

AMERICAN COMMON SEAMEN PRISONERS OF WAR  
IN BRITAIN DURING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

by

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## ABSTRACT

The history of the common man has yet to be written. This thesis attempts to begin that task by exploring the material left by the American common seamen prisoners of war in Britain during the American Revolution. The secondary literature on the prisoners in the war for American independence has failed to distinguish between the experience of officers and that of the common soldiers and seamen. Using the numerous diaries, journals, letters, petitions, and reminiscences of the prisoners during the American revolution, as well as the British documents and other contemporary sources, resulted in the conclusion that distinguishing between the different captive experiences of officer and commoner was tremendously significant for an understanding of the common man as well as the prisoner of war in the American revolution.

Essential prerequisites for understanding the outlook and reactions of the American common seamen prisoners of war were the oppressive relationship of the British navy toward the colonial seamen, the lack of opportunities for advancement in colonial society, the manpower needs of the British in the face of a naval war of attrition, and the

uncertain legal status as prisoner or rebel. The expansion of the British empire necessitated an enlarged navy with ever increasing duties. Britain relied on the ancient prerogative of impressment to raise the needed men. Colonial seamen were exempt from impressment in theory, though hardly in practice. A legacy of resentment toward the British navy and a tradition of resistance and desertion on the part of the colonial seamen set the stage for their loyal service on privateers in the war for independence. The lack of other opportunities for advancement from the bottom strata of colonial society resulted in a wide range of people trying their hand at a life at sea. Runaway slaves, Indians, and farmboys joined the traditional pool of seaboard citizens, making the group of seamen who fought for a chance to make their fortune as well as independence anything but a unified class of radical rebels. The traditional "private venture" and privateer prize shares tended to give the common seaman the look of the aspiring petty entrepreneur rather than working class militant.

A large number of the seamen raised through impressment deserted British service, causing a continual strain on Britain's ability to supply crews for the waiting vessels. As a partial solution to this dilemma, pressure was brought to bear on captured seamen to join the British

service. The ambiguity over whether these captured seamen were traitorous rebels or prisoners deserving the protection of international precedents concerning treatment of prisoners of war was used as part of the British pressuring tactics. The prisoner response was impressive in its frequent escape attempts and low number of enlistments into British service.

British reliance upon transportation of convicts overseas prior to the outbreak of hostilities resulted in an less than adequate facilities being available for prisoners of war and resorting to the "temporary expedient" of using hulks of decommissioned ships for their confinement. While hulks continued to be used throughout the war, hospitals and barracks were converted to serve as the main depots for American prisoners at Plymouth and Portsmouth. With spacious grounds and relatively uncrowded buildings, these prisons were generally healthy places of confinement. The low death rate of the prisoners confined in England is best attributed to the efforts of the prisoners themselves to obtain adequate food and clothing and the support they received from sympathizers in Britain. The role of the American government through the agency of Benjamin Franklin in France has been much overrated. The aid provided was more in the form of extension of credit to cover the expense

of escape than maintenance of a healthy regimen for all those remaining in prison. Efforts made by Franklin toward expediting an exchange failed repeatedly.

Consideration of the harshness of the prison experience in Britain in the American Revolution must take into account the two worlds of experience--officer and common seaman. The difference between official British policy and the practice at the local level is also important, the significant factor governing the condition of the prisoners was the subscription funds raised by humanitarians and friends of the American cause. Concentration solely on the situation of the prisoners and crediting the low death rate to enlightened British policy is misguided. Likewise, an emphasis on the complaints of the prisoners without an analysis of the changes in their condition through the course of the war leads to inaccurate conclusions. The treatment of prisoners of war must be viewed in a larger context including the need for manpower by the expanding British navy, the conflicting economic forces between Britain and the colonies, and the typical job conditions of the seaman in the eighteenth century. Only in comprehending these perspectives does an accurate picture of the common man begin to emerge.

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## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

The history of the prisoner of war in the American Revolution is very much a record of the common man. Simply in terms of numbers, enlisted soldiers and sailors constituted the vast majority of the men taken captive in the war of American independence. The history of the common man in the American Revolution has yet to be written, and, despite his numerical importance as prisoner of war, he has not been the focus of the work done on prisoners of war in the American Revolution. (1) This thesis is an attempt to begin the task of writing that history of the common man.

When historians have written about the common soldier or seaman, they have usually been concerned with his performance. (2) That is, the emphasis has been placed on such things as the results of battles and the performance of the navy. This focus has left the actors in the dark, with only their collective deeds in the light of history. One of the difficulties of shedding light on such actors is the paucity of primary source material about them. The prisoner in the American revolutionary war is an exception to the dictum that the common man is common by the fact that he

left no material with which the historian could work. To a remarkable extent, first hand sources, in the form of diaries, letters, songs, and reminiscences, do exist.(3)

The prisoner of war in the American Revolution is a particularly revealing topic of study because of certain aspects of the eighteenth century view of war and its captives. Officers were considered to have a bond of honour, even though they might have been officers of a rebellious colony the sovereign status of which was not only unrecognized but also a major issue of the conflict. When officers were not for some reason permitted a parole of honour, they were confined separately from the common soldiers and seamen. Part of the reason for separation was a concern for security. It was feared that officer contact with common prisoners would help them organize escape attempts and strengthen their will to resist enlisting with the captive forces.

The separation policy had some important beneficial results for the historian interested in examining the attitudes and activities of the commoner in this period of history. Uncomplicated by the direct influence of his "betters", the common prisoner was left on his own to organize daily routine and prisoner regulations within the parameters set by the prison officials. Since, in the eighteenth century, these prison regulations were few and

seldom enforced, the latitude open to the prisoner was quite wide. Due to the nature of the confinement and the lack of facilities available to the prisoner of war, self-regulation became the mode of the day. While this seemed to concentrate on attempting to escape, there was still plenty of opportunity to write, study, and manufacture handicrafts. Some of the more educated seamen taught their fellow prisoners the fundamentals of reading, writing, mathematics, and navigation. With this new knowledge, some common seamen prisoners were able to keep diaries that otherwise never would have existed. An extraordinary amount of material representing a class of people who would not have left their version of history for posterity is thus still available. Thus, for one brief period of history at least, it was not uncommon for the "common man" to leave written historical records.

The contemporary sources are especially good for developing an understanding of the experience of the commoner in the era of the American Revolution. The Jonathan Haskins, Charles Herbert, William Russell, and William Widger accounts of Mill prison were all written at the time of confinement. There are, however, weaknesses in the prisoner sources. Continuity of the prison experience is lacking where there are few existing sources. Forton prison in Portsmouth, England, for example, has only brief and inadequate prisoner source material for the years 1780

to 1783. The thorough sources for the earlier years at Forton show signs of plagiarism. These instances were apparently attempts to fill gaps in accounts by borrowing from other prisoner journals when they were to be published. (4)

With other sources, the bias of the authors have resulted in intentional misstatements. Jeremiah Colburn's list of Americans in Mill prison, for example, lists many prisoners as having escaped while the British government documents have them listed as entering the Royal Navy. (5) Samuel Cutler's journal sometimes synthesizes opinions of other prisoners. On his first day in Mill prison, for example, he made a condemnation of conditions that could not be based on his own experiences. (6) The journal credited to Timothy Connor by its editor, William R. Cutter, offers no positive proof that it in fact belongs to Connor. Thus, it is difficult to correlate any background material on Connor with the views set forth in the journal. Some of William Widger's diary is lost. He entered Mill prison, Plymouth, England, on May 10, 1779, and was in as late as January, 1782, but only the portion of his diary covering 3 January to 5 December, 1781, remains. Ethan Allen's account of his prison experiences must be viewed very cautiously because of its propagandistic intent, appearing as it did in serial

form in 1779. (7) The journals of Ethan Allen and other captured officers, while certainly not representative of the common man, are valuable for the descriptions they give of their fellow prisoners.

Another problem with the sources is the editing that they have undergone over the years. William Russell's journal has been drastically edited by Ralph D. Paine. There are only thirteen entries for the year 1780 in his edition. (8)

Some of the prisoner accounts are reminiscences and therefore suffer from failures of memory and the perceptions of hindsight. Joshua Barney's recollections are scanty and Andrew Sherburne's memoirs were written for the benefit of his grandchildren fifty years after his imprisonment and include some misstatements of fact. (9)

The official documents of the governments concerned also offer considerable information about the situation in which the prisoners found themselves. Both sides in the struggle set up departments to deal with the prisoner of war issue. Commissaries for prisoners were appointed for the army and naval prisoners, their corresponding offices set up at the colonial level. In Britain, The Commission of Sick

and Hurt Seamen was given the task of overseeing the American prisoners. At each prison, agents were assigned to look after the welfare of the captives by disbursing what funds and provisions were available. All of these activities involved complicated networks of correspondence. Much of this material has survived. Taken with the prisoner accounts, and checked against other contemporary sources, they offer the historian sufficient material to arrive at a comprehensive picture of the prisoner of war in the American Revolution. (10)

## FOOTNOTES

(1) For a review of the literature on prisoners of war in the American Revolution, see Appendix.

(2) Edward C. Papenfuse and Gregory A. Stiverson, "General Smallwood's Recruits: The Peacetime Career of the Revolutionary War Private," WILLIAM AND MARY QUARTERLY 30 (January 1973):117-118 n. 2.

(3) Sources on Mill prison, Plymouth, England, are Joshua Barney, A BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIR OF COMMODORE JOSHUA BARNEY, edited by Mary Barney, (Boston: Gray and Bower, 1832); Jeremiah Colburn, "A List of the Americans Committed to Old Mill Prison since the American War," NEW ENGLAND HISTORICAL & GENEALOGICAL REGISTER 19 (1863):74-75, 136-141, 209-213; Samuel Cutler, "Prison Ships, and the Old Mill Prison," Plymouth, England, 1777" NEW ENGLAND HISTORICAL & GENEALOGICAL REGISTER 32 (1876):42-44, 184-188, 305-308, 395-398; Charles Herbert, A RELIC OF THE REVOLUTION, (Boston: Charles H. Peirce, 1847); William Russell, "Journal," in Paine's SHIPS AND SAILORS OF OLD SALEM; Andrew Sherburne, MEMOIRS OF ANDREW SHERBURNE, A PENSIONER OF THE NAVY OF THE REVOLUTION, (Utica, New York: Williams, 1828; reprint ed., Freeport N. Y., Books for Libraries Press, 1970); William Widger, "Mill Prison Diary," ESSEX INSTITUTE HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS 73 (October 1937):311-347, 74 (January 1938):22-48, 142-158. Another source, unavailable to this author, is George Ralls, "Account of Captivity in England," Revolutionary Manuscripts, New York Historical Society Library, New York City. John K. Alexander, "'American Privateersmen in the Mill Prison during 1777-1782': an Evaluation," ESSEX INSTITUTE HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS 102 (October 1966):321, describes this as an "extremely brief dispositiön." For biographical information on Sherburne, see Sidney G. Morse, "The Yankee Privateersman of 1776," NEW ENGLAND QUARTERLY 17 (March 1944):72-73. Sources on Forton Prison, Portsmouth, England are Jonathan Carpenter, "Diary," VERMONT HISTORICAL SOCIETY PROCEEDINGS (1872):43-69; Timothy Connor, "A Yankee privateersman in Prison in England, 1777-1779," edited by William R. Cutter, NEW ENGLAND HISTORICAL & GENEALOGICAL REGISTER 30 (1874):174-177, 342-352; 31 (1875):18-20, 212-213, 282-288; 32 (1876):70-73, 165-168, 281-286; 33 (1877):36-41; Nathaniel Fanning, FANNING'S NARRATIVE: BEING THE MEMOIRS OF NATHANIEL FANNING, AN OFFICER OF THE REVOLUTIONARY NAVY,

1778-1783, ed. by John S. Barnes (New York: The De Vinne Press, 1912; George Thompson, "Diary of George Thompson of Newbury-port, kept at Forton prison, England, 1777-1781," ESSEX INSTITUTE HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS 76 (July 1940):221-242. For biographical information on Nathaniel Fanning and his brothers who were also prisoners of war, see Fanning's NARRATIVE, pp. xviii, 217-221.

(4) For a thorough analysis of the plagiarism issue and how the sources can be viewed as "one legitimate source", see John K. Alexander, "Forton Prison During the American Revolution: A Case Study of British Prisoner of War Policy and the American Prisoner Response to that Policy," ESSEX INSTITUTE HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS 103 (October 1967):365-366 n. 4. See also his discussion of the problems in "Jonathan Haskins' Mill Prison 'Diary': Can It Be Accepted At Face Value?" NEW ENGLAND QUARTERLY 40 (December 1967):561-564, and "Evaluation," pp. 322-326.

(5) Colburn, "A List," pp. 74-5, 136-41, 209-13.

(6) Cutler, "Journal," p. 186.

(7) George Carey, "Songs of Jack Tar in the Darbies," JOURNAL OF AMERICAN FOLKLORE 85 (April-June 1972):168; Alexander, "Evaluation," p. 325 n. 48; Widger, "Mill Prison Diary," 73 (1937):311-347; 74 (1938):22-48, 142-58; John Ditsky, "The Yankee Insolence of Ethan Allen," CANADIAN REVIEW OF AMERICAN STUDIES 1 (Spring 1970), p. 36.

(8) Paine, SHIPS AND SAILORS OF OLD SALEM, pp. 125-32. Paine also includes a letter from Russell written in 1780.

(9) Alexander, "Evaluation," pp. 327-8, and Sherburne, MEMOIRS, p. 83.

(10) The Commission of Sick and Hurt Seamen (CSHS) had responsibility for the care of American naval prisoners in Britain. The CSHS reported to the Lords of the Admiralty. The Commissioners correspondence to the Secretary of the Admiralty is located in Entry Books, stored in the Public Record Office, London, England, under Admiralty 98, books 1 to 14. The material originating from the Lords of the Admiralty is kept in the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, England, the volume for 1777-1780 is titled Ad/M/404 and that for 1781-1783, Ad/M/405. Letters to the Secretary of State relating to Naval affairs are located in volumes 42 through 57 of the State Papers



(Domestic: Naval) in the Public Record Office. They will hereafter be referred to as S.P. 42/57. The internal letters of the Admiralty are located in the Public Record Office, under Home Office, Correspondence and Papers, Departmental: Admiralty, volume 28. They will subsequently be referred to as H.O. 28. The House of Lords Record Office has a "Petition of Upwards of two hundred American prisoners confined in Mill Prison at Plymouth," dated 19 June 1781. The Public Record Office also holds Muster books of British vessels and in some of these are recorded the names of prisoners, the allowance given them, and their disposition. See, for example, the Muster Book for H.M.S. HUSSAR in Admiralty Muster Books, Series 1, 8030. Other log books relate details of captures. For example, see Admiralty, Accountant General's Department Log Books, Ad. 52 No. 2127 Book 4, pp. 28-29. The most important of the contemporary sources is undoubtedly the work of John Howard, whose tours of penal systems throughout Europe resulted in the first comprehensive analysis of treatment of prisoners and, by coincidence, of prisoners of war. See John Howard, THE STATE OF THE PRISONS IN ENGLAND AND WALES, WITH PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS, AND AN ACCOUNT OF SOME FOREIGN PRISONS AND HOSPITALS, 4th ed., (London: J. Johnson, C. Dilly, and T. Cadell, 1792). For an account of John Howard, see William E. Hart, AN APPRECIATION OF JOHN HOWARD, (St. John, New Brunswick: Lingley, 1959). See also R. Hingston Fox, DR. JOHN FOTHERGILL & HIS FRIENDS: CHAPTERS IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY LIFE, (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1919), and Max Gruenhut, PENAL REFORM A COMPARATIVE STUDY, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948), pp. 31-35. The Boston GAZETTE began a list of captured colonial prisoners in its June 24, 1782, issue. The list was completed over the following two issues and is an excellent source for comparison of the information found in the prisoners' diaries. See Alexander, "Haskins' 'Diary'," p. 564 n. 30, and Alexander, "Evaluation," p. 366. A letter to Henry Laurens contains a list of prisoners of war at Mill, dated March 8, 1782, see John Green, "American letter," SOUTH CAROLINA HISTORICAL MAGAZINE 10 (April P/1BFEE/B 1E M1CC AC PCHDEDC, 1E 1782; CAGCA1E JF E G/EEE, B 1909):116-124. Jeremiah Colburn, "A List of the Americans Committed to Old Mill Prison Since the American War," NEW ENGLAND HISTORICAL & GENEALOGICAL REGISTER 19 :74-75, 136-141, 209-213, has the same list. Herbert compiled a list of Americans in Mill as of February 7, 1779. See Marion and Jack Kaminkow, MARINERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION, (Baltimore, Maryland: Magna Charta Book Co., 1967), pp. xv-xvi, for a discussion of material in the British archives that has yet to be found.

## CHAPTER II

## THE BRITISH NAVY AND THE COLONIAL SEAMAN

To comprehend fully the situation that American common seamen prisoners of war faced and their reaction to captivity, one must examine the role of the British navy, the nature of the war, the British prison system, and the legal status of prisoners of war. To take a narrower focus would lead to misinterpretations of the hardships the seamen faced and the context of their response. For instance, examining prison rations without comparing them to rations in the British navy would be misleading. Similarly, comparing the incidence of colonial prisoners' escapes with their enlistment in the British navy without investigating both the historical role of the British navy as the oppressor of their rights and privileges, and the security of the British prisons, would lead to inaccurate conclusions. The following chapters deal with the nature of the war, the status of prisoners of war, and the British prison system, before the prisoner experience in Britain is examined. This chapter is concerned with the relationship of the British navy to the colonial seamen in the decades preceding the outbreak of the war for American independence.

The single most important factor governing the livelihood of seamen in the eighteenth century was the growth of sea trade. The size and role of the British navy expanded concomitantly. While serving as protector of British trade, the navy did not protect the merchant seamen. Through impressment, corruption, harsh conditions, and low pay, the navy became anathema to the average Jack Tar.

