains. Jones says he does not believe those who stepped forward first will be overlooked in these appointments, “. . . Nor can I suppose that my own Conduct will in the Esteem of Congress Subject me to be Superseded in favour of a Younger Officer, especially one who is said not to Understand Navigation—I mean the Lieutenant of the *Cabot* who was put in Commr of the *Fly* at Reedy Island after I had declined it—I was then told that no new Commission would be given—and I considered her as a paltry Message Boat fit to be commanded by a Midshipman.—but on my Appointment to the *Providence* I was indeed Astonished to find my Seniority Questioned—the Commodore told me he must refer to Congress—I have recd no New Commission . . . “⁵²⁴ Jones’s assignment to *Providence* had evidently been questioned by Hoysted Hacker, the lieutenant commanding the *Fly*. Hopkins’ intention was to promote Jones to Captain until Hacker’s protest. In the event Hopkins did not, apparently, refer to the Marine Committee, and did promote Jones. This episode is what provoked Jones’s letter to Hewes.

Providence sailed out of New York about 25 May, heading for New London. She had a crew of only forty-six men aboard, but Jones expected to get more men from the hospital at New London. The sloop arrived there about 27 May. The next day Jones got what men he could from the hospital: a total of one sailor. Jones sailed from New London on 29 May, going out in company with Connecticut Navy Schooner *Spy* (Captain Robert Niles) and Connecticut Privateer Sloop *Gamecock* (Commander Lemuel Brooks). *Cerberus* had been hanging about the coast for some time and saw and chased *Spy*, but the other two evaded her easily, *Gamecock* and *Providence* both arrived at Newport on 30 May.

⁵²² NDAR, “Lieutenant John Paul Jones to Joseph Hewes,” V, 151-153

⁵²³ NDAR, “Lieutenant John Paul Jones to Joseph Hewes,” V, 151-153

⁵²⁴ NDAR, “Lieutenant John Paul Jones to Joseph Hewes,” V, 151-153



On 12 May Hopkins issued sailing orders for *Andrew Doria* and *Cabot*. Biddle was to take enough men from *Alfred* to make his crew up to eighty-five, and Lieutenant Hinman (*Cabot*) was to take men from *Alfred* and *Fly* until he had ninety aboard. The two brigs were to cruise for three or four weeks, with Biddle as the senior officer. Prizes were to be sent to Providence except in cases of necessity.

Andrew Doria prepared for sea where she lay, in Providence River. After sending her eleven “New Marines” aboard *Providence* for delivery to New York, Biddle needed men to flesh out his crew. Seventeen men came from *Alfred* on 13 May, just before *Andrew Doria* and *Cabot* raised sail. The two brigs dropped down the river to Pawtucket and anchored there.

When Jones sailed from Providence in the *Providence* on 16 May *Columbus* was in the process of heaving down to clean, and *Alfred* was hauling to the wharf to begin repairs.⁵²⁵ *Alfred*’s status at this time was reported by Hopkins in a letter to Hancock on 22 May. Nearly half the men in the fleet were sick. *Alfred* had sent so many sailors to other vessels of the fleet that she was left “almost without hands—and the most I now expect is to fit and send the *Columbus & Providence* on a Cruise in about ten days, which will leave the *Alfred* without any hands more than the Officers—The Sickness discouraging new hands from entering.” The reason Hopkins had left *Alfred* for last was that she “is tender Sided and the most unfit Vessel in the Fleet for Service, and her Main Mast has a 9 lb shot through it, and can’t get another easily in this place, although it is fished in the best manner we could do it I am still in doubt whether it will bear hard Crowding on . . .” Hopkins hoped to get permission to man her by recruiting from the Rhode Island forces at Newport.⁵²⁶ So short of men was *Alfred* that the tiny sloop *Fly* turned over a man to her on the 16th.⁵²⁷

One sailor’s opinion of Captain Saltonstall came to light on 29 May. Able Seaman Kenneth McCloud wrote to the Commodore, asking what station he was to take. McCloud continued “. . . I am Content Ether Way for I am Determind to Stay By you So Long as I Receive the Same Good treatment as I always Have from you But Capt Saltison I will Not Saile with . . .”⁵²⁸

In a report to the Marine Committee on 19 June, Hopkins noted that he was going to go down to Newport in the *Alfred* in two or three days in an attempt to man her. He had gotten some sailors, temporarily, from Rhode Island, which enabled the *Providence* and *Columbus* to sail.⁵²⁹ About the same time Hopkins recommended five men from the *Alfred* for promotion: John Earle, Thomas Vaughan, and George House, for lieutenants aboard one of the new frigates at Philadelphia; Robert Sanders, then living in Maryland, for a lieutenancy on the frigate building

⁵²⁵ NDAR, “Lieutenant John Paul Jones to Joseph Hewes,” V, 151-153

⁵²⁶ NDAR, “Commodore Esek Hopkins to John Hancock,” V, 199-200

⁵²⁷ NDAR, “Muster Roll of the Continental Sloop *Fly*,” 6:138. This man is not shown on the *Alfred*’s muster roll.

⁵²⁸ NDAR, “Kenneth McCloud to Commodore Esek Hopkins,” V, 294-295 and 295 note

⁵²⁹ “Commodore Esek Hopkins to the Continental Marine Committee,” V, 622-623



there, and Francis Varell, for boatswain of one of the Philadelphia frigates.⁵³⁰

Just at this point came the news that Congress was to investigate the past activities of the fleet. When Hopkins' fleet had still not moved following the emphatic "request" to go South from the Marine Committee on 23 April, the tempers in Congress began to get very short indeed. By late May several officers and enlisted men had made their way to Philadelphia and more information was available to the Delegates on how their fleet was handled. Disgruntled Marine officers from the *Columbus* reported that Whipple was incapable of command and badly mistreated his crew. Saltonstall was reportedly as bad as Whipple, and everyone universally condemned the mishandling of the fleet in the Battle off Block Island. Then there was the matter of the New Providence cannon: it seemed impossible to get them away from Hopkins and Rhode Island.

Congress had previously appointed a Committee to examine Hopkins' instructions from the Naval Committee. On 22 May Congress ordered the Committee that was examining Hopkins' instructions from the Naval Committee to "enquire how far Commodore Hopkins has complied with the said instructions, and if, upon enquiry, they shall find he has departed therefrom, to examine in to the occasion. . . That the said committee have power to send for witnesses and papers."⁵³¹ Thus the Committee was given power to conduct a full investigation. On 31 May Congress received Hopkins' letter of the 22nd, transmitting the results of the courts-martial of John Hazard and Abraham Whipple. This letter was also referred to the Committee⁵³² which now knew that a disgruntled John Hazard would soon be coming down to see Congress.

Robert Morris expressed the nearly universal opinion when writing to Silas Deane on 5 June: "Commodore Hopkins has...[illegible]...short of Expectation and his fleet which might have performed the most signal service under an active vigilant Man, have been most useless."⁵³³ It must be remembered that at this time the Congress had a great many problems confronting it: there was just beginning a huge buildup of both American and British forces for the New York campaign; American troops in Canada were in full retreat and the Army there was in disintegration, bringing fears of an invasion down the lakes; another British army and naval forces was moving on South Carolina; and the movement for independence was in full swing and under debate. It was a time when everyone was straining every resource to provide men and munitions and money for the numerous threats. It was a time, in the view from Philadelphia, when the Commodore of the Navy, was consulting his safety in Newport in defiance of direct orders.

Of course, all the fault was not Hopkins's: there were extenuating circumstances. The sickness of his crews and the shortage of crews had largely prevented his complying with the orders of 23 April and he had done his best to get the vessels of the fleet out to sea individually to cruise. The situation with the New Providence cannon had gotten far beyond his ability to control.

⁵³⁰ "Commodore Esek Hopkins' Recommendations for Officers for the New Frigates," V, 623-624

⁵³¹ NDAR, "Journal of the Continental Congress," V, 205

⁵³² NDAR, "Journal of the Continental Congress," V, 319

⁵³³ NDAR, "Robert Morris for the Committee of Secret Correspondence, to Silas Deane," V, 383-385

Ultimately, had he followed his initial orders to the extent of looking in at Virginia, had he gone to Georgia or North Carolina after the New Providence raid, or had he landed the cannon at New London when he first received the order to do so from Congress, he probably would not have been in such trouble. Hopkins had done his best at sea, and not all that badly.

Esek's brother Stephen was still a delegate in Congress and saw how the wind was blowing quite clearly. He sent off a warning note to Esek on 31 May and brother Esek replied on 8 June. Esek knew he was in trouble and "as for the Souther Colonies being Uneasy it is no more. . .than I apprehended." Esek explained that he intended to go from New Providence to Savannah, but intelligence received only three or four days before he sailed revealed a large British frigate had arrived there. As for the *Glasgow* affair "had all the Commanders behaved as I expected they would, I should have had it in my power. . .to have relieved most of the Southern Goverments. . .but as the Case was it was lucky we did not fall in with their whole Strength at first—I was not deceived in the Strength of the Enemy but greatly in ow own Resolution." Esek thought perhaps he should have mentioned this sooner, but had hoped the fleet's reputation would be retrieved by later action. However, the "inattention to business of most of the Officers, and an expectation of getting higher Stations in the new Ships" had prevented the fleet preparing for sea quickly. The sickness among the crews further prevented action.⁵³⁴

Hopkins concludes by mentioning that he would be really quite pleased to hand the command over to someone else, for he was now feeling his age, and the "several difficulties that attend the Navy are too many to mention & perhaps imprudent to name, it is too much for my Capacity to Surmount."⁵³⁵

It would be very interesting to know just which "Commanders" had not displayed "Resolution" in the Battle off Block Island. Saltonstall, aboard the *Alfred*, had lain alongside the *Glasgow* exchanging blow for blow. Esek's son, John Burroughs Hopkins, had taken the *Cabot* alongside and been wounded for his troubles. Lieutenant Hacker, in the *Fly* was not in position to engage, nor was the sloop capable of being in the battle. That left Whipple (*Columbus*), Biddle (*Andrew Doria*) and Hazard (*Providence*) to account for. Hazard had been tried and his actions in the battle had partly led to his dismissal, at least according to Hopkins. Whipple had been tried and acquitted. This left only Biddle. Now interestingly enough, when the Philadelphia newspapers had published Hopkins' account of the battle, Biddle's family and friends had, as you might imagine, read them over carefully seeking notices of their relatives or friends. There was none, and this seemingly studied ignorance offended them. It was the subject of questioning to Nicholas in letters from home.⁵³⁶ If Hopkins was speaking of Nicholas Biddle as a "Commander" without "Resolution" he was never more wrong in a judgement.

Commenting on this omission in a letter home, Biddle said "the injustice and Partiality of the letter were so very glaring that it needed no comment, tis not from him that I can expect

⁵³⁴ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to his Brother, Stephen Hopkins, Philadelphia," V, 424-426

⁵³⁵ Ibid.

⁵³⁶ NDAR, "Captain Nicholas Biddle to Charles Biddle," V, 564-565 and 565 note

Justice.” Biddle had not discussed the letter with the Commodore, “Not a syllable has ever passed. . .about either the Action or letter...” Biddle also noted his belief that Hopkins “deserved the severest censure” for the way he handled the battle.⁵³⁷

Alerted by brother Stephen’s warning, Hopkins now gathered up papers, copies of orders, muster rolls, payrolls, and various other data for transmission to the Marine Committee. He sent them all off to Philadelphia under care of Marine Captain Samuel Nicholas of the *Alfred*, who was going to Philadelphia on personal business. Nicholas was to call on the Marine Committee while there and discuss the late cruise with the Committee. Nicholas departed Providence on 19 June 1776.⁵³⁸

While Hopkins was gathering papers the Committee conducting the investigation was gathering complaints. Complaints against Hopkins, Saltonstall, and Whipple. Finally, on 13 June, the Committee presented a report to Congress with the complaints detailed. It was enough for Congress to order an inquiry.⁵³⁹

President of the Continental Congress and of the Marine Committee John Hancock wasted no time in notifying Hopkins. On 14 June he wrote him a very direct letter. “Notwithstanding the repeated Efforts and Solicitations of the Marine Board to put the Continental Ships upon a respectable footing, and to have them employed in the Service for which they were originally designed. . .their Efforts & Solicitations have been frustrated & neglected in a manner unaccountable to them. . .there has been a great Neglect in the Execution of their Orders.⁵⁴⁰ For these reasons and to explain the complaints by the officers and men, Hopkins was ordered to Philadelphia to answer “with respect to your whole proceedings since you left this City.” This was followed by similar letters to Captains Saltonstall and Whipple: “The present inactive State of the Navy of the United Colonies, the many Complaints. . .and the daily Applications of both Officers & men who have left the fleet in Consequence of very severe usage.” They were directed to come by land to Philadelphia and report to Hancock as President of the Marine Committee, All necessary papers for their defense and relative to their ships was to be brought. Finally “I am to repeat to you that Congress expect your immediate Compliance with this order. . .”⁵⁴¹ Hancock also notified George Washington of the situation, noting “The shameful Inactivity of our Fleet for some Time past; the frequent Neglect or Disobediance of Orders in Commodore Hopkins, the numberless Complaints exhibited to the Marine Committee agt him, and also against Captains Saltonstal and Whipple. . .I hope soon to have our Ships on a more respectable Footing. No Effort of mine shall be wanting to accomplish so desirable an Event.”⁵⁴²

⁵³⁷ NDAR, “Captain Nicholas Biddle to Charles Biddle,” V, 564-565 and 565 note

⁵³⁸ NDAR, “Commodore Esek Hopkins to the Continental Marine Committee,” V, 622-623

⁵³⁹ NDAR, “Journal of the Continental Congress,” V, 511-512

⁵⁴⁰ NDAR, “John Hancock to Commodore Esek Hopkins,” V, 528-530

⁵⁴¹ NDAR, “John Hancock to Captains Dudley Saltonstall and Abraham Whipple,” V, 530-531

⁵⁴² NDAR, “John Hancock to George Washington,” V, 531



Hopkins received his notification on 20 June: the express rider must have passed Major Nicholas on the road. That same day Hopkins passed the orders of Congress along to Whipple, stopping him as he was on the point of sailing in the *Columbus*. Hopkins hoped that Whipple could “immediately take such Steps as you may be able to Satisfy the Congress with your Conduct—Captain Saltonstall and myself are both ordered there to Account for our Conduct—Shall take pleasure in your Company.”⁵⁴³ Finally, Hopkins informed Biddle that he was ordered to Congress, along with Saltonstall and Whipple, and that Biddle would be in temporary command of the fleet. Biddle was to be prudent and take “no Steps with the Ships till further orders from Congress.” Biddle was to transmit the state of the *Andrew Doria* to him, and order Jones and Hacker to do the same.⁵⁴⁴

The two captains and the Commodore met before their trip down to Philadelphia. What passed between them is unknown, except for a brief passage put down in a letter from John Paul Jones to Robert Morris on 12 January 1777. At the time Jones was on an extended character assassination of various captains who had been promoted over his head. Jones and Saltonstall had never gotten along, so the source must be considered somewhat suspicious. However, according to Jones, who said that he was told this by Commodore Hopkins, when the three men met Saltonstall told them “that if the other two were willing himself would Agree to be Broke if the Congress would allow them half pay”⁵⁴⁵

Whatever was decided or not the trip to Philadelphia was fast. Captains Whipple and Saltonstall reported to Congress in early July 1776, whereupon that body ordered, on 2 July 1776, that the Marine Committee immediately inquire into the complaints against them and bring in a report.⁵⁴⁶ The Committee reported to Congress on 11 July, having “called before them, divers of the inferior officers, belonging to the ships *Alfred* and *Columbus*, and having heard their complaints against the Captains Saltonstal and Whipple, in their presence, are of opinion, that the charge against Captain Saltonstal does not appear to the committee to be well founded, and that the charge against Captain Whipple amounts to nothing more than a rough, indelicate mode of behaviour to his marine officers.” After consideration Congress ordered both men to report to their ships and “that it be recommended to Captain Whipple to cultivate harmony with his officers.”⁵⁴⁷ Whipple and Saltonstall wasted no time in setting out for Providence. By 21 July Whipple was at New York, where Brigadier General Nathaniel Greene issued him a pass so he could transit the city easily.⁵⁴⁸

With the inquiries on the two captains out of the way, Congress turned to the Commodore. The

⁵⁴³ NDAR, “Commodore Esek Hopkins to Captain Abraham Whipple, *Columbus*, Newport,” V, 638-639

⁵⁴⁴ NDAR, “Commodore Esek Hopkins to Captain Nicholas Biddle,” V, 639

⁵⁴⁵ NDAR, “Captain John Paul Jones to Robert Morris,” 7:938-939

⁵⁴⁶ NDAR, “Journal of the Continental Congress,” V, 874

⁵⁴⁷ NDAR, “Journal of the Continental Congress,” V, 1028-1029

⁵⁴⁸ NDAR, “Pass Through New York for Captain Abraham Whipple,” V, 1171-1172 and 1172 note



Committee appointed on 8 May to examine his instructions was discharged on 12 July, and its business was turned over to the Marine Committee. The Marine Committee was ordered to examine Hopkins' compliance with his orders and also to inquire into the charges that were presented to Congress on 13 June by the Marine Committee.⁵⁴⁹

On 2 August 1776 the Marine Committee brought in its report on Hopkins' conduct. The report was read to the assembled Congress and it was ordered to lie on the table. Monday, August 5, was set as the date to take up the report and begin debate.⁵⁵⁰ But such was not to be. Instead, Hopkins presented a petition to Congress on Monday, stating:

“. . . he has been informed that certain complaints, interrogatories and report, charging him with sundry crimes and misdemeanors, had been exhibited to the honorable Congress; the purport of which complaints &c. he is ignorant of; and praying that he may be furnished with copies thereof, and of all other proceedings against him. . .and that time may be allowed him to prepare for, and a day assigned for, his being heard before Congress in his own defence.”⁵⁵¹

Congress gave Hopkins four days grace, fixing Friday, August 9, to hear his defense. On Friday the date was extended to Monday, August 12, and Congress ordered that “Captain Jones be directed to attend.”⁵⁵²

On 12 August Commodore Hopkins attended Congress and was admitted “agreeable to the order of the day.” His examination before the Marine Committee was read to Congress, and the Commodore presented his own case, elaborating answers to some of the questions asked by the Marine Committee, and presenting two witnesses.⁵⁵³ It was a trial and Hopkins knew it, telling the delegates “I am glad that I am to be tryed by a Court that I Can have no Doubt But will Judge from Maters of fact and not from aney Rumer propagated out Dorrs . . .”⁵⁵⁴ Hopkins added that the reputation of the Navy had not suffered under him.

The chief obstacle was the charge of insubordination. Hopkins specifically addressed this charge. His orders, he said, were made out on 5 January 1776 and he did not sail until 17 February 1776, during which time the situation and the strength of the British at Virginia had changed greatly. He stated it did not appear to him that the Naval Committee expected him to follow outdated

⁵⁴⁹ NDAR, “Journal of the Continental Congress,” V, 1045

⁵⁵⁰ NDAR, “Journal of the Continental Congress,” 6:22

⁵⁵¹ NDAR, “Journal of the Continental Congress,” 6:63

⁵⁵² NDAR, “Journal of the Continental Congress,” 6:63 and note

⁵⁵³ NDAR, “Journal of the Continental Congress,” 6:156-157

⁵⁵⁴ NDAR, “Journal of the Continental Congress,” 6:156-157 and 157 note



orders, but to follow his “Judgment and Prude [prudence] . . .”⁵⁵⁵ Delegate Thomas Jefferson kept detailed notes of Hopkins’ defense, and put down his conclusions, which were similar, no doubt, to the sentiments of most listeners.

According to Hopkins he did not go to Virginia for the following reasons: (1) before he sailed he had heard that HM Frigate *Liverpool* had joined the British there, and that the British were now an “overmatch” for his fleet; and (2) the sickness aboard the fleet. He did not send a vessel to obtain intelligence because both the *Fly* and the *Hornet* parted two days after he sailed. Hopkins did not proceed to North Carolina because he had heard that all the British shipping had left for Georgia. He did not go to South Carolina because: (1) the British shipping had left for Georgia; and (2) he had no pilots for Charleston Bar. He did not go to Georgia because the British were too strong there. Further, as he sailed south the health of his crews improved. Hopkins appointed a rendezvous at Abaco, because it was closer to Georgia than was South Carolina. Since he had ordered the ships that rallied at Abaco to wait upon each other for fifteen days, “he thought he might as well form expedm somewhere.” Local intelligence presented New Providence as an objective, to secure powder and cannon. Again he did not proceed to Savannah because he heard of the British strength there. Hopkins returned to Rhode Island with the cannon because they were not needed in South Carolina and he thought he could bring them more safely to Rhode Island. Further, his orders were for him to proceed to Rhode Island. He did not deliver them to Governor Trumbull of Connecticut, as ordered by Congress, because he was using them as ballast, which could not be replaced at New London. It could be obtained from Jew York, but delay was impossible, for Washington had warned him the British were going to blockade New London. He delivered the cannon to Governor Cooke because the Rhode Island governor offered pig iron ballast in exchange, and agreed to deliver the cannon when Congress asked for them. Finally, “a clause in his instrns authorized him to depart from his instrns if in his discretn he thought for the public good. if he was mistaken then it was no [crime.] instrns are never given positively & it is right they should not be, because of change of circumstances. . .”⁵⁵⁶

Patiently, with skill, and point by point, Jefferson destroys Hopkins’ defense. He states his theme at once: “The Commodore had a premeditated design not to go to the Southern colonies but to Providence . . .” He did not intend to go to Virginia because he did not send any vessels to reconnoiter, and the same for North Carolina. Nor did he send to South Carolina for information. The *Fly* had been purchased especially to allow him to obtain intelligence. Further, he still had the light vessel *Wasp* with him. A rendezvous at Charleston was closer than Abaco to Savannah, and signals had been made out for his reception, and pilots would be furnished, all of which Hopkins knew before he sailed. According to Major Nicholas’ testimony to the Marine Committee, Hopkins told Nicholas that he was going to Providence two days before he arrived at Abaco. The absence of the light craft, the *Fly* and the *Hornet* could not have prevented his going to Savannah, as they were not fighting ships. As for taking cannon to Rhode Island, there were none in North Carolina, and they “wre mch wantg there.” Further, if cannon were an object, Fort Johnson in North Carolina had more than New Providence. Why, after attacking New Providence, had he not gone to the Southern coast “that being not only the main object of his

⁵⁵⁵ NDAR, “Journal of the Continental Congress,” 6:156-157 and 157 note

⁵⁵⁶ NDAR, “Thomas Jefferson’s Notes on Commodore Esek Hopkins’ Defense,” 6:195-198 and 198 note



expedn, but in truth the object of equipping the Navy.” He demonstrated his lack of experience in the *Glasgow* affair. As to the cannon being used as ballast, two of “his officers say she had still the ballast with which she had gone to Providence & returned.” On being given the Congressional order to deliver up the cannon at New London “tho’ he was come out of the harbor of New London. . .he ot to have retd wth them.” The problem was, “(not] that he did not exercise an honest discretion in departing from his instrns but that he never did intend to obey them . . .”⁵⁵⁷

After presenting his case the Commodore withdrew from Congress and the debate began,⁵⁵⁸ and continued on 15 August.⁵⁵⁹ John Adams took up the mantle of defense attorney. “On this Occasion I had a very laborious task, against all the Prejudices of the Gentlemen from the southern and middle states, and of many from New England. . .I thought, however that Hopkins had done great Service. . .” Adams thought Hopkins was the victim of an “Anti New England Spirit. . .” He presented to Congress that he saw nothing in his conduct to show corruption or lack of integrity. Adams again: “Experience and Skill might have been deficient, in several Particulars: But where could We find greate Experience or Skill? I knew of none to be found. The other Captains had not so much. . .” Adams proceeded to investigate and examine the whole matter, going over the questions, Hopkins’ replies, using all his “Talents and Eloquence. . .in justifying him where he was justifiable, and excusing him where he was excusable.” Following the debate Rhode Island Delegate William Ellery approached Adams and told him “. . .you have made the old Man your Friend for Life. He will hear of your Defence. . .and he never forgets a Kindness.” And such was the truth.⁵⁶⁰ After the conclusion of the debate it was resolved that Hopkins “did not pay due regard to the tenor of his instructions. . .and that his reasons for not going from Providence immediately to the Carolinas, are by no means satisfactory.” The Pennsylvania delegates now requested a farther postponement to the next day.⁵⁶¹

On 16 August Congress took up the report again. Finally a resolution was approved: “Resolved, That the said conduct of Commodore Hopkins deserves the censure of this house, and the house does accordingly censure him.” A copy of the resolution was ordered sent to Hopkins. Adams regarded the vote of censure as a mistake “as it tended to discourage an Officer and diminish his Authority by tarnishing his reputation. . .” But Adams also regarded it as a victory of sorts for Hopkins was not cashiered “which had been the Object intended by the Spirit that dictated the Prosecution. . .”⁵⁶²

Hopkins had expected to be dismissed. When he received the resolutions of Congress, in a letter

⁵⁵⁷ NDAR, “Thomas Jefferson’s Notes on Commodore Esek Hopkins’ Defense,” 6:195-198 and 198 note

⁵⁵⁸ NDAR, “Journal of the Continental Congress,” 6:156-157

⁵⁵⁹ NDAR, “Autobiography of John Adams,” 6:157-158 and 158 note

⁵⁶⁰ NDAR, “Autobiography of John Adams,” 6:157-158 and 158 note

⁵⁶¹ NDAR, “Journal of the Continental Congress,” 6:195

⁵⁶² NDAR, “Journal of the Continental Congress,” 6:209 and note



from John Hancock on 16 August, he replied with a letter to Congress and then he said (in a note to Hancock) that he would “wait till I know if they have any further commands.” On 19 August Congress resolved that Hopkins “repair to Rhode Island, and take command of the fleet formerly put under his care.”⁵⁶³

How can this result of the investigation be explained? Surely Jefferson was basically correct in his analysis: Hopkins had deliberately disobeyed his orders, a situation that could not be tolerated in naval or military commanders. How then, had Adams’ eloquent defense saved Hopkins? The answer perhaps, is that it did not. The Southern delegates and most of those from the middle colonies, wanted him out. Many, but not all of the New Englanders, agreed he should go. But to dismiss the man would have created difficulties. So—the delegates from Pennsylvania brokered a vote of censure, and many of the gentlemen apparently expected that Hopkins, from a sense of his honor and dignity, would resign. He did not.