Parliament recognized the importance of the navy as the foundation of the empire, and realized that its growth in size and importance required more men all the time. To keep the supply of trained seamen increasing with the growth of the country's naval needs, in 1698 Parliament passed an act requiring masters of English fishing vessels to train inexperienced seamen by requiring that twenty percent of crews be composed of novices. (1)

With the beginning of the war and the need for rapid expansion of the size of the navy and consequent shortage of seamen, new measures were taken. The statute protecting American seamen from impressment (6 Anne, c. 37, s. 37) had been superceded in practice during previous wars but was only voided in 1775 by 15 George III, c. 31, s. 19. Early in 1776, Parliament passed an act permitting foreign seamen

to comprise two-thirds of the crew of English merchant vessels. Volunteers were called and the press intensified. (2)

If the navy could have retained the men raised for service, the system would have proved quite adequate, but the unpopular nature of civil war, the hardship of naval service in contrast to merchant or privateering life, and the abuses of the impressment system itself resulted in a constant flow of men out of the navy. (3) Probably the most important reason was the competition for seamen by the merchant fleet. Wages reached triple the pay offered by the navy. The navy board even paid seamen in army victuallers more than double the pay in the navy. (4) The opportunity to receive a large share of prize money above and beyond normal wages was a strong incentive to serve on a privateer. The limited duration of the average voyage and lax discipline on privateers compared favourably to that in the navy.

That there was no stated period of enlistment in the navy aggravated the seaman. The man with responsibilities at home could not meet them because of the uncertainty of when he might return. The fear of desertion led to measures

that also caused it. Ships' captains denied liberty to their men for fear of runaways. Payment of wages was delayed for extended periods in the hope that those with pay due would be less likely to run. Seamen would also lose this backpay owed them when accounts were not settled before they were transferred to a new ship. (5) Harsh measures were the result of a shortage of men and the fear of losing those the navy had through desertion. Trying to solve the manning problem by coercion resulted in more desertion. (6) These factors along with an inefficient administration caused twice as many men to be raised for service as were in service at the peak level of the war.

Landsmen for service in the British navy came from the same places as army recruits. They were enlisted through the carrot-and-stick of bounties and compulsion. "They included debtors, convicted felons and ne'er-do-wells shipped off as quota men by corporations and Parish Councils." (7)

Impressment was an ancient, feudal prerogative of the Crown, brought up to date and legalized in a series of acts of Parliament in the first decade of the eighteenth century.

While these acts gave the naval service the authority to take men against their will, they also granted protection to certain groups. For example, young seamen under eighteen and apprentices were exempt. The power to impress was delegated to several different authorities, including every ship captain. In wartime, the primary agency was the impress service. The press gangs were the main arm of this service. Though notorious, the press gang had a more difficult time collecting seamen dispersed in port than the naval branch of the press.

A fleet of cutters waited at the mouth of the harbour for incoming merchant vessels. Each ship was searched for seamen hiding from the press. Merchant captains attempted to protect their ablest men by listing some as dead or runaways so that the gang would not know the exact number on board. If the press left the vessel with too few hands to make harbour, the cutter would provide the deficiency with a party of "men in lieu." They were local fishermen or longshoremen employed just for this purpose. Merchants would also try to save their crews from the press by smuggling them ashore before reaching port, replacing them with longshoremen and others who held protections. (8) The eagerness of the press boat was revealed when John Paul

Jones cruised off the Scottish coast. One of his first captures was a boat sent with a gang to press from the RANGER's crew. (9)

The system of impressment was an important cause of desertion. The impress service raised half the men who served in the navy. Another third were pressed directly from ships by the navy warships attempting to reach full compliment before leaving harbour. The rest volunteered at the ships. (10)

Of those brought in by the press service, two-thirds received the volunteer's bounty. It is enlightening that all, faced with the intimidation of the press gang, did not make "the best of a bad situation" and "volunteer," getting the extra money as a bonus. When someone was confronted by the press gang, he was offered the chance to volunteer. "If he accepted, he was later paid the bounty. Many seamen preferred to be pressed and to refuse the king's shilling, since they could not be charged with desertion should they flee and later be caught." To a certain degree this refusal to volunteer was a tacit statement of intent to flee and clouded the hopes of the naval administration to keep a large percentage of those brought into service. (11)

There were many abuses of the impressment power. It was used as punishment for accidents and poor performance at sea. The press gang also used its strength against labour militancy and violated the law in search of sailors. The punishment for running into a British ship was the loss of four men to the damaged navy vessel. A British convoy vessel would take two men as penalty for not keeping up or straying from the convoy. The press would harass fishermen when they refused to act as men in lieu, a form of strike breaking. The press gang would also help out by serving anti-riot duty. In at least one instance, the press gang caused a riot, knowing the sailors in the area would come out to settle the dispute. (12)

Rules regulating impressment in the colonies were generally ignored due to the lack of accountability, given the distance from the authorities back in Britain. Even though the Act for Encouragement of the Trade to America included a clause prohibiting impressment in the colonies (6 Anne, c. 37, p. 13), there were problems with the interpretation of the duration of that prohibition. After a few cautious years, the British navy renewed impressment in the colonies with vigour. There were three days of anti-impressment riots in Boston in 1747. Impressment continued to be a growing concern and resistance to it



"became eventually a part of the general revolt against British authority, which resulted in American independence." (13)

Another aspect of impressment in the colonies was the large scale forgery of certificates of immunity. Certain occupations were granted an "issue of protection" to secure them from disruption. New York developed as a headquarters for the forgery of these certificates. "Impress officers knew this, so they were always suspicious when a seaman claimed protection as an American. This was one reason why many Americans were pressed." (14)

The crew of one ship that retook control from the prize crew after it had been captured was impressed as they brought the ship into Liverpool. Another example of the willingness of the navy to take everyone they could get is the examination procedure for American prisoners before entering prison in Great Britain. One purpose of the lengthy examination was to discover "all Englishmen and Irishmen [who] were [then] impressed into the King's fleet." Of course, this included those born in the colonies who did not have sufficient proof of their birthplace. (15)

The expansion of the navy for the war outstripped the prewar efforts to ensure an adequate supply of high quality, trained seamen. From 1774 to 1783, the number of ships in commission jumped from 103 to 430, and men in sea pay from 17,731 to 107,446. The channel fleet of 1778-1779 was filled with fever ridden old men, young boys, and men from the jails. Those men entering the navy healthy probably did not stay that way long, largely because of conditions of food and discipline. (16)

Victualling in the British navy was done through a purser, checked by the ship captain, and overseen by inspectors. The basic contradiction in the system was that the contract system was based on profit. To examine corruption and how it affected the seaman's experience in the navy of the eighteenth century, it is probably best to examine one area such as the normal diet of the crew. (17) What was sufficient, what was expected, and how it was obtained can be compared to the structure that was supposed to provide a healthy diet to the men who served the empire in its most critical area. The seaman was supposed to receive a set amount of food each week. This amount, however, was reduced by the purser by one-eighth to cover losses due to waste and seepage. Some amount beyond that eighth went due to corruption among pursers. What remained

tended to be more than enough for the sailor because it was common for him to sell a part of it back to the purser for cash used to purchase vegetables from bumboats that came alongside the ships in harbour. The principle was one of permissiveness-- "what the men ate was up to the men." Each captain was to look after his crew but each man was to look after himself. (18)

The 1734 edition of Regulations and Instructions listed the amounts of food to be supplied to each sailor. Each week the sailor was supposed to receive seven pounds of biscuit, seven gallons of beer, four pounds of beef, two pounds of pork, two pints of peas, three pints of oatmeal, six ounces of butter, and twelve ounces of cheese. Exact equivalents were specified for any substitutes. (19)

Principle and practice hardly coincided.

The purser had many logistical problems in handling the food supplies for the navy. The government had to predict the coming year's needs at the beginning of the killing season. The meat then had to be salt packed. As the warmer weather arrived, this packing became more difficult. The problems for the inspector were similar. Items like butter, beer, and cheese came in contractor's casks and could only be spot checked.

Logistical difficulties were insignificant, however, in comparison to the effects of corruption. There was considerable political influence in the contracting system. Agents for food orders took a percentage off the top. For example, the agent in Jamaica took ten percent off the meat orders. This usually involved the collaboration of the ship's officers. The accounts were kept by the captain and the purser. They used false vouchers to show a favourable balance. The corruption among pursers has been described as "a way of life," but it is important to note that this corruption would have been impossible if the captains had done their job. (20)

The contracting system, however, was the basic source of corruption. It was here that the greatest profits were to be made. The contractors were in the position to buy off all those who were supposed to keep a regulatory eye on the system. The inspectors, for example, were civil servants who could not be promoted. To improve their income, the obvious means was the contractor's bribe. (21) Corruption was inherent in the contract system. Those taking the contracts were doing so for a profit. The desire to maximize profit was contradictory with supplying the best food possible to the navy. If a contractor had stock marked "not saleable for home consumption," the navy was the logical outlet for it. (22)

One mitigating factor in this life of poor food was the possibility of fresh food on voyage. Ships tossed lines over to catch fish as they sailed. One vessel caught fourteen dolphins during one month of a cruise. The ships would also pick up fresh supplies from the local bumboats when going by an island. (23) Nevertheless, the conditions that the seaman faced were incredibly harsh in the British navy, less so in the merchant and privateering fleets, but still rigorous. While the conditions in the navy were a cause for desertion, they did not always result in the colonial seaman leaving life at sea for another vocation. That the sailor would stay in the face of these conditions was not merely because a life at sea was what he knew best. An examination of the society on the colonial seaboard reveals that he had few brighter alternatives.

Land was becoming scarce and expensive. Society was highly stratified and becoming more solidified. "Men without capital had little hope of acquiring their own farm....free laborers and servants at the bottom had only marginal opportunity to rise in social or economic status." (24) A study of the recruits in the revolutionary army concluded that they enlisted not out of duty or patriotism but because "Maryland society offered them few other opportunities for employment." (25) The bounty offered

to men to join the Maryland Continental Line was "equivalent to approximately one-quarter of the total assessable property owned by the average recruit or his family." It provided the immediate cash necessary to make ends meet or, in the case of a dependent, removed the burden of the cost of supporting him. (26) The observations of Ensign Thomas Hughes, on parole near Boston, reveal the hardships in colonial society. He notes depreciation of currency and immense taxes as accounting for the "disaffection amongst Americans" and describes mob riots over prices. (27)

Economic hardship was great among seamen on both sides of the Atlantic. With the war, the tobacco trade centred on the Clyde came to a standstill. Half of the sailors were left without work and turned to privateering and battling the press. (28) Others who comprised the privateers' crew were runaway slaves. A typical advertisement in the colonial newspapers would seek the return of a runaway "who has been used to privateering". (29) This is not to say that all those in the privateer's crew were unemployed and otherwise unemployable. The lure of adventure and prize shares also brought out those dissatisfied with their jobs. Ben Welles, in a letter explaining why he is "off a privateering", mentions that he wanted to get away from his "contemptible vocation". (30)

The reaction of a theological student, passenger on board a privateer in 1760, is probably the best example of the initiation into the seaman's life.

I clambered up the side and found myself in the midst of the most horrid confusion. The deck was crowded full of men, and the boatswain's shrill whistle, with the swearing and halooing of the petty officers, almost stunned my ears....

I observed a young gentleman walking at a distance...he invited me down between decks to a place he called his berth. I...followed him down a ladder into a dark and dismal region, where the fumes of pitch, bilge water and other kinds of nastiness almost suffocated me in a minute....We entered a small apartment, hung round with damp and greasy canvas, which made, on every hand, a most gloomy and frightful appearance. In the middle stood a table of pine, varnished over with nasty slime, furnished with a bottle of rum and an old tin mug with a hundred and fifty bruises and several holes, through which the liquor poured in as many streams...this detestable apartment was allotted by the captain to be the place of my habitation during the voyage!...

[After dinner, preparations for sleeping were made.] A row of greasy canvas bags, hanging overhead by the beams, were unlashd. Into one of them it was proposed that I should get, in order to sleep, but it was with the utmost difficulty I prevented myself from falling over on the other side. (31)

One of the few outlets for improvement in the sailor's lot was footlocker capitalism. A tradition in the merchant service was the opportunity for the sailors to fill their sea chests with the products available in port for their own private ventures. Thus each sailor who wished to invest his earnings was encouraged to do so and the practice

became common. "So firmly was this custom established that it was generally accepted that the seaman who did not engage in such importations had a right to the freight charges which a cargo would have brought." (32) This traditional custom was attacked by the British in 1768 when the new Board of Customs Commissioners ruled the contents of the sea-chests as part of the cargo and therefore subject to confiscation if not listed. Thus the seaman, already hounded by the possibility of impressment, increasingly had to fear that his customary avenue for capital accumulation would be confiscated. (33)

The British navy played an important role in the expansion and consolidation of empire. It also had a tremendous effect on the common seaman. While protecting commerce by its presence, the navy overturned the protections covering seamen by impressing them into its service. Desertion was the answer to impressment and more impressment became the solution to the problem of desertion. This cycle continued its inefficient way building resentment and self-reliance among seamen while postponing an effective resolution. The corruption in the navy also resulted in Jack Tar's seeking out his own solutions. The hard life at sea and especially in the navy was the best of few alternatives for most of those who chose to earn a living at



sea. The outlet that offered some hope of accumulating capital was the private venture. The opportunity to couple a steady job at sea with a chance to "make one's fortune" was the ray of hope that enabled many to endure much discomfort. When this began to be taken away in the decade before the revolution, the colonial seaman was left with a bitterness toward the navy and a legacy of independent action for solution to his problems. The choice of privateering and the determined spirit in the face of imprisonment had their initial impetus in this legacy.

## FOOTNOTES

(1) Dora Mae Clark, "The Impressment of Seamen in the American Colonies," in ESSAYS IN COLONIAL HISTORY PRESENTED TO CHARLES MCLEAN ANDREWS BY HIS STUDENTS, (Freeport, N. Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1966), p. 199. The law was 10 William III, c. 25, p. 9.

(2) Roland G. Usher, Jr., "Royal Navy Impressment During the American Revolution," MISSISSIPPI VALLEY HISTORICAL REVIEW 37 (1950-1951):679, 675. Clark, "Impressment", p. 223. The act, 16 George III, c. 20, was annually renewed 1777-1782. This procedure to increase the available supply of British seamen to war time levels was ancient, see "Navy Board to Admiralty, February 26, 1689, Shelburne Papers 139, No. 39" as cited in Usher, "Royal Navy", p. 675. See Usher, "Royal Navy", p. 673, on the importance of trained seamen to the fleet. The wording of 6 Anne was contradictory as to the duration of the exemption of colonial seamen from impressment. Subsequent measures did little to clarify the situation until 1775. For coverage of the controversy, see L. Jesse Lemisch, "Jack Tar vs. John Bull: The Role of New York's Seamen in Precipitating the Revolution" (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1962), pp. 12-51.

(3) IBID., p. 682; Usher's statistics are 235,000 raised between 1775-1783, of which 116,357 were raised by the impress service, (pp. 677-678). Between 1776 and 1780, "only 1,243 were listed as killed by the enemy" while 18,500 died of wounds, illness, etc. The total number of desertions for the period 29 August 1775 to 14 February 1783 was 79,000. About 30,000 were made unserviceable "because of wounds, illness, or age" or were paid off when the ships were "in for large repair or decommissioning." Of the 79,000 listed desertions, 47,028 were in home waters, 14,845 in North America, 15,191 in the West Indies, and the remainder in the Mediterranean and East Indies, (p. 685).

(4) IBID., p. 686.

(5) IBID. Among the minor incentives to desert, Usher mentions punishment, the lack of medical care, few shore liberties and no retirement possibilities (p. 687). See also J. Stewart, "The Press Gang of the Royal Navy," UNITED STATES NAVAL INSTITUTE PROCEEDINGS 86 (October 1960):84, for a discussion of poor wages and the competition of the transport and merchant fleets as a "powerful stimulus to desertion."

(6) J. Stewart, "Press Gang", p. 84. For the harsh measures by the British in need of men in earlier wars, see Eugene L. Armbruster, *THE WALLABOUT PRISON-SHIPS, 1776-1783*, (New York: Privately printed, 1920), p. 13.

(7) J. Stewart, "Press Gang", p. 84.

(8) *IBID.*, pp. 84-86, for a detailed description of the land press, see pp. 86-87.

(9) M. K. Barritt, "The Navy and the Clyde in the American War, 1777-1783," *MARINER'S MIRROR* 55 (January 1969):39.

(10) Usher, "Royal Navy", pp. 678, 675. For examples of a "hot press," see Timothy Connor, "A Yankee Privateersman in Prison in England 1777-1779," ed. by William R. Cutter, *NEW ENGLAND HISTORICAL & GENEALOGICAL REGISTER* 30 (1874):349, 31 (1875):285. John K. Alexander, "Jonathan Carpenter and the American Revolution: The Journal of an American Naval Prisoner of War and Vermont Indian Fighter," *VERMONT HISTORY* 36 (Spring 1968):80; Barritt, "Navy and the Clyde", pp. 36, 37.

(11) Usher, "Royal Navy", p. 677. Of 116,357 brought in by the impress service, 72,658 accepted the volunteer bounty, 43,699 refused. Usher does not connect the significance of this refusal to the impress service being a major cause of desertion. On the contrary, he plays a number game with those "pressed" by gangs from warships, choosing to view them as somehow different from "pressed men" -- meaning only those attributable to the impress service. He feels that the "improvised character of the impress service, as well as the numbers of men it raised, are an antidote to the common supposition that the navy was largely manned by pressed men," (p. 676). Because he could not detail the number impressed from warships from the sources he used, he limited his definition of "impressed seamen" to exclude all but those from the impressment service. For details on the size and "improvised" character of the impressment service, see p. 676.

(12) J. Stewart, "Press Gang", p. 87. In the virtually ungoverned sections of seaports that the sailors frequented, a vigilante justice existed in what E. P. Thompson has called the "moral economy of the crowd." The sailors would take part in collective decision making in the street. See E. P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *PAST & PRESENT* 50

(February 1971):76-136; L. Jesse Lemisch, "Jack Tar vs. John Bull: The Role of New York's Seamen in Precipitating the Revolution" (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1962), pp. 52-128. In "Revolutionary Violence and the Relevance of History," review of BOSTON, 1689-1776 by G. B. Warden and THE BOSTON MASSACRE by Hiller B. Zobel, in JOURNAL OF INTERDISCIPLINARY HISTORY 2 (Summer 1971), Pauline Maier notes that there is "considerable evidence, in fact, that those who participated in uprisings knew the laws of their country, defended their rights under them, and that considerations of legality played an important role in their tactics," (p. 132).

(13) Clark, "Impressment", p. 207. For a full discussion of the problems of interpretation of 6 Anne, the effect of impressment on the merchants involved in the colonial trade, and the excerpt from 6 Anne concerning impressment, see pp. 207-215. For a petition from 150 merchants describing disasters in commerce resulting from impressment in America, see p. 205. See also Neil R. Stout, "Manning the Royal Navy in North America, 1763-1775," AMERICAN NEPTUNE 23 (July 1963):175-185.

(14) J. Stewart, "Press Gang", p. 87.

(15) Samuel Cutler, "Prison Ships, and the 'Old Mill Prison,' Plymouth, England, 1777," NEW ENGLAND HISTORICAL & GENEALOGICAL REGISTER 32 (1876):44; Howard L. Applegate, "American Privateersmen in the Mill Prison During 1777-1782," ESSEX INSTITUTE HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS 97 (October 1961):303. For the complete discussion of the examination, see Chapter VI.

(16) Christopher Lloyd and Jack L. S. Coulter, MEDICINE AND THE NAVY 1200-1900, 4 vols. (London: E. & S. Livingstone, Ltd., 1961), 3:123-124. For ample details of the incredible state of medical health in the British navy, see IBID., 3:125-137, and the table of sick per number of seaman per year, 3:372. "The state of the navy from a medical point of view was so bad between the years 1778 (when the war became general) and 1783 that it must be accounted partly responsible for the defeat which Britain suffered," (3:122).

(17) For a view of the health of seamen in the Royal Navy, see Lloyd and Coulter, MEDICINE, 3:68-69, for problems in hospital ships, 3:125-137, for the tolls of disease in Rodney's fleet, 3:143-150.

(18) Daniel A. Baugh, BRITISH NAVAL ADMINISTRATION IN THE AGE OF WALPOLE, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965), pp. 385, 381.

(19) IBID., pp. 375-6. The table of day-by-day allotments is given on p. 375.

(20) IBID., pp. 386, 426, 399, 405, 393, 395. Baugh also points out that eighteenth century writers like Ned Ward, Barnaby Rudge, Smollett, and Fielding generally gave a low opinion of navy captains, (p. 396).

(21) IBID., p. 424.

(22) IBID., pp. 448, 426.

(23) John Cary, "'A Contrary Wind at Sea and Contrary Times at Home' -- The Sea Logs of Francis Boardman," ESSEX INSTITUTE HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS 101 (January 1965):12-13.

(24) Edward C. Papenfuss and Gregory A. Stiverson, "General Smallwood's Recruits: The Peacetime Career of the Revolutionary War Private," WILLIAM AND MARY QUARTERLY 3 (January 1973):130. See also Jackson Turner Main, THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF REVOLUTIONARY AMERICA (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965):44-67, 164-220; Aubrey C. Land, "Economic Base and Social Structure: the Northern Chesapeake in the Eighteenth Century," JOURNAL OF ECONOMIC HISTORY 25 (December 1965):639-654; Stuart Blumin, "The Historical Study of Vertical Mobility," HISTORICAL METHODS NEWSLETTER 1 (October 1968):1-13; James H. Hutson, "An Investigation of the Inarticulate: Philadelphia's White Oaks," WILLIAM AND MARY QUARTERLY 28 (January 1971):3-25; James T. Lemon and Gary B. Nash, "The Distribution of Wealth in Eighteenth-Century America: A Century of Change in Chester County, Pennsylvania, 1693-1802," JOURNAL OF SOCIAL HISTORY 2 (Fall 1968):1-24; Kenneth Lockridge, "Land, Population and the Evolution of New England Society 1630-1790," PAST & PRESENT 39 (April 1968):62-80; Gary B. Nash, CLASS AND SOCIETY IN EARLY AMERICA, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1970); Raymond A. Mohl, "Poverty in Early America, A Reappraisal: the Case of Eighteenth-Century New York City," NEW YORK HISTORY 50 (Fall 1969):5-27. Ebenezer Fox, in THE ADVENTURES OF EBENEZER FOX IN THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR (Boston: Charles Fox, 1847), described the depression in the colonies, (p. 52). His life itself speaks of the hardships encountered by those at the bottom of colonial society. He was farmed out by his parents to work and live with another family when he was

seven. At twelve he ran away "to be free". Then when he was an apprentice there was "not enough work for 2 apprentices" where he and another worked, so his boss allowed him to go to sea for a share of his prize money. Shortly after his first cruise, his father died leaving his mother with eight children to feed, so he went on a second cruise "to help out", (p. 75).

(25) Papenfuse and Stiverson, "General Smallwood's Recruits," p. 131. This study shows that most of the privates in the Maryland Continental Line were "newly freed servants, free laborers, or the sons of poor farmers," and that the army "offered a way of ameliorating their economic condition or provided at least a means of attaining a measure of economic security during the term of their enlistment. The immediate attraction of enlistment was the sum of money received for joining, either the inducement for serving as a substitute earlier in the war or the bounty paid in the case of Smallwood's recruits," (p. 127).

(26) IBID., pp. 124-125.

(27) Thomas Hughes, "Journal of Ensign Thomas Hughes, prisoner of war at Lancaster, May 1779 to November 1780," compiled and annotated by Herbert H. Beck, LANCASTER COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY PAPERS 58 (1954):7-8.

(28) Barritt, "Navy and the Clyde", pp. 33-36.

(29) Newport MERCURY, July 15, 1780, quoted in Sidney G. Morse, "The Yankee Privateersman of 1776," NEW ENGLAND QUARTERLY 17 (March 1944):75-76.

(30) Morse, "Yankee Privateersman," p. 74. He also mentions that he was in it for money and adventure. He served as a marine on the MARS privateer. The letter was dated 13 April 1778.

(31) Morse, "Yankee Privateersman," quoted in John Robinson and George F. Dow, THE SAILING SHIPS OF NEW ENGLAND, 1607-1907 (Salem, 1922):38-40.

(32) Lemisch, "Jack Tar vs. John Bull," p. 42; Morse, "Yankee Privateersman," p. 75; James D. Phillips, "Salem revolutionary privateers condemned at Jamaica," ESSEX INSTITUTE HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS 76 (1940):47, 49; and Thomas C. Parramore, "The Great Escape from Forton Gaol: An Incident of the Revolution," NORTH CAROLINA HISTORICAL REVIEW 45 (December 1968):350. See also Oliver M.

Dickerson, THE NAVIGATION ACTS AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION (Philadelphia, 1951), pp. 218-219, and Richard B. Morris, GOVERNMENT AND LABOR IN EARLY AMERICA (New York, 1946), p. 239. See also how a sailor could lose his capital to the sharp operators in port who knew better the fluctuations of the local inflationary currency, Morse, "Yankee Privateersman," pp. 83-84.

(33) Lemisch, "Jack Tar vs. John Bull," p. 42.

## CHAPTER III

## NATURE OF THE WAR

Max Farrand describes the American Revolutionary war as a guerilla action. The colonists fought and retreated, putting up an "irregular resistance." (1) Part of this strategy was to buy time in order to equip, train, and discipline an army. (2)

One of the reasons for the success of this type of warfare was the British view that the rebellion would collapse in time. Richard Howe, as both general and peace commissioner, sought a bloodless victory in the southern colonies to show Congress its folly in continuing the struggle. The feeling was that time was on the British side and a demonstration of superiority would be sufficient. The British were "counting upon the colonists becoming tired of continuing the rebellion. But time was a factor working in favor of the Americans, rather than the British." (3)

Time was on the side of the colonists not because of the guerilla warfare tactics, but rather because of the concurrent tactics of a harassing war of disruption and



attrition. Privateer warfare robbed the British war effort of manpower and supplies, interrupted shipping, and captured millions of dollars worth of prizes. Insurance rates skyrocketed. Ships without escorts became difficult to insure. Ships with escorts still had to pay triple the pre-war insurance rates and caused a further drain on the supply of manpower. It was the economic crisis precipitated by this war of attrition that produced the "cut our losses" climate of opinion in London and forced an ultimate reappraisal when the French fleet co-ordinated with Washington's army at Yorktown.

The efforts of the mariners of Connecticut alone resulted in the capture of "very nearly five hundred sail of all classes," (4) while "the ports of Fairfield, Norwalk and Stamford were the scenes of almost daily excitement.... prisoners constantly coming in." (5) The naval war was disruptive enough to cause General Howe to ask for 15,000 more troops and the implementation of an effective blockade. He resigned when he did not receive the aid. (6) Over 55 ships worth more than 1,800,000 pounds had been lost to the rebels. (7) Edgar Maclay estimates that the total value of vessels captured by privateers for the entire war exceeded \$18 million. He attempted a compilation of cruisers sailing for the continental forces and those under privateer

commissions that reveals a steady decline in continental forces through the war and a phenomenal rise in the number of privateers. (8)

Class of cruiser	1776	1777	1778	1779	1780	1781	1782
Continental	31	34	21	20	13	8	7
Privateer	136	73	115	167	228	449	323

Colby M. Chester estimates that privateers were responsible for capturing over 24 million dollars worth of enemy property. The strategic importance of the source of this wealth -- troop transports and supply vessels -- is duly noted. (9) The number of men utilized in privateering has been estimated at 40,000 men. (10) The amounts of money taken by privateers was considerable. Fantastic sums were accumulated by the more successful privateers. (11) The total number of prisoners taken by the privateers "could not have been short of sixteen thousand." (12) The figures for Salem are indicative of the larger picture of privateer warfare. Of 158 ships sent out from Salem, 54 were captured. But ninety per cent of the 445 prizes taken by Salem vessels reached colonial ports safely. (13)

The British mercantile view at the outset of the war considered the cost of the war to be recoverable in the form of the British merchant fleet securing the colonists' share

of commerce. The failure to meet this expectation and the prospect of increasing losses led the British mercantile class to protest against the continuance of the war. (14) The sailing notices for British vessels show that merchants needed to arm their vessels. No insurance was available for ships without convoy. Heavy premiums of up to 70% had to be paid. (15) In June, 1776, American cruisers captured about 500 British soldiers aboard transports headed for the colonies. (16) The REMEMBRANCER published a list of English vessels taken by Americans in 1776 totalling 342, only 44 of which were recaptured. (17) The British lost 467 merchantmen during 1777, despite a force of 70 men-of-war along the American coast. (18) The unprecedented destruction of British commerce was the subject of pleas to Parliament to bring about peace with America. Alderman J. Woodbridge testified on February 6, 1778, that "the number of ships lost by capture or destroyed by American privateers since the beginning of the war was seven hundred and thirty-three, whose cargoes were computed to be worth over ten million dollars." (19)

The war was taken to the British with American privateers cruising around the British isles. The expeditions of John Paul Jones caused great alarm. Silas Dean, writing to the Maritime Committee in 1777, said that

Jones' presence "effectually alarmed England, prevented the great fair at Chester, occasioned insurance to rise, and even deterred the English merchants from shipping goods in English vessels at any rate of insurance." (20) Benjamin Franklin saw the role that privateers could play in European waters. From his vantage in Paris, he wrote the Committee on Foreign Affairs on May 26, 1777, that two frigates "might intercept and seize a great part of the Baltic and Northern trade. One frigate would be sufficient to destroy the whole of the Greenland fisheries and take the Hudson Bay ships returning." (21)

George Washington also realized the importance of naval superiority and wrote, in formulating a plan with the French army, 15 July 1780, that "In all operation and under all circumstances a decisive naval superiority must be looked upon as a fundamental principle and the basis on which rests all hope of final success." (22) The importance of privateering efforts began early in the war with the commissioning of vessels by Washington. The orders to the captain of the schooner Harrison, 22 October, 1775, mention that the "design of this Enterprise [was]...to Intercept the supplies of the Enemy." To encourage the men, "one-third Part of the Cargo of every vessel...taken and sent into Port" would be split according to a table of shares, the captain receiving six and proportional through the ranks to the private's one. (23)

The privateers were not only disrupters of British commerce and suppliers to the colonies. They performed many other tasks, such as carrying envoys, dispatches, and specie. During the critical years 1775 to 1777, privateers maintained the link to Europe, and revealed the nature of the struggle both to Britain and France, making the French alliance possible. (24) An example of an extraordinary endeavour by a privateer was the taking of a Spanish letter of marque carrying 160 British troops from Pensacola. The Spanish vessel normally would not have been detained, but the capitulation at Pensacola enabled the British troops to ship to New York where they could be employed against the colonists. The privateer HOLKER took them into port as prisoners. (25) Contrary to the view that privateers were not part of the navy, held no higher orders, and were solely after prize money, their history includes patriotic acts of crucial importance to the war effort. (26)

One of the special efforts that privateers made on behalf of the American war effort was the deliberate attempt to capture prisoners of war for exchange. John Paul Jones' cruise in the RANGER had as a main objective the kidnapping of Lord Selkirk and others for exchange. Benjamin Franklin made other efforts to obtain prisoners for exchange by hiring privateers to harass the coasts of Britain. (27)

Another important aspect of the war at sea was the role played by Russia and the League of Armed Neutrality. By custom, Britain or any other blockading power had been able to sustain a blockade of neutral ports by proclamation rather than a show of force. The League of Armed Neutrality changed that. While professing friendship with England, Russia was building a navy. When strong enough to defy England she issued a proclamation on February 26, 1780, that "neutral states have a right to carry on their commerce with belligerent powers unmolested, and even to convey from one port to another of a belligerent power, all goods whatsoever, except what could be deemed contraband in consequence of previous treaties." Thus no port could be considered blockaded unless there was a sufficient force present to maintain a blockade. Through the remainder of 1780, Prussia, Denmark, Sweden, and Holland became parties to the League. (28)

As the war developed, the ability of the colonial forces to avoid a major defeat on land and harass the British at sea aided the diplomats to bring France into open alliance. While the victory at Saratoga can be viewed as a turning point, The French naval strength was the subsequent key to the struggle. On February 6, 1778, France signed the Treaty of Alliance and Commerce. Congress ratified it on May 4, 1778, with Spain joining France by the Treaty of Aranjuez on April 12, 1779. (29)

One of the reasons that a war of attrition could succeed against the British was the sad state of the British navy at the outset of the struggle. In the summer of 1777, six of the ten frigates in home waters were off for desperately needed repairs. Twenty of the 36 ships of the line were used to fill in for ships on station and with convoys. (30) When Jones arrived off the Scottish coast in 1779, there were only three frigates off the west coast, none being on permanent station there. Even when in 1781 there was a permanent frigate stationed off the Clyde, the commerce was not secure. (31) In 1778, there were only 88 frigates listed by the Admiralty. Lord Sandwich complained in 1779 of the "Want of frigates at home last year. Upwards of 70 in America. 20 ordered home but not sent. Upwards of 50 lost or taken." While Sandwich confused frigates with ships of all sizes in his calculations, his worry reflects the consternation felt by those responsible for defense of the homeland in simply not having enough for the country's needs. (32) The spring of 1778 was a critical period of the war for the British naval forces. They were called upon to defend the home coasts and commercial traffic, maintain lines of supply to the troops and ships on station in America, contain the enemy in the English Channel, and contend with privateers. The British navy was pressed to the limit.

The problems with the British navy did not begin with the war for American independence, nor were they confined to the number of vessels available. Throughout the decade before the war began, the fleet stationed on the north American coast suffered from a shortage of seamen and was consequently ineffective. The problem of desertion kept ships from putting to sea. Because impressment in America was of doubtful legality, the ships had a great deal of difficulty replacing lost men. Resorting to the press resulted in even more problems. (33)

It did not require brilliant insight to see the need for an unofficial navy. The British had over a hundred vessels off the coast. The Congress did not have the funds to build up a regular navy to combat this number of ships. On March 23, 1776, Congress passed the law encouraging the people to provide the necessary naval forces. The impression that cruising in a volunteer navy was somehow less patriotic than serving in the land forces must be tempered by the realization that the inducement to enlist in the army was a bonus or land bounty. The incentives to choose the privateer were as much the freedom of independent action and speedy promotion as merely the possibility of collecting prize money. (34)



The captains and other officers of privateers were generally the commanders of vessels before the war. Many had commissions in the continental navy, but received permission to serve on a privateer due to a lack of ships in the navy. A privateer's crew consisted of two distinct groups. Those who had never been to sea, but, from living in the coastal towns, had heard the lore of the sea composed the group that was inclined toward volunteering for the positions available in the marine guard that went with every vessel. Their job included doing the fighting, standing guard, and manning the prizes back to port. (35) A large part of the combat that took place between a privateer and its enemy consisted of small arms fire from this group of marines. This firepower was devastating to the enemy's crew and the paralyzed vessel would be forced to surrender for lack of healthy men to control the rigging and man the cannon. In this way a privateer with inferior number and size of cannon was able to outsail and outfight a ship of superior size and firepower. Because of the nature of the work and because experience at sea was not required, the type of men comprising this service on the privateer tended to be a cut above the common seamen. The common seamen who comprised the large majority of the crew were recruited from the ranks of longshoremen and fishermen from the coastal towns as well as from the crews of the merchant vessels that converted to privateering for the duration of the war. (36)

One advantage to many of privateering was the limit placed on the length of the cruise by the owners. A typical cruise would be set for two months. (37) Other incentives were the carefully listed rewards and punishments set forth by the owners for the "orderly conducting" of the cruise. If any member of the crew was disabled in an engagement, "he shall receive & be allowed out of the first Prize to be taken One thousand pounds." Whoever sighted a sail that turned out to be a prize was rewarded one hundred pounds for "his Vigilance." The first to board the enemy vessel would receive "three hundred pounds as a Recompence for his Valour." Perhaps the most important incentive for members of the crew was that providing for a share in the prizes taken by the ship after a crew member was put on a prize and that prize retaken by the enemy. The shares in the subsequent prizes were allowed, "provided he or they obtain their Liberty before the end of the Cruize" and "use their best endeavours" to rejoin the privateer. (38) Another advantage to service with a privateer was the tradition of collective decision making on board. While making decisions by majority vote was less in evidence on Revolutionary privateers than in earlier years, the authority of the commander was not as rigorous as that in the navy and army. (39)

Congress attempted to control the privateers by the posting of bonds from the owners, guaranteeing the strict adherence to the wishes of Congress. (40) The first, for five thousand pounds, insures against misconduct and transgression of the powers granted in the commission. The second is for four thousand pounds and guards against the release of any prisoners. "All prisoners" were to be delivered "to the Commissary of Prisoners in some of the United States" on penalty of forfeiture of the bond. Posting bond did not solve the problem entirely. One privateer captain who did not turn over any prisoners and was called in to explain, gave the unlikely story that all of the crew of the captured vessel were Americans who joined the privateer's crew. (41) A privateer's commission usually would expressly state in the purpose of the cruise that any vessel whatsoever "carrying Soldiers, Arms, Ammunition, Provision or any other contraband goods to any of the British Armies or Ships of War employed against these United States" should be attacked, subdued, and taken. (42)

## FOOTNOTES

(1) Max Farrand, THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE UNITED STATES FROM COLONY TO A WORLD POWER (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1918), pp. 45-46.