Support for this conclusion comes from a letter written by Robert R. Livingston, former delegate from New York, to Edward Rutledge (delegate from South Carolina), on 27 September 1776. Livingston noted, referring to Hopkins, “you have but one way left, appoint an Admiral—but dont flatter yourself that even that will bring about a resignation. A sense of honour must exist where in dignity produces a sacrifice of interest. If you have not the courage or interest to carry this as the next wise step sell your ships to private adventurers.”⁵⁶⁴

There exists a partial muster roll for *Alfred*, from about 2 August 1776, of men who entered from Connecticut. The earliest date is 18 December 1775 and the latest date is 11 February 1776. There are thirty-three men on the list, which also includes the status of each sailor. This shows that the earliest any of these men left the *Alfred* was on 13 March 1776, when two deserted. Of the deserters, another ran on 15 March, two more on 10 April and 21 April 1776, and one on 17 July 1776, a total of six. Three men died (21 March, 16 April, and 9 June 1776). Seven men were discharged (14 June, 16 June, 20 June (three men) and two men on 2 August 1776). One was transferred to *Andrew Doria* on 13 May 1776. Six men are shown as being sick and left in Connecticut, but not yet returned. Finally there is a category called “left the ship;” ten men are indicated in this group, which may be something like the modern absent without leave: the dates are 17 June, 3 July, 4 July (seven men), and 11 July. Of these thirty-three men, 18%deserted, 10% died, 21%were discharged, 3%were transferred to another ship, 18%were left ashore, sick, and 30% “left the ship.” If we add the last category to the deserters, the desertion rate is a whopping 48% Although this is a small sample, perhaps on one sixth of *Alfred’s* crew, it reveals some very real manning problems.⁵⁶⁵

Whipple was certainly in Providence by 7 August. On that date he persuaded Saltonstall (or Pitcher) to transfer twenty-seven of *Alfred’s* men to the *Columbus*, including Master John Earle, Third Mate Philip Alexander, and Midshipman George House. Fourteen of these men were

⁵⁶³ NDAR, “Commodore Esek Hopkins to John Hancock,” 6:220 and note

⁵⁶⁴ NDAR, “Robert R. Livingston to Edward Rutledge,” 6:1023 and note

⁵⁶⁵ NDAR, “List of Men from Connecticut Who Served On Board the Continental Ship *Alfred*,” 6:17-18



Marines, led by Sergeant William Hamilton. The next day two men were transferred to the *Andrew Doria*, and one was received from the same brig.⁵⁶⁶ Only fourteen Marines and thirty-eight sailors were left on the *Alfred*.

Alfred lost an officer on 13 August, when Second Mate Thomas Vaughan was promoted to Third Lieutenant and transferred to the Continental Navy Ship *Washington* at Philadelphia. Saltonstall was ordered to discharge Vaughan.⁵⁶⁷ Vaughan was discharged on 26 August.⁵⁶⁸ Another officer was lost on 22 August when Saltonstall was appointed as captain of the Continental Navy Ship *Trumbull*, being built in Connecticut.⁵⁶⁹ Another sailor deserted on 14 August.⁵⁷⁰

The short list of officers led to promotions on 20 August. Midshipman Robert Sanders was promoted to Second Lieutenant; Midshipmen Walter Spooner and Charles Bulkeley were both promoted to Master.⁵⁷¹

When Hopkins had been cleared by the investigating committee of Congress he was sent back to the fleet with a fresh set of orders, dated 22 August. The Marine Committee understood that the *Alfred* and *Cabot* were inactive and ordered Hopkins to ready them for a six months cruise. He was to join to these two the *Columbus* and *Hampden* to attack and disrupt the English Newfoundland fishery. Hopkins was told to take, sink, burn, and destroy as many fishing vessels as possible, making prisoners of the fishermen. Hopefully many of these would enter the Continental service. Shore raids were to be conducted to destroy the drying stages for the fish. If all four vessels were unable to proceed, Hopkins was to send out the ones available, appointing a rendezvous so that the others could follow and join later. The Marine Committee noted that it was the time of the year when the fishermen packed their cargo for home, so “no time must be lost.” Following the raid on Newfoundland the squadron was to cruise in the Gulf of St. Lawrence to capture inbound shipping to Quebec, possibly try to intercept some homeward bound Hudson’s Bay vessels, and call at French St. Pierre and Miquelon to announce the Declaration of Independence and sound out local sentiment. Hopkins was to have the schooner prize *Hawke* purchased, re-named the *Hopkins*, and joined to this expedition.⁵⁷²

⁵⁶⁶ NDAR, “A Roll of all the Officers and Men belonging to the Ship *Alfred* from the time of her being put into Commission until the 5th of September 1776.,” 6:692-705

⁵⁶⁷ NDAR, “Journal of the Continental Congress,” 6:170-171

⁵⁶⁸ NDAR, “A Roll of all the Officers and Men belonging to the Ship *Alfred* from the time of her being put into Commission until the 5th of September 1776.,” 6:692-705

⁵⁶⁹ NDAR, “Journal of the Continental Congress,” 6:270-271

⁵⁷⁰ NDAR, “A Roll of all the Officers and Men belonging to the Ship *Alfred* from the time of her being put into Commission until the 5th of September 1776.,” 6:692-705

⁵⁷¹ NDAR, “A Roll of all the Officers and Men belonging to the Ship *Alfred* from the time of her being put into Commission until the 5th of September 1776.,” 6:692-705

⁵⁷² NDAR, “Continental Marine Committee to Commodore Esek Hopkins,” 6:271-273



Hopkins returned to Providence from Philadelphia on 31 August, bearing these orders. He found that *Columbus* and *Cabot* were out cruising. The other vessels were in various stages of being refitted. Writing to the Marine Committee on 1 September 1776 he noted that he had not yet seen Saltonstall. Hopkins understood *Alfred* was five miles below Providence, anchored in the river, with only about forty men, including officers, aboard. Hopkins planned to rest a short time and then begin manning the *Alfred*. He asked permission to send her out under Lieutenant Jonathan Pitcher, “a prudent Capable Man,” when ready. Hopkins clearly was not expecting Saltonstall to stay.⁵⁷³ Governor Cooke of Rhode Island, answering an inquiry from Governor Trumbull of Connecticut, stated the same information on 3 September. *Alfred* was the only Continental Navy unit in the state, he said, and she had only forty men aboard including officers.⁵⁷⁴

Alfred's muster roll was drawn up on 5 September 1776, covering the period from *Alfred's* commissioning to 5 September, although there are a number of entries after that date. The muster roll bears the notation that it is a true copy of the roll “left in the ship by Captain Saltonstall,” and is signed by James Hogan. The muster roll shows the captain’s clerk being turned over to the *Trumbull* on 8 September. Saltonstall’s cabin boy is shown as turned over to the *Trumbull* in September, with no date given. It seems certain that Saltonstall moved on to his new command on 8 September, leaving Pitcher in charge of the *Alfred*.⁵⁷⁵

The muster roll illustrates the manning difficulties in a similar way to the partial roll of Connecticut sailors mentioned above. There are 268 names on the muster roll including the Captain and Commodore. Of these men ninety-eight are listed as having “run” or “left the ship;” a desertion rate of 36.57% Eighty men (29.85%) were turned over to other vessels of the fleet at various times. Twenty-two (8.21%) were discharged; thirteen died (4.86%); eight were left somewhere too sick to serve (2.99%) and five (1.86%) were killed in action.⁵⁷⁶

By 10 September Hopkins had examined the *Alfred*. He discovered her bottom was so foul that she could not go out on a cruise without cleaning. On 10 September she sailed down to Newport, to be hove down and cleaned. In a report to the Marine Committee that day Hopkins noted the privateering fever throughout the New England states. He suggested that the Continental Navy should “give the same Prize Money which is one half as they do, it would be a great deal easier to Mann the Continental Vessels.”⁵⁷⁷

About 20 September Francis Varrell was appointed as a Boatswain on the Continental Navy Ship *Washington*. The Marine Committee directed the “Commander” of the *Alfred* to discharge him,

⁵⁷³ NDAR, “Commodore Esek Hopkins to the Continental Marine Committee,” 6:639

⁵⁷⁴ NDAR, “Governor Nicholas Cooke to Governor Jonathan Trumbull,” 6:662

⁵⁷⁵ NDAR, “A Roll of all the Officers and Men belonging to the Ship *Alfred* from the time of her being put into Commission until the 5th of September 1776.,” 6:692-705

⁵⁷⁶ NDAR, “A Roll of all the Officers and Men belonging to the Ship *Alfred* from the time of her being put into Commission until the 5th of September 1776.,” 6:692-705. Detailed analysis.

⁵⁷⁷ NDAR, “Commodore Esek Hopkins to the Continental Marine Committee,” 6:770



as if unsure who the commander was. Varrell was not then on the *Alfred*, but had been loaned to the *Andrew Doria*, which arrived at Philadelphia on 17 September.⁵⁷⁸

Hopkins reported to the Marine Committee on 22 September. The *Alfred* was at Newport, cleaning, and the Commodore expected her to be ready for sea in a week. Captain Hacker was at New London. Hopkins had gone to see Governor Trumbull regarding the Long Island Sound operation, and had gone to New London, leaving there on 19 September. Hacker was heaving down the *Hampden*, and she would be ready for sea in a few days, but not fully manned. Hacker was to bring her around to Newport to join the *Alfred*. Hopkins again expressed the opinion that manning the ships would be difficult without giving one half as prize money. He noted the privateer owners also gave large pay advances. *Alfred* and *Hampden* would sail as soon as possible on the Newfoundland Expedition.⁵⁷⁹

The *Alfred* and *Hampden* were ready by 30 September, except for men, reported Hopkins in a letter to the Marine Committee. He had not yet been able to recruit sufficient men. Once again, Hopkins blamed the privateers: “there are so many Privateers a fitting out which give more encouragement as to Shares; it makes it difficult to mann the Continental Vessels.”⁵⁸⁰ Again, on 5 October both vessels were said to be ready for sea, but only partially manned.⁵⁸¹

Barely had Hopkins returned from Philadelphia than Governors Trumbull (of Connecticut) and Cooke (of Rhode Island) began to pressure him to use the fleet in an attempt to clear Long Island Sound of enemy shipping and cover the transportation of a large raiding force to the east end of Long Island. Governor Trumbull proposed joining forces with Rhode Island on 5 September and mentioned the desirability of securing the assistance of the Continental vessels. Trumbull proposed to man the ships from the military forces if necessary.⁵⁸² Although General Washington approved the plan on the 7th, he absolutely declined to allow the ships to be manned from the Continental Army.⁵⁸³ About 17 September Hopkins visited Governor Trumbull to coordinate planning for this enterprise. He returned by way of New London, where he examined Connecticut Navy Ship *Oliver Cromwell* (and *Hampden*). Hopkins left on the 19th and returned to Providence. Hopkins reported to Trumbull on the 22nd that the two new frigates, *Warren* and *Providence*, would be ready in ten days, if it were possible to man them. They would join the expedition if he received no orders to the contrary from the Marine Committee.⁵⁸⁴ Hopkins reported to the Marine Committee on the status of *Alfred* and *Hampden* that day. He proposed using the new frigates

⁵⁷⁸ NDAR, “Minutes of the Continental Marine Committee,” 6:915 and note

⁵⁷⁹ NDAR, “Commodore Esek Hopkins to the Continental Marine Committee,” 6:948-949

⁵⁸⁰ NDAR, “Commodore Esek Hopkins to the Continental Marine Committee,” 6:1055-1056

⁵⁸¹ NDAR, “Commodore Esek Hopkins to Governor John Trumbull,” 6:1134-1136

⁵⁸² NDAR, “Governor Jonathan Trumbull to Governor Nicholas Cooke,” 6:706

⁵⁸³ NDAR, “George Washington to Governor Jonathan Trumbull,” 6:763

⁵⁸⁴ NDAR, “Commodore Esek Hopkins to Governor Jonathan Trumbull, Lebanon,” 6:948 and note



in Long Island Sound, while *Hampden* and *Alfred* conducted the Newfoundland Expedition.⁵⁸⁵

Governor Trumbull was still trying to coordinate plans with Washington for the Long Island Sound operation on 27 September. In a letter to Washington Trumbull reported he had the Commodore's "concurrance."⁵⁸⁶ Meanwhile, delegate (and Marine Committeeman) Stephen Hopkins had arrived in Rhode Island from Philadelphia. After conferring with him the Rhode Island government directed that Commodore Hopkins be permitted to enlist men from Richmond's regiment before that unit marched for New York. To further the Long Island raid, this regiment was to be sent by way of New London. The Rhode Island row galleys were also put under Hopkins' orders.⁵⁸⁷ On 5 October Hopkins notified Trumbull that *Alfred* and *Hampden* were ready, and that the two frigates would be ready in a week, except, of course, all four were only half manned. Hopkins said he was ready to join the Connecticut forces whenever Trumbull gave the orders, "but expect you will Excuse me to the Congress for not putting their Orders in Execution with respect to some of the Fleet."⁵⁸⁸

Two events occurred in early October. Captain John Paul Jones arrived at Newport in Continental Navy Sloop *Providence* on 7 October 1776, from a highly successful patrol. Hopkins at once proposed to him to take command of *Alfred*, *Hampden*, and *Providence*, and proceed on the Newfoundland Expedition "to Destroy the Fishery . . . but Principally to relieve an Hundred of our fellow Citizens who are detained as Prisoners and Slaves in the Coal Pits of Cape Briton." Jones accepted at once.⁵⁸⁹ Thus Hopkins was reverting to his original orders from the Marine Committee.

Three days later, in Philadelphia, the Marine Committee ordered Hopkins to plan a new expedition, assuming he had laid aside the Newfoundland plan when he found his vessels out cruising upon his return to Providence from Philadelphia. He was to collect *Alfred*, *Columbus*, *Cabot*, and *Hampden* and sail at once to strike the small British naval forces in the Cape Fear River in North Carolina. Hopkins was to take one of the new frigates with him if it was ready for sea. After capturing the British warships, taking as many prizes as possible, and seizing the batteries around the anchorage, he could proceed to South Carolina or Georgia, or return to Philadelphia.⁵⁹⁰ The same day, Congress, acting upon the recommendations of the Marine Committee, fixed the relative rank of the naval Captains and assigned them to their vessels. *Alfred* was assigned to Captain Elisha Hinman, with a seniority of 20th on the list. Jones was ranked 18th, but was assigned to *Providence*. Hoysted Hacker was assigned to *Hampden*, and

⁵⁸⁵ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to the Continental Marine Committee," 6:948-949

⁵⁸⁶ NDAR, "Governor Jonathan Trumbull to George Washington," 6:1020

⁵⁸⁷ NDAR, "Governor Nicholas Cooke to Governor Jonathan Trumbull, Lebanon," 6:1134

⁵⁸⁸ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to Governor Jonathan Trumbull," 6:1134-1136

⁵⁸⁹ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to Robert Morris," 6:1302-1304

⁵⁹⁰ NDAR, "Continental Marine Committee to Commodore Esek Hopkins," 6:1202 and 1202-1203 note



ranked 16th.⁵⁹¹

The Long Island expedition was still in active planning. On 11 October Trumbull reported to Washington on the military preparations and added that the Continental Navy ships had been manned from Richmond's regiment. With the two Connecticut Navy vessels joined to them this fleet would attack British frigates off Montauk Point and in the East River. In case these ships were still undermanned, Trumbull requested permission to man them from the Army. He also requested that fresh and current intelligence be sent him.⁵⁹²

Hopkins was apparently well prepared except for men. He ordered Hacker to put to sea in *Hampden* on 14 October, to cruise against British store ships. In his orders to Hacker, Hopkins said "My Orders was to Send you to annoy the Trade at Newfoundland but I imagine that is too late." If Hacker went that way he was to patrol about latitude 30° or 40° North.⁵⁹³ Hopkins had previously informed Trumbull, on 11 October, that Hacker was ordered out to gain intelligence (although there was nothing in Hacker's orders concerning that item); that *Columbus*, having come in from her patrol, was now cleaning; and that the two frigates and *Alfred* were ready, saving only four hundred men to man the fleet. In strenuous efforts to enlist men at Newport from the 5th to the 15th, Hopkins had only raised 120 sailors.⁵⁹⁴ And that pretty much ended the Continental Navy's participation in the Long Island Expedition. There were no four hundred men to man any vessels. Hopkins returned to his original orders of August 1776. It is not likely that Hopkins was ever very serious about fighting the British in Long Island Sound.

Meanwhile, the Marine Committee, under the impression that Hopkins had received its orders of 10 October, added to and changed those orders on 23 October. Hopkins was notified that British naval forces had withdrawn from Georgia and South Carolina and that HM Frigate *Galatea* and HM Sloop *Nautilus* were cruising off the Virginia Capes. Hopkins was ordered to attack these ships on the way to Cape Fear. He was to take the Rhode Island built frigates, *Cabot*, and *Providence* with him. Two brigs from the North Carolina Navy would join him at Ocracoke Inlet. The Committee concluded "As this Service to the Southward is of much publick importance, we expect...that you proceed on and execute this Service with all possible vigor and despatch."⁵⁹⁵ The Committee also advised Captains John Manley (of Continental Navy Ship *Hancock*), Hector McNeill (Continental Navy Ship *Boston*), and Thomas Thompson (of Continental Navy Ship *Raleigh*) that their ships might join this expedition under certain circumstances.⁵⁹⁶ The North Carolina authorities were advised that Hopkins was coming and it was suggested they be ready

⁵⁹¹NDAR, "Journal of the Continental Congress," 6:1200-1201

⁵⁹² NDAR, "Governor Jonathan Trumbull to George Washington," 6:1218-1219; "Governor Jonathan Trumbull to Commodore Esek Hopkins," 6:1219-1220

⁵⁹³ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to Captain Hoysted Hacker," 6:1253

⁵⁹⁴ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to Governor Jonathan Trumbull," 6:1271

⁵⁹⁵ NDAR, "Continental Marine Committee to Commodore Esek Hopkins," 6:1384

⁵⁹⁶ NDAR, "Continental Marine Committee to Captains John Manley, Hector McNeil and Thomas Thompson," 6:1385



to join the North Carolina warships to the fleet, as well as to furnish pilots for the coast.⁵⁹⁷

The Marine Committee altered Hopkins' orders again on 30 October. He was to abandon the North Carolina phase of the expedition completely and proceed directly to Virginia. After receiving local intelligence and destroying the British at the Virginia Capes, he was to cruise off New York for incoming supply ships.⁵⁹⁸ Two days later John Paul Jones sailed for Cape Breton Island. Hopkins had still not received the Committee's letter of 10 October. It had been slightly over two months since the Marine Committee had issued the orders that Hopkins was now carrying out.

When John Paul Jones accepted command of the proposed Newfoundland (now Cape Breton) Expedition, he threw himself into the preparations. First *Providence* had to be made ready for sea. By 17 October Jones could report to Robert Morris that the sloop was ready. *Alfred* was another matter: Jones was "Under the Greatest Apprehension that the Expedition will fall to nothing as the *Alfred* is greatly Short of Men.—I found her with only about thirty men and we have with much Adoe enlisted Thirty more—but it seems Privateers entice them Away as fast as they receive their Months Pay." Jones added that, if *Alfred* were not manned soon it would be too late to sail for Cape Breton: the colliers would be gone to Halifax and the fishermen to Europe.⁵⁹⁹

Jones found *Alfred* in terrible condition. Following his inquiry at Philadelphia and his appointment to command the new Connecticut frigate, Saltonstall had left *Alfred* unrepaired. She still had her old fished mainmast (a relic of the Block Island battle) and only one working pump.⁶⁰⁰ The deteriorating crew was demoralized and very short handed. *Alfred* was reported to be ready for sea by 15 October but still only half manned.⁶⁰¹ Jones solved the most important problem by turning over most of the crew of his sloop *Providence* to *Alfred* when he assumed command of the ship on 22 October. This brought her crew up to about 140.⁶⁰²

Carpenters were now set to work, stores were provided, and the ship cleaned and scrubbed. Wooding and watering was completed. All this was not without incident: one Robert Shillingford injured his hand and a surgeon had to be paid to dress the wound. Part of the crew received wages on 23 October, by Hopkins' order. Meanwhile, *Alfred* finished cleaning at William Redwood's Wharf and was hauled off into the harbor. Captain of Marines Edmund Arrowsmith was recruiting in town: in October one Robert Lillibridge was paid £0.17.06 for assisting him to find Marines. There was still sickness aboard *Alfred*, for two men were left behind when she

⁵⁹⁷ NDAR, "Continental Marine Committee to the Governor and Council of Safety of North Carolina," 6:1385-1386

⁵⁹⁸ NDAR, "Continental Marine Committee to Commodore Esek Hopkins," 6:1464-1465

⁵⁹⁹ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to Robert Morris," 6:1302-1304

⁶⁰⁰ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to Robert Morris, 7:938-939 and 939 note

⁶⁰¹ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to Governor Jonathan Trumbull," 6:1271

⁶⁰² NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to Joseph Hewes," 6:1473-1475



sailed on 1 November.⁶⁰³

As was by now traditional in a Hopkins supervised operation, crew quality was none too good. On 19 October Hopkins received a complaint against James Bryant, Gunner on the *Hampden*, for theft of a pair of pistols from the gunner aboard *Alfred*. Hopkins sent Second Lieutenant Sanders to search *Hampden* and ordered Captain Hacker to cooperate with him.⁶⁰⁴ There was apparently a little more to this incident, for Jones was requested to sit on a court martial on four sailors, held aboard *Alfred*, on 23 October.⁶⁰⁵ Bryant was tried the same day, aboard *Alfred*, with Jones as president of the court.⁶⁰⁶

Part V

Hopkins issued sailing orders on 22 October 1776. Jones was instructed to take command of *Alfred*, along with Hacker and *Hampden*, and proceed on the Cape Breton Expedition. He was first to attack the Cape Breton coal trade, free the prisoners, and then cruise against the Newfoundland fishery or the transports bound for Canada. He was then to return to a New England port for a winter expedition.⁶⁰⁷ Hopkins passed along the latest intelligence concerning the Cape Breton mines: the harbor was guarded by HM Sloops *Hope* and *Savage* (with one usually at Louisburg) and an army force of twenty-six soldiers.⁶⁰⁸

Commodore Hopkins surely drew some temporary pleasure by reporting to the Marine Committee, on 24 October, that *Alfred* was manned and under orders.⁶⁰⁹ *Alfred* and *Hampden* actually sailed on 27 October, but Hacker promptly ran the brig aground on a "Sunken Ledge" in the harbor. Part of her false keel was knocked off and several leaks started.⁶¹⁰ Jones put back into Newport and notified Hopkins. On the 28th Hopkins "Recd your Disegrable Letter" and ordered Jones to proceed to Newport, examine *Hampden*, and shift Hacker and his crew into sloop *Providence* and follow the former orders. Hopkins hoped to be in Newport personally on the 29th.⁶¹¹ Jones

⁶⁰³ NDAR, "Account Book of John Manley, Deputy Continental Agent at Newport," 7:1329-1332

⁶⁰⁴ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to Captain Hoysted Hacker," 6:1331

⁶⁰⁵ NDAR, "Samuel Lyon to Captain John Paul Jones," 6:1361

⁶⁰⁶ NDAR, "Court Martial of James Bryant, Gunner of the Continental Brig *Hampden*," 6:1378-1380

⁶⁰⁷ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to Captain John Paul Jones," 6:1362; "Commodore Esek Hopkins to Captain Hoysted Hacker," 6:1362-1363

⁶⁰⁸ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to the Continental Marine Committee," 6:1398-1399

⁶⁰⁹ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to the Continental Marine Committee," 6:1398-1399

⁶¹⁰ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 6:1457-1458

⁶¹¹ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to Captain John Paul Jones," 6:1434

reported to the Marine Committee that he now hoped to sail on 31 October.⁶¹² But the last day of the month was a poor day to sail; thick heavy weather with strong gales held the Continentals in port.⁶¹³

On 1 November 1776 the wind was fair. Jones issued a few last minute instructions to Hacker. Signals were fixed for foggy weather recognition and course was to be set for Spanish River, near Cape North on Cape Breton Island.⁶¹⁴ Once again *Alfred* sailed, this time accompanied by *Providence*. Hacker managed to avoid the reefs and the pair slipped out to sea.⁶¹⁵

As soon as *Alfred* and *Providence* had cleared Newport and had stood off the land for a short time, Jones turned east, along the Massachusetts coast. Not very long though, for the wind grew light and began to show signs of coming around from the south. *Alfred* steered close to *Providence* and Jones conferred with Hacker. They decided to head for Tarpaulin Cove for the evening.⁶¹⁶ About 1600 the two Continentals came into the anchorage,⁶¹⁷ just as darkness was falling.⁶¹⁸ There was another vessel in the anchorage, Rhode Island Privateer Schooner *Eagle* (Commander Isaac Field); a vessel familiar to the Continental sailors.⁶¹⁹

Alfred's anchor rope rumbled as her anchor sank into the water, followed immediately by her boat being swung out. A party of sailors under First Lieutenant John Peck Rathbun clambered aboard. Rowing vigorously the party soon reached and boarded *Eagle*. Rathbun informed Field that he was under orders to bring "sd Schooner under sd Ships Stern—Accordingly the sd Rathbone immediately with his Men weigh'd Anchor and carried her along side the Sloop *Providence*." A guard was set over the schooner and her long boat removed.⁶²⁰

Before dawn⁶²¹ Jones ordered First Lieutenant of Marines John Trevett of *Providence* to report to

⁶¹² NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 6:1457-1458

⁶¹³ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to Captain Hoysteed Hacker," 7:6

⁶¹⁴ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:17

⁶¹⁵ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:935-937

⁶¹⁶ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to Commodore Esek Hopkins," 7:16

⁶¹⁷ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to Commodore Esek Hopkins," 7:16 and 16-17 note, quoting deposition of *Eagle* Prize Master Justin Jacobs; hereafter "Jacobs."

⁶¹⁸ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to Commodore Esek Hopkins," 7:16

⁶¹⁹ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to Commodore Esek Hopkins," 7:16; "Jacobs," 7:16-17

⁶²⁰ NDAR, "Jacobs," 7:16-17

⁶²¹ NDAR, "Jacobs," 7:16-17



him on *Alfred*.⁶²² At a meeting of Trevett and other officers Jones told them to man and arm the barges from *Alfred* and *Providence* and go alongside *Eagle*. After boarding the schooner, the officers were to examine her papers, looking for deserters from the Navy.⁶²³ If any were found Trevett was to "press all we could."⁶²⁴

Meanwhile, the schooner's crew and officers had spent an apprehensive night. Field knew what was coming, and had taken what steps he could, as will be seen. A little before sunrise the two boats moved over to *Eagle*, and Rathbun, Captain of Marines Arrowsmith, *Providence*'s First Lieutenant Philip Brown, and Trevett boarded the schooner, accompanied by a suitable number of armed Marines and sailors. Rathbun informed Field they had come to examine his crew for deserters. Field replied that they could take any man they could successfully challenge.⁶²⁵

The Marines set about searching the schooner. A new bulkhead was found forward⁶²⁶ below decks⁶²⁷ and was broken down.⁶²⁸ Cowering behind the bulkhead were found two deserters from the Continental Navy and two from the Rhode Island brigade of state troops. These were hauled up on deck and put in the boats.⁶²⁹ Rathbun now told Field that he "had further Orders to take all the men on Board." The Marines set to with relish and "by Force and Violence they took out of sd schooner" twenty more men throughout the day.⁶³⁰

Near the end of the day Rathbun returned aboard with a boat full of "Indians," who were ordered to go through the schooner's hold, probing and poking with drawn cutlasses. Rathbun "abus'd the first Lieut of sd Schooner by heaving him on the Deck, and many other Acts of high insult were committed by Rathbone's Orders." After the last of the men were aboard *Alfred*, the two Continental vessels raised sail and sortied for Cape Breton.⁶³¹ Before he sailed Jones made a brief report to Hopkins. He noted, in a significant phrase concerning the deserters, "I took them out with about Twenty—others greeable to your Orders."⁶³²

⁶²² NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to Commodore Esek Hopkins," 7:16 and 16 note, quoting John Trevett's Journal, hereafter "Trevett."