(2) Maurer Maurer, "Military Justice under General Washington," MILITARY AFFAIRS 28 (January 1964):8. For improvement in discipline in the army, see Douglas S. Freeman, GEORGE WASHINGTON: A BIOGRAPHY, 7 vols., (New York: Scribner, 1948-1957), 3:544.

(3) Farrand, DEVELOPMENT OF THE UNITED STATES, p. 46.

(4) Louis F. Middlebrook, MARITIME CONNECTICUT DURING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION, 2 vols., (Salem, Massachusetts: Essex Institute, 1925), 2:258.

(5) IBID., 2:255.

(6) Reginald Hargreaves, "Good-Natured Billy," ARMY QUARTERLY AND DEFENCE JOURNAL 93 (January 1967):189.

(7) Ruth Y. Johnston, "American privateers in French Ports 1776-1178," PENNSYLVANIA MAGAZINE OF HISTORY & BIOGRAPHY 53 (October 1929):358. Before the war insurance had been 2% to the northern American colonies, 2 1/2% to Jamaica and longer voyages.

(8) Edgar Stanton Maclay, A HISTORY OF AMERICAN PRIVATEERS, (New York: Burt Franklin, 1968), p. xiii.

(9) Colby M. Chester, "The volunteer navy in the Revolution," MAGAZINE OF HISTORY 19 (August 1914):58, 69.

(10) IBID., p. 58.

(11) William Bell Clark, "That mischievous HOLKER: the story of a privateer," PENNSYLVANIA MAGAZINE OF HISTORY & BIOGRAPHY 79 (January 1955):27-62; for a list of the amounts going to owners for prizes auctioned off, see "Newburyport privateering, 1779-1780," ESSEX INSTITUTE HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS 76 (July 1940), PASSIM.

(12) Maclay, "Privateers," p. ix; John B. Meserve, "A Privateersman of the Revolution," GRANITE STATE MONTHLY 59 (May 1927):137-138. The figures are impossible to total accurately. The number of prisoners who joined the capturing vessel, those released in faraway ports and escapees were not accurately recorded.

(13) William Russell, "Journal," in Ralph D. Paine, THE SHIPS AND SAILORS OF OLD SALEM, (London: Heath Cranton Ltd., 1924), p. 94. Paine gives the example of Elias H. Derby, a rich merchant who switched to underwriting privateers, starting his own shipyard to build faster privateers, (pp. 98-99).

(14) Maclay, "Privateers," pp. x, xiii.

(15) M. K. Barritt, "The Navy and the Clyde in the American War, 1777-1783," MARINER'S MIRROR 55 (January 1969):34 n. 3. "Maritime insurance policies...were void if ships did not sail with convoy." "Within ten days in September 1781 the premium of insurance on the Jamaican and West Indian fleets on passage rose from 12-15 to 35-45 guineas per cent with convoy."

(16) Eugene L. Armbruster, THE WALLABOUT PRISON-SHIPS, 1776-1783, (New York: Privately printed, 1920), p. 6.

(17) IBID.

(18) IBID.

(19) Maclay, "Privateers," p. xiii. See also Winthrop L. Marvin, THE AMERICAN MERCHANT MARINE ITS HISTORY AND ROMANCE FROM 1620 TO 1902, (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co. Ltd., 1902), p. 14, for a colony by colony list of the number of privateers commissioned.

(20) Quoted in Maclay, "Privateers," p. xii. British citizens wrote home from the Caribbean with similar stories, see pp. xii-xiii. See Marvin, MERCHANT MARINE, p. 13 for entirety of the Dean quote and other letters from Britishers overseas.

(21) Quoted in Maclay, "Privateers," p. xii. Ships were sent, making two circuits of Ireland, securing fifteen prizes that were sold in France. The funds went to support the diplomatic effort then proceeding in the courts of Europe.

(22) Perry Belmont, NAVAL SUPREMACY DURING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION (Brussels: Imprimerie P. & E. De Bie, 1931), p. 15.

(23) Middlebrook, MARITIME CONNECTICUT, 2:111. The first lieutenant received 5 shares, the second lieutenant, 4, the surgeon, 4, the ship's master, 3, the steward, 2, the mate, gunner, and boatswain, 1 1/2 each. For an agreement that gives the captain eight shares, the first lieutenant four, etc., down to "boys under 16 years 1/2 share," see 2:128.

(24) Marvin, MERCHANT MARINE, p. 15.

(25) Clark, "HOLKER," p. 51.

(26) Richard H. Kohn, Review of THE TOLL OF INDEPENDENCE: ENGAGEMENTS AND BATTLE CASUALTIES OF THE REVOLUTION, edited by Howard H. Peckham, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), WILLIAM AND MARY QUARTERLY 32 (April 1975):339. Peckham omits the tabulation of sea action by privateers "because they 'were not part of our navy; they were not under any higher orders; they reported to no official; and they were after prize money, not defeat of the enemy's warships' (p. 103)." This view leads to a distorted view of the war effort as Kohn notes: "Much of the conflict and action that proved crucial to the outcome of the war does not appear here...the statistics show naval action diminishing in 1780 and after, just when American privateering began to skyrocket and put so much pressure on the British war effort." This is not to say that owners of privateers were not above giving orders such as to maximize the chance of profit to them. One owner, in directing a joint cruise of two of his ships, ordered them to avoid sailing with others so that they would not have to split any prize money. Clark, "HOLKER," pp. 40-41.

(27) Barritt, "Navy and the Clyde," p. 38. See William Bell Clark, BEN FRANKLIN'S PRIVATEERS A NAVAL EPIC OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION, (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1956), PASSIM. Note that Lord North seems to have had forewarning of this aim of the Jones cruise. Leaks out of the Franklin offices in France are the probable cause, Barritt, "Navy and the Clyde," p. 38 n. 2, and Cecil B. Currey, CODE NUMBER 72 BEN FRANKLIN PATRIOT OR SPY? (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974), PASSIM.

(28) Benson J. Lossing, THE PICTORIAL FIELD BOOK OF THE REVOLUTION (New York: Harper Bros., 1855), p. 468 n. 3.

(29) Belmont, NAVAL SUPREMACY, pp. 9-12.

(30) Barritt, "The Navy and the Clyde," p. 33.

(31) See complaints of Glasgow merchants in Barritt, "Navy and the Clyde," p. 42.

(32) The actual figures are 11 frigates lost, "together with 16 sloops or craft of comparable size." Barritt, "Navy and the Clyde," p. 41. Sandwich probably meant 70 ships total, not frigates, in America.

(33) Neil R. Stout, "Manning the Royal Navy in North America, 1763-1775," AMERICAN NEPTUNE 23 (July 1963):175, 177, 178, 182, 183. See L. Jesse Lemisch, "Jack Tar vs. John Bull: The Role of New York's Seamen in Precipitating the Revolution," (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1962), pp. 21-51, for the view of impressment before the war as a cause of the war.

(34) Chester, "Volunteer Navy," p. 56. "Making one's fortune" was not neglected as a lure to join a privateer; see the newspaper advertisement in Sidney G. Morse, "The Yankee Privateersman of 1776," NEW ENGLAND QUARTERLY 17 (March 1944):71-72. For the enormous profits a voyage could reap, see Clark, "HOLKER," p. 35. "Half of the net proceeds of all prizes went to the crew," (p. 31). Charles I. Bushnell, ed., ADVENTURES OF CHRISTOPHER HAWKINS, (New York: Privately printed, 1864), p. 28, has the percentages for the crews' prizeshares.

(35) Chester, "Volunteer Navy," p. 57. The author stretches the distinction between these two groups comprising the privateers' crew. Those from families of distinction who sailed on privateering vessels, were generally not employed, but booked on as passengers or agent for the owner to oversee the sale of the cargo in some port of destination.

(36) Russell, "Journal," p. 110; Ebenezer Fox, THE ADVENTURES OF EBENEZER FOX IN THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR, (Boston: Charles Fox, 1847), p. 67, also describes the virtues of the privateer's riflemen. While Fox and others on the privateers would tend to boast of the effectiveness of the riflemen, the point is that the privateers were capable of successful actions that their inferior size and informal nature have caused people to overlook.

(37) Middlebrook, MARITIME CONNECTICUT, 2:126-130.  
See Article I of the privateer agreement for the sloop  
HIBERNIA, p. 126.

(38) IBID., 2:127, 128, 129.

(39) Morse, "Yankee Privateersman," p. 78.

(40) Examples of two such bonds are given in Meserve,  
"Privateersman," pp. 135-143.

(41) Clark, "HOLKER," pp. 30-31.

(42) Isaac J. Greenwood, CAPTAIN JOHN MANLEY SECOND  
IN RANK IN THE UNITED STATES NAVY 1776-1783, (Boston: C. E.  
Goodspeed & Co., 1915), pp. 165-166.



## CHAPTER IV

## STATUS OF PRISONERS OF WAR

Principles governing the status of prisoners of war had been developed by political thinkers like Vattel and Grotius. Their ideas on the customs of war were reflected in policies of treatment of prisoners. By the mid seventeenth seventies, their ideas, most recently reformulated by Rousseau, were generally held by the European governments. Rousseau's argument on the status of prisoners of war, in summary, was that war was no longer a conflict between armies but rather a conflict between nations. His conception was that war was in no way a relation of man to man but rather a relation of state to state. The right to kill the soldiers of the enemy state ended when they put down their arms and remained as long as they maintained their status as prisoners. (1)

Because the philosophers' ideas were formulated for nation states, the status of the rebelling colonies left the position of their prisoners of war unclear. The colonies tried to live up to the rules of international law as best they could. The British, however, vacillated between the

practices developed in international law for nation states and those for putting down domestic disturbances. Because the aim of the war for the British was to stop a breakaway from home rule by the colonies, it followed that each captive would be pressured to swear allegiance to the crown and join the British forces. Intimidation to induce prisoners to enlist and the threat of trial and hanging for treason were common measures taken by the capturing British forces.

Because of the British practice of maintaining its prisoners under dual status, the American forces resorted to threats of reprisal, the traditional method of obtaining equal usage of prisoners of war. While retaliation was a tactic used throughout the war, the possibilities of escalation on both sides were always present, limiting its effectiveness. One example of mutual escalation occurred when Britain sent thirty-three Irish-American prisoners to England to be tried for treason. Congress authorized retaliation, the same number of British captives being placed in close confinement. The British in return closely confined sixty-six Americans. This brought a similar response from the Americans. The rounds of reprisal only ended when the British paroled some of the Americans with instructions to inform Congress that the original thirty-three had not been tried. (3)

Besides the ambivalent status of the American prisoners of war, a major source of irritation was the transportation of prisoners overseas. The Americans viewed the removal of prisoners across the Atlantic as harassment to force enlistment. That transportation was a real issue for the Americans can be seen from its inclusion in the treaty of 1785 between the United States and Prussia. This first international treaty to deal explicitly with prisoners of war signed by nations not at war, forbade "the destruction of prisoners of war, by sending them into distant and inclement countries...[or] send[ing] the prisoners...into the East Indies or any other parts of Asia or Africa." (4)

Close confinement of prisoners was likewise a source of complaint for the Americans. For reasons of intimidation, security, and manpower allocation, the British kept prisoners closely confined in New York in large buildings and on board prison ships. In reaction to this an irritated Congress directed Washington to inform Howe of its expectation that the British general "will...take effectual measures that the American prisoners may not suffer any distresses from the approaching hot season, which it is in its power to prevent, as the present possession of Long Island and Rhode Island afford him the opportunity of extending humanity towards prisoners, without a breach of duty to the power under which he acts." (5)

In late 1775 and early 1776, Congress attempted to make arrangements for the payment of the costs of maintaining prisoners of war in their hands. In May, 1776, Washington reported to Congress that custom had it that French and English prisoners in past wars had been maintained by commissary who contracted for their support, while officer prisoners on parole were permitted to negotiate their own bills of exchange. (6) Congress had already resolved that British prisoners in American hands should be maintained at the expense of the crown through an agent appointed by Great Britain and approved by the American government. (7) The officers on parole, however, caused some problems from the outset. They were at first permitted to sell their bills for their subsistence, but when their manner of living became extravagant--"being boarded at taverns, and the inn keepers supplying them in a luxurious manner, on the credit of the Continent"--Congress resolved that each officer be allowed two dollars a week for room and board, to be paid before release. (8)

Congress was repeatedly forced to deal with problems concerning the maintenance of prisoners in their hands and insuring that sufficient provisions reached their prisoners in the hands of the British. Congress instructed the Board of War in June, 1776, to arrange with the British for each

captor to pay for prisoner provisions, agree to the quantity and value of those provisions, and balance the books at regular intervals each year. (9) In July, 1776, a committee reported to Congress that American prisoners in British hands were given insufficient provisions. In January, 1777, Congress instructed Washington to try to arrange for prisoners held by the British to be supplied by agents commissioned by America, since the British did not supply what Congress felt to be minimal provisions. Again, in April, Congress ordered that bills of exchange, up to the amount of pay due the prisoners, be sent to them to help them meet their needs. (10)

An American investigation into the difficulties of supplying and arranging payment for goods for prisoners in January, 1778, concluded that England had blocked the American attempts to feed and clothe prisoners that the British were not caring for properly. They had "obstructed the American effort to sell bills to obtain sterling hampered entrance into occupied territory and...the sale there of provisions to furnish clothing for prisoners." Other areas of harassment included price-fixing on goods brought into British territory to be sold for funds for prisoners there, refusal of entry to agents for the purchase of clothing, and failure to grant allowances to officer

prisoners. The Americans retaliated by refusing British agents permission to sell bills for the support of their prisoners. (11) This retaliation led to others and Congress eventually ordered the temporary maintenance of prisoners in American hands at American expense. (12)

When the American government assumed the responsibility of granting rations to all prisoners in its hands, Congress resolved to give that amount that the British were supplying their captives. As this temporary expedient became permanent in appearance, the American government coupled its demand for reimbursement with a threat to reduce rations to British prisoners to half the first month, one-third the second, etc. (13)

The failure of the Americans to secure better treatment for American prisoners had fateful results for those captives. It is a sign of American humanitarian concern that measures were taken to aid the British prisoners in their hands when, after the arrest of the British commissary, he was not replaced. But it is also a sign of elitist priorities that they abandoned the struggle to maintain American prisoners with the British despite the knowledge that they were poorly provided. (14) The cost of supplying the prisoners mounted on the American side, the

balance not being paid. In 1782 retaliation again became the rule. In October, 1782, Congress ordered the reduction in expense of maintaining British prisoners. (15)

The British attempts to harass American prisoners into its service, their view of the struggle as a rebellion, and their feeling of strategic superiority left the question of prisoner maintenance a source of considerable concern for the American authorities. At first vigorous efforts were made to fill the gaps left by British administration of prisoner welfare. When this was met by obstruction, the Americans resorted to retaliation. When the retaliation was essentially ignored and began to cause discontent leading to security problems, the American leaders capitulated. Even with the subsequent tacit agreement of captor as provider, the Americans provided at a level greater than the British until renewed efforts to retaliate in 1782 brought American-provided subsistence levels to those given to American prisoners by the British. The result of these events was hardship and death for American prisoners in New York.

The rhythm of naval exchange in previous wars followed a steady pattern. Exchanges ceased during the summer. There would be an exchange in the early spring and again at the end of the campaign in the early autumn when

the expense of maintaining prisoners far outweighed the likelihood of their being employed against their captor for that campaign. Through the winter there would be a steady flow of exchange. These would be exchanges of expediency rather than the result of any agreement for the duration of the war. The overriding factor governing whether or not there would be a general agreement for the exchange of prisoners between combatants was the perception of the balance of the war by each side. Which side needed the return of its prisoners more or which side would be helped by a return of prisoners more were the key questions. Man-for-man exchanges periodically throughout a war favoured that side that took more prisoners or needed the return of its own men less.

Britain adopted a dual strategy regarding prisoners of war. With the colonies the British reserved the right to try the prisoners for treason when and if the war terminated favourably. With France the traditional jockeying for strategic advantage was played out in the on again off again negotiations for a general cartel to govern exchange of prisoners. Toward the colonial prisoners the captors were harsh in their treatment but open in their attempts for exchange, holding back only the political recognition that the colonists sought. They refused a general exchange with the French until they felt they no longer held the strategic advantage, signing a cartel in 1780.