⁶²³ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to Commodore Esek Hopkins," 7:16; "Trevett," 7:16

⁶²⁴ "Trevett," 7:16

⁶²⁵ NDAR, "Jacobs," 7:16-17

⁶²⁶ NDAR, "Jacobs," 7:16-17

⁶²⁷ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to Commodore Esek Hopkins," 7:16

⁶²⁸ NDAR, "Jacobs," 7:16-17

⁶²⁹ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to Commodore Esek Hopkins," 7:16

⁶³⁰ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to Commodore Esek Hopkins," 7:16; quoting "Jacobs," 7:16-17

⁶³¹ NDAR, "Jacobs," 7:16-17

⁶³² NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to Commodore Esek Hopkins," 7:16



After sailing from Tarpaulin Cove the two Continental vessels sailed out around Cape Cod and steered northeast, heading for the seas off Cape Breton Island. By the morning of 11 November the two vessels were off Cape Breton, despite meeting "contrary winds and Stormy Weather" during the voyage.⁶³³ In the afternoon a strange sail was sighted and *Alfred* and *Providence* gave chase, a chase that lasted through the afternoon and night.⁶³⁴ *Providence* was having a hard time in the stormy weather and took a pounding in the chase, "being Obligated to carry sail hard & the Wind blowing very fresh," which started a number of leaks in the little sloop.⁶³⁵

Finally the prize was run down and captured. She was the 150-ton⁶³⁶ brigantine *Active*⁶³⁷ (Isaac Fox),⁶³⁸ from Liverpool to Halifax⁶³⁹ with a cargo of dry goods and coal,⁶⁴⁰ valued at £6000.⁶⁴¹ *Active* was Liverpool built for the Greenland trade with a doubled hull forward.⁶⁴² Jones sent Acting Lieutenant Walter Spooner to take charge of her after removing the crew,⁶⁴³ Fox being left aboard.⁶⁴⁴ As a tribute to his patron in Congress, Robert Hewes, Jones ordered *Active* to put into Edenton, North Carolina, consigned to Continental Agent Robert Smith.⁶⁴⁵ Spooner was given latitude to make for another port if unable to proceed to North Carolina.⁶⁴⁶ Jones took some of Fox's private goods (his "adventure") for the use of slops for *Alfred*'s crew.⁶⁴⁷ For the time being *Active* was kept with the two warships.

Following the capture of *Active*, Jones, Hacker and Spooner continued in company through the

⁶³³ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:110-111

⁶³⁴ NDAR, "Officers of the Continental Sloop *Providence* to Captain Hoysteed Hacker," 7:132

⁶³⁵ NDAR, "Officers of the Continental Sloop *Providence* to Captain Hoysteed Hacker," 7:132

⁶³⁶ NDAR, "Libels Filed Against Prize Vessels in the Massachusetts Admiralty Court," 7:599-600

⁶³⁷ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:110-111

⁶³⁸ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to Robert Smith," 7:111 and note

⁶³⁹ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:110-111

⁶⁴⁰ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to Leonard Jarvis," 7:277-278

⁶⁴¹ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:110-111

⁶⁴² NDAR, "John Bradford to Robert Morris," VIII, 36

⁶⁴³ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to Acting Lieutenant Walter Spooner," 7:112 and note

⁶⁴⁴ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to Robert Smith," 7:111 and note

⁶⁴⁵ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to Robert Smith," 7:111 and note; "Captain John Paul Jones to Acting Lieutenant Walter Spooner," 7:112 and note

⁶⁴⁶ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to Acting Lieutenant Walter Spooner," 7:112 and note

⁶⁴⁷ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to Robert Smith," 7:111 and note



night. At dawn⁶⁴⁸ the next day, 12 November, the Continentals and prize were near Louisburg, about 120 miles north of Halifax.⁶⁴⁹ Midshipman Stephen Rust of *Providence*, and assigned to *Active's* prize crew, was on deck scanning the horizon when he spotted a sail.⁶⁵⁰ Rust sung out to the others and soon all three vessels were pounding through the heavy seas after the stranger. *Providence* drew ahead and ranged alongside the brigantine, which was preparing to fight. According to Jones "She made some defence but it was triffling."⁶⁵¹ Lieutenant Trevett said "the Ship haled down her colours to the Sloop *Providence*," and *Active* and *Alfred* bearing down encouraged the British to do so.⁶⁵²

A boarding party soon went over and secured the prize's papers. Not until they returned did Jones realize what he had captured. The prize was the British Army Transport Ship *Mellish*⁶⁵³ (Joseph Stevenson),⁶⁵⁴ armed with six 3-pounders and six swivels,⁶⁵⁵ and with a security detachment of twenty-one soldiers aboard. Trevett reported she had a large crew of sixty or seventy men.⁶⁵⁶ Jones reported over sixty prisoners of whom forty were soldiers and sailors. *Mellish* was en route from London to Quebec. In his report Jones stated "this Prize is I believe the most Valuable Ship that hath been taken by the American Arms." And what was *Mellish's* cargo, that was so valuable? It was winter uniforms. Jones continued "...the clothing on board of her is the last intended to be sent out for Canada this season...I will not loose Sight of a prize of such importance but will sink her rather than suffer her to fall again into their hands."⁶⁵⁷ Lieutenant Trevett reported she had "10,000 suits of Soldiers Clothing ready made, a et of light-horse accoutrements with carbines and a valuable invoice of Medicine chests...trunks of silk gowns and dry goods suitable for Gen Burgoynes army at Quebeck...every article complete for a Soldier from the hat, to the shoes."⁶⁵⁸ The value of the cargo was estimated at £60000,⁶⁵⁹ a truly astonishing

⁶⁴⁸ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:110-111

⁶⁴⁹ NDAR, "*London Packet, or New Lloyd's Evening Post*, Wednesday, February 26 to Friday, February 28, 1777," 8:621-622

⁶⁵⁰ NDAR, "Leonard Jarvis to Captain John Paul Jones," 9:156-157

⁶⁵¹ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:110-111

⁶⁵² NDAR, "Journal of Lieutenant John Trevett, Continental Sloop *Providence*," 7:329-330 and 330 note

⁶⁵³ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:110-111

⁶⁵⁴ NDAR, "Libels Filed Against Prize Vessels in the Massachusetts Admiralty Court," 7:599-600

⁶⁵⁵ NDAR, "T. Brett to William Knox," 6:537

⁶⁵⁶ NDAR, "Journal of Lieutenant John Trevett, Continental Sloop *Providence*," 7:329-330 and 330 note

⁶⁵⁷ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:110-111

⁶⁵⁸ NDAR, "Journal of Lieutenant John Trevett, Continental Sloop *Providence*," 7:329-330 and 330 note

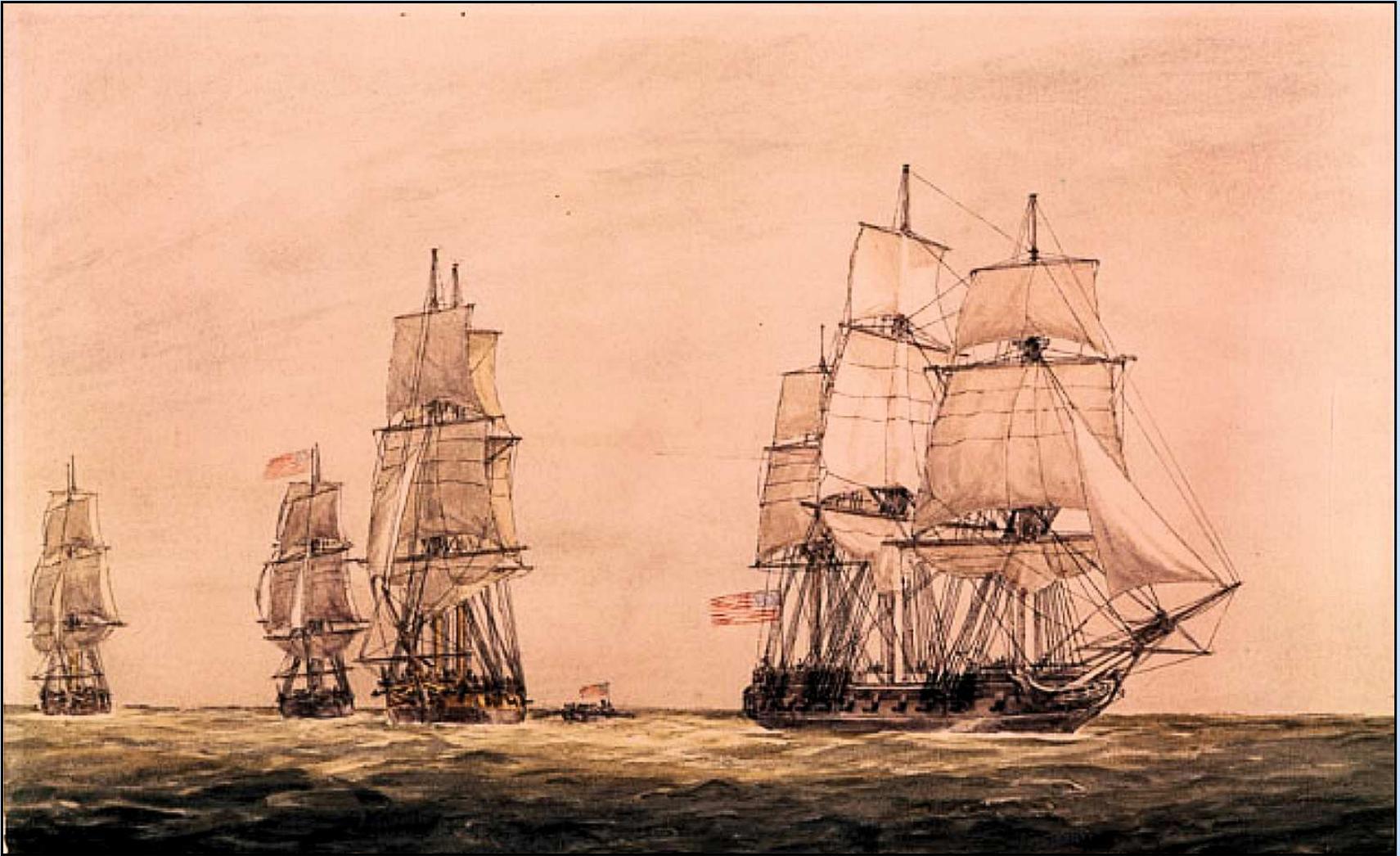
⁶⁵⁹ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:277 and note



figure, but a British newspaper later estimated its value at £80000.⁶⁶⁰ Well could Jones crow "this will make Burgoyne 'Shake a Cloth in the wind'

⁶⁶⁰ NDAR, " *London Packet, or New Lloyd's Evening Post*, Wednesday, February 26 to Friday, February 28, 1777," 8:621-622





“ALFRED AND PROVIDENCE CAPTURE MELLISH,” from the Bailey Collection of the Mariner’s Museum, painted in late 19th century. The flags shown are incorrect for this period as the stars did not come until mid-1777.

and check his progress on the Lakes."⁶⁶¹ As a dessert to the main dish Jones found, among the ship's papers, the private recognition signals for British warships in North America.⁶⁶²

How had such a prize come to be captured so easily? The British had made efforts to prevent it. *Mellish* was a 350-ton, former Royal Navy bomb ship⁶⁶³ (*Thunder*). She was loaded with her cargo and fitting out by 9 August 1776, when the owners agreed to arm her as a protection against American privateers.⁶⁶⁴ When the master and mate declared they would not fight the ship, the British Navy Board ordered them suspended, and appointed, on 21 August, Joseph Stevenson.⁶⁶⁵ He was requested to sign an affidavit stating that he would defend the ship. A week later Midshipman Samuel Horsenail and a petty officer were ordered aboard, to "explain" convoy procedure to Stevenson.⁶⁶⁶ Finally, an officer and twenty soldiers went to *Mellish* with another midshipman from HM Frigate *Richmond*. With these precautions taken, *Mellish* sailed under escort of *Richmond*.⁶⁶⁷ She may have gotten to the mouth of the St. Lawrence River with *Richmond*⁶⁶⁸ and transport *Union*.⁶⁶⁹ Severe icing conditions and a northwest wind prevented the trio from getting up the river, so they bore away for Halifax. *Mellish* seperating in the bad weather.⁶⁷⁰ Stevenson met *Alfred* and *Providence* soon after.

Jones now ordered *Active* into port, bearing his reports on the cruise and the capture of *Mellish*.⁶⁷¹ He then set about securing *Mellish*. The three vessels lay to for two days⁶⁷² while *Mellish*'s crew

⁶⁶¹ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to Robert Smith," 7:111

⁶⁶² NDAR, "Captain Sir George Collier, R.N., to Philip Stephens," 7:883-884

⁶⁶³ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to Robert Morris," 7:968-969; "John Bradford to Robert Morris," 7:1058

⁶⁶⁴ NDAR, "T. Brett to William Knox," 6:537

⁶⁶⁵ NDAR, "Minutes of the British Navy Board," 6:557

⁶⁶⁶ NDAR, "Lords Commissioners, Admiralty, to Captain John Lewis Godoin, H.M.S. *Richmond*, Spithead," 6:575-576 and 576 note

⁶⁶⁷ NDAR, "Philip Stephens to Vice Admiral Richard Lord Howe, New York," 6:593-596

⁶⁶⁸ NDAR, "Dr. Edward Bancroft to Silas Deane," 7:789-790; "*Whitehall Evening Post*, Tuesday, December 24 to Thursday, December 26, 1776," 7:807 and note

⁶⁶⁹ NDAR, "*Whitehall Evening Post*, Tuesday, December 24 to Thursday, December 26, 1776," 7:807 and note; "Captain Sir George Collier, R.N., to Philip Stephens," 7:883-884

⁶⁷⁰ NDAR, "Dr. Edward Bancroft to Silas Deane," 7:789-790; "Captain Sir George Collier, R.N., to Philip Stephens," 7:883-884; "Vice Admiral Richard Lord Howe to Philip Stephens," 8:230-234

⁶⁷¹ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:110-111

⁶⁷² NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to First Lieutenant Philip Brown," 7:160; "Officers of the Continental Sloop *Providence* to Captain Hoysteed Hacker," 7:132 and note

was removed. Ten cannon were put aboard the prize,⁶⁷³ along with a strong prize crew of twenty-five men.⁶⁷⁴ First Lieutenant Philip Brown of *Providence* was assigned as prize master.⁶⁷⁵ On 15 November Jones ordered Brown to stay near him, follow his signals, and render assistance if an engagement should occur. If separated, Brown was to make for Rhode Island, going by way of Nantucket Shoals.⁶⁷⁶

While the vessels lay to, securing *Mellish*, trouble was developing aboard *Providence*. The rough weather and the strain of chasing *Active* had started many leaks on the sloop. On the night of 13 November the sloop had to keep "both Pumps constantly going," and she was forced to lay to "by Reason we could not carry Sail." On the 14th the officers of the sloop addressed a petition to Hacker: "Should we meet with a Severe Gale of Wind it is our Opinions both pumps would not keep her free unless We scudded." The officers noted a quarter of the crew were sick and many were aboard the prizes. The officers were of the opinion that sailing any further north "will too much Endanger the Vessel." All officers signed except Lieutenant of Marines John Trevett.⁶⁷⁷ Jones later said there was "an Unaccountable murmuring in the Sloop for which I could see no Just foundation And in Vain had I representated to them how much humanity was concerned in our endeavours to releive our Captive ill treated Brethren from the Coal Mines."⁶⁷⁸

Nevertheless, *Providence* resumed the cruise with *Alfred* and *Mellish* on 15 November. In a short while, off Cape North,⁶⁷⁹ the squadron fell in with and captured the 120-ton⁶⁸⁰ merchant snow *Kitty*⁶⁸¹ (or *Hetty*, Charles Ross),⁶⁸² from Gaspee to Barbadoes with a cargo of fish and oil. Acting Lieutenant Joseph Allen of *Providence* was assigned as *Kitty*'s prizemaster, and ordered to go into Rhode Island, if possible.⁶⁸³

Before *Kitty* sailed in the afternoon Jones reported to the Marine Committee. From Ross he had learned that the harbors in the Gaspee Peninsula were already frozen up, which was "by no means

⁶⁷³ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:183-184

⁶⁷⁴ Morison, Samuel Eliot, *John Paul Jones: A Sailors' Biography*,

⁶⁷⁵ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to First Lieutenant Philip Brown," 7:160; "Officers of the Continental Sloop *Providence* to Captain Hoysteed Hacker," 7:132 and note

⁶⁷⁶ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to First Lieutenant Philip Brown," 7:160

⁶⁷⁷ NDAR, "Officers of the Continental Sloop *Providence* to Captain Hoysteed Hacker," 7:132 and note

⁶⁷⁸ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:935-937

⁶⁷⁹ NDAR, "*Independent Chronicle*, Thursday, December 19, 1776," 7:517-518

⁶⁸⁰ NDAR, "Libels Filed in the Massachusetts Maritime Court," 7:906-907

⁶⁸¹ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to Acting Lieutenant Joseph Allen," 7:160-161

⁶⁸² NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones's Notes on the *Alfred*'s Cruise," 7:417

⁶⁸³ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to Acting Lieutenant Joseph Allen," 7:160-161



an encouraging Account...as it lays me under the greatest Apprehension that the port of my distination may be in the same condition." Jones reported stormy seas and contrary winds, and that both *Alfred* and *Providence* kept a pump going.⁶⁸⁴

Jones resumed his cruise. On 18 November a strong gale from the northeast, filled with snow and rain showers, blew down on the little squadron⁶⁸⁵ ("it could not be called a hard Gale"). Afraid that the weather would force his vessels apart, Jones spoke both *Mellish* and *Providence* and ordered them to lay to. The next morning, "to my great surprise I found the *Providence* had disappeared," said Jones. Later he found out that Hacker had put about and steered for home as soon as darkness had fallen.⁶⁸⁶ Jones was considerably angered by this defection: "...the Captain of the *Providence* thought proper to dispence with his Orders and give me the Slip in the Night which entirely Overset the Expedition—If such things are permitted the Navy will never rise Above contempt!"⁶⁸⁷

Providence ran south before the gale and had an uneventful voyage to Newport, where she arrived on 27 November. Hacker and his crew gave out information that *Alfred* had made port at "the eastward."⁶⁸⁸ With *Providence* gone the "Epidemical discontent" spread to *Alfred*. The weather was severe and the season was cold, and everyone wanted to go home, except Jones. He "was determined at all hazards while my provision lasted to persevere in my first plan."⁶⁸⁹

When the storm blew over *Alfred* was found to be in dangerous waters. She was in sight of the northeast reef of Sable Island, with the wind blowing from the north. Jones was forced to beat up the south side of the island, and, "after exercising much Patience I weathered the N W Reef of the Island." From here *Alfred* and *Mellish* headed for Canso, Nova Scotia.⁶⁹⁰

On 22 November *Alfred* lay to off Canso. Examining the waterfront Jones saw a "Fine Transport"⁶⁹¹ brig⁶⁹² had gone aground in the harbor. A landing party was organized and went ashore to seize the town and secure the transport, probably led by Captain of Marines Arrowsmith. The transport was found to be from Ireland, bound to Quebec with a cargo of

⁶⁸⁴ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:183-184

⁶⁸⁵ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones's Notes on the *Alfred*'s Cruise," 7:417

⁶⁸⁶ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:935-937

⁶⁸⁷ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to Joseph Hewes," 7:937-938 and 938 note

⁶⁸⁸ NDAR, "*Newport Mercury*, Monday, December 2, 1776," 7:348

⁶⁸⁹ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Marine Committee," 7:935-937

⁶⁹⁰ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Marine Committee," 7:935-937

⁶⁹¹ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:935-937

⁶⁹² NDAR, "*Providence Gazette*, Saturday, December 21, 1776," 7:540

provisions.⁶⁹³The transport was burned as was an oil warehouse and its contents, and assorted processing materials for the fishery.⁶⁹⁴ Two sailors took the opportunity of being ashore (possibly at their home town) to desert.⁶⁹⁵

While *Alfred* was laying offshore an American sympathizer came out and warned Jones that three British frigates were searching the coast for him, and had been since he was cruising in the area in *Providence* in late summer. Before leaving Canso Jones also took a small schooner to use as a tender, replacing *Providence*.⁶⁹⁶

After clearing Canso Jones set course for Sydney, where the Cape Breton coal mines were located. On 24 November *Alfred* was off Louisburg, in thick hazy weather. In the afternoon large shapes loomed out of the fog, surrounding *Alfred*. All three were seen to be ship rigged. "Every one Assured me they were English Men of War," and Jones thought so too. He thought he had encountered the three frigates that were supposed to be searching for him. "Resolving to sell my liberty as dear as possible" Jones took *Alfred* down to the nearest sail. She proved to be a British Army transport, bound from the Cape Breton coal mines⁶⁹⁷ at Spanish River⁶⁹⁸ to New York, under escort of HM Frigate *Flora*. The other two ships were a "Considerable distance Assunder" but *Alfred* soon rounded them up too. The masters informed Jones that *Flora* was nearby and, in fact, would be in sight if the weather were clear. They also informed Jones that no transports were left at Spanish River and that all the American prisoners there had enlisted in the Royal Navy.⁶⁹⁹

With no need to pursue his voyage to the north, Jones turned south to avoid *Flora*. On 25 November *Alfred* fell in with and took the ship *John*, armed with ten cannon, from Liverpool to

⁶⁹³ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:935-937

⁶⁹⁴ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:935-937

⁶⁹⁵ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones's Notes on the *Alfred*'s Cruise," 7:417

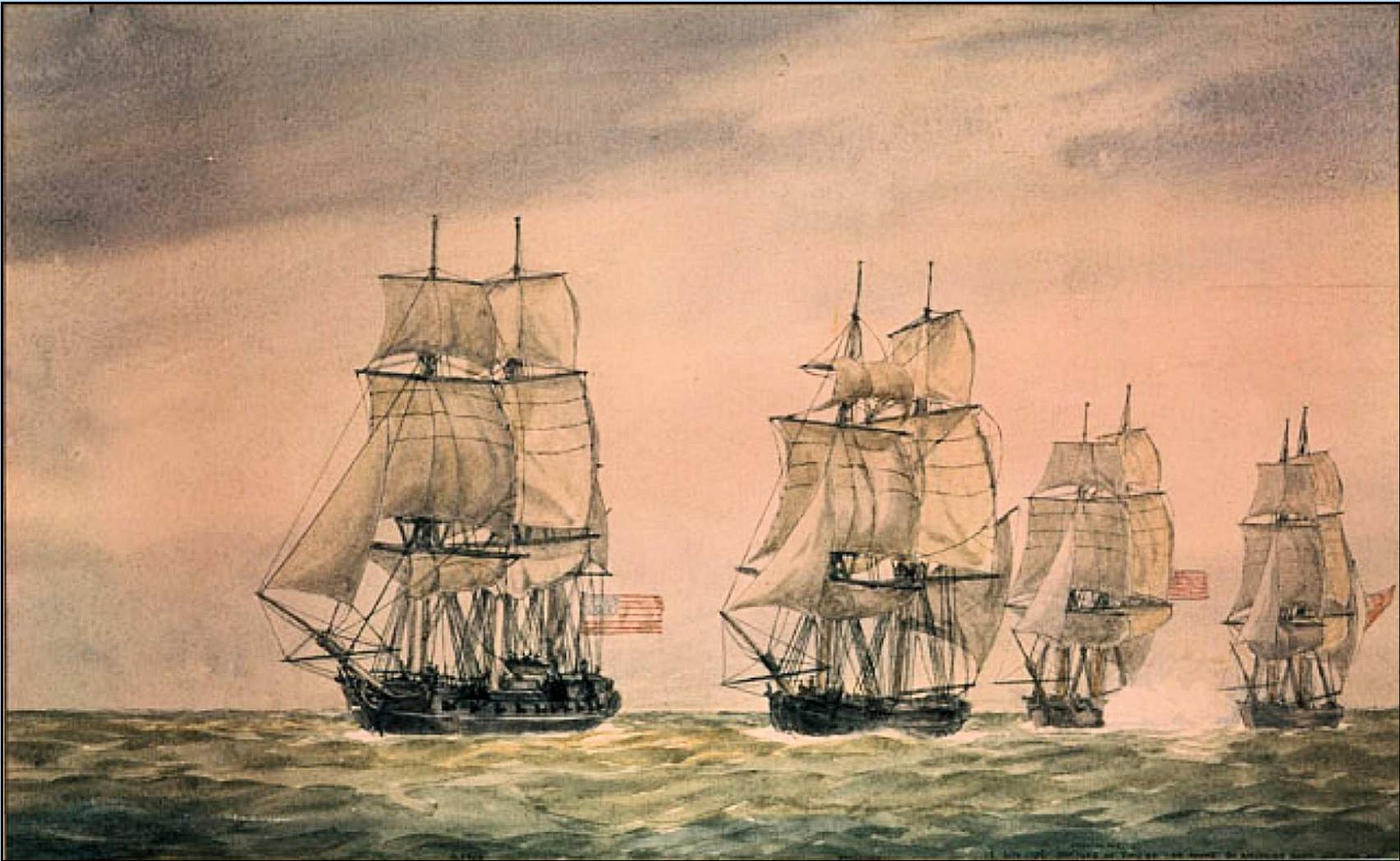
⁶⁹⁶ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:935-937

⁶⁹⁷ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:935-937

⁶⁹⁸ NDAR, "*Independent Chronicle*, Thursday, December 19, 1776," 7:517-518

⁶⁹⁹ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:935-937





“CAPTURE OF TWO BRITISH SHIPS BY AMERICAN SHIPS OFF CAPE BRETON” from the Bailey Collection of the Mariner’s Museum, painted in the late 19th century. It seems to show the capture of the colliers off Cape Breton, however there was no reported engagement.