There were essentially two kinds of exchange possible: all-for-all and man-for-man. In an all-for-all exchange, there was a continuous flow of returning prisoners with numbers only checked to see which side had to pay ransom for receiving more. This type of agreement took place between opponents of approximately equal strength. A man-for-man, rank-for-rank exchange had a scale of equivalents of higher ranks in terms of privates or common seamen. The side that took more prisoners or needed its men less had the advantage in this type of exchange. (17)

Britain had to arrange both types of exchanges. The urgent need for more men conflicted with the superior numbers that British ships captured. Because the American prisoners were predominantly from the pesky privateers that caused such complaints from British merchants, exchanging them was out of the question. The British ruled out a general cartel with the colonists also on the basis of the tacit recognition that such an agreement would bestow. So these prisoners became a potential manpower pool for recruiting purposes rather than a number to be saved for exchange. These efforts at encouraging American seamen to enlist met with very limited success.

As the war wore on and British manpower needs became more acute, and especially after Keppel's fleet failed to destroy the French at Ushant, the British came to look upon

an all-for-all cartel with the French as a solution to their problems. Negotiations began in early 1779 with the British more anxious to sign than the French. (18) Preparing the defense of the planned French invasion of Britain was becoming urgent and required new ships and more men. A sign of the Admiralty's desperation was the refusal in 1779 to grant the traditional exemption of returning prisoners from the press. (19)

The Admiralty was therefore anxious at all costs to get British seamen home, and this overriding motive was merely reinforced by the desire to ease the financial and administrative position which their subordinates, the commissioners for Sick and Hurt Seamen and the Exchange of Prisoners of War, repeatedly stressed. But for the French, their grand invasion project made it worthwhile for once to sacrifice their own reinforcements for the sake of preventing the British from receiving the experienced seamen they so desperately needed. It was not until the combined French and Spanish operations had been quite given up in October 1779 that French procrastination and obstruction ceased abruptly and negotiations forged ahead to culminate in the signing of the cartel in March 1780. (20)

## FOOTNOTES

(1) Jean Jacques Rousseau, *THE SOCIAL CONTRACT*, trans. by Willimooore Kendall, (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1954), pp. 13-14.

(2) *JOURNALS OF CONGRESS* (hereafter cited as J of C), 4:22 (2 January 1776), quoted in William E. S. Flory, *PRISONERS OF WAR*, (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Public Affairs, 1942):41.

(3) Francis Wharton, *A DIGEST OF THE INTERNATIONAL LAW OF THE UNITED STATES* 3 vols., (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1886-1887), 3:330-331; *AMERICAN STATE PAPERS, FOREIGN RELATIONS*, 1:85. See also Flory, *PRISONERS OF WAR*, p. 43.

(4) Article 24, 8 U.S. Stat. 84, quoted in Flory, *PRISONERS OF WAR*, p. 46. The full title of the treaty is the American-Prussian Treaty of Amity and Commerce of 1785. See also Eleanor C. Flynn, "The Geneva Convention on Treatment of Prisoners of War," *GEORGE WASHINGTON LAW REVIEW* 2 (June 1943):505-506.

(5) J of C, 11:521 (21 May 1778), quoted in Flory, *PRISONERS OF WAR*, p. 46.

(6) J of C, 4:361-362 (11 May 1776), quoted in Flory, *PRISONERS OF WAR*, p. 51.

(7) J of C, 3:434 (16 December 1775) and 4:116 (7 February 1776). See also Flory, *PRISONERS OF WAR*, p. 51.

(8) J of C, 3:418 (9 December 1775). Officers bills were, in British law, valid and collectible in the courts after the restoration of peace. J of C, 4:51-52 (12 January 1776). Congress agreed to pay the debts already contracted.

(9) J of C, 8:494 (24 June 1776). See also Flory, *PRISONERS OF WAR*, p. 52.

(10) J of C, 5:536 (10 July 1776); 8:12 (3 January 1777), 8:41 (16 January 1777), and 8:289 (22 April 1777).

(11) J of C, 10:74-81 (21 January 1778), see also Flory, *PRISONERS OF WAR*, pp. 52-53.

(12) J of C, 12:1111 (7 November 1778), see also Flory, PRISONERS OF WAR, p. 53.

(13) J of C, 16:39-40 (11 January 1780). The same threat was given again in 1782, J of C, 22:335 (17 June 1782). See also Flory, PRISONERS OF WAR, p. 62.

(14) J of C, 23:661 (16 October 1782), see also Flory, PRISONERS OF WAR, p. 54 n. 101.

(15) J of C, 3:400 (2 December 1775).

(16) Olive Anderson, "The Establishment of British Supremacy at Sea and the Exchange of Naval Prisoners of War, 1689-1783," BULLETIN OF THE INSTITUTE OF HISTORICAL RESEARCH 38 (January 1960):78.

(17) Ad. 3/86, 15 December 1778, S.P. 42/54, 6 February 1779, S.P. 42/55, 23 June and 9 September 1779, Ad. 98/12/1, 18. See also Anderson, "British Supremacy," p. 82.

(18) Anderson, "British Supremacy," p. 89. For the history of the inducements made to try to keep returning prisoners in the navy, see Anderson, "British Supremacy," pp. 88-89.

(19) Anderson, "British Supremacy," p. 82, Cf. Ad. 98/12/284-285, 304-306, 308-312, 342-344. 364.

## CHAPTER V

## THE BRITISH PRISON SYSTEM

Great Britain had long relied on transportation as the mainstay of its penal system. Approximately two thousand criminals were exported each year up to 1717 when the numbers increased after the passage of legislation allowing transportation for other than just capital offences. (1) This system met several needs. It was inexpensive, avoided the complaints of those near prisons, and populated the colonies. Perhaps because of this expedient, a penal system was never fully developed. Those prisoners remaining in Britain were cared for by contracting out to private citizens for their keep. As a profit oriented enterprise, this led to squalor, overcrowding, and corruption. What transportation left was a series of "miniature institutions", small private jails with generally fewer than ten prisoners. A confusion of institutions and corporations, all with problems of financing, all aiming to keep costs low, leaving the care of inmates often contracted out to private citizens in the business of keeping prisoners. Profit taking priority over care for prisoners, the inmates suffered from neglect. (2)

The war with America brought a sudden end to transportation, and England turned to the use of hulks as a "temporary expedient." Those who would have been transported worked at hard labour and returned to hulks at night. Two hulks at Woolwich, the JUSTITIA and the CENSOR, were turned into prisons. The system was expanded to Portsmouth and Plymouth, serving throughout the war. By 1782 the prisons had deteriorated through overcrowding and lack of maintenance. New legislation tried to solve the situation but only worsened it. The hulks became places of confinement rather than mere sleeping quarters for day labouring prisoners. Management was turned entirely over to contractors. (3) John Howard had visited the JUSTITIA in 1776, finding filth, sickness, bad food, and a death rate of thirty per cent per year. (4) At the same time, hulks, which had been used to a limited extent in the Seven Years War, were put in use for prisoners of war. In that war, the system had fallen into the hands of corrupt contractors and agents. Some blame was due the Transport Office which was "slack and corrupt." (5)

There was little resolution of the hulk situation, although in the early years of the war with the colonies the accumulation of prisoners forced the establishment of

permanent prisons to house them. As one writer has put it, the administration was in no position to cope with prison reform:

Harassed by a naval war in Europe, and by the bloody wrangle in America; beset by reform-agitation in England, and chronic insurrection in Ireland; and lastly confounded by a spasm of Protestantism which had convulsed the populace into 'No Popery' riots, Lord North's rickety cabinet had neither taste nor leisure for experiments in social science. (6)

While reform was slow to come to the prison system for convicts in Britain, measures to deal with prisoners of war were taken very early in the war. An act passed in 1776 set down the legal status of prisoners of war and set aside major installations in Portsmouth and Plymouth for their reception and detention. Along with smaller depots designed more as regional collection points and a major prison in Ireland, Forton near Portsmouth and Mill at Plymouth were the main prisons for holding American prisoners of war. While these locations were supposed to be the place of confinement for American prisoners of war, there was occasional confusion at the local level and magistrates locked up some Americans in local jails. (7) The act designated the Americans taken in arms against the King as traitors and pirates, but also stated that any persons suspected of High Treason committed in the colonies or on

the High Seas were not to be tried until after January 1, 1778. The act was renewed each year postponing the date of trial and leaving open the option of a pardon and exchange as prisoners of war. (8)

In an effort to avoid the corruption rampant in the contract system of managing prisons, the keepers of Forton and Mill prisons were direct appointments by the Admiralty. The profit incentive was dealt with by providing a paid staff. This recognition of the "exploitation of the prisoners" in the British prison system was an improvement, if not quite a "great advance." Direct appointments and salaried staff hit at the corruption in the system but did not strike at the source. That the job of caring for prisoners was still used for private profit is evident in the prisoner complaints "that the keeper was watering the beer, feeding his pigs on the prisoners' food" and condoning bribery. (9)

Maintaining security in the prisons was a constant headache. Converted from hospitals, the prisons were poorly designed for security. While improvements were made in the structures throughout the war, keeping the prisoners confined was largely dependent upon an adequate and alert guard. The militia used for guard service was anything but



adequate and alert. Composed of raw recruits, the aged and invalids, the militia units were so poor that they were replaced with military units used in monthly rotation from nearby staging bases. (10) Accepting bribes to aid escapes and conniving with the local populace to share the rewards for recapture was widespread among the guard. The soldiers were also "half-hearted in their job, resenting the cheeseparing attitude of the authorities who grudged them their proper supply of coals and candles." (11) The guard was usually thirty to forty men, but would be doubled when conditions warranted. (12) Conditions in the prisons depended in large measure more on the guards than on administrative policy. A new guard allowed Gustavus Conyngham greater liberty and he concluded that there was a "verry material Difference in the officers orders of the Garde." (13)

Treatment fluctuated with individual guards, the policies of their commanders, and the location of the prisons. The treatment of the prisoners in Ireland was partly the result of an overseas mentality (away from home station and far from supervisory authority) that vented itself on the local citizenry as well. Margaret Hazlitt, a woman who grew up near Kinsale, recalled "the unbridled licence of the army (who took liberties in Ireland that they

dared not do at home) made it dangerous to offend the haughty officers, who seemed to think wearing a sword entitled them to domineer over their fellow subjects." (14)

Those in charge of prisoners in Britain were not totally neglectful. Responding to prisoner complaints, they attempted to rectify abuses that came to their attention and had a standing policy of investigating every death that occurred in prison. However, they usually suffered from an inadequate budget, and the manner and conclusions of their investigations were more in the category of whitewash than commendable practice. (15)

The total number of prisoners held throughout the war was approximately 2500 for Forton and Mill alone. The number at any one time varied considerably for each prison depending on escapes, deaths, and exchanges. Mill first took in American prisoners of war on May 27, 1777, and still had seven on July 30, 1782. Howard totaled 1296 for the duration of the war. Forton had 1200 by Howard's count, beginning June 13, 1777, with 133 still confined on November 6, 1782. There were fewer than three hundred prisoners at Forton or Mill through 1777, with the numbers climbing to around six hundred (in Mill) in February 1782. Forton seemed to level off around 250 prisoners to the end of the war. Capture of a large crew could drastically increase the total. (16)

The health of the prisoners was a major topic concerning the authorities in charge of the naval prisoners of war. Many of the newly arrived captives were wounded or ill and needed hospitalization. Others caught small pox or "gaol fever" and needed to be segregated to avoid an epidemic. This concern had its sources outside the government. There was the threat of American retaliation on British prisoners in their hands. Closer to home were the advocates of the miasmatic theory of contagion. Foul conditions produced odors that fostered the spread of disease according to this theory. Pressure was brought to bear on the government to keep conditions reasonably clean. This group overlapped with the humanitarians and clergy who aided those who suffered the ills of neglect. There was also pressure brought to bear from the political opposition and those sympathetic to the American cause. These three pressure groups combined had a formidable influence on government policy formulation, and some effect on the practice at the prisons. (17)

Generally the health of the prisoners was remarkably good. Jonathan Carpenter drew that conclusion in mid-February, 1779: "by kind Providence we are very healthy [as] we have not lost but 9 men Died in this place since the first Prisoners were committed which is almost 2 years." From this time to the end of the war, however, the death rate for American prisoners of war doubled. (18)

Haslar hospital south of Gosport, near Portsmouth, took in sick prisoners, although it mainly served as the principal naval hospital in the south of Great Britain. (19) Jonathan Carpenter went directly from a guardship in the harbour to Haslar on 19 May 1778, describing it as a very fine building "where there was upwards of 1700 men belonging to ye Shiping." (20)

This change in the death rate was not due to any change in British health policies or practices. These seem to have been laudable. The Commission for Sick and Hurt Seamen (CSHS) paid "special attention to matters of health" throughout the war. They provided an assistant surgeon, added a pharmacist, took great care in planning a new hospital building, had a shed built for shade in the summer, and met the "sudden infection of the summer of 1782 by bringing in an extra physician. (21) It was CSHS policy, for example, to grant inoculation for small pox on request. (22) This had little effect on prisoner health because ninety per cent of the American prisoners had already had either small pox or been inoculated. On March 1, 1779, Jonathan Carpenter was inoculated along with "26 more being all that never had it." He went to hospital and emerged two weeks later, "cleansed of pox." (23) The policy toward inoculation probably had its impetus in the doctors at Mill learning

that the prisoners were inoculating themselves. British medical practice called for isolation of the inoculated prisoner so the secret practice of inoculation would have been very worrisome to the medical authorities. (24)

The proclamations on health standards put forth by the CSHS had little correlation with the reality within the prisons, which did not change through the war. One example is the Commission's concern for cleanliness. Wash tubs were provided, general cleanings were encouraged, but the prisons and hospitals simply "were not clean." (25) Fresh water was supposed to be supplied daily, but ditches and drains were used for collection and the prisoners' water was therefore hardly fresh. The prisoners complained about the condition of the water but to no avail. (26)

British concern for the health of the prisoners had a twofold purpose. There was a widespread fear that contagion in the prisons would spread to the populace. So it was in the best interests of the nation to keep the prisons healthy enough to prevent epidemics. On the other hand, it was hoped that a good percentage of Americans would join the British cause, healthy prisoners being an investment in manpower recruitment. Volunteers from the prisons were never numerous. Even among those who did volunteer were

some who stated their intent was to expedite their escape. (27) Connor's records for Forton list only twenty-three men as entering in the year and a half that he was imprisoned. This rate of entry is only one-fifth the escape rate. (28)

British policy concerning what to do with American prisoners of war went through several changes through the course of the war. At first, considering the rebellion of short duration and about to be put down, prisoners were considered rebels, pirates, and traitors who would likely hang for their acts against the Crown. Thus prison was just a detention camp before trial and hanging. As the protracted nature of the struggle came to be understood, and especially after Saratoga, the prisoners began to be considered as prisoners of war. Overt recognition of such status, however, was a while longer in coming. Throughout the war there was steady pressure to accept a pardon and enlist in the British service. With the entry of France into the war and the consequent fear of invasion, the need for return of skilled British seamen held as prisoners of war became acute. Enlistment of Americans took a lower priority to exchange. American prisoner escapes in answer to pressure to enlist helped change this priority. But merchant pressure kept exchange of Americans from taking

place, while an agreement for exchange with France was agreed upon. Finally, in an effort to reach a separate peace settlement with America, the exchange of prisoners became a token gesture of goodwill.

British policy was always out of line with practice at the prisons, but the nature of that treatment seems not to have been the determining factor regarding the health of the American prisoners. British policy, as far as it went, also seems to have been enacted not out of humanitarian concern but rather as a reaction to outside pressures, either from the prisoners or the British public.

## FOOTNOTES

(1) Walter L. Clay, *THE PRISON CHAPLAIN: A MEMOIR OF THE REVEREND JOHN CLAY*, (Montclair, New Jersey: Patterson Smith, 1969), p. 54. The number of convicts being brought to the colonies drew complaints, including one from Benjamin Franklin in 1770, (p. 55).

(2) Max Gruenhut, *PENAL REFORM A COMPARATIVE STUDY*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948), pp. 27-28, "In England, in 1779, no less than 130 of the gaols and Bridewells had less than ten inmates," (p. 27). See Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *ENGLISH PRISONS UNDER LOCAL GOVERNMENT*, p. 31, n. 3. The Webbs estimate that the number transported was one thousand per year, (p. 44). They give no explanation as to how they arrived at this lower figure.

(3) Clay, *PRISON CHAPLAIN*, pp. 60-61.

(4) *IBID.*, p. 56 n. 1, "172 died out of 632, August 1776 to March 1777." William B. Johnson, *THE ENGLISH PRISON HULKS*, (London: Phillimore, 1957; revised ed., 1970), gives the figures "176 out of 632" for the two years after the "Act of 1776 received Royal assent," and compares that to the loss of one in seven in transportation, (p. 10).

(5) Johnson, *PRISON HULKS*, p. 45.

(6) Clay, *PRISON CHAPLAIN*, p. 59. There was more than just temporary crisis preventing prison reform. Despite the resumption of transportation (to New South Wales in 1787), the hulks remained for forty years, (p. 61). For example, in 1793, of "1864 persons awaiting departure, 1449 were confined on hulks," Johnson, *PRISON HULKS*, p. 26. For the history of the prison reform movement in Britain, see U. R. Q. Henriques, "The Rise and Decline of the Separate System of Prison Discipline," *PAST & PRESENT* 54 (February 1972):6 n. 1.

(7) Eunice H. Turner, "American Prisoners of War in Great Britain, 1777-1783," *MARINER'S MIRROR* 45 (July 1959):201. Turner feels that most mistakes were rectified, but not all. There was considerable confusion when Americans escaped from the local jail and were caught. The magistrates did not know whether to send them back or transfer them on to For on or Mill. Escape was one means to



bring to the attention of the authorities that a "mistake" had been made and seemed to bring better results than petitions. Turner sees the attitude of British authorities as being characterized by "tolerance and good sense," whereas her examples show corruption and confusion on the local level and an administration pressured into humanitarian proclamations as opposed to actions based upon principle. There seems to be little evidence of concern that policies were implemented at the local level and concerned local magistrates were revealing their confusion throughout the war, (p. 200).

(8) Both Forton and Mill had buildings dating back to Queen Anne's reign, serving as hospitals for prisoners of war in earlier wars. Christopher Lloyd and Jack L. S. Coulter, *MEDICINE AND THE NAVY 1200-1900*, 4 vols., (Edinburgh: E. & S. Livingstone, 1961), 3:108. Forton is also referred to as Forten, Fortune, and Faunton; see Isaac J. Greenwood, *CAPTAIN JOHN MANLEY SECOND IN RANK IN THE UNITED STATES NAVY 1776-1783* (Boston: C. E. Goodspeed & Co., 1915), p. 119. For detailed descriptions of these prisons see Chapter VI. The major prison in Ireland was Kinsale, located not far from Brandon, near Cork; see Ernest J. Moyne, "The Reverend William Hazlitt: A Friend of Liberty in Ireland During the American Revolution," *WILLIAM AND MARY QUARTERLY* 21 (April 1964):288-289. The regional depot-prisons were located in Liverpool, Deal, Weymouth, and a prison ship at Chatham. See 98/11/218, 305; 98/13/96, 509-510; 98/14/240, 301, and Turner, "American Prisoners," p. 201. Turner mentions other prisons located in Edinburgh, Shrewsbury, Bristol, and Pembroke, (p. 201). For a discussion of the American captives' status as both traitors and prisoners of war, see Marion and Jack Kaminkow, *MARINERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION*, (Baltimore, Maryland: Magna Charta Book Co., 1967), p. xii.

(9) Turner, "American Prisoners," pp. 201-202. The keeper received a salary of 150 pounds annually, his clerk 50, three turnkeys 40 each, a steward 25, cook 20, and a surgeon and labourer were paid by the day. Other turnkeys were added when the load of European prisoners crowded the prisons, (see N.M.M./Adm/M/404, 19 April 1777). The tap-room for the sale of alcohol was outlawed in 1751 (24 George II, c. 40, secs. 13-16) but the practice never was eliminated. For the history of the prison reform movement and the series of laws passed to relieve the plight of prisoners in British jails, see Richard S. E. Hinde, *THE BRITISH PENAL SYSTEM, 1773-1950*, (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1951), pp. 14, 17-20.

(10) John K. Alexander, "Forton Prison During the American Revolution: A Case Study of British Prisoner of War Policy and the American Prisoner Response to that Policy," ESSEX INSTITUTE HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS 103 (October 1967):381; Timothy Connor, "A Yankee Privateersman in Prison in England 1777-1779," William R. Cutter, ed., NEW ENGLAND HISTORICAL & GENEALOGICAL REGISTER, pp. 70, 168, 281, 31:285; 98/11/96, 140. Turner, "American Prisoners," p. 204. The height of the wall at Forton was increased and additional lights were provided for the sentries. Kaminkow, MARINERS, p. xv. The Mill prison walls were raised five feet and sixteen lights were placed around them, September 24, 1777, Samuel Cutler, "Prison Ships, and the 'Old Mill Prison,' Plymouth, England, 1777," NEW ENGLAND HISTORICAL & GENEALOGICAL REGISTER 32 (1876):395. Cutler detailed the security arrangements as 12 lamps, 40 men on guard and 13 sentries, (p. 188).

(11) Turner, "American Prisoners," p. 204. Turner finds that the decently salaried turnkeys participated in this double dealing for bribes and rewards. Likewise, while stating the stingy attitude of authorities toward prison guards, does not see this carried over to treatment of the prisoners. Turner does not entertain the possibility that this resentment toward the authorities could be taken out on the prisoners, nor does she attempt to reconcile the "great advance" reforms with the level of corruption she details.

(12) Connor, 31:285. The approach of American privateers or fear of the French fleet making an attempt to release the prisoners (or the prisoners making a mass escape to coincide with the approach of either) brought out more guards.

(13) Robert W. Neeser, ed., LETTERS AND PAPERS RELATING TO THE CRUISES OF GUSTAVUS CONYNGHAM -- A CAPTAIN OF THE CONTINENTAL NAVY 1777-1779, (London, 1915; reprint ed., Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1970), pp. 171-172. Conyngham was confined at Mill in August, 1779, and he remarked upon his change of fortune on August 6, 1779.

(14) Moynes, "Reverend Hazlitt," p. 288, see p. 296 for examples of military harassment of Irish citizens.

(15) Turner, "American Prisoners," p. 202 n. 4. Turner concludes that this order to investigate resulted in no deaths of prisoners closely confined (in the "hold" or "black hole"). This lack of deaths must be partially

credited to prisoner policy of sharing rations with those on half allowance in the black hole. The threat of an investigation did not seem to affect the policy of no visits of the doctor to those prisoners in close confinement. See Connor, p. 72, for the inquiry procedure following the deaths of prisoners in hospital. The Admiralty also may have backed into their policy of investigation. They were aware of English sympathy for the Americans and the existence of a Committee for American Prisoners "which took up individual cases." Turner, "American Prisoners," p. 202, and N.M.M./Adm/M/404, 23 November 1780.

(16) John Howard, *THE STATE OF THE PRISONS IN ENGLAND AND WALES, WITH PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS, AND AN ACCOUNT OF SOME FOREIGN PRISONS AND HOSPITALS*, 4th ed., (London: J. Johnson, C. Dilly, & T. Cadell, 1792), p. 185, gives the total of 1296 Americans as well as the totals for European prisoners of war. Howard also has the dates for the first arrival and 30 July 1782 figure, (p. 194). William B. Clark, "In Defense of Thomas Digges," *PENNSYLVANIA MAGAZINE OF HISTORY & BIOGRAPHY* 77 (October 1953):399, notes 289 on 28 December 1777; John K. Alexander, ed., "Jonathan Carpenter and the American Revolution: The Journal of an American Naval Prisoner of War and Vermont Indian Fighter," *VERMONT HISTORY* 36 (Spring 1968):82, has "upwards of 300" on 12 January 1779, Howard (p. 185) lists 298 on February 3, 1779, while Herbert's list, in Clara Breed, "Extracts from the Journal of George Herbert," *DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION MAGAZINE* 58 (October 1924):629, has 364 on 7 February 1779; Clark, "Digges," p. 404, finds 190 in Mill on 8 October 1779; and a list given to Henry Laurens, in John Green, "American prisoners in Mill prison at Plymouth, in 1782; Captain John Green's letter," *SOUTH CAROLINA HISTORICAL MAGAZINE* 10 (April 1909):116, totals 590 on 19 February 1782. Howard notes the seven still there on 30 July 1782, (p. 194). For Forton, Howard, p. 187, has the grand total and those remaining in November 1782; Clark, "Digges," p. 389 n. 45, gives 119 for 29 December 1777; Alexander, "Carpenter," p. 82, has 255 on 19 February 1779; Howard finds 251 in Forton on 2 March 1779 (p. 194); and Clark, "Digges," p. 404, numbers 135 in prison on 8 October 1779. For a discussion of the numbers confined throughout the war, see Alexander, "Forton," p. 369, although his estimates are higher than the numbers given by the first hand accounts. Howard also visited the confined prisoners at Pembroke (Old House) in Wales, finding 37 Americans on 5 June 1779.

(17) Henriques, "Prison Discipline," p. 63, "the demand for hygiene and ventilation arose from the growing consciousness, fostered by the Miasmatic theory of infection, that dirt produced smells which produced disease." Puritanism was "affronted by the idleness, corruption, drunkenness and profane jollity in the prisons." For the role of John Howard and his contemporaries, see Hinde, PENAL SYSTEM, pp. 27-39. For the influence of the Friends, see R. Hingston Fox, DR. JOHN FOTHERGILL & HIS FRIENDS: CHAPTERS IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY LIFE, (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1919), p. 225. David Hartley and the Reverend Thomas Wren are covered in Chapter VI. The erection of a hospital to house one eighth of the prison population was called for in 1777. Alexander, "Forton," p. 370, see 98/11/88, 94, 135-137.

(18) Alexander, "Carpenter," p. 82. Alexander computes this to be a 2.65 per cent death rate and notes that Howard counted 69 deaths from a total wartime population of 1200 in Forton, (p. 82 n. 24). This works out to five and three quarter per cent. Connor and Foot drew the same conclusion as Carpenter, (Connor, pp. 36-39, and Foot, PASSIM). Connor had counted eleven deaths in his time at Forton and mentioned that none of them had been officers. This should be an important consideration, but the relative rates, officer and common seaman, can not be calculated exactly. For the "two worlds of imprisonment" consideration, see Chapter VI. Alexander deals with death rates in note 80, page 380, Alexander, "Forton," comparing the American death rate to that of the lower rates for French and Spanish. He claims that the American death rate was higher because the Europeans were not prisoners for long periods of time. He attributes the higher death rate for Americans in the years after 1777-1779 (5.75 overall versus 2.65) to the epidemics that hit England between 1780 and 1785. While the epidemic theory may explain the higher later rate for Americans, it does not explain why Americans were more susceptible than the French and Spanish during those years. Also, the journals do not attribute the deaths to epidemics, nor do they show them in bunches (as would happen when a scourge hit the region of the prison.) See Charles Creighton, ET AL., A HISTORY OF EPIDEMICS IN BRITAIN (2d ed., 2 vols.; New York, 1965), 2:363, "The influenza of 1782 was a very definite incident of a few weeks." The table of London weekly mortalities shows a jump in the second week of June from 385 deaths to 560, the next two weeks had 473 and 434 while early July showed a drop back to 296. The epidemic hit Portsmouth in the middle of May, (2:364). It should be noted that the death rate more than

doubled at a time when the subscription for American prisoners ran out (see Chapter VI). Alexander does not deal at all with the 3.5 per cent death rate at Mill given by Howard, (p. 185), and noted by Applegate, p. 312. Nor does he consider the higher death rate at Kinsale. Hazlitt states that 60 out of 260 died before April, 1782. It is difficult to find accurate statistics on Kinsale. British documents mention that at one time it held 319 prisoners, making it comparable in size to Forton and Mill. Hazlitt's recollections, however, indicate that it must have been much smaller for most of the war. The sixty deaths, if accurate, make its death rate considerably higher than Forton and Mill, given the likelihood that it held fewer prisoners. See Moyne, "Reverend Hazlitt," p. 290; 98/13/507, and John K. Alexander, "American Privateersmen in the Mill Prison during 1777-1782": an Evaluation," ESSEX INSTITUTE HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS 102 (October 1966):320.

(19) Alexander, "Carpenter," p. 79 n. 13. See Lloyd and Coulter, MEDICINE AND THE NAVY, 3:195, for the history of Haslar and Royal hospital at Plymouth.

(20) Alexander, "Carpenter," p. 79. Carpenter's stay in hospital lasted until 4 June 1778 when he was returned to the guardship. Part of the health problem was the status of the naval surgeon. He had to act as physician, surgeon, and apothecary while having only craftsman status. "Since the conditions under which such men served were so bad, one can hardly blame the surgeon at Forton prison, for example, for resigning his position in 1797 on the grounds that his position was 'neither profitable, comfortable, nor respectable,'" (see Lloyd and Coulter, MEDICINE AND THE NAVY, 3:10).

(21) Alexander, "Forton," p. 381. See 98/11/88, 94, 135-7, 150-1 and 98/14/215-6, and Fanning, pp. 9, 16.

(22) Carpenter, pp. 49-50, 98/11/118.

(23) Alexander, "Carpenter," p. 82, there were approximately 255 American prisoners at Forton at the time, making the number inoculated slightly more than ten per cent.

(24) Howard L. Applegate, "American Privateersmen in the Mill Prison During 1777-1782," ESSEX INSTITUTE HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS 97 (October 1961):311; for other interaction between prisoners and their physicians at Mill, see Barney, p. 87; Haskins, pp. 289, 297-299, 302, 306-307, 425, 431, 435; Herbert, 57, 59, 123, 126-127, 166, 168, 171, 182, 186, 203, 226-227, 232; Russell, 132-134, 137, 160-161, and Widger, 39-48, 215, 315, 326, 339-346.

(25) Alexander, "Forton," p. 380, Howard found the hospital wards "were not clean" on his visit in 1782, (p. 187). In February, 1779, Howard found the Mill prison hospital dirty and offensive, (p. 184). Only the month before his visit had the coal been supplied for heat, p. 312; Sherburne, p. 90. See also Thompson, p. 239, Carpenter, pp. 51.

(26) Applegate, "American Privateersmen," p. 311, Widger, pp. 39-40, 47; Russell, pp. 144, 147; Barney, p. 87.

(27) Alexander, "Forton," p. 384; ANNUAL REGISTER FOR 1778 (London, 1779), p. 78, and Charles I. Bushnell, ed., "Narrative of John Blatchford," in CRUMBS FOR ANTIQUARIANS, 2 vols., (New York: Privately printed, 1866), 2:22.

(28) Alexander, "Forton," p. 384, and Connor, pp. 36-39. The Admiralty figures give the names listed on pardons, which are not the number that finally enlisted. Some prisoners were exchanged before their pardon arrived, some changed their mind, some escaped. To encourage fellow prisoners to change any ideas of joining the British, prisoners organized groups for the purpose of discouraging such intentions through discussion or, if need be, intimidation. Thus, the Admiralty figures for entry average about thirty per cent greater than the number that did join. See Alexander, "Forton," p. 384 n. 103, and Ad/M/404-405, PASSIM.

## CHAPTER VI

## PRISONER EXPERIENCE IN BRITAIN

The first American prisoners of war to be brought to England arrived before Forton or Mill were ready to receive them and they were therefore kept aboard ships in Plymouth harbour. Charles Herbert and Samuel Cutler, both of the crew of the privateer DALTON, have left records of their treatment upon arrival in England. The crew of the DALTON, captured 24 December, 1776, was carried to Plymouth, England. The DALTON's sailors arrived January 13, 1777, and waited on board a prison ship until June 5, 1777, when they were sent to Mill prison. Through the winter of 1776 they and their fellow prisoners suffered from the cold and damp weather. There was no relief from the itch, smallpox and other diseases that plagued them in their close confinement. Many were sent ashore to hospital. It was with relief that they greeted the opening of Mill prison and left their cramped guardship behind. Timothy Connor of the RISING STATES underwent the same experience of close confinement on a guardship in Portsmouth harbour. He fell ill and spent two weeks recovering ashore before returning to the ship to await the opening of Forton. (1)

Pressures to enlist began from the time of capture and continued throughout imprisonment. Shortly after Nathaniel Fanning's capture he was taken aboard the ANDROMEDA, which happened to be carrying General Howe. Fanning writes that the General "asked" them to enlist. When the offer was declined, the following "search" robbed them of their baggage and stripped them of their clothes. (2) Captain Conyngham described the efforts of the British to recruit his crew. But "after many threatenings to get them to enter the Major part was sent on board the prison ship with the officers." Treatment of prisoners on the vessel that captured them was generally very harsh. For security reasons the prisoners had to be kept confined, which usually meant in the hold or cable tier. The captain of the capturing vessel usually allowed the officers of the captured ship the "liberty of his Quarter deck" but the crew remained below. In Conyngham's case, all were thrown into the hold at first, only Conyngham being allowed to walk the deck the first night. The next day the other officers were permitted the liberty of the lower decks. The stifling heat and cramped quarters, usually with "cables for a pillow," had their toll on the crew. Some enlisted. (3)

Captain Manley dined at the captain's table the night of his capture. On his way to Mill prison, the vessel stopped off at Newfoundland where he was "severely censured"



for having broken his parole at Bridgetown in the Barbadoes "and was directed to return to the SURPRISE [the capturing ship] and there to be confined until his arrival in England." (4) The experience of Eli Bickford was quite different. An ordinary member of the crew, he received no special treatment. On the contrary, he was treated with "insults and severity...[by] the officers of the vessel" and contracted a case of smallpox as well. Likewise the crew of a Massachusetts privateer carried into Halifax received "bribes & threats" to enter British service. It came to the attention of the Maryland Council, in September, 1782, that a man named Collins from their state was "carried into New York, [and] was compelled, in a fraudulent Manner, into the Service of the Enemy." (5)

The lengthy time spent confined on the vessel delivering them to prison in England posed special hardships for the prisoners who refused to enlist with the British. It is impossible to say what percentage refused and endured. The accounts that do mention part of the crew joining the British are vague and tend to be understanding of the suffering that caused the decision. Many note that the crew was plundered of decent clothes and valuables before going into the hold. Speculations on their fate were generally encouraged by the British who told them they were being taken to England to hang. (6)

The experience was not always harsh. In one instance, the prisoners were confined above the food storage area. They were successful in prying up a floorboard and sending down a small fellow prisoner who kept them well fed and intoxicated until their arrival in England. Others mention sympathetic British seamen coming to their aid when the opportunity afforded itself. (7)

Israel Potter plotted to take over the ship on which he was being transported to England. When the plot was betrayed, he was put in irons for the remainder of the voyage. (8) Potter notes that many came down with smallpox and were sent ashore from the guard ship to hospital, where half did not recover. (9) After about one month on the guard ship, Potter was ordered to assist in rowing a lieutenant ashore. He escaped when the crew went to an alehouse for a beer. (10) Silas Talbot describes being confined in the hold, "crowded with provisions," for the seven week journey across the Atlantic. (11)

British hailed the "healthy, athletic-looking" seamen and accused them of being Englishmen. "About a third of our

After his capture, Ebenezer Fox was taken to New York, where the British ships off Sandy Hook examined the prisoners of war. Claiming to look for Englishmen, the

ship's crew were taken on board of their vessels, to serve in the capacity of sailors, without regarding their remonstrances." (12) The normal place of confinement for the captured crew was between decks, usually in a store room such as the cable tier. Christopher Hawkins was confined to the cable-tier.

Our situation in the cable tier was uncomfortable almost beyond endurance--we were so crowded that we could not either sit or lie down. I was among them, but being small, I crawled back on to the cable very near the bulk-head where a man of common size could not stow himself--here I stretched out--the following night was one of extreme misery for my fellow prisoners, especially to the unfortunate men who had been in this floating hell for two or three weeks. (13)

This misery did not prevent the prisoners from taunting their captors with patriotic songs all night.