Halifax, with a cargo valued at £1100. She was added to the prize convoy.⁷⁰⁰

Jones now lay to and reorganized his gaggle of prizes. He had 140 prisoners aboard *Alfred* and the provisions were being consumed fast; and he had five or six prize vessels with "the best of my Sailors" aboard. He "concluded it most for the interest and Honor of the Service to Form the Prizes into a Squadron and proceed with them into Port."⁷⁰¹ The three transport colliers, *Betty*, *Surprise*, and *Molly*, were manned and assigned prizemasters.⁷⁰² *Betty* (or *Betsey*, James Sutton), a ship in ballast,⁷⁰³ was given to Carpenter Samuel Tyler.⁷⁰⁴ The crew was removed but Sutton was left aboard.⁷⁰⁵ Ship *Molly*⁷⁰⁶ (or *Polly*,⁷⁰⁷ James Lash, Lush, or Lusk),⁷⁰⁸ with a cargo of coal,⁷⁰⁹ was assigned to Second Mate James Bechup.⁷¹⁰ Again the crew was removed and the master left aboard.⁷¹¹ Ship *Surprise*,⁷¹² also loaded with coal,⁷¹³ was given to Midshipman Michael Knies⁷¹⁴ with a prize crew of five men to assist him.⁷¹⁵ Ship *John*, with a less valuable cargo and armed with ten guns, was fitted out as a tender.⁷¹⁶ Command of *John* was given to First Lieutenant Rathbun.⁷¹⁷

⁷⁰⁰ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:935-937

⁷⁰¹ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:935-937

⁷⁰² NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to Three Prize Masters," 7:267-270

⁷⁰³ NDAR, "A List of Prizes taken...under the Command of the Commodore Sir Peter Parker," 7:926-927

⁷⁰⁴ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to Three Prize Masters," 7:267-270

⁷⁰⁵ NDAR, "Commodore Sir Peter Parker to Vice Admiral Lord Howe," 7:923-927

⁷⁰⁶ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to Three Prize Masters," 7:267-270

⁷⁰⁷ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones's Notes on the *Alfred*'s Cruise," 7:417

⁷⁰⁸ NDAR, "Extract of a Letter from Londonderry, Jan. 17," 8:529 and note; "Minutes of the British Navy Board," 8:840

⁷⁰⁹ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:935-937

⁷¹⁰ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to Three Prize Masters," 7:267-270

⁷¹¹ NDAR, "Minutes of the British Navy Board," 8:840

⁷¹² NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to Three Prize Masters," 7:267-270

⁷¹³ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:935-937

⁷¹⁴ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to Three Prize Masters," 7:267-270

⁷¹⁵ NDAR, "Journal of H.M.S. *Greyhound*, Captain Archibald Dickson," 7:495

⁷¹⁶ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:935-937

⁷¹⁷ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to Lieutenant John Peck Rathbun," 7:270



Jones ordered *Betty* to take station on *Alfred*'s port quarter, with *Surprise* to fall in astern of her. *Mellish* was to form two or three cable lengths on *Alfred*'s starboard quarter, followed by *John*, with *Molly* falling in astern of *John*. Jones fixed signals for his squadron, and particularly those for meeting again after separation. The prizemasters of the colliers were ordered to any available port, if separated, but Newport was recommended.⁷¹⁸ Similar orders were given to Rathbun, except that he was to keep his station and assist *Alfred* in an engagement, if possible.⁷¹⁹ First Lieutenant Brown (*Mellish*) was enjoined to keep station and only leave it to prevent "Eminent Danger."⁷²⁰

Meanwhile there had been an attempt by part of *John*'s crew to recapture that ship. The master, Edward Watkins, realizing the hopelessness of the attempt, had intervened, even taking a cutlass from one of the crew. Jones sent Lieutenant of Marines William Hamilton aboard *John* to secure the ship and to arrest Watkins. Rathbun intervened for Watkins, who was sick, and he stayed aboard *John*.⁷²¹

Frequent gales of wind from the west blew on the little convoy.⁷²² The weather was not the only source of problems. Jones's secretary, James Hogan, had had some sort of altercation with Jones and was placed in confinement. This soon produced the "most acute sensations" of regret on Hogan's part. He apologized and requested release on 7 December.⁷²³

Alfred and her convoy were crossing the northern edge of George's Bank on 8 December, steering west by south, with the wind from the northwest.⁷²⁴ A large vessel was sighted to the northeast in the afternoon, some distance away. Unknown to Jones it was HM Frigate *Milford* (Captain Henry Mowat).

Milford was one of Commodore Sir George Collier's squadron, based at Halifax. She had recently changed commanders, her Captain Burr being too ill to continue in command, and Collier selected Mowat to replace him. Mowat was, of course, an old hand in northeastern waters. Collier sent *Milford* out to patrol from Cape Cod to Monhegan in November, seeking American privateers and shipping.⁷²⁵ *Milford* was a 603 ton frigate, with a crew of two hundred men, and armed with

⁷¹⁸ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to Three Prize Masters," 7:267-270; "Captain John Paul Jones to Lieutenant John Peck Rathbun," 7:270

⁷¹⁹ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to Lieutenant John Peck Rathbun," 7:270

⁷²⁰ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to Lieutenant Philip Brown," 7:271

⁷²¹ NDAR, "Lieutenant John Peck Rathbun to Captain John Paul Jones," 7:270-271 and 271 note

⁷²² NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:935-937

⁷²³ NDAR, "James Hogan to Captain John Paul Jones," 7:393 and note

⁷²⁴ Morison, Samuel Eliot, *John Paul Jones: A Sailor's Biography*, Little, Brown & Company: New York, 1959, p. 81

⁷²⁵ NDAR, "Sir George Collier to Lord Sandwich," 7:228-230

twenty-eight cannon; a much more powerful vessel than the converted merchantman *Alfred*.⁷²⁶

Milford's log indicates that she was seventy-eight miles southwest of Cape Negro in windy hazy weather on 8 December.⁷²⁷ The weather was freezing cold. Mowat was steering west by south, sailing before the wind.⁷²⁸ About 1500 five strange sail (*Alfred*'s group) were sighted away to the southwest at a distance of twelve miles. Mowat immediately raised more sail and gave chase, clearing for action.⁷²⁹ By the time darkness was falling *Milford* had closed enough so that Jones could make out that his pursuer was a British frigate.⁷³⁰ Jones now deployed the private recognition signals that had been captured in *Mellish*. *Milford*'s lookouts saw the correct signals run up and Mowat "Supposed to be a Man of War and her Convoy for New York." He lost interest, broke off pursuit, and the Americans slowly moved away. By 1800 they were out of sight in the fading light.⁷³¹

Jones now made preparations for getting the prizes to port and possibly engaging *Milford*. First Lieutenant Rathbun was recalled to *Alfred* from *John*, Jones apparently feeling he needed Rathbun aboard in case action developed with the British. Second Lieutenant Robert Sanders was sent to *John* as prizemaster, with orders to head for Nantucket Shoals and then Newport, if separated. He was to keep company with *Surprise*, whose new prizemaster, Carpenter Tyler, was a pilot.⁷³² First Mate John Margeson was ordered to *Betty*, to replace Tyler, with orders to keep company with *Alfred*. If separated Margeson could proceed to any safe port.⁷³³

The convoy was divided. *Mellish*, *Betty*, and perhaps the schooner tender, were ordered "to Crowd Sail and go a Head."⁷³⁴ Jones held *John* back with him because she was armed and had a cargo (according to her invoice) of low value.⁷³⁵ *Surprise* stayed with *Alfred* and *John*.⁷³⁶ In the

⁷²⁶ Morison, *John Paul Jones*, 81

⁷²⁷ NDAR, "Master's Log of H.M.S. *Milford*," 7:416-417

⁷²⁸ Morison, *John Paul Jones*, 81

⁷²⁹ NDAR, "Master's Log of H.M.S. *Milford*," 7:416-417

⁷³⁰ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:935-937

⁷³¹ NDAR, "Master's Log of H.M.S. *Milford*," 7:416-417; "Captain Sir George Collier, R.N., to Philip Stephens," 7:883-884

⁷³² NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to Robert Sanders," 7:407-408 and 408 note

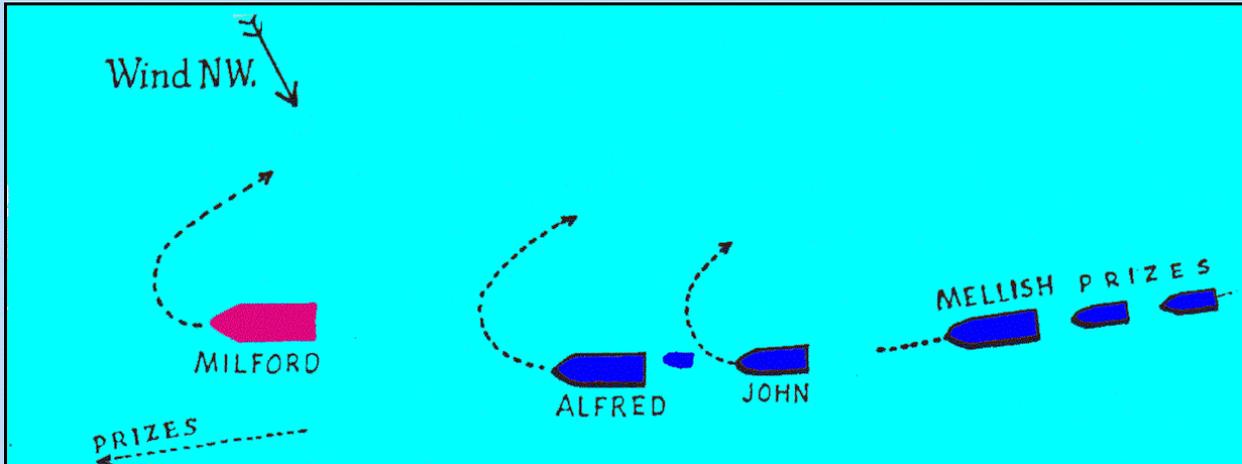
⁷³³ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to John Margeson," 7:408 and note

⁷³⁴ NDAR, "*Independent Chronicle*, Thursday, December 19, 1776," 7:517-518

⁷³⁵ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:935-937

⁷³⁶ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones's Notes on the *Alfred*'s Cruise," 7:417

night *Alfred* led *John* away,⁷³⁷ steering north while the prizes stood on to the south.⁷³⁸ Jones lit *Alfred*'s large top light to lead *Milford* away from the escaping prizes.⁷³⁹



The situation at midnight 8/9 December 1776: *Alfred*, her tender, and *John* turn onto port tack. *Mellish* and prizes continue on. *Milford* follows *Alfred* later. The prizes steer west by south. Adapted from Morison, *John Paul Jones*.

Meanwhile *Milford* tacked at 0300, perhaps following *Alfred*'s light, but more likely changing course because of the weather.⁷⁴⁰ At dawn, *Milford* was seen two points on *Alfred*'s lee quarter, about the same distance as she was the night before. Jones had discovered that *Alfred* was very out of trim, sailing "very ill by the Wind." Jones also had observed that *John* "made much less lee Way." Jones ordered *John* to drop back astern, staying to windward of *Milford*, and examine her strength. Sanders was to signal whether *Milford* was stronger or weaker than *Alfred*.⁷⁴¹

Milford had sighted the group of three vessels on her weather bow at 0800, about nine miles away, and had given chase. At 1000 she tacked, bringing the ships on her weather beam. At 1130 the ship on her beam (*John*) bore down for *Milford*. About 1200 *John* fired four shots at her.⁷⁴² Perhaps Sanders had misunderstood his orders. Jones reported "After a considerable time the Signal

⁷³⁷ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:935-937

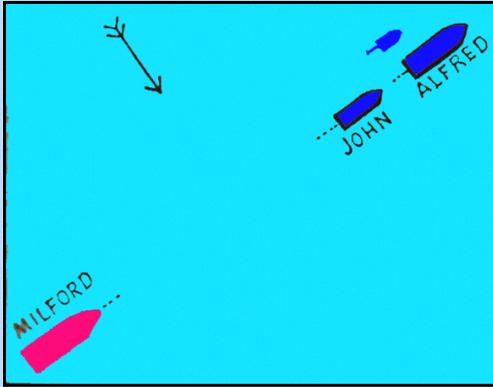
⁷³⁸ NDAR, "*Independent Chronicle*, Thursday, December 19, 1776," 7:517-518

⁷³⁹ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:935-937

⁷⁴⁰ NDAR, "Master's Log of H.M.S. *Milford*," 7:416-417

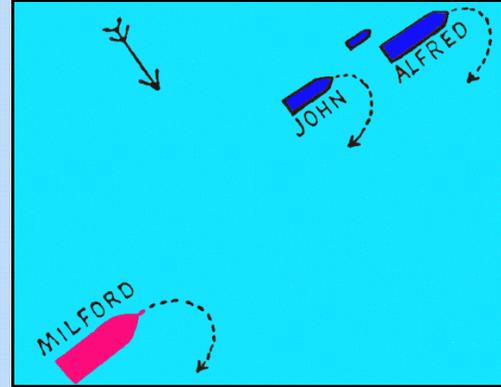
⁷⁴¹ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:935-937

⁷⁴² NDAR, "Master's Log of H.M.S. *Milford*," 7:416-417

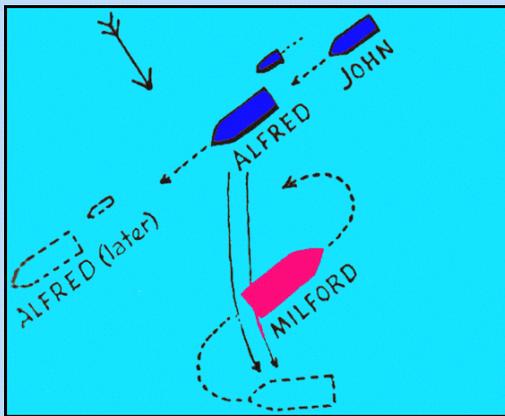


The situation at 0730/0800. *Milford* nine miles astern of *John*.

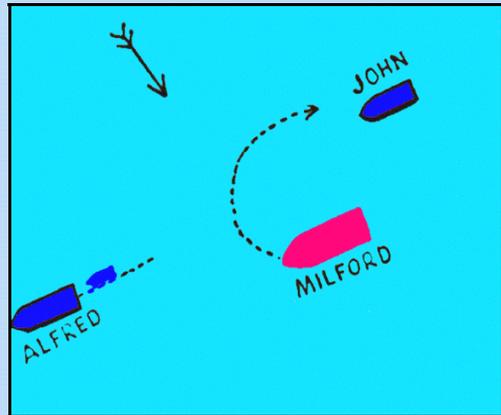
was made that the Enemy Was of Superior Force." Meanwhile the wind had risen, laced with severe squalls, blowing a hard gale. *Alfred* was making seven or eight knots by evening, and spindrift was blowing across the sea.⁷⁴³ Jones and *Alfred* were far away from *John*. Mowat, already suspicious as to what these vessels were, had had any



Milford wears and turns south, *Alfred* and *John* follow.



At 1130 *Milford* tacks to meet *Alfred*, which fires on her at 1200. *Milford* tacks again to pursue *John*, which is astern of *Alfred*.



0300: After hours of fruitless pursuit, *Milford* tacks and runs down *John*.

doubts eliminated as soon as *John* fired at *Milford*. He immediately began to chase after *Alfred*. *Milford's* log book indicates the afternoon weather as fresh gales with squalls and hail showers. Mowat ignored *John* and pursued the other two sail, west by south from him at a distance of twelve miles. The hapless *John* fell astern, following *Milford*.⁷⁴⁴ Mowat hung on in pursuit of *Alfred*. Jones reported the seas were so rough it was "impossible" to hoist out a boat. At nightfall *Milford* wore around on the other tack.⁷⁴⁵ *Alfred* and *Surprise* continued on and soon parted in the rough weather.⁷⁴⁶

When Mowat tacked at 1500 he steered down on *John*. Sander's luck was out and he knew it.

⁷⁴³ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:935-937

⁷⁴⁴ NDAR, "Master's Log of H.M.S. *Milford*," 7:416-417

⁷⁴⁵ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:935-937

⁷⁴⁶ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones's Notes on the *Alfred's* Cruise," 7:417



In a half hour *Milford* was alongside her, hoisted out the cutter, and occupied the prize.⁷⁴⁷ Jones believed that Sanders "had Wilfully given her up and continued Voluntarily by the Enemy through the whole of the very dark and Stormy night that ensued," basing his criticism on the sea state at the time.⁷⁴⁸ On the other hand, Jones was later criticised for abandoning *John* and Sanders to *Milford*.⁷⁴⁹ Neither criticism was correct. Sanders was caught, the British launched their cutter, and there was little Jones could do from nine miles away against the superior *Milford*. After removing *John*'s American prize crew, a petty officer took the ship away to Halifax.⁷⁵⁰ Among the papers found on *John* were *Alfred*'s signals, which Mowat later attempted to use.⁷⁵¹

Following the breakup of the prize convoy by the encounter with *Milford*, Jones and *Alfred* steered south and west. On 14 December *Alfred* was attempting to get into Boston, but the wind was blowing very hard from the north. Jones was nearly without provision, and, if the wind increased, he was in danger of being driven out of Massachusetts Bay, so he decided to put into Plymouth. Now that is a very difficult harbor to enter. In "Working up the Harbour the Ship Missed Stays in a Violent Snow Squall on the South Side which Obliged me to Anchor immediatly in little more than three Fathom." *Alfred* grounded at low tide and began to beat against the bottom in the wind and surf, but she was freed by the morning of the 15th. Jones sailed to Nantasket Roads "with a tight ship and no perceptible damage whatever." *Alfred* arrived with two days provisions left and over 140 prisoners aboard.⁷⁵² On the 16th *Alfred* dropped anchor in Boston Harbor.⁷⁵³ Now let us see how Jones's various prizes fared on their voyage home.

Brigantine *Active*, under Acting Lieutenant Walter Spooner of *Alfred*, had been despatched for Edenton, North Carolina, it will be recalled. Spooner instead steered for Rhode Island but put into Dartmouth, Massachusetts on 23 November 1776, the first of Jones's prizes to get into port. Spooner brought word of the capture of *Mellish* to the Continental Agents.⁷⁵⁴ At Dartmouth the brigantine was delivered to Deputy Continental Agent Leonard Jarvis,⁷⁵⁵ while Spooner traveled to Newport to deliver Jones's letters to Commodore Hopkins (on 24 November).⁷⁵⁶ Hopkins ordered any items of clothing and the coal aboard *Active* held for the use of the Army and

⁷⁴⁷ NDAR, "Master's Log of H.M.S. *Milford*," 7:416-417

⁷⁴⁸ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:935-937

⁷⁴⁹ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to the Marine Committee," 8:56

⁷⁵⁰ NDAR, "Master's Log of H.M.S. *Milford*," 7:416-417

⁷⁵¹ NDAR, "Master's Log of H.M.S. *Milford*," 7:454 and note

⁷⁵² NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:935-937

⁷⁵³ NDAR, "*Independent Chronicle*, Thursday, December 19, 1776," 7:517-518

⁷⁵⁴ NDAR, "Extract of a letter from Dartmouth, dated Nov. 24," 7:265

⁷⁵⁵ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to Leonard Jarvis," 7:277-278

⁷⁵⁶ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:277

Navy.⁷⁵⁷ *Active* was libeled on 26 December 1776 and tried on 14 January 1777.⁷⁵⁸ The imprisoned crew was exchanged in February 1777.⁷⁵⁹ *Active* eventually wound up in Robert Morris's service, as the *Delaware*.

When Jones arrived in Boston and discovered *Active* had not sailed to North Carolina he was not pleased. In a letter to Joseph Hewes he explained why she had been ordered to North Carolina, then he said, of the prizemaster, "to My no small concern...hath thought proper to break his Orders" and go into Dartmouth. Jones listed this as the first example of insubordination on his cruise.⁷⁶⁰

Mellish was the premier prize of the cruise. When the convoy broke up on 8 December *Mellish* was among those prizes sent on ahead, steering south. Jones found she had not arrived in port by 16 December, when he anchored at Boston. The local authorities and the Continental Agent were alerted. Steps were immediately taken to intercept her before Brown ran her into Newport, recently captured by the British.

The danger of recapture at Newport was very real. By at least 11 December the British commander at Newport, Commodore Sir Peter Parker, knew that *Alfred* was at sea and was due back into port very soon. Parker had struck his broad pendant and the British warships had lowered their colors. American colors were ready to be hoisted at Newport if *Alfred* appeared, and a frigate was ready to slip out after her.⁷⁶¹

The Massachusetts Board of War's efforts to find *Mellish* began on 17 December. The Board of War called three captains of the Continental Army schooners at Boston before the Board to inquire about the condition of the schooners. The Board wanted them to sail out, seeking *Mellish*. Captain Ayres declined, stating his main mast was broken. Captains Skimmer and Waters were unprepared and could not proceed. The Board of War passed this particular work on to Continental Agent John Bradford, recommending that he send out a schooner to look for *Mellish*.⁷⁶²

Bradford immediately sent an express to Dartmouth, with orders to get out an advice boat. The boat was supposed to find *Mellish* and warn her away from Newport. One of the Continental Army schooners sailed from Boston on the same errand (which one is unknown).⁷⁶³ It so happened

⁷⁵⁷ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to Leonard Jarvis," 7:277-278

⁷⁵⁸ NDAR, "Libels Filed Against Prize Vessels in the Massachusetts Admiralty Court," 7:599-600

⁷⁵⁹ NDAR, "Dartmouth Committee of Safety to Captain John Ayres," 7:1119; "Committee of Wrentham to Captain John Ayres," 7:1189

⁷⁶⁰ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:935-937

⁷⁶¹ NDAR, "Commodore Sir Peter Parker to Lord Sandwich," 7:445; "Diary of Frederick Mackenzie," 7:620-621

⁷⁶² NDAR, "Minutes of the Massachusetts Board of War," 7:503-504

⁷⁶³ NDAR, "John Bradford to the Continental Marine and Secret Committees," 7:539



that Lieutenant Brown was familiar with the waters around Nantucket Shoals, and had put into Martha's Vineyard.⁷⁶⁴ Bradford's advice boat found her there and *Mellish* arrived at Dartmouth on 20 December. After sending express to order the cargo unloaded, a representative of the Army set off on 22 December "to receive what part of the cargo is wanted for the Army and to forward it." Jones claimed *Mellish* had 16000 uniforms aboard.⁷⁶⁵

Since Deputy Continental Agent Leonard Jarvis was absent from Dartmouth, one John Proud took charge of *Mellish*, sending an express to Bradford with the good news.⁷⁶⁶ According to John Trevett, who was not there, "As soon as they arrived, without trial, for the *Malech*, she was unloaded, and all the clothing taken out and waggons prepared to send them on to Gen. Washingtons army, at that time his army being in a distressed situation for clothing...and at that time I can say with pleasure I had rather taken her than a Spanish Galleon with hard money, although we took Continental money for our parts of all the prizes."⁷⁶⁷

Mellish was libeled on 26 December 1776 and tried on 14 January 1777.⁷⁶⁸ She was eventually bought by Bradford for the government in late March 1777,⁷⁶⁹ for conversion to a warship. This was not, however, done.

Snow *Kitty* (or *Hetty*), under Acting Lieutenant Joseph Allen of *Providence* had parted company in the afternoon of 15 November, bound for Newport. Allen got down to the Nantucket Shoals area where he was recaptured by HM Frigate *Unicorn* (Captain John Ford).⁷⁷⁰ Before *Unicorn's* prize crew could get her into port, she was captured again, by Massachusetts Privateer Brig *Reprisal* (Commander John Wheelwright).⁷⁷¹ The privateer sent *Kitty* into Boston, where she arrived 27 December.⁷⁷² She was libeled by Wheelwright on 9 January 1777, tried 28 January,⁷⁷³ and sold at Avis's Wharf on 7 February.⁷⁷⁴ Naturally, the crew of *Alfred* received nothing from

⁷⁶⁴ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:935-937

⁷⁶⁵ NDAR, "John Bradford to the Continental Marine and Secret Committees," 7:539

⁷⁶⁶ NDAR, "John Proud to Commodore Esek Hopkins," 7:539-540 and 540 note

⁷⁶⁷ NDAR, "Journal of Lieutenant John Trevett, Continental Sloop *Providence*," 7:329-330

⁷⁶⁸ NDAR, "Libels Filed Against Prize Vessels in the Massachusetts Admiralty Court," 7:599-600

⁷⁶⁹ NDAR, "Robert Morris to John Bradford," 8:211

⁷⁷⁰ NDAR, "*Public Advertiser*, Wednesday, February 26, 1777," 8:613; "*Independent Chronicle*, Thursday, January 2, 1777," 7:844-845

⁷⁷¹ NDAR, "Libels Filed in the Massachusetts Maritime Court," 7:906-907; "*Independent Chronicle*, Thursday, January 2, 1777," 7:844-845

⁷⁷² NDAR, "*Independent Chronicle*, Thursday, January 2, 1777," 7:844-845

⁷⁷³ NDAR, "Libels Filed in the Massachusetts Maritime Court," 7:906-907

⁷⁷⁴ NDAR, "*Independent Chronicle*, Thursday, February 6, 1777," 7:1118

this prize.

The three colliers had similar fates although the details were quite different. Ship *Molly* had parted from the convoy on the night of 6 December in a heavy sea with a westerly gale.⁷⁷⁵ Soon after parting the master of the ship, James Lash, conspired with prizemaster James Bachope and part of the crew to retake the vessel.⁷⁷⁶ The four loyal members of the prize crew were seized and Bechup took her across the Atlantic to Londonderry, Ireland, arriving 15 or 16 January 1777.⁷⁷⁷ From Londonderry she was taken to Plymouth and Bachope traveled to London, where the British Navy Board awarded him £100, on 12 May 1777, for his treachery.⁷⁷⁸

After parting from *Alfred*, collier ship *Betty* steered for Narragansett Bay and Newport under First Mate John Margeson. Margeson had no information that Newport had fallen to the British and may have been deceived by the lack of British colors. On the morning of 18 December *Betty* nosed into the bay, sailing up the western channel. At 0900 HM Frigate *Sphynx* (Captain Anthony Hunt) saw her steering for Newport.⁷⁷⁹ Margeson was growing nervous (the Americans had no ship at sea that looked anything like *Sphynx*) and turned north with a favorable west wind.⁷⁸⁰ Near Prudence Island *Betty* was cut off by another British warship. Margeson turned back south toward Newport.⁷⁸¹ At 1100⁷⁸² *Betty* was approaching the harbor, apparently trying to run out to sea again. The shore batteries at Newport opened fire,⁷⁸³ joined in by HMS *Preston* (Captain Samuel Uppleby).⁷⁸⁴ *Betty* was taking hits and Margeson had enough sense to surrender. Boats from *Preston*⁷⁸⁵ and other warships rowed out and secured *Betty*. Commodore Sir Peter Parker credited the capture to his flagship, HMS *Chatham*. Jones later commented proudly that *Betty* was only retaken "after standing the fire of three of the Enemies Ships."⁷⁸⁶

⁷⁷⁵ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones's Notes on *Alfred*'s Cruise," 7:417

⁷⁷⁶ NDAR, "Minutes of the British Navy Board," 8:840

⁷⁷⁷ NDAR, "Extract of a Letter from Londonderry, Jan. 17," 8:529 and note; "Extract of a Letter from Londonderry, Jan. 20," 8:538 and note

⁷⁷⁸ NDAR, "Minutes of the British Navy Board," 8:840

⁷⁷⁹ NDAR, "Journal of H.M.S. *Sphynx*, Captain Anthony Hunt," 7:511

⁷⁸⁰ NDAR, "Commodore Sir Peter Parker to Philip Stephens," 7:891

⁷⁸¹ NDAR, "Journal of John Trevett," 7:511-512 and 512 note

⁷⁸² NDAR, "Journal of H.M.S. *Sphynx*, Captain Anthony Hunt," 7:511

⁷⁸³ NDAR, "Diary of Frederick Mackenzie," 7:511 and note

⁷⁸⁴ NDAR, "Journal of H.M.S. *Preston*, Captain Samuel Uppleby," 7:511

⁷⁸⁵ NDAR, "Journal of H.M.S. *Preston*, Captain Samuel Uppleby," 7:511

⁷⁸⁶ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:1005-1007

Ship *Surprise*, under Carpenter Samuel Tyler and Midshipman Michael Knies sailed south after parting with Jones and *Alfred*. On 15 December *Surprise* was running fifteen miles off the coast of Long Island in breezy, cloudy weather. She was sighted, at 1600, by HM Frigate *Greyhound* (Captain Archibald Dickson). At 1630 *Greyhound* fired one gun in the general direction of *Surprise*, and Tyler and Knies put about and bore down to *Greyhound*. At 1800 they were close enough to speak the frigate, but heavy seas and winds prevented the British from occupying the prize. *Greyhound* set sail and fired guns at *Surprise* to keep her in company. At 2300 the wind began to abate. At 0630 on 16 December a boarding party took control of the ship, removing the six prisoners. Seven men from *Greyhound* took the *Surprise* to New York, where Tyler, Knies and the sailors were put in the prison ships.⁷⁸⁷

Part VI starts on the next page.

⁷⁸⁷ NDAR, "Journal of H.M.S. *Greyhound*, Captain Archibald Dickson," 7:495



Jones' crew was largely dispersed by early January. The men entered at Rhode Island, at Commodore Hopkins' orders, had come aboard only for a single cruise. Most of the men from *Providence* had served out their enlistment and were gone. The remaining crew had been put to work on the rigging by 11 January. Jones thought that, if men could be raised, *Alfred* could sail in a week after receiving orders from the Marine Committee.⁷⁸⁸

Meanwhile, Commodore Hopkins wrote to Bradford on 13 January 1777 informing him that Captain Elisha Hinman had been appointed to command the *Alfred*. Hinman was the bearer of the letter, which called upon Bradford to assist Hinman in getting the *Alfred* ready for sea.⁷⁸⁹ The next day Hopkins wrote to Jones, giving him the unpalatable news that he had been relieved of command of the *Alfred*: "the bearer Capt Elisha Hinman comes down to take Charge of the *Alfred* for which Ship he has a Commission from Congress for, and has this day applied to me for an Order to take Command of the Ship he was appointed to--and as I have recd no directions from the hon Marine Board to Contradict this Commission I do not think I have any power to displace him" Hopkins offered Jones command of the sloop *Providence*, "which Vessel your Commission is for . . . or any other Vessel that is in my power to give you." Hopkins also gave Jones directions for discharged the members of *Columbus's* crew aboard the *Alfred*, and the payment of wages and accounts to the sailors.⁷⁹⁰ Hopkins issued his orders to Hinman on the 15th, to take command of the *Alfred*, and ready her for sea.⁷⁹¹

Meanwhile, Jones, at Boston, was planning a major refit of the *Alfred*. The ship was unfit for service as a warship in her present configuration.⁷⁹² Her battery was of "such a Variety of lengths and Sizes that it is both difficult and dangerous to Fight them and the Nine pounders are all too long for Sea Service." *Alfred* was also so crank that her lee guns could not be used.⁷⁹³ He thought it was "unadvisable to have any thing done to the Hull" at present.⁷⁹⁴ Jones had had an estimate made of the expense of altering the *Alfred* to correct these problems,⁷⁹⁵ and forwarded it to the Marine Committee on 11 January 1777.⁷⁹⁶ Writing to Robert Morris, in a letter of 16 January. Jones also expressed his opinion that *Alfred* was "much better calculated for the Merchant Service

⁷⁸⁸ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:919-920

⁷⁸⁹ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to John Bradford, Boston," 7:944

⁷⁹⁰ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to Captain John Paul Jones," 7:950-951

⁷⁹¹ NDAR, "Commodore Esek Hopkins to Captain Elisha Hinman," 7:958

⁷⁹² NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:919-920

⁷⁹³ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to Robert Morris," 7:968-969

⁷⁹⁴ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:919-920

⁷⁹⁵ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to Robert Morris," 7:968-969

⁷⁹⁶ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:919-920



than She can be made for War.” Jones suggested sending her to France with a cargo of tobacco.⁷⁹⁷ The prize *Mellish*, he further suggested, would make a much better cruiser than *Alfred*.⁷⁹⁸ Bradford concurred in this opinion. An equal sum as the estimate for *Alfred*'s refit, he said, spent on the *Mellish*, would provide a better warship.⁷⁹⁹

On 16 January 1777, the Congressional Committee in Philadelphia, writing to John Hancock, reported “You have herein the Copy of Capt Jones's Acc of his last expedition in the *Alfred*, he is a fine Fellow and shou'd be constantly kept employed, If the Congress please I will propose to him one or two expeditions & leave him to take his Choice of them . . .”⁸⁰⁰

Jones took the opportunity of the letter to Morris to express his thoughts on other matters. An item that aroused his disapproval was the association for sharing prize money. “I must here Assert that it is both Unjust and inimical to the interest of the Service that any Person or persons belonging to the Navy should share in Prizes when they were themselves Absent and out of harms way when the Capture was made by this Unprecedented⁸⁰¹ Association which was effected by Fellows who have consulted their Personal Safety ever since, the Navy hath received . . . real injury . . .”⁸⁰² Prize money, because of this association, had become “so very intricate and perplexed” that many sailors had deserted after the return from New Providence. Those who had stuck it out were “detered” from reenlisting, as they had received no prize money, or had any prospect of receiving any. Jones noted that such associations were “never known to be binding for more than a Single cruise.” He suggested it be set aside and “Some happy expedient fallen upon to induce the Seamen to enter chearfully into the Service” for an unlimited term. Jones also asked Morris about a rumour he had heard from Nathaniel Falconer, “that I was Appointed to one of the Ships at Philadelphia.”⁸⁰³

About 19 or 20 January Hinman arrived at Boston and handed Jones his orders to take command of the *Alfred*. This order stung Jones. According to Jones, Hinman's method of presenting the orders added something to their distate. “It seems that Captain Hinman's Commission is No 1, and that in consequence he who was first my Junior Officer by Eight, hath expressed himself as my Senior Officer, in a manner which doth himself no honor, and which doth me signal Injury.” In as much as Jones had already received orders from the Marine Committee, dated 10 December

⁷⁹⁷ NDAR, “Captain John Paul Jones to Robert Morris,” 7:968-969. A similar opinion was expressed to the Marine Committee on 11 January. NDAR, “Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee,” 7:919-920

⁷⁹⁸ NDAR, “Captain John Paul Jones to Robert Morris,” 7:968-969

⁷⁹⁹ NDAR, “John Bradford to the Secret Committee of the Continental Congress,” 7:980-981

⁸⁰⁰ NDAR, “Congressional Committee in Philadelphia to John Hancock,” 7:972-973 and 973n2

⁸⁰¹ The word “damned” was written in, and then marked out.

⁸⁰² Jones is here referring to the captains at Providence, Rhode Island, Whipple, John B. Hopkins, and Dudley Saltonstall, and, possibly, to Commodore Hopkins.

⁸⁰³ NDAR, “Captain John Paul Jones to Robert Morris,” 7:968-969

1776, to proceed on a cruise in the *Alfred*,⁸⁰⁴ there was some doubt in Jones' mind if these orders of Hopkins' were correct.⁸⁰⁵



This is NOT a portrait of Captain Elisha Hinman. According to the family this is a portrait of a near relative. This is here to prevent future mis-identification. Personal communication from the family. The original is a nineteenth century engraving titled "E. Hinman," tentatively identified as the Continental Navy captain. From McCusker, *Alfred: The First Continental Flagship, 1775-1778*.

Hinman also planned to refit *Alfred*, but on a different plan from that Jones had proposed. Agent Bradford reported, on the 22nd, that it would be less expensive. Bradford also noted Hinman had orders from Hopkins "to alter her."⁸⁰⁶ Bradford reported on the 29th that the alterations were under way, and that *Alfred* would be ready for sea in six weeks. Bradford noted that paying off *Alfred's* portledge bill consumed a large sum of money.⁸⁰⁷ Bradford returned to the point of money on 6 February 1777, writing to John Hancock. "Great sums" were expended in paying off *Alfred's* portledge bills "for a year," as well as *Cabot's*. The refit was consuming money, and as none was realized from the sale of prizes, Bradford needed funds forwarded from Philadelphia.⁸⁰⁸

Robert Morris answered Bradford's letters of 21 December and 17 January on 7 February. Morris did not yet know of Jones' being relieved in command of the *Alfred*. Orders were sent to Jones for another cruise in the *Alfred*, but Morris noted that he had missed the letters proposing an alteration in the *Alfred*. If

the Marine Committee had approved that, and issued orders to Jones, then let Jones follow those orders. If their orders did not contradict Morris' orders, then let Jones follow the ones he was

⁸⁰⁴ NDAR, "Continental Marine Committee to Captain John Paul Jones," 7:438-439

⁸⁰⁵ NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones to the Continental Marine Committee," 7:1005-1007 and 1007 note, dated 21 January 1777

⁸⁰⁶ NDAR, "John Bradford to Robert Morris," 7:1013-1014

⁸⁰⁷ NDAR, "John Bradford to Robert Morris," 7:1058

⁸⁰⁸ NDAR, "John Bradford to John Hancock," 7:1117



sending.⁸⁰⁹

On 20 February Bradford reported that *Alfred* was “forward in the Alterations they are making by order of Commodore Hopkins.”⁸¹⁰ This was the second time Bradford reported that the alteration was done by Hopkins’ orders, information he probably received from Hinman. In this context, it is worth noting that Hopkins, in a letter dated 14 February, to the Marine Committee, referred to the alterations as “without any directions from Me.”⁸¹¹

Alfred, Bradford reported on 6 March 1777, would be finished in about three weeks.⁸¹² Hinman had left town, proceeding to Connecticut on a personal matter. On 18 March he was at Providence, where he called on Commodore Hopkins. The work on *Alfred* was going quickly. Even better, said Hinman, he had a nearly a full crew.⁸¹³ Hinman’s personal business was a wedding. On 24 March he was married in New London’s North Parish, by the Reverend Jewet, to Miss Abigail Dolbeare, an accomplished young lady of fortune.” Both were “Parties greatly esteemed and respected” said the local paper.⁸¹⁴

Work on the *Alfred* continued apace. Bradford reported on 27 March that she would haul off in five days; the carpentry work nearly completed.⁸¹⁵ On 5 April 1777 he reported she was graving, but would be finished that day, and begin getting in her guns. Hinman, gone to New London “to get a Wife,” had not yet returned.⁸¹⁶ Bradford also reported, on 9 April 1777, that fifty-two tons of *Alfred*’s iron ballast had been removed. This was being used to cast cannon for the Continental Navy Ship *Raleigh*, building at Portsmouth, New Hampshire. The *Alfred* was taking in more ballast and her carpentry work was complete.⁸¹⁷

Hinman was certainly back in Boston by 17 April, for he was called on to sit on a court of inquiry on Captain Joseph Olney, for the loss of the Continental Navy Brig *Cabot*.⁸¹⁸ Jones was back in Boston by 23 April. He was asked by the senior officer there, Captain John Manley, to

⁸⁰⁹ NDAR, “Robert Morris to John Bradford,” 7:1136-1137, signed as Vice President of the Marine Committee

⁸¹⁰ NDAR, “John Bradford to John Hancock,” 7:1241-1242

⁸¹¹ NDAR, “Commodore Esek Hopkins to the Continental Marine Committee,” 7:1199-1200

⁸¹² NDAR, “John Bradford to John Hancock,” 8:36

⁸¹³ NDAR, “Commodore Esek Hopkins to the Continental Marine Committee,” 8:142-144

⁸¹⁴ NDAR, “*Connecticut Gazette*, Friday, March 28, 1777,” 8:219 and note

⁸¹⁵ NDAR, “John Bradford to John Hancock,” 8:209

⁸¹⁶ NDAR, “John Bradford to Robert Morris,” 8:274 and note

⁸¹⁷ NDAR, “John Bradford to the Continental Marine Committee,” 8:302-303; “John Bradford to the Continental Marine Committee,” 8:398-399; “Continental Marine Committee to Captain Thomas Thompson,” 8:472-475

⁸¹⁸ NDAR, “Captain John Manley to Captains Hector McNeill, Elisha Hinman and John Roche,” 8:357; “Report of a Court of Inquiry into the Loss of the Continental Navy Brig *Cabot*,” 8:372-374



attend a court martial, to be held on the *Hancock* in “Congress Road” on 24 April, on George Torrey. Torrey was an acting master’s mate on the *Alfred* and was accused of striking the master and using insulting language to Hinman.⁸¹⁹ The trial was postponed, being rescheduled for 5 May 1777, at 0900, on the *Alfred*.⁸²⁰

With *Alfred* approaching that state known as “ready for sea,” the Marine Committee, on 23 April, issued Hinman sailing orders. He was to cruise against British transports and return to port about the end of June 1777 for further orders. He was to hold crew together as these orders might require immediate execution.⁸²¹ Hinman was still in port and fitting out on 2 May, when he informed Captain Dudley Saltonstall that some materials Saltonstall wanted were not available.⁸²²

On 5 May *Alfred* began obtaining ordnance stores. Massachusetts furnished 712 6-pound shot and five hundred sheets of tin that day.⁸²³ Bradford came back to Massachusetts on 12 May, and obtained 350 9-pound canister shot, fifty 4-pound canister shot, fifty 6-pound canister shot, false fires, match and hand grenades from the Massachusetts Council.⁸²⁴ By 15 May *Alfred* had hauled off from the wharf, had wooded and watered, and was taking in provisions.⁸²⁵ That ever necessary article, rum, was obtained by Bradford on 20 May, when the Massachusetts Board of War delivered 708 gallons.⁸²⁶

No sooner had *Alfred* hauled into the harbor than the usual problem of desertion arose. On 15 May Hinman advertised for a deserter, a “French Negro, named Francois, by Trade a Barber, and plays well on the Violin,” for which a reward of \$4 was offered. Another advertisement attempted to lure a “Good Coasting Pilot” for the ship.⁸²⁷ On 19 May Hinman advertised for three deserters in the Connecticut papers, offering rewards of \$10 for one and \$5 each for the other two.⁸²⁸ On 24 May the Providence paper carried an advertisement from Hinman recalling all officers and men of the crew then at Providence. Those who ignored this notice would be deemed

⁸¹⁹ NDAR, “Captain John Manley to Captain John Paul Jones,” 8:404-405

⁸²⁰ NDAR, “Captain John Manley to Captain John Paul Jones,” 8:908

⁸²¹ NDAR, “Continental Marine Committee to Captain Elisha Hinman,” 8:410

⁸²² NDAR, “Captain Elisha Hinman to Captain Dudley Saltonstall,” 8:897

⁸²³ NDAR, “Journal of the Massachusetts Council,” 8:915

⁸²⁴ NDAR, “John Bradford to the Massachusetts Council,” 8:951-952; “Journal of the Massachusetts Council,” 8:959

⁸²⁵ NDAR, “John Bradford to the Continental Marine Committee,” 8:970

⁸²⁶ NDAR, “Minutes of the Massachusetts Board of War,” 8:1001

⁸²⁷ NDAR, “*Independent Chronicle*, Thursday, May 15, 1777,” 8:970-971

⁸²⁸ NDAR, “Advertisement for Deserters from the Continental Navy Ship *Alfred*,” 8:996. The advertisement was run on 30 May.

deserters.⁸²⁹

A rather odd incident occurred on 9 June 1777. One Louis Daniel Charrier, apparently engaged as an officer aboard the *Amphitrite* by Captain John Paul Jones, was aboard a vessel in Boston Harbor. Charrier met something from which he had to escape. Charrier saw a boat from *Alfred* ashore. He said the “Officer that was in the Boat knowd m Case and on my Desire he lett the Boat Draw Under Our Stern and I got out of the Gun room Port and Slid down by the Rudder Shoe & got Safe a Board the *Alfred*, Captain hinman happen’d to be ther he was kind enough as to lend me his Paniss who Carry’d me to Charlestown ferry . . . “ Exactly what Charrier was escaping from is not known.⁸³⁰

The waiting for orders from the Marine Committee bred interference by a state in the Continental Navy’s operations. Massachusetts was planning a thrust to the St. John’s River in Nova Scotia. On 26 June the Massachusetts Council tried to enlist New Hampshire’s aid in the enterprise, pointing out that the *Raleigh* would be of assistance, and that Hinman had agreed to use the *Alfred* in the project. *Alfred* was to be used as a convoy to the transports.⁸³¹ It was as well that this project collapsed: British spies had quickly provided accurate reports on it, and the British were prepared.⁸³²

Meanwhile, *Alfred* was ready for sea. Bradford reported on 3 July 1777 that she had been ready for a week, “the Captain being disappointed in manning his Ship” however. Bradford now reminded the Marine Committee that *Alfred* and Hinman needed orders,⁸³³ and repeated the request a week later.⁸³⁴ Minor events intruded on this waiting process. On 5 July a cartel vessel arrived from Halifax. Among the prisoners thus exchanged was former Lieutenant Robert Sanders, of the *Alfred*.⁸³⁵ About 14 July the “master” of Anthony and Prince “(two Blackmen)” turned up and claimed them. One was under guard at Boston; both had entered the *Alfred*. It was a shame the vessel had not sailed.⁸³⁶ By mid-July Hinman had received orders to join Continental Navy Ship *Raleigh* (Captain Thomas Thompson) at Portsmouth and sail with her to France. Thompson expected *Alfred* at Portsmouth on 19 July.⁸³⁷ *Alfred* was at Marblehead on 23 July. The great lack

⁸²⁹ NDAR, “*Providence Gazette*, Saturday, May 24, 1777,” 8:1025

⁸³⁰ NDAR, “Louis Daniel Charrier to Captain John Paul Jones, Boston,” 9:80-81 and 81 note

⁸³¹ NDAR, “Massachusetts Council to Meshech Weare, President of the New Hampshire Council,” 9:172

⁸³² NDAR, “Minutes of the Executive Council of Nova Scotia,” 9:345; “Captain Sir George Collier, R.N., to Philip Stephens,” 9:347-349

⁸³³ NDAR, “John Bradford to the Continental Marine Committee,” 9:207

⁸³⁴ NDAR, “John Bradford to the Continental Marine Committee,” 9:254

⁸³⁵ NDAR, “*Independent Chronicle*, Thursday, July 10, 1777,” 9:254-255

⁸³⁶ NDAR, “John Bradford to Leonard Jarvis,” 9:283-284

⁸³⁷ NDAR, “Captain Thomas Thompson to Captain Hector McNeill,” 9:296-298



was crewmen. She had only about 120 men aboard, but was to sail anyway, with the first favorable wind.⁸³⁸

Raleigh (Captain Thomas Thompson) had gone through a long and tortuous fitting out process at Portsmouth, New Hampshire. After many near starts she was ready to sail by late July 1777, despite being short-handed and without her complete battery. It was decided to send her to France with a cargo and there obtain the necessary items to complete her outfit and arming. To accompany the *Raleigh*, the *Alfred* was chosen. Command of the squadron thus to be formed was vested in Thompson. *Alfred* sailed from Marblehead in late July 1777 and arrived in the lower Piscataqua River about the first of August.⁸³⁹ Hinman brought the *Alfred* up to Portsmouth soon after. Here he completed his stores, drawing supplies from Continental Agent John Langdon on 12 August.⁸⁴⁰ *Raleigh* was so short-handed that Hinman was forced to send twenty of his men aboard to enable her to sail.⁸⁴¹

Although Hinman was but a short time at Portsmouth, he was there long enough to make a favorable impression on William Whipple, delegate to Congress from New Hampshire and a Marine Committee member. Whipple dined and was entertained aboard the *Alfred* while she was at Portsmouth.⁸⁴² Whipple, writing to Robert Morris on 28 August, said “I had formed an opinion of him not the most favorable (and that without any just cause, or indeed without any cause, except the general Prejudice I had taken to Commodore Hopkins’s Officers) I think myself bound in justice to say . . . I am fully convinced he is an exceeding good Officer. He is very judicious & active, an Excellent disciplinarian & at the same time possesses the intire Confidence & even the affection of his Officers & men . . .”⁸⁴³

Part VII begins on the next page.

⁸³⁸ NDAR, “Captain Joseph Cunningham to Robert Morris and Carter Braxton,” 9:317

⁸³⁹ Allen, *Naval History of the American Revolution*, i, 222-223

⁸⁴⁰ Morgan, *Captains to the Northward*, 240n74

⁸⁴¹ NDAR, “Captain Elisha Hinman to Ellis Gray,” 10:946-947 and 947 notes

⁸⁴² NDAR, “William Whipple to Robert Morris,” 11:1150-1151 and 1151 notes

⁸⁴³ NDAR, “William Whipple to Robert Morris,” 9:828-829



Raleigh and *Alfred* sailed for France on 22 August 1777. Three days after sailing a small schooner⁸⁴⁴ (*Athens*)⁸⁴⁵ was sighted and captured. She was bound for Halifax from New York and was in ballast except for a small cargo of flour and \$4390 in counterfeit Continental and Massachusetts currency, as well as 275 Spanish milled dollars. Thompson saved a small sample of the counterfeit money and burned the rest. The schooner was of little value so it was burned too.⁸⁴⁶

The next day, 26 August, the Continentals fell in with a Bermudian vessel bound from Halifax. Since vessels from Bermuda were exempted from capture by Congress, the vessel was released. The skipper was short of provisions for he had not been allowed to take any provisions from Halifax. The Americans supplied him with some provisions and received intelligence in exchange: a British sloop or two lay about Bermuda and “greatly annoy’d” American trade to the West Indies. The Americans set sail for Bermuda to engage the British sloops.⁸⁴⁷

The wind was favorable until 36°N was reached, when a hard gale blew up from the south. For two days the American ships ran to the northeast under shortened sail. They were pushed far to the north and east, away from Bermuda. After the gale eased, about 1 September 1777, the captains conferred and decided to steer to the east in hopes of finding the Jamaica convoy, or at least stragglers from it.

⁸⁴⁴ NDAR, “Captain Thomas Thompson to the Continental Marine Committee,” 10:847-849; “Captain Elisha Hinman to Ellis Gray,” 10:946-947 and 947 notes; Allen, *Naval History of the American Revolution*, i, 223; Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 117

⁸⁴⁵ NDAR, “William Cooley and W. Stiles to the Commissioners of the Customs,” 10:939 and note; “Captain Elisha Hinman to Ellis Gray,” 10:946-947 and 947 notes

⁸⁴⁶ NDAR, “Captain Thomas Thompson to the Continental Marine Committee,” 10:847-849; Allen, *Naval History of the American Revolution*, i, 223; Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 117

⁸⁴⁷ NDAR, “Captain Thomas Thompson to the Continental Marine Committee,” 10:847-849



On 2 September 1777, just a daybreak, the 150-ton⁸⁴⁸ snow⁸⁴⁹ or brig⁸⁵⁰ *Nancy*⁸⁵¹ (or *Nanny*),⁸⁵² master Anthony Hooper⁸⁵³ was captured, bound from St. Vincent's to England.⁸⁵⁴ She had outsailed the convoy the day before,⁸⁵⁵ and was thus a "romper" rather than a straggler. A sailor aboard the *Nanny* gave the position as 40°00'N.⁸⁵⁶ Aboard the *Nanny* were several passengers. These, and skipper Hooper, were "Old Acquaintance" of Thompson's. They "communicated freely every particular they knew respecting the fleet." From them Hinman and Thompson learned that there were four escort vessels: the *Camel*, a large, lofty ship, like an Indian, armed with twenty-two 12-pounders, and three sloops-of-war, the *Druid*, *Weazel*, and *Grasshopper*, all armed with sixteen guns. One sloop was to part at 39°N, and return to the West Indies, which Thompson thought had probably already departed.⁸⁵⁷ He took copies of the convoy's sailing orders and signal books.⁸⁵⁸ One Nutter was put in command of the *Nanny* as prizemaster.⁸⁵⁹ *Nanny* was

⁸⁴⁸ NDAR, "Libels Filed in the Massachusetts Maritime Court of the Southern District," 10:242 and note

⁸⁴⁹ NDAR, "Captain Thomas Thompson to the Continental Marine Committee," 10:847-849; "Providence Gazette, Saturday, October 11, 1777," 10:116 and note, "Libels Filed in the Massachusetts Maritime Court of the Southern District," 10:242 and note; "Affidavit of John Hall, Seaman of Snow *Nanny*," 10:930 and note; "Captain Elisha Hinman to Ellis Gray," 10:946-947 and 947 note

⁸⁵⁰ NDAR, "Captain Thomas Thompson to John Langdon," 9:895-896 and 896 note

⁸⁵¹ NDAR, "Admiral Sir Thomas Pye to Philip Stephens," 10:940-942; Allen, *Naval History of the American Revolution*, i, 224; Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 117

⁸⁵² NDAR, "Captain Thomas Thompson to John Langdon," 9:895-896 and 896 note; "Captain Thomas Thompson to the Continental Marine Committee," 10:847-849, "Providence Gazette, Saturday, October 11, 1777," 10:116 and note, "Libels Filed in the Massachusetts Maritime Court of the Southern District," 10:242 and note; "Affidavit of John Hall, Seaman of Snow *Nanny*," 10:930 and note

⁸⁵³ NDAR, "Captain Thomas Thompson to John Langdon," 9:895-896 and 896 note; "Captain Thomas Thompson to the Continental Marine Committee," 10:847-849, "Providence Gazette, Saturday, October 11, 1777," 10:116 and note, "Libels Filed in the Massachusetts Maritime Court of the Southern District," 10:242 and note; "Admiral Sir Thomas Pye to Philip Stephens," 10:940-942; Morgan, *Captains to the Northward*, 98. In NDAR, "Affidavit of John Hall, Seaman of Snow *Nanny*," 10:930 and note, the master is called Smith.

⁸⁵⁴ NDAR, "Captain Thomas Thompson to the Continental Marine Committee," 10:847-849; "Captain Elisha Hinman to Ellis Gray," 10:946-947 and 947 notes

⁸⁵⁵ NDAR, "Captain Thomas Thompson to the Continental Marine Committee," 10:847-849; Allen, *Naval History of the American Revolution*, i, 223; Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 117

⁸⁵⁶ NDAR, "Affidavit of John Hall, Seaman of Snow *Nanny*," 10:930 and note

⁸⁵⁷ NDAR, "Captain Thomas Thompson to the Continental Marine Committee," 10:847-849

⁸⁵⁸ Allen, *Naval History of the American Revolution*, i, 224; Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 117

⁸⁵⁹ NDAR, "Captain Thomas Thompson to John Langdon," 9:895-896 and 896 note

loaded with sugar and cotton⁸⁶⁰ and coffee.⁸⁶¹ Thompson kept her with him for the time being,⁸⁶² removing most of the crew to the *Raleigh*.⁸⁶³

Raleigh and *Alfred* went hunting for the convoy and found it the next morning. All day long the two American frigates closed the convoy and were close enough by dusk to count over sixty sail from the mastheads, as well as to make out details of the leading ships. The British were bearing east by north from the Americans and the wind was westerly.⁸⁶⁴

Raleigh hoisted a signal taken from the prize to indicate that she was a merchant vessel being left behind by the convoy, then Thompson steered alongside the *Alfred*. Thompson hailed Hinman and told him he planned to take *Raleigh* into the convoy at sunrise and attack the escort. *Alfred* was ordered to keep under *Raleigh's* stern until they were alongside the *Camel*, when both ships would engage and capture her.⁸⁶⁵

In the night the wind shifted around to the north and the convoy close hauled to the wind. This put the two American frigates far to leeward of the convoy. At dawn the convoy was sighted to the northeast, steering east northeast at a distance of six to nine miles. The wind was coming up stronger. *Alfred* and *Raleigh* set out to catch up.⁸⁶⁶

Alfred's execrable sailing qualities now came to the fore. She was “extremely tender-sided” and was unable to carry maximum sail, and so fell further astern and to leeward.⁸⁶⁷ Thompson noted she sailed “very dull indeed.” *Raleigh* soon began to gain on the convoy under “double-reefed topsails” while *Alfred* struggled. Thompson dared not take in sail to await the *Alfred* lest he be discovered, so he “kept our sails shaking in the wind” to slow down the *Raleigh*. Hinman, doing the best he could to catch up, now signaled that he was “overpressed” with sail.⁸⁶⁸ Thompson had

⁸⁶⁰ NDAR, “Captain Thomas Thompson to John Langdon,” 9:895-896 and 896 note; “*Providence Gazette*, Saturday, October 11, 1777,” 10:116 and note

⁸⁶¹ NDAR, “*Providence Gazette*, Saturday, October 11, 1777,” 10:116 and note

⁸⁶² NDAR, “Captain Thomas Thompson to John Langdon,” 9:895-896 and 896 note

⁸⁶³ NDAR, “Affidavit of John Hall, Seaman of Snow *Nanny*,” 10:930 and note

⁸⁶⁴ NDAR, “Captain Thomas Thompson to the Continental Marine Committee,” 10:847-849; Allen, *Naval History of the American Revolution*, i, 224; Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 117

⁸⁶⁵ NDAR, “Captain Thomas Thompson to the Continental Marine Committee,” 10:847-849; Allen, *Naval History of the American Revolution*, i, 224

⁸⁶⁶ Allen, *Naval History of the American Revolution*, i, 224

⁸⁶⁷ Morgan, *Captains to the Northward*, 99

⁸⁶⁸ Allen, *Naval History of the American Revolution*, i, 224-225, quoting Thompson. See also NDAR, “Captain Thomas Thompson to the Continental Marine Committee,” 10:847-849

previously resolved not “to war against the merchant when Kings ships are in sight.”⁸⁶⁹ “I determined to stand into the fleet and take my chances alone,” said Thompson.⁸⁷⁰ When *Alfred* failed to close up, Thompson became “vexd and stood into the fleet alone, passing several Merchant mend.”⁸⁷¹

Alfred had only the part of an observer in the ensuing action between *Raleigh* and HM Sloop *Druid*, during which *Druid* was shot to pieces. When the remaining escorts chased *Raleigh* out of the convoy, *Alfred* resumed the role of semi-participant. As *Raleigh* ran down to her, about four miles from the convoy, Hinman hoisted his colors and raised his main courses. *Raleigh* shortened sail as she approached, and both awaited the pursuing British, who returned to the convoy.⁸⁷²

The convoy was well scattered by morning of 5 September. At 0500, *Camel* ordered the remnants of the convoy to collect around the escorts.⁸⁷³ Finch saw the two American frigates were still present, twelve to fifteen miles to windward of the convoy.⁸⁷⁴ *Druid* saw them in the northwest quarter at 0800.⁸⁷⁵ At 1200 the Continentals were seen again, steering down to the convoy, position 40°09’N,47°33’N.⁸⁷⁶ Two hours later the Americans were seen to the west southwest, about four miles away, and steering for the convoy under fighting sail. Finch judged it was time to get under way again and ordered the merchant ship *Colhoun* (William Olliver) to lead the convoy, which allowed the escorts to keep between the convoy and the Americans,⁸⁷⁷ while *Weazle* cleared for action.⁸⁷⁸ At 2000, in the darkness, the British saw two lights to the northwest: the Americans were still circling.⁸⁷⁹

By 0500 on 6 September Finch had managed to collect eighty of the convoy. The Americans were now down in the southeast, between six and nine miles off. In the afternoon the weather turned

⁸⁶⁹ NDAR, “Captain Thomas Thompson to John Langdon,” 9:895-896 and 896 note

⁸⁷⁰ Morgan, *Captains to the Northward*, 99, quoting Thompson. See also NDAR, “Captain Thomas Thompson to the Continental Marine Committee,” 10:847-849

⁸⁷¹ NDAR, “Captain Thomas Thompson to John Langdon,” 9:895-896 and 896 note. See NDAR, “Captain Thomas Thompson to the Continental Marine Committee,” 10:847-849

⁸⁷² NDAR, “Captain Thomas Thompson to the Continental Marine Committee,” 10:847-849

⁸⁷³ NDAR, “Journal of H.M.S. *Camel*, Captain William Finch,” 9:881-882

⁸⁷⁴ NDAR, “Journal of H.M.S. *Camel*, Captain William Finch,” 9:881-882

⁸⁷⁵ NDAR, “Lieutenant’s Journal of H.M. Sloop *Druid*, Lieutenant John Burchier,” 9:882

⁸⁷⁶ NDAR, “Journal of H.M.S. *Camel*, Captain William Finch,” 9:881-882

⁸⁷⁷ NDAR, “Journal of H.M.S. *Camel*, Captain William Finch,” 9:881-882

⁸⁷⁸ NDAR, “Journal of H.M. Sloop *Weazle*, Captain Charles Hope, 9:882-883

⁸⁷⁹ NDAR, “Journal of H.M.S. *Camel*, Captain William Finch,” 9:881-882



squally and the frigates were lost to sight.⁸⁸⁰ The next day the convoy was still collecting and straggling. At 1200 on 6 September the Americans were seen again, bearing southwest. The weather had cleared, with moderate breezes and clear skies. At 1400 a strange sail was seen ahead and *Weazle* was sent to chase, the Americans still in sight to the southwest.⁸⁸¹ At 1830 the Americans were seen again, bearing west southwest, eight or nine miles distant. *Druid* lost sight of them at 2000.⁸⁸²

On 8 September Thompson penned his battle report and noted the problem: “I could have taken as many merchant ships as I had a mind, here I leave you to paint to your self my feeling at not being mand. have not 20 men Can find a rope in the Night.” Thompson intended to await a storm so the convoy would separate.⁸⁸³ The *Nanny* was now dispatched for Salem with Thompson’s initial battle report.⁸⁸⁴ *Nanny* safely arrived at Boston, Massachusetts by 11 October 1777.⁸⁸⁵ She was libeled on 23 October, with trial set for 11 November 1777.⁸⁸⁶

It was just as well that *Alfred* had not gotten into the convoy. According to Thompson, in his report to the Marine Committee, said “neither can we trust to the *Alfred*’s sailing—had she got into the Fleet that Day, she is so tender-sided she could not have fit her Guns, she is in my Opinion a very unfit Ship for a Ship of War . . .” If she had been a better sailer the whole convoy could have been destroyed, Thompson thought. Thompson added he was “exceedingly happy” with Hinman and his officers, who were always ready to do what they could: they deserved a better ship.⁸⁸⁷

The *Raleigh* and the *Alfred* gave up on the convoy on 8 September. Finch was not going to be drawn out, and *Alfred* was just too slow to support *Raleigh*. Course was shaped for France. *Raleigh* recorded her position that day as 43°31’N, 43°15’W. She chased and spoke a brigantine, which turned out to be the *Ville de Bayonne*, a prize to the Massachusetts Privateer Brigantine *Oliver Cromwell* (Commander William Coles) en route to the United States. The two continued toward France, meeting a gale on 11 September which sprung *Raleigh*’s mainmast, but with no other incidents. On 28 September they were at 49°35’N, 13°13’W, where the brigantine⁸⁸⁸ (or

⁸⁸⁰ NDAR, “Journal of H.M.S. *Camel*, Captain William Finch,” 9:888

⁸⁸¹ NDAR, “Journal of H.M.S. *Camel*, Captain William Finch,” 9:888

⁸⁸² NDAR, “Journal of H.M. Sloop *Druid*, Lieutenant John Bouchier,” 9:892-893

⁸⁸³ NDAR, “Captain Thomas Thompson to John Langdon,” 9:895-896 and 896 note

⁸⁸⁴ NDAR, “Captain Thomas Thompson to John Langdon,” 9:895-896 and 896 note

⁸⁸⁵ NDAR, “*Providence Gazette*, Saturday, October 11, 1777,” 10:116 and note

⁸⁸⁶ NDAR, “Libels Filed in the Massachusetts Maritime Court of the Southern District,” 10:242 and note

⁸⁸⁷ NDAR, “Captain Thomas Thompson to the Continental Marine Committee,” 10:847-849

⁸⁸⁸ NDAR, “Journal of Continental Navy Frigate *Raleigh*, Captain Thomas Thompson,” 10:875



brig)⁸⁸⁹ *Sally* (Edward Marshall) was captured. She was bound from Dartmouth, England for Newfoundland⁸⁹⁰ (or Halifax, Nova Scotia)⁸⁹¹ with a cargo of salt,⁸⁹² bread,⁸⁹³ and cordage.⁸⁹⁴ *Sally* had sailed on 21 September⁸⁹⁵ from Bristol, where she was owned.⁸⁹⁶ The seas were rough and *Raleigh's* pinnace was lost alongside the *Sally* when a large sea overturned the boat. Thompson removed some bread and put a prize master aboard, ordering her to the United States.⁸⁹⁷

Unfortunately, *Sally* did not proceed to the United States, but to Corunna, Spain. By 27 October 1777 notice of her arrival there had come to the attention of the British Ambassador, Lord Grantham, who passed the information along to Lord Weymouth.⁸⁹⁸ Weymouth replied on 18 November 1777, urging Grantham to demand restoration of the brig. Spain's northern coast had long harbored the rebels and allowed collusive sales of their prizes. Grantham must push the issue.⁸⁹⁹

Two days later, 30 September, *Alfred* and *Raleigh* were at 49°13'N, 10°56'W,⁹⁰⁰ the mouth of the English Channel.⁹⁰¹ Two stragglers from the Jamaica convoy were encountered. *Raleigh*

⁸⁸⁹ NDAR, "Captain Elisha Hinman to Ellis Gray," 10:946-947 and 947 notes; "Lord Grantham to Lord Weymouth," 10:948 and notes

⁸⁹⁰ NDAR, "Journal of Continental Navy Frigate *Raleigh*, Captain Thomas Thompson," 10:875; "Lord Grantham to Lord Weymouth," 10:948 and notes

⁸⁹¹ NDAR, "Captain Elisha Hinman to Ellis Gray," 10:946-947 and 947 notes

⁸⁹² NDAR, "Journal of Continental Navy Frigate *Raleigh*, Captain Thomas Thompson," 10:875; "Lord Grantham to Lord Weymouth," 10:948 and notes

⁸⁹³ NDAR, "Journal of Continental Navy Frigate *Raleigh*, Captain Thomas Thompson," 10:875

⁸⁹⁴ NDAR, "Captain Elisha Hinman to Ellis Gray," 10:946-947 and 947 notes

⁸⁹⁵ NDAR, "Journal of Continental Navy Frigate *Raleigh*, Captain Thomas Thompson," 10:875

⁸⁹⁶ NDAR, "Lord Grantham to Lord Weymouth," 10:948 and notes

⁸⁹⁷ NDAR, "Journal of Continental Navy Frigate *Raleigh*, Captain Thomas Thompson," 10:875

⁸⁹⁸ NDAR, "Lord Grantham to Lord Weymouth," 10:948 and notes

⁸⁹⁹ NDAR, "Lord Weymouth to Lord Grantham," 10:1001

⁹⁰⁰ NDAR, "Journal of Continental Navy Frigate *Raleigh*, Captain Thomas Thompson," 10:875

⁹⁰¹ NDAR, "Gourlade, Berard freres, & Montplaisir to the American Commissioners in France," 10:877

captured the 800-ton⁹⁰² ship *Jamaica*⁹⁰³ (or *Jamaican*)⁹⁰⁴ (David Watt⁹⁰⁵ [Watts]),⁹⁰⁶ bound from Jamaica to London,⁹⁰⁷ and owned in London.⁹⁰⁸ *Jamaica* was out two months from Jamaica.⁹⁰⁹ *Jamaica* was a big three-decker,⁹¹⁰ and mounted fourteen⁹¹¹ (or sixteen)⁹¹² guns to protect her cargo of rum, sugar,⁹¹³ cotton and coffee,⁹¹⁴ but made no resistance. She had parted from the convoy only a few days before. *Alfred* took the 500-ton⁹¹⁵ ship *Anna Susannah*⁹¹⁶ (or *Anna and Susannah*) (Johnson⁹¹⁷ [John Taylor])⁹¹⁸ with a similar cargo,⁹¹⁹ also owned in London and bound there,⁹²⁰ which had also left the convoy a few days before. Both prizes were manned and kept in company

⁹⁰² NDAR, "Jonathan Williams, Jr., to the American Commissioners in France," 10:922

⁹⁰³ NDAR, "Journal of Continental Navy Frigate *Raleigh*, Captain Thomas Thompson," 10:875; "Gabriel de Sartine to Jean-Francois-Timoleon Viger, Commissary of the Port and Dockyard, L'Orient, France," 10:900 and note

⁹⁰⁴ NDAR, "Gourlade, Berard freres, & Montplaisir to the American Commissioners in France," 10:877

⁹⁰⁵ NDAR, "Journal of Continental Navy Frigate *Raleigh*, Captain Thomas Thompson," 10:875; "Gabriel de Sartine to Jean-Francois-Timoleon Viger, Commissary of the Port and Dockyard, L'Orient, France," 10:900 and note

⁹⁰⁶ NDAR, "Gourlade, Berard freres, & Montplaisir to the American Commissioners in France," 10:877

⁹⁰⁷ NDAR, "Journal of Continental Navy Frigate *Raleigh*, Captain Thomas Thompson," 10:875

⁹⁰⁸ NDAR, "Gourlade, Berard freres, & Montplaisir to the American Commissioners in France," 10:877

⁹⁰⁹ NDAR, "Journal of Continental Navy Frigate *Raleigh*, Captain Thomas Thompson," 10:875

⁹¹⁰ NDAR, "Gourlade, Berard freres, & Montplaisir to the American Commissioners in France," 10:877

⁹¹¹ NDAR, "Journal of Continental Navy Frigate *Raleigh*, Captain Thomas Thompson," 10:875

⁹¹² NDAR, "Gourlade, Berard freres, & Montplaisir to the American Commissioners in France," 10:877

⁹¹³ NDAR, "Journal of Continental Navy Frigate *Raleigh*, Captain Thomas Thompson," 10:875, "Gourlade, Berard freres, & Montplaisir to the American Commissioners in France," 10:877

⁹¹⁴ NDAR, "Gourlade, Berard freres, & Montplaisir to the American Commissioners in France," 10:877

⁹¹⁵ NDAR, "Jonathan Williams, Jr., to the American Commissioners in France," 10:922

⁹¹⁶ NDAR, "Journal of Continental Navy Frigate *Raleigh*, Captain Thomas Thompson," 10:875; "Gabriel de Sartine to Jean-Francois-Timoleon Viger, Commissary of the Port and Dockyard, L'Orient, France," 10:900 and note; "Admiral Sir Thomas Pye to Philip Stephens," 10:940-942

⁹¹⁷ Morgan, *Captains to the Northward*, 101

⁹¹⁸ NDAR, "Gabriel de Sartine to Jean-Francois-Timoleon Viger, Commissary of the Port and Dockyard, L'Orient, France," 10:900 and note; "Admiral Sir Thomas Pye to Philip Stephens," 10:940-942

⁹¹⁹ Morgan, *Captains to the Northward*, 101

⁹²⁰ NDAR, "Gourlade, Berard freres, & Montplaisir to the American Commissioners in France," 10:877



with the American ships.⁹²¹

Hinman and Thompson, with the prize ships, resumed course for France. On the night of 4 October the prizes parted company. In the morning, Sunday, 5 October 1777, the lookouts sighted Belle Isle. By afternoon the Isle of Groix was in sight. A calm came up and night came down, so the American ships stood off and on until morning. Morning of the 6th revealed a pleasant sight: both prizes were nearby. Pilots came out and *Alfred* and *Raleigh* were soon riding at anchor in Port Louis.⁹²² The prizes anchored under the Isle of Groix.⁹²³

Part VIII starts in the next page.

⁹²¹ NDAR, "Journal of Continental Navy Frigate *Raleigh*, Captain Thomas Thompson," 10:875

⁹²² NDAR, "Journal of Continental Navy Frigate *Raleigh*, Captain Thomas Thompson," 10:875

⁹²³ NDAR, "Journal of Continental Navy Frigate *Raleigh*, Captain Thomas Thompson," 10:875, "Gourlade, Berard freres, & Montplaisir to the American Commissioners in France," 10:877



Thompson went ashore immediately and contacted Goullade, Berard freres, & Montplaisir, the Continental agents at L'Orient. A letter was written to the American Commissioners in France, announcing their arrival, with the news that Thompson had no dispatches and had just missed the post: he would write tomorrow. Goullade, Berard freres, & Montplaisir noted that the frigates had several "wants of Cables Ankers Sails Ballastg. Of Iron, Guns, and several other things which we will provide having declared them in such a manner as to avoid trouble . . ." The Frenchman meant he had entered the ships as distressed, to avoid any inconveniences caused by British protests. The vessels needed to be cleaned, and the French agents suggested that the American Commissioners get the "approbation of the Minister that difficulties may not be Started." As to the prizes, "we will do our best . . . and dispose of them as soon as possible as they stand before the answer of the court, or any application can be made from ye Court of England or the owners . . ." ⁹²⁴

Thompson reported from L'Orient on 10 October. He acknowledged that he was following orders four months old when he sailed, and that the American Commissioners would be surprised to find two frigates had arrived with no dispatches. Thompson had come to complete the *Raleigh* and refurbish the *Alfred*. They had obtained permission to refit "after various pretences, not consistant with the Honour of the United States, nor the Respect due to a Man of War belonging to a free and Independant Empire—But small Folks must sing small, & for the sake of Convenience must abate their Dignity . . ." Thompson and Hinman had met with every "personal Respect" at L'Orient and were well received by the population. Thompson requested orders from the American Commissioners, and suggestions as to a "Line for my Conduct during my stay here. . . ." Thompson sent a copy of his battle report, and his journal, noting that he had come into Port Louis "in Distress." The prizes were left under the Isle of Groix until he saw what kind of reception he obtained. They were still there, but had already been sold, for about half their value; but there seems a necessity for secresy & Dispatch . . ." The *Alfred* and *Raleigh* were preparing to heave down, and the work would be forwarded as fast as possible. Thompson passed along the news he had, which wasn't much. ⁹²⁵

The French line of conduct was laid down by the Minister of Marine, Gabriel de Sartine, on 11 October. The Commissary of the Port, Jean-Francois-Timoleon Viger, was to verify the repairs to the *Alfred* and *Raleigh*, and furnish necessaries, for payment. No warlike supplies or munitions were to be embarked. They were only to remain until they were ready for sea, and Viger was to expedite their departure. The prizes, which had been reported as American merchant vessels being escorted by the warships, were allowed to trade freely. ⁹²⁶

On 13 October the American Commissioners wrote to Goullade, Berard freres, & Montplaisir,

⁹²⁴ NDAR, "Goullade, Berard freres, & Montplaisir to the American Commissioners in France," 10:877

⁹²⁵ NDAR, "Captain Thomas Thompson to the American Commissioners in France," 10:895-897

⁹²⁶ NDAR, "Gabriel de Sartine to Jean-Francois-Timoleon Viger, Commissary of the Port and Dockyard, L'Orient, France," 10:900 and note



asking them to assist the two ships, and to deliver a letter to Thompson.⁹²⁷ The letter to Thompson requested him to forward any letters by way of Gourlade and company, which was much safer than other routes.⁹²⁸ To help smooth the way for the two American captains, Jonathan Williams, the Continental Agent at Nantes, sent Captain Samuel Nicholson to L'Orient. Nicholson had long been in France and was well familiar with the tricks necessary to avoid delay and detection by the English.⁹²⁹

By 13 October de Sartine had been informed that the two merchant vessels were prizes, and had been sold. Although Viger had ordered them out of port at once, but Sartine had learned from another source that the "entirety of the two cargoes was sold to foreigners. I could hardly believe it after the positive orders I gave to you and the king's wish which is well known to you." De Sartine demanded a special report by courier of this transaction.⁹³⁰ Two days later Sartine was answering an inquiry by Lord Stormont, through the Comte de Vergennes, about the two ships and the prizes. Sartine noted that they had been allowed to repair only after an inspection; and that the prizes had not been allowed to enter port. He did not state that he knew that the prizes had already been sold.⁹³¹

On 15 October, in a report to his British spy masters, George Lupton (James Van Zandt) mentioned *Alfred* and *Raleigh*. They were two hundred men short of their required crews, he said, and meant to sail as soon as refitted. The prizes had been sold for £9600 he added.⁹³² The same day Lord Stormont protested to Comte de Vergennes concerning the two ships. He requested they be ordered out to sea, and that the prize vessels not be sold. Vergennes seemed surprised, said Stormont later, however Maurepas, the French Prime Minister know of the arrival. Maurepas claimed they were admitted in distress and were leaky. Maurepas thought the prizes had left. Stormont countered that "Vessels would always appear Leaky to those who had a Mind to think them so, and that in a Word the whole was a mere jest, and was considered as such by the Americans themselves . . ." ⁹³³

Jonathan Williams had learned the details of the sale of the prizes by 18 October and was stunned. The property had been sold for £9700, which Williams thought was about one third of its value; and about one half of what it should have sold for in "their circumstances." Williams disapproved, and had written to L'Orient offering £2000 more, on the American Commissioner's

⁹²⁷ NDAR, "American Commissioners in France to Gourlade, Berard freres, & Montplaisir," 10:905

⁹²⁸ NDAR, "American Commissioners in France to Captain Thomas Thompson," 10:905

⁹²⁹ NDAR, "Jonathan Williams, Jr., to the American Commissioners in France," 10:910-911 and 911 note

⁹³⁰ NDAR, Gabriel de Sartine to Jean-Francois-Timoleon Viger, Commissary of the Port and Dockyard, L'Orient, France," 10:906

⁹³¹ NDAR, "Gabriel de Sartine to Comte de Vergennes," 10:913-914 and note

⁹³² NDAR, "George Lupton (James Van Zandt) to William Eden," 10:912-913 and 913 note

⁹³³ NDAR, "Lord Stormont to Lord Weymouth," 10:914-915 and 915 note



account, if the deal was not yet completed. If he got the goods they would be sent to Holland as French property and sold there. Williams had a good opinion of Goullade, but thought that advantage had been taken by others in the haste of disposal of the property.⁹³⁴ Answering the letters of the American Commissioners in France on 20 October, Thompson also regretted the prizes had sold so low. He thought the two would be worth £21000 in England.⁹³⁵ A British spy in the American headquarters reported that there was much to do about this sale. Chaumont begged the purchasers to make up the price to £13000 for the "Honor & Interest of France . . ."⁹³⁶

Meanwhile the British prisoners aboard *Raleigh* and *Alfred* had to be disposed of in some way. Seventy odd prisoners were put in a French brig and sent over to England, sailing on 11 October.⁹³⁷ As the brig got under way so did the two prize ships. Although there was some talk of attempting to recapture the ships, cooler heads prevailed.⁹³⁸ They arrived at Christchurch on 20 October.⁹³⁹ Among the prisoners thus released were Watt (*Jamaica*), Hooper (*Nanny*), Marshall (*Sally*) and Athens (the schooner from New York). These landed at Portsmouth, and, in passing through customs, revealed that the two prizes were unloading, their cargoes having been sold. The two American frigates were discharging their guns, preparing to clean, and that a third frigate, built in France at L'Orient, was about to be launched. The three together, when ready, were to escort a convoy of twenty sail to America. The customs officials passed this information to London.⁹⁴⁰

From these prisoners a good description of the two ships emerged. The *Alfred* was armed with twenty 9-pounders, swivels on her forecastle, and four cohorns in her tops. guns and had a crew of 160 men. She was a former merchant ship of lofty build, with a figurehead much like the *Raleigh's* (*Raleigh's* figurehead was that of a "yankey Head with a feather in his Cap, a Sabre in his right Hand . . ."). Her yards were not square and she had two topgallant masts, long royal masts, with large studding sails. Her waist cloths were black with white borders at the top. She had a five and a half foot breastwork on the quarterdeck, which was going to be lowered in France. *Alfred* sailed poorly, particularly on a wind. She had a top lantern and a poop lantern. When the prisoners left she was cleaning opposite Port Louis. The colors consisted of thirteen stripes with a blue field with thirteen white stars. Only Continental ships with commissions from Congress carried these colors, according to the prisoners.⁹⁴¹

⁹³⁴ NDAR, "Jonathan Williams, Jr., to the American Commissioners in France," 10:922

⁹³⁵ NDAR, "Captain Thomas Thompson to the American Commissioners in France," 10:925

⁹³⁶ NDAR, "Paul Wentworth to William Eden," 10:960-963

⁹³⁷ NDAR, "Admiral Sir Thomas Pye to Philip Stephens," 10:940-942

⁹³⁸ NDAR, "Admiral Sir Thomas Pye to Philip Stephens," 10:940-942

⁹³⁹ NDAR, "Affidavit of John Hall, Seaman of Snow *Nanny*," 10:930 and note

⁹⁴⁰ NDAR, "William Cooley and W. Stiles to the Commissioners of the Customs," 10:939 and note

⁹⁴¹ NDAR, "Admiral Sir Thomas Pye to Philip Stephens," 10:940-942

In a letter home on 26 October Hinman reported on the American reception in France. Although the official line was neutrality the French were “friends at Hart.” They were fitting out large armaments but seemed to be unready for war at present. They offered any assistance, but not publicly. Both captains were treated “very gently, by People of the first Characters here. We have had the honor to pay our respects to the Duke de Durass and the Dutchess de Mazarine, by whom we were received kindly, and shewed every mark of Friendship. They did us great Honour at a public Entertainment, both by drinking our Healths and wishing us Success. We also had a similarity of Friendship shewn us from the Spanish Ambassador, who passed through this Town a few days past . . .”⁹⁴²

On 5 November 1777 Lord Stormont had another interview with Comte de Vergennes. Another protest it was, over French treatment of the American rebels. In the course of the discussion *Alfred* and *Raleigh* were mentioned. Their guns and powder had been removed before cleaning, as was usual, and deposited in the King’s storehouse, which was not usual. Stormont noted this as a mark of favoritism. Vergennes :gave his usual frivolous Answer, that the Ships were in distress . . .”⁹⁴³

Two days later Sartine wrote to Charles Pierre Gonet, Commissary at L’Orient, concerning the *Alfred* and *Raleigh*. He was to impress on the captains the urgency of their completion of the refit of the ships, and of their departure. As to the prizes, Berard “surely would merit being punished” if it were proven he was behind the movement of the ships and their sale. He had already paid a fine for breaking other regulations. Sartine emphasized the point: “Enjoin him to be more circumspect in the future . . .” As to the French sailors who had moved the prizes: “. . . come to an understanding with the Admiralty officers of Vannes . . .” to remove the sailors and get the prizes away from French shores. Gonet was to prohibit clandestine enlistments, said Sartine. This meant, of course, that such enlistments had already taken place.⁹⁴⁴ Again, on 22 November Sartine wrote to Gonet to hasten the re-fit of the vessels. He noted the *Raleigh* was cleaned and was re-fitting, and that *Alfred* would begin careening. The two American captains “have left to return to L’Orient ...”⁹⁴⁵

It was true. Hinman and Thompson had traveled up to Paris in late October, and remained until mid-November. The two captains presented themselves to the American Commissioners to France.⁹⁴⁶ The sale of the prizes, however poorly handled, allowed the squadron to support its own expenses, a pleasant surprise to the American Commissioners.⁹⁴⁷ The captains remained in the French capital for nearly a month and had a most delightful stay. Hinman recalled dining with

⁹⁴² NDAR, “Captain Elisha Hinman to Ellis Gray,” 10:946-947

⁹⁴³ NDAR, “Lord Stormont to Lord Weymouth,” 10:973-974

⁹⁴⁴ NDAR, “Gabriel de Sartine to Pierre Gonet, Commissary of Marine at L’Orient,” 10:976-977 and 977 notes

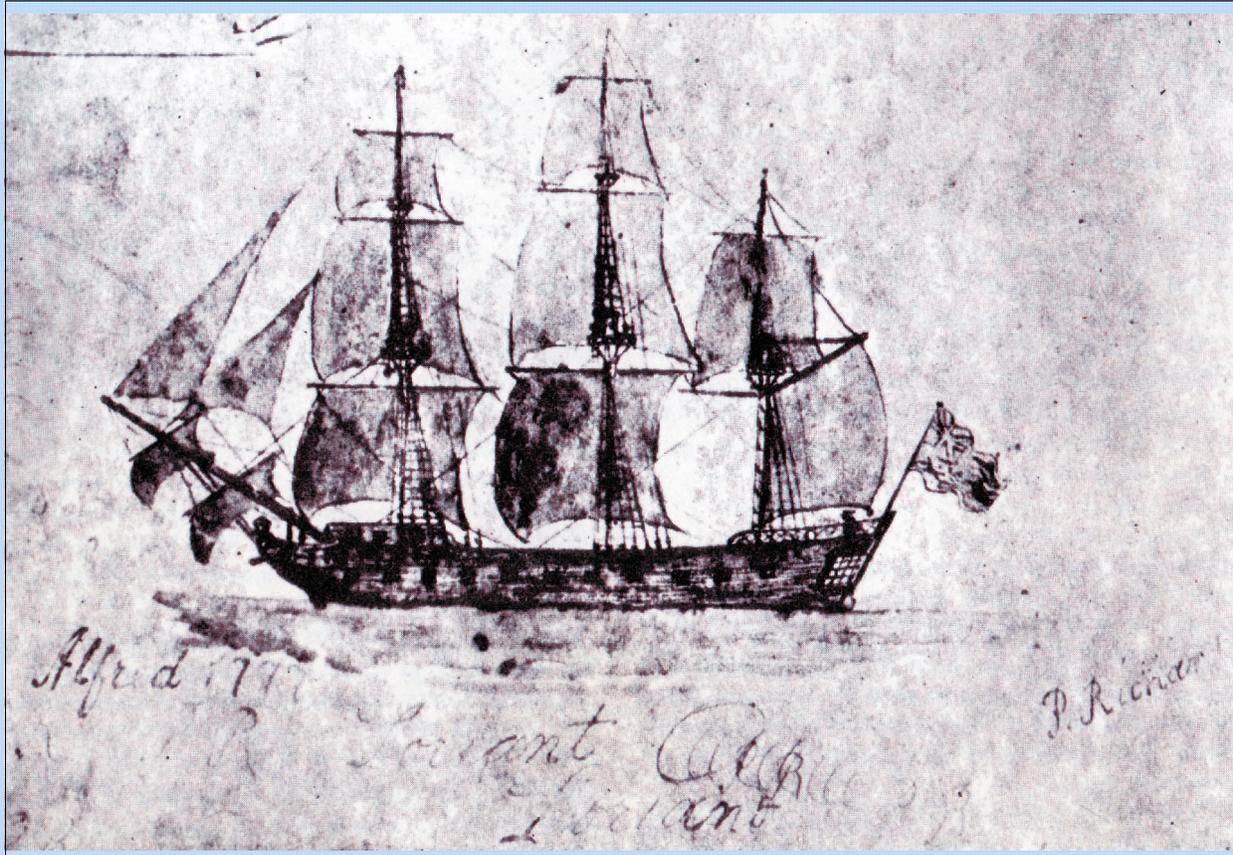
⁹⁴⁵ NDAR, “Gabriel de Sartine to Charles Pierre Gonet, Commissary of Marine at L’Orient,” 10:1014-1015

⁹⁴⁶ Morgan, *Captains to the Northward*, 101

⁹⁴⁷ NDAR, “American Commissioners in France to the Committee of Commerce,” 10:1051-1054

the Commissioners, and remembered meeting “the most beautiful ladies” Marie Antoinette and the Marchioness de Lafayette.⁹⁴⁸ The captains and the Commissioners also did a little work: discussing future cruising plans.

Several projects were considered. One was to collect all the America-bound arms shipments into a fleet and sent them off under escort of the *Raleigh* and *Alfred*. This was rejected because, in



Alfred at L'Orient in 1777. Taken from McCusker, *Alfred: The First Continental Flagship, 1775-1778*. The original is unknown. McCusker comments that this drawing is “either a nineteenth-century pipe dream or a twentieth century hoax.” It is signed by P. Richard, who was First Lieutenant of the *Alfred*.

the time it would take to collect the convoy, the British could collect a superior force to await it.⁹⁴⁹ Finally, the Commissioners issued their orders on 25 November 1777 (signed by Deane and Franklin). One thing was certain: “As it is by no means safe to return into the ports of France . . .” the ships were to take on stores sufficient for the cruise. The Commissioners suggested several ideas to the captains: to cruise against the returning West India ships, to intercept British transports sailing for America, or perhaps sail off the West African coast and then steer for the

⁹⁴⁸ Morgan, *Captains to the Northward*, 101

⁹⁴⁹ NDAR, “American Commissioners in France to the Committee of Commerce,” 10:1051-1054

West Indies. Since Thompson and Hinman had already discussed all these plans in “harmony and confidence” it was left to the captains to choose which plan to pursue. Neutral flags were to be shown respect and no neutral shipping molested. Prisoners captured could be released if necessary, but the Commissioners requested Thompson to make lists of the prisoners and have them acknowledge that they were prisoners. When released the prisoners were to be given a copy of this list to present to the British authorities. Another copy was to be given to the Marine Committee or other American authority. The Commissioners thus hoped to secure an exchange for the prisoners thus released.⁹⁵⁰ Arrangements were made to provision and refit the frigates. Additional crewmen were needed and recruiting parties were sent out to enlist sailors of any nationality.⁹⁵¹

Meanwhile a scheme had come to light to improve Hinman’s vessel. A ship lately purchased by Berard Freres & Co. was offered to the American Commissioners in exchange for the *Alfred*. They turned down this offer on 26 November, because of time constraints. The American Commissioners also noted that Thompson would settle the refit bill and handle the distribution of prize money.⁹⁵²

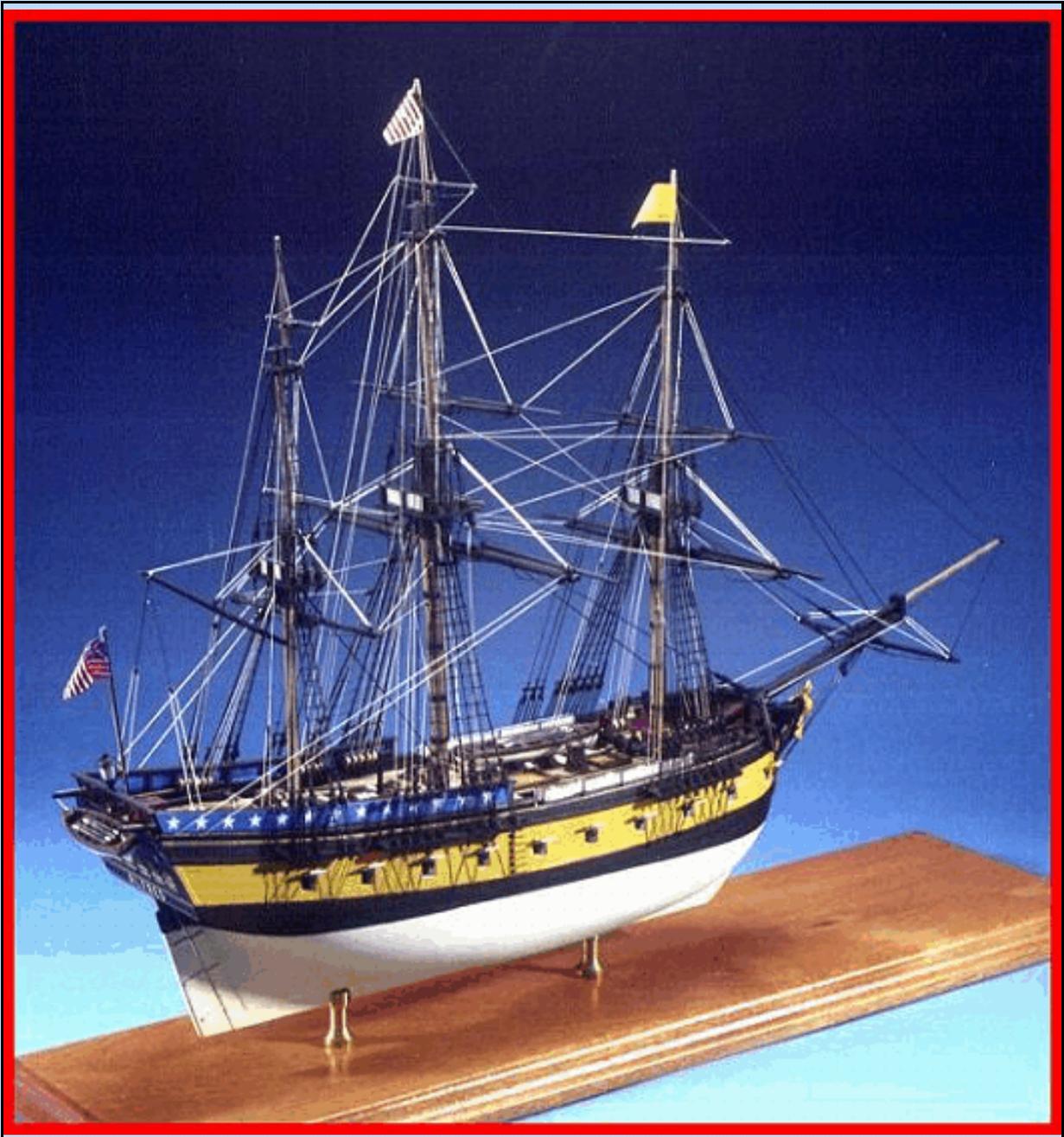
The American captains arrived at L’Orient about the end of November 1777. There they were rudely received by Commissary Gonet. Under unrelenting pressure from Sartine, and, apparently without the discretion to realize the delicate nature of the Franco-American relationship, Gonet exploded. He accused Hinman and Thompson of going to Paris for pleasure and not forwarding work on their ships. He immediately ordered them to put to sea, with no provisions and no guns, “don or Not don . . .,” and sent two pilots aboard. Somehow the dispute was made over, but not for Thompson. On 2 December 1777 he protested to the American Commissioners, claiming his honor and that of the United States had been insulted. The ships were now in the road, with ballast and water aboard.

⁹⁵⁰ NDAR, “American Commissioners in France to Captain Thomas Thompson,” 10:1026-1027

⁹⁵¹ Morgan, *Captains to the Northward*, 101

⁹⁵² NDAR, “American Commissioners in France to Berard Freres & Co.,” 10:1037-1038





Stern view of a fine model of the *Alfred*, as she appeared in late 1777. Photographs of this model used by permission of Dudley B. Fay, owner.

The guns and provisions would soon follow. Thompson inclosed a letter to Sartine, and requested the American Commissioners to examine it before they forwarded it.⁹⁵³ One suspects it was never sent in its initial form, but a protest was made to Sartine.

⁹⁵³ NDAR, "Captain Thomas Thompson to the American Commissioners in France," 10:1061-1062



The same day that Thompson was protesting Gonet's action, Sartine was writing him again. He again referred to *Alfred* and *Raleigh*.⁹⁵⁴ Gonet, on 1 December, notified Sartine that the American captains had arrived and that he had ordered them to put to sea at the first wind. Sartine replied on 6 December, approving those orders.⁹⁵⁵ After this letter went out, Sartine received the protests of the Americans regarding Gonet. Sartine again wrote to Gonet: "I am receiving protests, Sir, that you wish to force the captains of the American frigates to leave without their provisions and their artillery, If this is true, you are going too far." They were to leave when ready for sea. Gonet was to execute his orders without causing protests "over your manner . . ." ⁹⁵⁶

Against all odds, it would seem, Lord Stormont had now located one of the *Raleigh* and *Alfred*'s prizes, the *Anne Susannah*. She was at Pelerin, nine miles from Nantes, on 26 November. There she was being altered, her name erased, and her appearance changed. She had been renamed *La Mignonne*. Stormont demanded, in a memorandum dated 2 December, the return of this vessel and her cargo.⁹⁵⁷ Sartine investigated and reported, on 28 December, that the ship in question was not the *Ann Susannah*, although it was the *La Mignone*. There was no known evidence to connect the two, said Sartine.⁹⁵⁸

A new difficulty now arose at L'Orient. The Americans had purchased forty-six casks of rum for the two ships, but had neglected the "requisite formalities." Because of that the rum was seized by French officials. Sartine approved of Gonet's conduct in this case, but was directing the rum be released because it was a "special case," and would eliminate another excuse for the ships not to sail.⁹⁵⁹

About 4 December a gentleman left L'Orient and, going to England, provided another description of the *Alfred* and *Raleigh*. The *Alfred* was a former merchant vessel, of about 275 or 300 tons. She was pierced for twenty 9-pounders, and carried six 4-pounders on the quarterdeck and forward. She had a crew of 160 men, and with better officers than the *Raleigh*, but "sails dully." When her guns were housed and her ports lowered she scarcely resembled a warship. She was square-sterned, without quarter galleries or badges. Her figurehead was painted yellow, with a
l a r g e f e a t h e r p l u m e

⁹⁵⁴ NDAR, "Gabriel de Sartine to Charles Pierre Gonet, Commissary of Marine at L'Orient," 10:1059-1060

⁹⁵⁵ NDAR, "Gabriel de Sartine to Charles Pierre Gonet, Commissary of Marine at L'Orient," 10:1070-1071

⁹⁵⁶ NDAR, "Gabriel de Sartine to Charles Pierre Gonet, Commissary of Marine at L'Orient," 10:1071

⁹⁵⁷ NDAR, "Lord Stormont to Lord Weymouth," 10:1062-1063 and 1063 note; "Lord Stormont to Comte de Vergennes," 10:1060-1061

⁹⁵⁸ NDAR, "Gabriel de Sartine to Comte de Vergennes," 10:1155-1156

⁹⁵⁹ NDAR, Gabriel de Sartine to Charles Pierre Gonet, Commissary of Marine at L'Orient," 10:1096-1097



Forward view of the Bluejacket model of the *Alfred*, as she appeared in late 1777. Photographs of this model used by permission of Dudley B. Fay, owner.

painted white on the helmet. She was painted plain black and yellow with a white bottom. She was very taunt, but not square-rigged. Her top armor and quarter cloths were blue with white stars, the same as the upper corner of her colors.⁹⁶⁰ The Admiralty ordered the descriptions circulated to the cruisers off the French coast on 18 December.⁹⁶¹

⁹⁶⁰ NDAR, "F. Steward to the Earl of Sandwich," 10:1105-1106

⁹⁶¹ NDAR, "Philip Stephens to Captain Thomas Graves, R. N., and Admiral Sir Thomas Pye," 10:1116 and note



The Americans also had a small Bermuda sloop of four guns with them.⁹⁶² This was the sloop *Mars* (Alexander Holmes).

Raleigh and *Alfred* were still at L'Orient on 17 December. According to one observer the only thing holding them in port was fear of the British patrols off the coast. They stayed in the harbor under "frivolous pretexts," although summoned to leave in a "faint friendly manner" by the French. The French agents had "abused the confidence" of the Americans: they had gained 60,000 livres on one prize alone, made advance charges on all goods furnished for refit and cargo, "besides the impudent advantages they have taken in becoming purchasers of prize-goods at an under-value."⁹⁶³ About 19 December the rum was released by the farmers-general. Sartine, writing on 25 December, noted that there was no longer any excuse for the Americans not to sail, and expected them to "comply" with the orders to depart.⁹⁶⁴

On 21 December the skipper of the *Sylphide* (Lieutenant de Vaisseau le Breton de Ransanne) reported the Americans had their rum, and were only delayed by the fear of finding the British waiting on the coast in force. A coasting vessel, the *Margueritte de Bonne Alliance* (Jacques Mandret), had just arrived at L'Orient, and reported that at 0800 on the 19th he met two frigates within sight of Belle-Isle. De Ransanne thought they were British frigates, come to cruise for *Alfred* and *Raleigh*. If Sartine wished, *Sylphide* would leave with them and lead them out into the open sea. De Ransanne awaited orders on this matter.⁹⁶⁵

On 25 December Thompson wrote to the American Commissioners, commending Berard for his work: "He has transacted every matter to my entire satisfaction like a Man of Honour, a Man of Business & an able Mercht. . . ." Berard had particular management of the *Raleigh*. Thompson referred the American Commissioners to Hinman for remarks on Gourolade and Montplaisir, who managed the *Alfred*. He recommended Berard for future business.⁹⁶⁶

While Thompson was commending Berard, Lord Stormont was complaining again about the ships at L'Orient. They were still there, he said in a letter to Vergennes, had taken on arms and ammunition, which he demanded be unloaded, and they should have sailed long ago. Many "frivolous" pretexts had been used to allow them to remain in port. Sartine ordered the commissary of marine at L'Orient to investigate this complaint on 28 December. Sartine also told Vergennes on the same day that the Americans had probably sailed, since the commander of the French frigate (*Sylphide*) had ordered them not to delay departing.⁹⁶⁷

⁹⁶² NDAR, "Philip Stephens to Captain Thomas Graves, R. N., and Admiral Sir Thomas Pye," 10:1116 and note

⁹⁶³ NDAR, "Extract from a letter from L'Orient, dated December 17," 10:1115

⁹⁶⁴ NDAR, "Gabriel de Sartine to Charles Pierre Gonet, Commissary of Marine at L'Orient," 10:1144-1145

⁹⁶⁵ NDAR, "Lieutenant de Vaisseau le Breton de Ransanne to Gabriel de Sartine," 10:1133-1134 and 1134 note

⁹⁶⁶ NDAR, "Captain Thomas Thompson to the American Commissioners in France," 10:1149

⁹⁶⁷ NDAR, "Lord Stormont to Comte de Vergennes," 10:1146-1147 and 1147-1148 notes

Thompson and Hinman were anxious to sail. Thompson wrote a last letter (29 December) to the American Commissioners. Only wind and weather were holding the ships in port. The accounts would be forwarded when they sailed, and acknowledged receiving several letters from the American Commissioners, particularly one from Lee informing him that there was a British spy at L'Orient. Thompson noted that the time of his sailing and his route had been disclosed to no one. A British frigate and a 74-gun battleship had been sighted off Belleisle. Thompson had hired a small vessel to act as an advice boat, and would sail when the coast was clear. Since the American Commissioners had complained to Sartine the commissary "has given us Leave to Command our own ships—all kindness and Condiscion to the Highest degree."⁹⁶⁸

At 1500 on 29 December the wind was favorable, coming from the northeast. *Alfred* and *Raleigh* set sail and departed the river, accompanied by the sloop *Mars* (Holmes) and the French frigate *Sylphide*.⁹⁶⁹ Thompson had asked Lieutenant de Vaisseau Le Breton de Ransanne if the Americans could follow the French warship out to Pointe du Raz.⁹⁷⁰ The captain of the French frigate had privately agreed with the Americans to precede them and signal them if any British shipping was sighted.⁹⁷¹ At 0200 on 30 December de Ransanne hove to, after traveling only six miles. The American ships "left me and took to the open sea . . ."⁹⁷² Can there be any doubt that the Americans captains were pleased to be out of France and away from Gonet's clutches?

Part VIII Begins on the next page.

⁹⁶⁸ NDAR, "Captain Thomas Thompson to the American Commissioners in France," 10:1158-1159

⁹⁶⁹ NDAR, "Jacques-Alexandre Gourelade and Pierre-Andre Montigny de Monplaisir to the American Commissioners in France," 10:1158 and notes

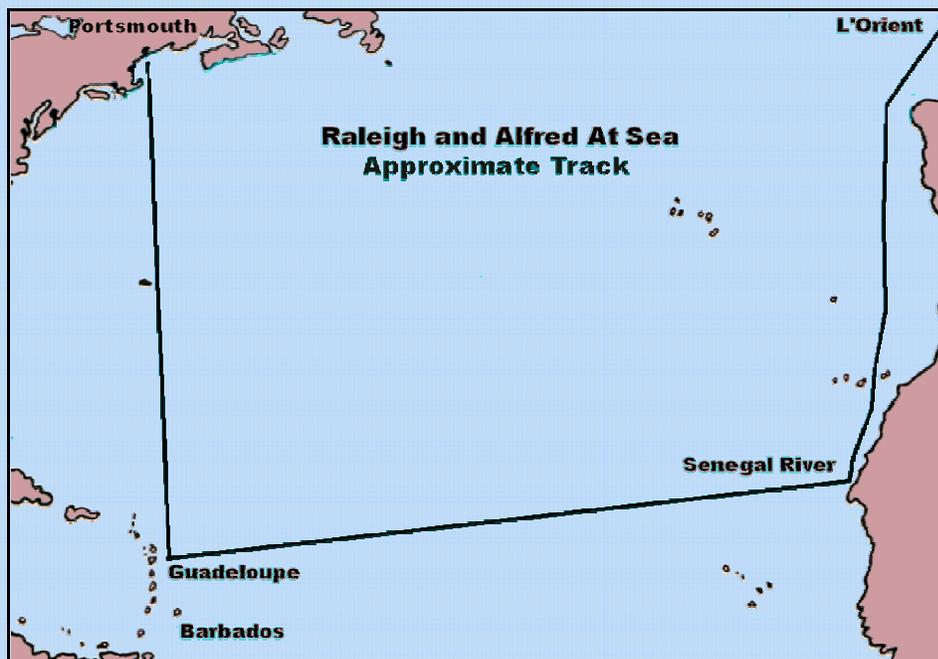
⁹⁷⁰ NDAR, "Lieutenant de Vaisseau Le Breton de Ransanne to Gabriel de Sartine," 10:1164-1165 and 1165 note

⁹⁷¹ NDAR, "Jacques-Alexandre Gourelade and Pierre-Andre Montigny de Monplaisir to the American Commissioners in France," 10:1158 and notes

⁹⁷² NDAR, "Lieutenant de Vaisseau Le Breton de Ransanne to Gabriel de Sartine," 10:1164-1165 and 1165 note



The little American squadron apparently came close to taking a prize soon after sailing. The 120-ton brig *Eagle* (J. Morgan), bound from Yarmouth, England to Genoa and Leghorn, was captured on 30 December 1777, by two American “privateers,” one of thirty-two and the other of twenty guns. The Americans were unable to take possession of the *Eagle*, presumably because of bad weather. The prize eluded her captors in the night and bad weather and got away.⁹⁷³



Two large French ships sailed on 31 December from L'Orient and joined the Americans, which, apparently, were to serve as escorts out of European waters. These were the ship *Lyon*, a three decked vessel of 1100 tons, mounting forty guns with a crew of 200 men and commanded by J. Michel. Michel had a “defensive” commission and a cargo of European and India goods.

The other vessel was the 20 or 24-gun ship *Vicomte de Vaux* (Pierre Marie Donat de La Garde), bound for Chesapeake Bay. These ships stayed with *Alfred* and *Raleigh* until about 13 January 1778.⁹⁷⁴ *Raleigh* and *Alfred* steered south for the Guinea coast.⁹⁷⁵ In early February 1778 they were off the bar of the Senegal River,

⁹⁷³ NDAR, “*The London Chronicle*, Tuesday, February 24, to Thursday, February 26, 1778,” 11:1046 and notes

⁹⁷⁴ NDAR, “News from New London,” 11:629 and notes

⁹⁷⁵ NDAR, “Captain Thomas Pringle, R.N., to Vice Admiral James Young,” 11:708-709 and 709 note





Figure 44: Continental Navy Ship *Alfred*, December 1777. *Raleigh* is visible in the distance. From a painting by Colonel Phillips Melville USAF, published in *Alfred: The First Continental Flagship, 1175-1778*. Author John J. McCusker notes she is shown against the Brittany coast as she sailed for home in December 1777. This is a modern, although carefully researched, interpretation.

Africa, A sloop with a cargo of wine was captured at anchor,⁹⁷⁶ This was the sloop *Granville* (Renn), bound to Senegal from London, England.⁹⁷⁷ On 6 February the two American frigates visited the French fort at Île de Gorée,⁹⁷⁸ and then course was set for the Windward Islands in the West Indies.⁹⁷⁹

On 9 March 1778 the two Continentals were at 16°31' N, 55°40' W (according to Captain Thompson).⁹⁸⁰ More accurately, they were about 200 miles north of Barbados and about 125 miles east of Guadeloupe, to the windward of La Désirade.⁹⁸¹ A third witness stated the location was eighty leagues east of Antigua.⁹⁸² The day dawned with moderate and fair weather.⁹⁸³ In the early morning, at 0600, *Raleigh's* lookouts saw two sail away to the west northwest. *Alfred* was trailing behind *Raleigh*, as was usually the case.⁹⁸⁴ The two strangers were sailing across the projected course of the American ships.

Thompson and Hinman had found HM Frigate *Ariadne* (Captain Thomas Pringle), a small 20-gun ship with a reputation as a very fast sailer,⁹⁸⁵ and HM Sloop *Ceres* (Commander James Richard

⁹⁷⁶ *The Independent Chronicle and the Universal Advertiser*, April 9, 1778; Allen, *Naval History of the American Revolution*, i, 301

⁹⁷⁷ NDAR, “*The Freeman’s Journal, or New-Hampshire Gazette* (Portsmouth), Tuesday, April 7, 1778, 12:46 and 46note2; “*The London Chronicle*, Thursday, May 21, to Saturday, May 23, 1778, 12:739 and note

⁹⁷⁸ NDAR, “Log of Rhode Island Privateer Ship *Marlborough*, Captain George Wait Babcock, Commander,” 12:817-829 and 829n14

⁹⁷⁹ *The Independent Chronicle and the Universal Advertiser*, April 9, 1778; Allen, *Naval History of the American Revolution*, i, 301

⁹⁸⁰ Allen, *Naval History of the American Revolution*, i, 301 and *The Continental Journal*, April 30, 1778, both extracts from Thompson’s letter to the Navy Board of the Eastern District. Thompson’s position was far off the mark in regard to longitude. He reported that he was at 16°31' N, 55°40' W, about six hundred miles east of Guadeloupe. [Allen, *Naval History of the American Revolution*, i, 301] Guadeloupe is a large island, the northernmost part being about 16°30' N. Clearly Thompson and Hinman were running down the latitude, a common way of navigating in the eighteenth century. Finding longitude was notoriously unreliable at that time. It is likely that the Americans were further west than anticipated. Moreover, the position given by Thompson is likely to be the noon reading from the day before. According to the log of the *Ceres*, she was at 15°09' N, north of Barbados, at noon on 8 March. [NDAR, “Journal of H.M. Sloop *Ceres*, Commander James R. Dacres,” 11:575 and notes] *Ariadne*, in company with *Ceres*, reported that Barbados bore SW by west, distant 129 miles at the same time. [NDAR, “Journal of H.M.S. *Ariadne*, Captain Thomas Pringle,” 11:575 and notes] In general it appears that the American latitude was more correct, but the longitude was far off.

⁹⁸¹ *The Independent Chronicle and the Universal Advertiser*, April 9, 1778

⁹⁸² NDAR, “John Bradford to the Continental Marine Committee,” 12:59

⁹⁸³ NDAR, “Journal of H.M.S. *Ariadne*, Captain Thomas Pringle,” 11:575 and notes

⁹⁸⁴ Allen, *Naval History of the American Revolution*, i, 301

⁹⁸⁵ NDAR, 12:122

Dacres), an 18-gun ship.⁹⁸⁶ Pringle was a very professional and able captain, and had commanded the British fleet to victory in the Lake Champlain campaign of 1776. Dacres was a veteran of the same campaign. The British vessels were decidedly inferior to the Americans in firepower, fifty-two to thirty-eight.

The British ships had also sighted the Americans at 0600. Pringle later stated they were seen to the east⁹⁸⁷ and *Ariadne's* log indicates a sighting of two sail in the northeast.⁹⁸⁸ *Ceres's* log indicates two sail were sighted at 0500, in the northeast quarter, but it is unlikely to have been quite so early.⁹⁸⁹ Following Pringle's orders, both British vessels began to chase.⁹⁹⁰

At 0730 *Raleigh* hove to, awaiting the slower *Alfred*. Thompson had seen that the strangers had closed up and were standing north, close hauled to the wind.⁹⁹¹ This in itself would indicate that they were probably warships, and most likely British.

When the *Raleigh* and *Alfred* were close enough the two captains conferred. Hinman asked Thompson what he thought of the two ships; Thompson replied that he was unsure at that distance, but "we would go down and see what they were and then determining accordingly, desired him to go down to the sternmost ship . . ." If the trailing ship was the largest, Thompson said he would make for her. Hinman said he would go down and observe Thompson's "motions." By 1000 the Continentals were about five or six miles away from the two strangers, and it was clear by now that they were armed vessels.⁹⁹²

Thompson now hauled his wind on the same tack as the two British ships, that is, to the north. The British vessels were to leeward of the Americans, who thus had the better tactical position. Thompson wanted to get a longer and better look at their sailing qualities and strength before committing to battle. *Alfred* was trailing *Raleigh* on her weather quarter.⁹⁹³ This was probably the maneuver that Pringle interpreted as showing an American "disposition" to attack, as he later

⁹⁸⁶ McCusker, 14, 15; Clowes, 4:10. Dacres was a veteran of the Lake Champlain campaign. McCusker, 14, gives *Ceres* sixteen guns.

⁹⁸⁷ NDAR, "Captain Thomas Pringle, R.N., to Vice Admiral James Young," 11:708-709 and 709 note

⁹⁸⁸ NDAR, "Journal of H.M.S. *Ariadne*, Captain Thomas Pringle," 11:575 and notes

⁹⁸⁹ NDAR, "Journal of H.M. Sloop *Ceres*, Commander James R. Dacres," 11:575 and notes

⁹⁹⁰ NDAR, "Journal of H.M.S. *Ariadne*, Captain Thomas Pringle," 11:575 and notes; "Journal of H.M. Sloop *Ceres*, Commander James R. Dacres," 11:575 and notes

⁹⁹¹ Allen, *Naval History of the American Revolution*, i, 301 and *The Continental Journal*, April 30, 1778, both extracts from Thompson's letter to the Navy Board of the Eastern District

⁹⁹² Allen, *Naval History of the American Revolution*, i, 301 and *The Continental Journal*, April 30, 1778, both extracts from Thompson's letter to the Navy Board of the Eastern District

⁹⁹³ Allen, *Naval History of the American Revolution*, i, 301 and *The Continental Journal*, April 30, 1778, both extracts from Thompson's letter to the Navy Board of the Eastern District

stated.⁹⁹⁴

Pringle promptly tacked again, “trying to work up and get our wakes” according to Thompson. If the wind was from the northeast, as it usually was in this area, the British were now steering to the southeast, attempting to close ground to windward. *Raleigh* stood on and held her position, but the abysmal sailing *Alfred* fell behind and to leeward, closing with Pringle’s *Ariadne*, and following Thompson’s orders to look over the enemy.⁹⁹⁵

At 1100 *Ariadne* fired two shots at the headmost American ship (*Raleigh*), as a signal to heave to. Thompson ignored them, and probably didn’t even see them. At 1130 Pringle signaled to the *Ceres* to tack, presumably turning to the north at the same time. At 1200 Pringle ordered *Ceres* to tack again, to the southeast, presumably.⁹⁹⁶ Both British vessels took their noon positions: *Ariadne* indicated she was 201 miles north of Barbados⁹⁹⁷ and *Ceres* showed a position of 17°34’N.⁹⁹⁸

Meanwhile, to Thompson, it appeared that *Ceres* was four miles to leeward of *Ariadne* (about six miles from *Alfred*), and *Raleigh* was three miles ahead of *Alfred*. Thompson prepared to tack and stand down (that is, turn south) to the *Alfred*, when both could attack the *Ariadne*.⁹⁹⁹ Pringle made sail and stood north, as if intent on closing. This was Pringle’s second tack. Thompson judged that the other ship (*Ceres*) would be two hours in closing.¹⁰⁰⁰

On her third tack the *Ariadne* passed under *Alfred*’s lee, standing south, distant about two miles. Hinman hoisted the American colors and fired a few shots at *Ariadne*, opening the battle.¹⁰⁰¹ *Ceres* log indicates the time was about 1200, and noted the weather was clear with light breezes.¹⁰⁰² Recalling that *Ceres*’s log time was off an hour would make this about 1100. Pringle ran up British colors and fired off a reply to *Alfred*’s shots.¹⁰⁰³

⁹⁹⁴ NDAR, “Captain Thomas Pringle, R.N., to Vice Admiral James Young,” 11:708-709 and 709 note

⁹⁹⁵ Allen, *Naval History of the American Revolution*, i, 301 and *The Continental Journal*, April 30, 1778, both extracts from Thompson’s letter to the Navy Board of the Eastern District

⁹⁹⁶ NDAR, “Journal of H.M.S. *Ariadne*, Captain Thomas Pringle,” 11:575 and notes

⁹⁹⁷ NDAR, “Journal of H.M.S. *Ariadne*, Captain Thomas Pringle,” 11:575 and notes

⁹⁹⁸ NDAR, “Journal of H.M. Sloop *Ceres*, Commander James R. Dacres,” 11:575 and notes

⁹⁹⁹ Allen, *Naval History of the American Revolution*, i, 302

¹⁰⁰⁰ Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 166

¹⁰⁰¹ Allen, *Naval History of the American Revolution*, i, 301

¹⁰⁰² NDAR, “Journal of H.M. Sloop *Ceres*, Commander James R. Dacres,” 11:575 and notes

¹⁰⁰³ Allen, *Naval History of the American Revolution*, i, 302



At 1230 *Ceres* passed by and alongside the *Alfred*, which hoisted American colors and fired a broadside at her in passing.¹⁰⁰⁴ *Alfred* now stood off before the wind (light, from the east northeast), crowding on her light sails to escape.¹⁰⁰⁵ This maneuver took her across the projected track of the British, following their next tack, and startled the undecided Thompson (“I had not determined in my own mind what was to be done.”)¹⁰⁰⁶ One can assume that Hinman, in the slow and cranky *Alfred* was doing his best to escape in the absence of any sign of assistance from *Raleigh*.

It was obvious to Thompson that *Alfred* could neither escape from both British ships, nor engage only one, while *Raleigh* could fight one or escape both. The *Ceres*, now bearing southwest from *Raleigh* was steering to cut off the *Alfred*. Thompson’s hesitancy had provoked Hinman to steer into Pringle’s grasp. Amazingly, Thompson now hauled up his courses, the traditional way of inviting battle. He hoped to lure *Ariadne* to attack him while leaving *Alfred* to engage *Ceres* alone; “but they both made toward the *Alfred*.” Thompson now veered and stood down for the *Alfred* to come between her and the *Ceres*.¹⁰⁰⁷

Although it is not so stated, the British must have now tacked again, chasing the *Alfred*, which was now steering an intersecting course. Pringle ignored Thompson’s maneuvers and both British vessels closed on *Alfred*. At first Hinman gained on his pursuers, but in a few minutes (about 1250) both British came up alongside.¹⁰⁰⁸ Thompson reported that the British began a “furious” fire on the *Alfred*, which Hinman returned. *Raleigh* was finally turning about but Hinman was presumably too busy to notice. Thompson set his studding sails to close quickly, but not quickly enough: Hinman, assailed on both sides, surrendered at 1300, after, said Thompson, a ten minute fight.¹⁰⁰⁹

Another American captain was aboard the *Raleigh* during the action. John Adams, skipper of the Continental Army Schooner *Lynch*, where she had been sent with dispatches and captured, was taking passage home from France and observed the action. According to Adams “the *Alfred* was attack’d by the smallest, & the other went to her Assistance at which the *Alfred* being engag’d with both bore away & gallantly supported a running Fight with the two, however she was obliged to strike after doing great honour to his Colours. Capt. Adams was a Witness to this Matter tho at the same time the *Raleigh* took no Part in the Action.”¹⁰¹⁰

¹⁰⁰⁴ NDAR, “Journal of H.M.S. *Ariadne*, Captain Thomas Pringle,” 11:575 and notes

¹⁰⁰⁵ Allen, *Naval History of the American Revolution*, i, 302

¹⁰⁰⁶ Smith, *Marines In the Revolution*, 166

¹⁰⁰⁷ Allen, *Naval History of the American Revolution*, i, 302

¹⁰⁰⁸ Allen, *Naval History of the American Revolution*, i, 302

¹⁰⁰⁹ Allen, *Naval History of the American Revolution*, i, 302

¹⁰¹⁰ NDAR, “John Bradford to Continental Marine Committee,” 12:59 and 59n13



The British accounts indicate that both *Ceres* and *Ariadne* got alongside the *Alfred* at 1300, when a general action began.¹⁰¹¹ Pringle stated that *Alfred* gave and received a number of broadsides¹⁰¹² before she surrendered at 1330,¹⁰¹³ a full half hour after the fight began. Thompson, who evaluated the British as superior in force, was still three miles away when Hinman struck.¹⁰¹⁴ The next the British saw of *Raleigh*, she was making off.¹⁰¹⁵

The British quickly sent boats over to the *Alfred* to take possession and to remove the prisoners. Pringle reported *Alfred* as armed with twenty 9-pounders and as having a crew of 181 men aboard. She was later noted as measuring 300 tons.¹⁰¹⁶ Most of these men were removed to the *Ariadne*, including all the principal officers.¹⁰¹⁷ Fifty-nine of the crew were placed on the *Ceres*.¹⁰¹⁸ No mention of any casualties in the fight itself was made in any source, British or American. By 1500 the prisoners had been removed and *Ariadne* began chasing the *Raleigh*.¹⁰¹⁹ At 1700 *Ceres* took in her boats and joined *Ariadne* in chasing the fleeing *Raleigh*.¹⁰²⁰

Meanwhile, Thompson turned *Raleigh* on the smooth sea and fled. *Ariadne* pursued with determination, followed by *Ceres* and *Alfred*. *Alfred*, which had been keeping company, fell behind and was lost to Pringle's sight at 2100.¹⁰²¹ Thompson threw everything possible overboard to lighten his ship and escape. Pringle broke off the pursuit at 1000 on 10 March, turning south to regain his station. He was "exceedingly chagrined to find that even a Copper bottom could not outsail a Ship tho' reduced by lightening to the quality of a skimming dish."¹⁰²²

¹⁰¹¹ NDAR, "Journal of H.M.S. *Ariadne*, Captain Thomas Pringle," 11:575 and notes

¹⁰¹² NDAR, "Captain Thomas Pringle, R.N., to Vice Admiral James Young," 11:708-709 and 709 note

¹⁰¹³ NDAR, "Journal of H.M.S. *Ariadne*, Captain Thomas Pringle," 11:575 and notes; "Captain Thomas Pringle, R.N., to Vice Admiral James Young," 11:708-709 and 709 note

¹⁰¹⁴ Allen, *Naval History of the American Revolution*, I, 303-304

¹⁰¹⁵ NDAR, "Journal of H.M.S. *Ariadne*, Captain Thomas Pringle," 11:575 and notes

¹⁰¹⁶ NDAR, "Journal of H.M.S. *Ariadne*, Captain Thomas Pringle," 11:575 and notes

¹⁰¹⁷ NDAR, "A List of 181 Prisoners Taken out of the Rebel Ship *Alfred*, Victuald at 2/3d Allowance," 11:577-582

¹⁰¹⁸ NDAR, "A List of 181 Prisoners Taken out of the Rebel Ship *Alfred*, Victuald at 2/3d Allowance," 11:577-582; "Muster Table of H.M. Sloop *Ceres*," 11:583-585

¹⁰¹⁹ NDAR, "Journal of H.M.S. *Ariadne*, Captain Thomas Pringle," 11:575 and notes

¹⁰²⁰ NDAR, "Journal of H.M. Sloop *Ceres*, Commander James R. Dacres," 11:575 and notes

¹⁰²¹ NDAR, "Journal of H.M.S. *Ariadne*, Captain Thomas Pringle," 11:575 and notes

¹⁰²² NDAR, "Captain Thomas Pringle, R.N., to Vice Admiral James Young," 11:708-709 and 709 note



Hinman ever believed that Thompson had deserted him.¹⁰²³ When Hinman boarded *Ariadne* after the battle he was introduced to Captain Thomas Pringle. Referring to Thompson the British captain asked who “that damnd rascal was who ran away?” Hinman replied “Sir, he is your countryman.” Pringle answered that “He is a rascal, come from where he may.” Hinman then added: “Had I his ship, I would have taken you, Sir.” Pringle thought that was boasting: “That is loud talking, Capt Hinman.” Hinman stated the force of the *Raleigh* and asked Pringle if he, Pringle, commanded such a ship did he not think he could have captured the two British vessels. Pringle thought he could have, to which Hinman added, “I think I could do as much as you.” Pringle concluded “I believe you can.”¹⁰²⁴

Ariadne and *Ceres* proceeded to Barbados, accompanied by *Alfred*. On 13 March the three encountered HMS *Yarmouth*, and continued on.¹⁰²⁵ *Alfred* arrived at Barbados with her captors later that day.¹⁰²⁶ *Yarmouth* arrived on 14 March.¹⁰²⁷ Vincent, reporting on his cruise on 17 March, noted the *Alfred* as having twenty guns and a crew of 180 men.¹⁰²⁸

At Barbados, the officers were transferred to HMS *Yarmouth* (Captain Nicholas Vincent). One officer, Second Lieutenant of Marines Nathaniel Richards, was released at Barbados, on the intercession of both the English Captain Vincent and of Hinman. Hinman wanted him to go to America and inform the Navy Board of the Eastern Department of Thompson’s behavior.¹⁰²⁹ From Barbados the officers were transported to England, arriving at Gosport¹⁰³⁰ before being confined to Forton Prison.¹⁰³¹ on 18 July 1778.¹⁰³² Hinman was brought before a Scotch judge for examination at Gosport, where he allegedly won over the judge with his Yankee humor.¹⁰³³

One week later Hinman escaped.¹⁰³⁴ He left some money for his officers, bribed a guard with ten guineas, and walked out of jail at night. He walked in rain for ten miles, found a lodging place

¹⁰²³ Morgan, *Captains to the Northward*, 124

¹⁰²⁴ Morgan, *Captains to the Northward*, 125

¹⁰²⁵ NDAR, “Journal of H>M.S. *Yarmouth*, Captain Nicholas Vincent,” 11:638 and notes

¹⁰²⁶ NDAR, “Governor Edward Hay to Lord George Germain,” 11:810-811 and 811 note

¹⁰²⁷ NDAR, “Journal of H>M.S. *Yarmouth*, Captain Nicholas Vincent,” 11:646-647 and 647 notes

¹⁰²⁸ NDAR, “Captain Nicholas Vincent, R.N., to Vice Admiral James Young,” 11:683-684 and 684 note

¹⁰²⁹ Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 167

¹⁰³⁰ Morgan, *Captains to the Northward*, 126

¹⁰³¹ Morgan, *Captains to the Northward*, 125

¹⁰³² Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 167; Kaminkow, *Mariners of the American Revolution*, 90

¹⁰³³ Morgan, *Captains to the Northward*, 126

¹⁰³⁴ Kaminkow, *Mariners of the American Revolution*, 90



near London, and contacted people who helped him get to France three weeks later.¹⁰³⁵ Hinman took passage home from France in Continental Navy Ship *Providence* (Captain Abraham Whipple).¹⁰³⁶ First Lieutenant Peter Richards was also committed to Forton Prison on the 18th. He later escaped.¹⁰³⁷ Captain of Marines John Welsh, committed to Forton at the same time as the others, also later escaped.¹⁰³⁸ Lieutenant Charles Buckley and Prize Master Robert Walker also escaped. Marine Lieutenant William Hambleton appears to not have escaped.¹⁰³⁹ Other members of the crew joined the Royal Navy (two) or were later exchanged (one) or escaped (one).¹⁰⁴⁰

Of the 116 prisoners aboard the *Ariadne*, all were shown as discharged at Barbados, presumably to the local jail.¹⁰⁴¹ *Ceres's* muster table is a bit more informative. Of her fifty-nine prisoners, five were discharged to HM Sloop *Fly* on 15 March, presumably to enter the Royal Navy; two joined the Loyal Nova Scotia Volunteers the same day; Midshipman Peter Arnold and four sailors were retained aboard and entered the British merchant service on 9 April 1778; and the remaining forty-seven went to Barbados jail on 16 March 1778.¹⁰⁴² The British, however, lacked facilities in the West Indies to handle many prisoners and the crew gained their release almost immediately.¹⁰⁴³

The news of *Alfred's* capture spread rather quickly. It was known on St. Vincent by 12 March,¹⁰⁴⁴ and had reached New York by 21 March 1778.¹⁰⁴⁵ The Philadelphia papers had it by 22

¹⁰³⁵ Morgan, *Captains to the Northward*, 126. A different tale is told in McCusker, 14: "in less than a week they [the officers] bribed their jailors and got free by means of a hole through their chamber floor." This version is confirmed by the Journal of Timothy Connor, also confined at Forton. He says "Last Night 10 of our Officers made their escape by cutting a hole through their Chamber foor into the black hole and have got off clear and have not been heard of since" NDAR, "Journal of Timothy Connor," 13:1077. Hinman was in France by 14 August, when he is mentioned in a letter of John Paul Jones. NDAR, "Captain John Paul Jones, Continental Navy, to Edward Bancroft," 13:1136-1139 and 1139n7.

¹⁰³⁶ Morgan, *Captains to the Northward*, 155

¹⁰³⁷ Kaminkow, *Mariners of the American Revolution*, 161

¹⁰³⁸ Kaminkow, *Mariners of the American Revolution*, 202

¹⁰³⁹ Kaminkow, *Mariners of the American Revolution*, 28, 82, 161, 200, 202

¹⁰⁴⁰ Kaminkow, *Mariners of the American Revolution*, 107, 110, 123, 167

¹⁰⁴¹ NDAR, "A List of 181 Prisoners Taken out of the Rebel Ship *Alfred*, Victuad at 2/3d Allowance," 11:577-582 and 582 note

¹⁰⁴² NDAR, "Muster Table of H.M. Sloop *Ceres*," 11:583-585

¹⁰⁴³ McCusker, John J., *Alfred, The First Continental Flagship 1775-1778*, 14

¹⁰⁴⁴ NDAR, "Governor Valentine Morris to Lord George Germain," 11:624 and 625 notes

¹⁰⁴⁵ NDAR, "Extract of a letter from a Gentleman in Antigua, dated February 12," 11:329 and note

April 1778.¹⁰⁴⁶ *Raleigh* continued her cruise and arrived at Portsmouth on 6 April 1778.¹⁰⁴⁷

As for the *Alfred*, what happened to her is not clear. According to one historian she was possibly sold at Barbados, presumably to someone who lived on Grenada. Pringle, still commanding *Ariadne*, escorted her there.¹⁰⁴⁸ *Ariadne*'s master's log for 6 November 1778 records that the ship's company received twelve dollars and five bits a "fore mast" man for the *Alfred*.¹⁰⁴⁹ This indicates she was sold there. *Alfred* was in England by late summer, where she was purchased for the Royal Navy. According to these records, she was 440 tons by measure, but no dimensions are given. She probably retained her American battery as HM Armed Ship *Alfred*, being commissioned in October 1778. She was sold out of service after July 1782.¹⁰⁵⁰

Adams's version of the capture was soon being passed around. On 9 April 1778, in a letter to his assistant, John Bradford remarked "that so far as Capt. John Adams may be credited. . . it is the most criminal Matter that has happen'd this War. Adams declares that the *Raleigh* with 230 stout fine fellows on Board lay to Windward & see the *Alfred* engage two Ships, the one he says could not be larger than a 24, & the other an 18 Gun Sloop. Hinman finding himself deserted by his Companion bore right before the Wind, & continued a running Fight about an hour the wind being very light, when the very Instant Thompson order'd to let down the Foresail & bear down to them, the brave Hinman overpower'd by so superior a Force was obliged to strike . . ."¹⁰⁵¹

The Marine Committee heard of the loss of the *Alfred* with distress and irritation. On 28 April 1778 the Marine Committee notified Massachusetts Continental Agent John Bradford, noting that the loss was to be inquired into, along with Thompson's conduct.¹⁰⁵² On 8 May 1778 the Marine Committee ordered the Navy Board of the Eastern District to suspend Thompson from command pending a court of inquiry.¹⁰⁵³ Thompson was duly tried and cashiered from the Navy.

Hinman's court-martial for loss of the *Alfred* was convened on 12 February 1779, aboard Continental Navy Ship *Providence*, at Boston. Captain Abraham Whipple presided. The charges were preferred by Thomas Thompson, who had already been cashiered out of the Navy for his behavior in command of the *Raleigh*. Thompson charged Hinman with dis-obedience of orders,

¹⁰⁴⁶ *The Philadelphia Ledger, or the Philadelphia Market-Day Advertiser*, Wednesday, April 22, 1778

¹⁰⁴⁷ NDAR, "The Freeman's Journal, or New-Hampshire Gazette (Portsmouth), Tuesday, April 7, 1778," 12:46 and note 1

¹⁰⁴⁸ McCusker, 14

¹⁰⁴⁹ McCusker, 14-15 and 18n29. McCusker concludes that this was about £2800 for the two ship's share of *Alfred*. This statement of the *Ariadne*'s master is based on Spanish milled dollars, not the currency of the United States.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Winfield, Rif, *British Warships in the Age of Sail 1714-1792*, 272; Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships, *Alfred*," online [here](#).

¹⁰⁵¹ NDAR, "John Bradford to Leonard Jarvis," 12:68-69

¹⁰⁵² NRAR, 71

¹⁰⁵³ NRAR, 72



neglect of duty, and unprecedented conduct. The court “duly and maturely” considered the evidence and “fully and clearly” decided that Hinman was not guilty of any charges. Hinman was acquitted with “the highest honor,” the court “approving the whole of his conduct on the 9th of March 1778, he having behaved himself according to the strictest rules of naval discipline and agreeable in all respects to the 27th Article of the Rules and Regulations of the Continental Navy.” The decision was published in the Boston papers on 18 February 1779.¹⁰⁵⁴

Thompson publicly attacked the court’s decision in the press. He pointed out irregularities in the trial and noted that Hinman had come home from France in the *Providence*, commanded by Whipple. The majority of the court’s members had thus heard Hinman’s account numerous times “. . . and they must be prejudiced in his Favour, by hearing his account of the matter so often on the passage.” On 18 March 1779 Thompson had the dissenting opinion of Captain Henry Johnson published in the newspapers in Boston. Johnson, who believed Hinman “. . . did actually bare away before the wind, without any order to that purpose, and also commence an engagement with the British Ships without any signal from the *Raleigh* for that purpose . . .” Johnson noted that Hinman had called a council of his officers, “. . . at a time by no means critical or dangerous . . . being entirely subversive of all order and discipline . . .” Johnson thought Hinman was clearly guilty.¹⁰⁵⁵

By 2 July 1778 the trial of Thompson was underway for his abandonment of the *Alfred*.¹⁰⁵⁶ On 7 July Marine Lieutenant Nathaniel Richards arrived at Boston, from Halifax, after being exchanged.¹⁰⁵⁷ The court convicted Thompson of not doing his utmost to assist the *Alfred*, and dismissed him from the Navy on 8 July.¹⁰⁵⁸

¹⁰⁵⁴ *The Continental Journal and the Weekly Advertiser* [Boston], 18 February 1779; *The Independent Chronicle and the Universal Advertiser* [Boston], 18 February 1779

¹⁰⁵⁵ *The Independent Chronicle and the Universal Advertiser* [Boston], March 18, 1779; *The Continental Journal and the Weekly Advertiser* [Boston], March 18, 1779

¹⁰⁵⁶ NDAR, “*The Continental Journal, and Weekly Advertiser* (Boston), Thursday, July 2, 1778,” 13:250 and 250n4

¹⁰⁵⁷ NDAR, List of Prisoners Returned from Halifax in the Cartel Schooner *Greyhound*,” 13:297 and 297n2

¹⁰⁵⁸ NDAR, “Samuel Adams to James Warren,” 13:449 and 449n5