The crew of a captured Providence privateersman bellowed pro-colonial songs at the cable tier where they were confined. When their guards told them to be still, they sung all the louder and swore at their tormentors to 'fire and be damned.' (14)

The experience on the guardships in Plymouth or Portsmouth harbour was difficult for the prisoners to endure. Having finished the Atlantic crossing, they had to wait for the commissioners to arrive for the examination and processing. Jonathan Carpenter came into Portsmouth harbour and was shifted from guard ship to guard ship. He

interpreted the confinement and shifting around as an attempt to make him "enter on board a Kings ship." (15) The guard ship experience depended upon how many prisoners there were and the captain's attitude toward them. Over one hundred of the crew of the DALTON were put on the BELLE ISLE when they arrived in Plymouth harbour. The crew of the CHARMING SALLY joined them two weeks later on January 30, 1777, and all were moved to the TORBAY on February 7, 1777. They were so crowded on the TORBAY that it was impossible for all of them to lie down at one time and many fell ill. One week later, they were transferred to the BUFORD, whose captain did all he could to relieve their suffering. (16) Carpenter "rejoiced" at the opportunity to leave the guard ship. Caleb Foot described his leaving the guard ship for the march to Forton as "like coming out of Hell and going into Paradise." (17)

One could not enter "paradise" without first undergoing a strict examination as part of the commitment procedure. Conyngham, for example, was not permitted into Mill "without [first] being taken before a Justice & Committed by him." (18) The purpose of the examination was to determine the nature of the offense committed against the Crown. Some passengers, for example, were released. It was important for the British to discover whether or not the captive was

in fact an American. Those British captives who failed in their attempt to pass as colonists were generally taken off to be pressed into the Royal Navy. Those Americans who could not convince the civil magistrates that they were indeed Americans met the same fate. Some deserters were brought to trial for treason. (19) The examination procedure was quite thorough. A detailed list of questions was put to the captive, his answers written down, then the questions were some time afterward repeated and the answers compared. The judgment was then read to the examinee and he was either released or sentenced to confinement in prison to await trial for treason.

There was some confusion in the minds of the prisoners about the examination. Some thought they had been tried and convicted, but what they received was a warrant listing the charge of treason and any others the commissioners felt they had committed. (20) A calculated aspect of the interrogation was to intimidate the prisoner in effort to have him repent. Fanning, however, remembered the examination as reassuring. (21) John Kilby thought he was being tried after his two month stay on the guard ship PRINCESS AMELIA. He was "carried up to Hazel Hospital for trial and condemnation (a mock trial to be sure)," he was condemned for piracy and high treason, then "marched up to Fortune's Jail...and locked up...in the Cold Sweating walls" sometime in mid-February, 1778. (22)

The examined prisoners were collected and marched off to prison accompanied by guards. What they found when they arrived at the prison was quite different from their cramped guard ship. John Claypoole described the setting of Mill prison:

This Prison is situated about half a mile from the town of Plymouth on the side of a Hill so that we can see a good distance to sea[.] the prison yard is about 70 or 80 yards square which serves us to walk in and many a Solitary hour do we saunter away in it. (23)

Andrew Sherburne gives a full description of Mill, noting that formerly there were wind mills on the hill, giving it the name "Mill Hill." There were three buildings, one dating back to Queen Anne's reign.

The largest building was a hundred feet long and about twenty feet wide; situated at the north end of the yard. It was two stories high, built with stone and lime, having no windows on the north, front. There was a space of about twenty feet between this building and the commissary's office, which stood to the west, but had no windows in the east end. A wall on the north as high as the eaves of the prison, extended from the prison to the office; a similar wall on the south, joined the two buildings. In this wall was a gate leading into the main yard.

South of the small yard in front of the commissary's office was the cook room, "in the ground floor...[of] the north end of one of the other buildings, which stood in a line, making the west side of the yard. A space between these prisons answered as a yard for both. On south of our common yard was a stone wall, fourteen feet high, with broken glass bottles set in lime mortar on the top, to prevent climbing over. There was a similar wall on the east; altogether inclosing something like half an acre. (24)

Cutler's description of Mill mentions that the Americans were committed to the largest of four prisons, "132 feet by 23." Claypoole estimated the yard to be seventy to eighty yards square. (25)

Cutler arrived June 3, 1777. At this time all of the space in the prison was not being utilized, all of the prisoners fitting into the larger of the buildings. There was as yet no separation, all being placed together "without any distinction, officers people and negroes all in the same room." "Four prisons" means four compartmentalized areas in the two buildings. Haskins was the first to enter Mill prison, May 27, 1777, describing it a "shocking place" and a week later, "this wretched purgatory." (26)

The history of Forton prison began with the erection of a naval hospital by a private contractor named Nathaniel Jackson. As the government built its own hospitals, the site was converted and expanded (about 1740) into a place for prisoners of war. (27)

By the time Fanning was in Forton (July, 1778), the prisoners were separated by rank. The officers occupied the building to the north of the one for the common prisoners. This made imprisonment somewhat more comfortable for the officers than the common seamen. Their building had more

space per person, a fireplace and night tub. Fanning considered it a "convenient place for prisoners of war, as there is a spacious lot adjoining the prisons containing about three quarters of an acre of level ground, in the centre of which stands a large shed or building, open on all sides to admit the free circulation of air; under which were seats for our accomodation when the weather was hot and sultry." Segregation was not a policy based on the convenience and comfort of the officers, rather an attempt to isolate them from influencing their crews, (28) who would be incapable of holding out against British pressures to enlist. The buildings at Forton were spacious. The CSHS considered them sufficient to contain 2158 men "with sufficient airing ground for that number." (29) While towns were a half mile or more away, Forton was not isolated from neighboring buildings. One source mentions houses within forty feet of his prison house. (30)

Organization inside Forton and Mill was minimal. The prison authorities posted a list of regulations in the yard. (31) The majority of these regulations dealt with punishments for abuses by the prisoners. Failing to keep good order, failing to respond to a muster call, damaging the prison, attempting to escape, fighting with other prisoners, failing to take a turn at cleaning the prison,



and destroying clothing or bedding were all offenses punishable by close confinement or short rations-(32)

Close confinement meant keeping the prisoner locked up twenty-four hours a day in a special room that the officials called the hold, but which prisoners called the "black hole." It was not below ground, but a small stockade in a remote part of the prison grounds. More than one prisoner at a time would be confined in the black hole, so it was not necessarily an isolation cell. And security was no more strict there than elsewhere as numerous escapes were attempted from its confines. Life was not pleasant in such close confinement: there was no bedding, it was hot and stuffy in the summer, cold in the winter and very crowded after mass escapes brought in recaptured prisoners. (33)

Short rations generally meant half allowance, varying in quality depending upon the amount that the prisoners were receiving as full allowance. The prison accounts vary as to the amount of half rations, listing everything from "bread and water" to half the full food ration given in the victualling table. Cutler mentions that there was a separate prison for those on half allowance, perhaps the hospital rooms, for the 22 on half allowance were moved on September 6, 1777, to make room for 16 with the itch. (34)

There were occasional instances of corporal punishment. One prisoner received twelve lashes for stealing a set of "silver knee-buckles." (35) Impressment into the Royal Navy was irregularly used as a punishment. Escapees were sometimes returned, other times not. It was common knowledge among the prisoners that the gang was to be feared. When Edward Manning was captured by the press gang, Connor wrote, "I do not expect to see him again, as they are in great want of men." Manning, luckier than some, was returned to prison. (36) Connor refers to Edward Manning as "Mr. Manning." This is his typical deference toward officers. In other cases escaped prisoners returned by the press gang appear to be officers as well. Given the treatment of officer prisoners on the capturing vessels, their rank may be the crucial factor in their return to prison from the hands of the press. (37)

The daily routine of the prisoners was usually left to them. On days with decent weather, they were given the liberty of the yard. The time limits for this differ with the various accounts, but from approximately half an hour after sunrise to half an hour before sunset the prisoners had the use of the yard. This privilege would be taken away after a particularly large escape took place or a tunnel was discovered. (38)

There was normally a daily market by the front gate of the prison from nine to two. This market supplied the captives with most of their necessities. Thompson gives the rules of the market:

The prisoners will be indulged between the hours of Nine and Two O'clock in the day time, to purchase at an open Market at the Gate, Such Articles of fruit, or other, Refreshment as they may Chuse, or any Articles of Cloathing they May be able to purchase with redy Money, or they May Inform thr Keeper and Agent of Such Arti: of Cloathing as they May Stand in need of, and have Money to pay for, and he will take Measures for their being Supplid with them. (39)

To earn the money to spend at the market, prisoners busied themselves in various activities. They made boxes, plaited straw for baskets, whittled bone into dice and other handicrafts, made ladles, model ships and other objects that they thought the people at market would purchase. Cutler sold his shoe buckles for seven shillings and six pence and his ladles for one shilling each. They also pulled the stuffing from their blankets to sell to the villagers who made mittens. In short, they were very enterprising in their efforts to earn money to make their life in prison more bearable. (40)

Handicrafts, however, were far from the only thing on their daily routine. Writing letters and diaries was a common, although surreptitious, activity. Some prisoners conducted classes in mathematics, navigation, and French, as

well as reading and writing. besides reading and writing. In the creative vein, the sailors sang and played music, composed new songs and poetry. All of this went on beside the chores of cooking, cleaning and washing. Following the news and speculating on the course of the war and possibilities of exchange were also time killers, (41) and the subject of many of the diary entries. There seemed to be little trouble smuggling in newspapers and letters. Some letters were inspected by the prison officials, but outside contacts acted as intermediaries in relaying information uncensored on a regular basis. The prisoners were even able to hear from former inmates who successfully escaped and wrote them from France. (42)

The flow of information did not stem the rampant speculation and rapid flow of rumors. The newspapers were notorious for running false information throughout the war. When an exchange seemed imminent, the best source of information seemed to be the prisoners in the other prison. There was some interchange of letters between prisoners in Mill and Forton. Carpenter mentions receiving word from Mill about the arrival of a cartel. He then saw the same news in the local newspaper, but he was still not sure if it were true. (43) The caution with which Carpenter and other prisoners met the news of the arrival of the

cartel is understandable in the light of the news about exchange over the previous year. From early July, 1778, there were rumors of a possible exchange through France. On December 10, 1778, Carpenter writes, "They tell us we shall soon be exchanged but I sopose they Lie as they used to do." (44) Although the misinformation of the prison officials and recruiting officers did little for the morale of the prisoners, not all the information they received was cause for dejection. Herbert heard of Burgoyne's capture and Howe's request for reinforcements, while Widger mentions receiving the news of Cornwallis' defeat. Some story in the local paper was so ludicrous that Herbert and his fellow captives were amused rather than depressed. (45)

Food was a preoccupying concern of the prisoners. The amount to be distributed to them was at first based on rations for rebels in 1745. This was modified to the diet supplied during the last war with the French. The daily ration included a quart of beer, a pound of bread, three-quarters of a pound of beef (except Saturday when six ounces of cheese were substituted) four ounces of butter, and one-half pint of peas every other day. Cutler complained that the beef, "when boiled, weighs 6 oz." (46) This ration gave less bread to the Americans than the French, Spanish, and Dutch, causing complaints throughout

the war. The prisoners at Mill wrote a petition in June, 1781, that produced a debate in Parliament. The bread allowance, however, remained the same. (47)

The list of regulations ordered the prisoners to be served in messes. These generally held six members. The regulations sought to punish the mess that tried to cover an escape and receive an extra share of food by putting it on half allowance for forty days from the time of discovery. The regulations also sought to prevent "groundless clamors" by permitting two prisoners, chosen by the prisoners, "to attend every day at the Receipt and weighing, and to Continue in the Cook Room during the Dressing and issuing of the provisions to See that they are good in quality, and they provided according to the Scheme of diet." (48) This measure not only failed to stem complaints but it also did not assure the prisoners of their full allowance of food. Fanning's charges concerning the food are so over dramatic that they are hard to believe, but all of the prisoner diaries list complaints about the food. Connor described the prisoners' reactions to the "bad beef" when they were served it a second consecutive day. They threw it in the cook's window. They then received "cheese instead of stinking meat." (49) Howard found the bread short-weighted on his visit in 1782. Without comparative weights, the

prisoners could not check for such shorting in their rations. When a prisoner complained of the beef and bread being light in weight, he was taken to the black hole. (50)

The problem of corrupt agents and contractors affected the prisoners' diet more than the regulations for prisoner checking and complaint could regulate. According to a letter to the Admiralty, signed by "Humanitas", corrupt agents were influential in the contract system for feeding prisoners of war. It is not unreasonable to assume that the corruption followed the pattern set in the victualling service for the Royal Navy. As the Annual Register for 1778 pointed out, the job of agent or contractor attracted men of lowly character and were seen as chances for financial gain. (51)

The problem of clothing also caused problems for the prisoner of war. The British were supposed to supply them with clothing. It was recognised that, in many cases, the prisoners had been stripped of their good clothing by seamen on the capturing vessel. But the gap between policy set forth by the Admiralty and practice at the prison was never wider than on the supply of clothing. Admiralty called for monthly inspection and supply of needed clothing, but the prisoner accounts show few inspections and only one case of

clothing being supplied. Throughout the war, the common seamen suffered from being poorly clothed, and poorly bedded. (52)

The bedding should have been hammocks, furnished with a "paillasse and bolster, stuffed with straw, changed from time to time, and a coverlid." The distances between hammocks were regulated to prevent crowding, and a two foot space set as the proper distance between hammocks. In fair weather, the prisoners were required to go into the yard so that the rooms could be aired and cleared. In fact, the bedding was somewhat different. Hazlitt's description of the bedding at Kinsale mentions "a nasty piece of tow-cloth, about three feet and a half long, stuffed with a handful of straw, and almost alive with vermin." Howard's check of the mattresses found the straw turned to dust. (53)

The condition of the prisoners depended in large measure on how well they could support themselves and receive outside aid. The British supplied minimal food and clothing but administered the prisons so loosely that the prisoners generally were able to manage for themselves. They set out a charity box for contributions from those who came to look at them. The funds from this box were divided evenly each week. Individual prisoners had personal



acquaintances visit them. These visitors were able to slip some money to their friend in prison. Mail with money enclosed would also reach its intended destination, especially when routed through a friendly intermediary in Plymouth or Portsmouth. An occasional visitor from the colonies or someone with relatives there would contribute aid to those prisoners from that colony or town. In these ways, a steady but small stream of contributions found its way to the prisoners. (54) The charity box at Mill was put out June 13, 1777, and the first distribution of funds ten days later gave one penny to each. Even the officer of the guard gave a shilling to Cutler and four of his friends. (55)

At Kinsale prison, the prisoners had at least two friends who visited them regularly. The Reverend William Hazlitt made many trips to the prison "to see and assist the poor prisoners." A friend of the minister, Reuben Harvey, was a Quaker merchant in Cork who also helped "relieve the distresses of the American prisoners of war in Ireland." (56) At Forton the Reverend Thomas Wren visited the prisoners regularly. Along with a Mr. Duckett, Wren "brought the men the latest news, obtained clothing for the needy, and helped escapees get to France." The Reverend Robert Heath did likewise for Americans confined in Mill prison. (57) Later in the war, David Hartley, the Whig pamphleteer and member of

Parliament, visited Forton to tell the prisoners of the progress in negotiations for an exchange. (58) Another visitor and source of aid to the prisoners was Henry Laurens. He had been captured on his way to Europe, was confined in the Tower of London from October, 1780, to November, 1781, when he was exchanged. His own imprisonment certainly made him sympathetic to the plight of his fellow Americans, as evidenced by his letter to Congress:

After my enlargement I further urged that business [the exchange of American prisoners] to its completion, visited those prisoners at a considerable expense to myself, administered to some of them relief from my own impoverished pocket, and obtained much greater for them from other persons. (59)

The activities of Eli Bickford, in prison for four and a half years, illustrate the desperate ingenuity that made the American prisoners a difficult group to administer. Using part of a door hinge as a scraper, he tunneled out of the prison and up into "an adjoining house." He concealed the dirt in the hammocks as he dug. He was foiled, however, in succeeding in his escape but made a deal with the occupant of the house to split the reward for returning him to prison. At the time the reward was a healthy five pounds. Bickford and others used this route to advantage when they needed money. (60) The reward had been raised because of the frequency of American escapes and the

inability of the guard to keep the prison secure. A strong force of local farmers came out with their dogs to hunt down the escaping prisoners at the sound of drumbeats from the prison. They turned out to be subject to collusion and deals with the guards and prisoners and the reward was reduced. (61)

At the same time that the prisoners were devising ways of their own to make life in prison bearable and effect ways to make their escapes successful, those in England sympathetic to their plight opened subscription books throughout the country. A subscription was started around Christmas, 1777, raising over 3,815 pounds for the prisoners' relief. (62) On December 25, 1777, Connor made the following observation in his journal:

Since the defeat of Burgoyne, things wear another face... They begin to use us better. There are subscription books opened in many parts of England for our relief as poor prisoners. (63)

The Reverend Thomas Wren and Mr. Duckett administered the subscription money for the Forton prisoners. Carpenter kept detailed notes on the amount he received. His share totalled three pounds, two shillings and three pence for the period from February 19, 1778, to June 25, 1779. This averaged about one shilling and two pence per week. From mid-1779, the average was six pence per week. (64)

Connor entered the amount he received each week. Wren's first visit brought clothes that Wren had collected from donors and a distribution of subscription money--five shillings for each officer, two for each common seaman. On April 7, 1778, Connor notes that the officers received eight shillings, while he and the other seamen got two. In mid-June, Wren refused the weekly allowance to those who had no coats. By September, the officers' allowance was reduced to three shillings and, on October 27, 1778, the allowance dwindled to two shillings and six pence for officers and fifteen pence for common seamen. Connor mentions subscription money only twice more, one shilling each on November 3, and December 11, 1778. (65)

A contact of Benjamin Franklin in England reported to him in September, 1779, that the subscription had run very low. Later Connor remarked that "officers of the men of war are low. There were several factors mitigating against a successful renewal of the subscription. The capture and execution of Captain Andre as a spy in the colonies brought a reaction against any activity that hinted of treason. A Captain Thomas Hutchins was arrested on the charge of treasonable correspondence with Benjamin Franklin, throwing the community of American sympathizers into a state of fear and caution. The French alliance and resultant fears of invasion also had an effect on the sympathetic feelings in

the country. Exchanges had also taken place, making their condition of confinement a supposedly temporary hardship. (66) By the end of 1779 the situation concerning outside funds to aid the prisoners was causing concern. In a letter to Benjamin Franklin, Captain Conyngham expressed his fears:

I must acquaint your excellency that the poor unfortunate prisoners in Plymouth are in a most distressed situation. The donation, when I left that, had been at 6 d per week. I am afraid could they not be exchanged soon, will be obliged to enter in their service. They cannot live on the Government allowance. (67)

A comparison of the conditions of those prisoners who did not receive the benefits of the subscription to those at Forton and Mill reveals its importance. Howard commented on the sad state of those confined at Pembroke when he visited in June, 1779. In an effort to explain the "bad conditions" he found, he noted that "these [men were] overlooked in subscription." Fanning summarized the importance of the subscription by stating that his situation was comfortable with the allowance, but without it things were "very miserable." (68)

The reduction of the subscription allowance coincided with a recruiting drive by the Royal Navy. Only ten days after Connor noted the reduction of the weekly sum to one

shilling the Navy got thirty prisoners to enlist. One month here this day a plenty, to get as many men as possible to enter with them." Seventeen volunteered. On another occasion Connor was given the opportunity "to go to India for five years." Three Frenchmen and one American accepted the offer. (69) Although offers to enlist in the Royal Navy were most common, a prisoner deciding to join the British could request a personal preference. In the case of a prisoner wanting to join the Fourth Regiment of Foot, the wish was granted. Another was released from Forton in order to join the whaling fleet. (70)

The numbers who enlisted were few. Bureaucratic delays lessened the total. In order for the prisoner contemplating joining the British to enlist, he had to wait for a pardon. In the time it took for the pardon to arrive, the other prisoners may have convinced him to stay with them in prison or join them in an escape attempt. (71) The Admiralty recognized this problem and attempted to collect those who indicated an inclination to join by foregoing the delays. (72) Even this measure did not meet the other problem of the prisoner enlisting in order to enhance his chances of escape. (73)

American government officials in France were another important source of funds for American prisoners of war in England. First Arthur Lee and later Benjamin Franklin took a sympathetic interest in the plight of the prisoners across the channel. In December, 1777, Arthur Lee contacted and authorized a friend of the Lee family living in London, Thomas Digges, to spend fifty pounds to help the prisoners in Forton. A year later Franklin sent 56 pounds of tobacco to the Americans in Forton. Throughout the course of the war, however, the efforts of those in France were disorganized and insufficient. (74)

Benjamin Franklin first contacted David Hartley in October, 1777, in an effort to have him distribute money. Hartley, an American sympathizer and member of the opposition in Parliament, not only had too many other commitments but also did not think it wise for him to be the link between Franklin and the American prisoners concerning money. Soon afterwards the subscription campaign permitted Franklin to drop the search for a contact person in England. Franklin concentrated his efforts upon obtaining an exchange of prisoners and paying the bills of credit run up by Wren and others who aided escapees in reaching France. American government funding through Franklin remained in this dormant state as he repeatedly proved ineffectual in his efforts to

exchange prisoners. (75) Despite warnings that the subscription was running low and that prisoners may be forced to enlist with the British, Franklin did not authorize an allowance to be distributed at the prisons until June 25, 1780. The payment of six pence per man per week began July 18 at Forton and some time later at Mill. (76)

Although Franklin indicated that he wanted that amount tripled for the winter months, he balked at the estimated cost of 150 pounds per month. Widger refers to receiving six pence or one shilling, never more. (77) This amount was at or below the level from the subscription that Conyngham warned was so low that the prisoners were in a state of despair. Some confusion existed between the correspondents in London and Passy in the approaching fall of 1780. England received word of the hanging of Major John Andre in early October. In November John Trumbull was arrested as a spy, his papers confiscated. These papers implicated Thomas Digges in possibly treasonable activities. Digges wrote Franklin of these for a period of time. Franklin at this time had a bad case of gout and was not keeping abreast of his correspondence. When he finally got back to writing Digges, his poor London contact had resorted to charging his living expenses to Franklin's account,



claiming aid to escaping prisoners. The difficulty in unravelling this confusion may have prevented Franklin from paying closer attention to the needs of the American prisoners. (78)

A more likely cause for the low allowance to those in prison was Franklin's priority toward aiding officers and those escapees who came to see him personally in France. Franklin had Digges supply Captain Conyngham with clothes and forty pounds for expenses. Again, with Captain Manley, 25 out of a total 100 guineas available to Franklin's contact went to one officer. When Conyngham escaped he collected another 28 guineas from Digges. Dr. James Brehon, surgeon on the HORNET, received 20 pounds from Digges. While Franklin did not have direct control over the amounts handed out by his contacts in England, neither did he give them specific guidelines. Franklin also was a soft touch for those who visited him in Passy, time and again giving aid to those that sought it when he claimed he could not afford the extravagance. The aid to the captains resulted in privateers returning to action. The very men needed to work those ships, however, faced the problem of not having enough money to make a successful escape. (79)

Aside from funds from and contact with sympathizers who visited the prisons, the next most important determinant of prisoner morale was the contact with the prison officials and guards. These men were sometimes capable of kind gestures and friendly communication. They supplied the latest information about possible exchanges, did favours in return for bribes, and generally were so lax in the performance of their duties that the prisoners benefited. (80) Some guards were even too friendly. Herbert mentions two that ran off with five prisoners in an unsuccessful attempt to change their means of livelihood. (81) While there were possibilities of friendly contact between guards and the prisoners, the number of incidents of friction and hostility far outweigh them. Harassment and insults from the guard as well as thievery existed at both Forton and Mill. (82)

The guards did not provoke all the incidents. Fanning tells of harassing the guards by dancing above their guard room and rushing back into their hammocks before the awakened and angry guard could climb the stairs to catch them at it. Connor listed the incident of a drunken lieutenant striking the doctor and cook. (83) There was an occasional fight between a prisoner and a guard, but the hardest conduct for the prisoner to swallow was the

acceptance of a bribe and failure to fulfill on his end of the deal. Many potentially successful escapes were foiled by double-dealing guards. A typical incident involving the guard went as follows. A dispute arose with the baker. A scuffle followed, the guard being called into the yard to restore order. The prisoners were ordered into the building and missed the evening meal. On occasion the guards would be ordered to load and prime. Once a prisoner was stabbed with a bayonet in an argument with a guard. Another incident resulted in a prisoner's death. In March, 1779, a guard was harassing the prisoners hanging their shirts to dry on the fence by burning holes in their laundry with a red-hot poker. When the Americans went to save their shirts, the guard fired, killing one and wounding several others. This is the only recorded incident of prisoner-guard friction resulting in a prisoner's death. It was not, however, the only shooting incident. (84)

The guard was changed about every month. This was often enough to prevent either animosities or friendships from developing to the point of extreme difficulty for the authorities. Relations between the guards and captives was not the only worry for the keeper of the prisons. He had more than enough trouble just trying to make the militia do their job properly. James Anton, a guard for the Royal

Highlanders, considered his job "a light, and in some respects even an amusing duty." Describing how the sentries could not be seen from the guard-house, they worried little about detecting escaping prisoners, but

laid their firelocks against the sentry-boxes and amused themselves by playing at putting-stone, pitch-and-toss, and such like amusements, without fear of detection; for a cordial amity of feeling existed throughout the corps, so that as soon as the officer, sergeant, or corporal of the guard made his appearance, it was notified in an instant to the most remote corners, without his being aware of the communication, and our gambling amusements instantly ceased. (85)

The disposition of the keeper of the prison had more effect on the morale of the prisoners because of his powerful position. At Forton John Newsham, both keeper and agent, had a terrible personality. He had a low opinion of his wards and they described his personality and actions in bitter terms. He forced the Americans to give over their money to him and interfered with attempts by the prisoners to register complaints with the commissioners. (86)

At Mill the keeper was named Cowdray. Prisoners described him as a dishonest, vengeful drunkard and charged him in a letter of complaint to his superiors of robbing the prisoners of their money, stealing from the charity box, watering the beer and serving prisoner rations to his hogs.

Cutler's word for him was "tyrant." The prisoners sent a petition to a commissioner Bell "setting forth the very ill usage rec'd from the Keeper and turnkeys." (87)

Despite the poor image the keepers had with the prisoners and vice versa, the agent did occasionally do helpful things for the prisoners. Newsham did forward some of the prisoners' complaints. When he allowed Benjamin Franklin's letter to be read to the prisoners assembled in the yard, he received a reprimand from the Admiralty. The prisoners did not know whether the treatment they received was personal abuse by the agent or policy from the Admiralty. They could see the petty corruption and blamed everything on the local officials. As on the occasion of Franklin's letter, though, the local official was less strict than Admiralty policy desired. (88)

Leaving prison is by far the most often recorded subject in the prison diaries. While the prisoners hoped of exchange and their moods fluctuated with the flow of rumors, their actions centered on escape. The diaries mentioned attempted escapes by every conceivable means. Even before arriving at the prison, prisoners swam from the capturing vessel, attempted to take it over, or escaped from a work party detailed from the guard ship. One even made off

between sessions at his examination. (89) Once in prison the escapes varied from vaulting the wall, going through a hole in the wall, and once even breaking through the gate. No place was exempt from an escape attempt. The store room, the kitchen, the hospital and the black hole all were tried. There were even attempts from the outhouse. While most escapes were lone efforts or in pairs, several major tunneling schemes resulted in several mass escapes. (90)

Many unsuccessful attempts resulted in a stay in the black hole. The best way to insure a decent chance of success was to bribe a guard. It was helpful to have some money remaining to bribe those farmers and villagers who patrolled the area in search of a reward for returning runaways. More money was needed for passage across the channel. One account of a successful escape mentions the importance of the money received from "the good subscribers to the American" prisoners of war. The money was necessary to "bribe poor and mercenary people to secrete them [the escapees], and forward their escape." As Fanning put it, those who "had not money enough to bear their expenses as far as London" were taken and brought back to the black hole. (91)

Some aid could be found if the escapees reached the Reverend Wren or other friends in England. Three escaping prisoners from Kinsale were hidden among friends of William Hazlitt. Richard Coffin, a native of Massachusetts living in England, assisted Elisha Henman's escape by advancing him money and procuring black clothes so that he would pass for a minister. Successful escapees wrote back to their friends still imprisoned with the names of those to contact and estimates of the cost. Thompson even gave mileage figures between towns on his escape route and cautioned somewhat needlessly, "do not be too hasty in letting any one know that you are from Fortune prison." Cutler and a friend made their break from the "sick apartments," found their way to a friend's house in Plymouth, and paid their way across the channel. An itemized expense account for their journey came to 77 pounds total for both. Bills for aiding Conyngham and some other officers escape totaled over 51 pounds. (92)

The total number of escapes from Forton between June, 1777, and April, 1782, listed in the records of the Commissioners for Sick and Hurt Seamen, was 536. How many of these were recaptured or the same prisoner on several different attempts can not be determined. Connor's record totals 112 successful escapes in the time he spent at Forton. From a total of 415, this was more than a quarter of the inmates. Given that some were wounded or too sick to attempt an escape, the percentage goes even higher. (93)

When the few exchanges that did take place were halted by the unavailability of American-captured British prisoners in France, the word reached those prisoners in Forton. Numerous escapes resulted. The reason for the escapes seems obviously to be the pessimistic (but accurate) assessment by the prisoners that they would not be exchanged in the reasonably near future. It is this evaluation of their situation that led American prisoners to try to liberate themselves so often and with such success, not simply the lure of the five pound reward or the compulsion of an extraordinary patriotism. (94)

The five pound reward for returning American prisoners of war was the result of an Admiralty decree in July, 1777. Previously the amount had been ten shillings. The reward created an unpaid army of auxiliaries that did more to curb successful escapes than attempts to increase the guard, but the corruption that ensued caused more problems. The three-way sharing of the reward between prisoners, guards, and civilians became common enough to come to the attention of the office of the Admiralty itself. Amid complaints and demands to move the prisoners to another location, the Admiralty reduced the reward back to ten shillings after April 29, 1782. (95)



Good morale among the prisoners of war in England was difficult to maintain. Exchange was long in coming. Their status as prisoners of war was unclear. They faced the possibility of being hung as traitors and pirates. The American government was far away, retaliation for their mistreatment difficult to effect. Very much on their own, they were under continual pressure to join the Royal Navy to escape their condition. On the other hand, they had many supporters in England who came to their aid with a substantial subscription and played the role of watchdog for the prisoners' welfare. Inside the prison, however, the men were left to their own resources. Under these difficult circumstances, the men pulled together remarkably.

The prisoners maintained good morale over all despite their realistic appraisal of their imprisonment. On entering Forton, Carpenter found 175 Americans: "Some of them had been there a year and were in good heart but expected a long imprisonment &c." (96)

One of the ways that the prisoners raised their spirits was through singing. They sang about love, drinking and the sea. They created a spirit of humor and revelry. Their songs were escapist and patriotic, not mournful laments. Only two songs recorded by Connor from those sung

in Forton had even the slightest reference to any kind of prison experience. "The escape might be to dreams of romance; it might be an escape back to the sea or simply to the thought that the war might soon be over." (97) Over half of the songs were about romance. Nine of these "portray sailors as leading figures and recount their teary leave takings or joyful returns." Others had themes of sexual conquest and cuckoldry. Some songs built up the sailor's character as being bolder than the landsman or used to rugged experiences. (98) The other main purpose of the songs was patriotic. Songs were used as a counter-demonstration to the salute to the King's birthday. One song revealed the mercantilist base to their patriotism: "the wars will be over soon which was for to be / And we will have free trading in North America." (99) Naturally the prisoners created some verse to celebrate their release. (100)

Songs were not the only form of morale-boosting entertainment created by the prisoners. They celebrated birthdays. But the major celebration came on the fourth of July. Herbert's journal at Mill prison, 1778, reads:

July 3, 1778: As it is two years tomorrow since the Declaration of Independence in America, we are resolved, although we are prisoner, to bear it in remembrance; and for that end, several of us have employed ourselves today in making cockades.

They were drawn on a piece of paper, cut in the form of a half moon, with the thirteen stripes, a Union and thirteen stars, pointed out and upon the top is printed in large capital letters, 'Independence' and at the bottom, 'Liberty or Death' or some appeal to Heaven.

July 4, 1778: This morning when we were let out, we hoisted the American flag upon our hats, except about five or six, who did not choose to wear them. The agent, seeing us all with those papers on our hats, asked for one to look at, which was sent him, and it happened to be one which had 'Independence' written upon the top, and at the bottom 'Liberty or Death.'

He not knowing the meaning of it, and thinking we were going to force the guard, directly ordered a double sentry at the gate. Nothing happened until one o'clock; we then drew up in the thirteen Divisions, and each Division gave three cheers, till it came to the last, when we all cheered together, all of which was conducted with the greatest regularity. We kept our colors hoisted till sunset, and then took them down. (101)

To execute a demonstration such as Herbert described required some organization among the American prisoners. They had that organization already established for their own self-policing. To regulate aspects of their daily lives such as eating in messes, defending their property, and controlling disagreements and fights, "it was found necessary to have some mode of government among the prisoners." (102) The prisoners "adventured to form themselves into a republic, framed a constitution and enacted wholesome laws, with suitable penalties." Articles of government were drawn up and read to the newcomers. Punishments were set for various misdeeds. And a trial system was formulated. If a

person was accused "of any transgression, he had a legal trial and was punished according to the crime. There had been one or more instances of tying up to the lamp post, and putting a dozen lashes on the bare back." (103)

Security was a prime consideration for laws in this prisoner government. Keeping tunnels secret, making a fake muster to cover for those who escaped, and keeping secret the outside sources of information from possible informers was an essential task. This involved pressuring those who might inform, especially those who indicated a desire to receive a pardon and join the British. Connor relates the incident of a guard discovering a hole dug for a mass escape. The prisoners in turn discovered an informer had revealed the location of the tunnel. The prison officials had to isolate him in the hospital to keep the others from carrying out their punishment. That prisoner then took up application for enlistment. (104) One alleged informer named Rogers had his trial and was found guilty. His sentence was one hundred stripes. They dragged him out and administered the beating. (105)

An example of the organization of daily routine performed by the prisoners' attempt at self-regulation was the organizing of the distribution of food. The men in each mess chose one among them to divide the loaf of bread into

shares of as equal size as possible. Another would be blindfolded and asked to call a name of a messmate when the cutter pointed to each piece. A similarly elaborate scheme for avoiding disputes over the beef ration existed. (106)

The prisoner organization seemed to work very well. The food distribution system eliminated a major point of irritation. The penalties kept thievery and fighting to a minimum. Connor cites only one case of fighting among the prisoners. Sherburne brags at the beginning of his account that there was no fear of having one's clothing stolen because of the "republic." (107)

Overall it could even be argued that there were advantages to the prison experience for the common seaman. The schooling that some used to fill their hours brought useful skills for the future. Fanning commented that "many of these have since advanced to the rank of masters of vessels, otherwise, had they never seen Forten prison, they never would have been more than sailors". (108) Such an observation should not obscure the difficulty of the prison experience. Some men were confined for a very long time. Many healthy young seamen emerged broken and unfit for further life at sea. Even officers who fared better than the common seamen characterized their experience as "very

disagreeable" and described their release as "our deliverance from a horrible prison, where we fared very hard." (109)

The experience did not turn them from a life at sea or from further service to their country. John Paul Jones signed on many of these men for the BONHOMME RICHARD. Lieutenant Cutting Lunt wrote home, informing his father of his freedom and future plans: "I have shipped myself for another cruise, and hope I shall have better success. I am going in a ship called the Poor Richard, commanded by John Paul Jones, esquire, but our expedition is secret, but I hope to be at home next Christmas, if my life is spared." (110)

## FOOTNOTES

(1) "The Old Mill Prison, Plymouth, England," *MAGAZINE OF HISTORY* 20 (January 1912):19. In the colonies the British confined prisoners in warehouses, large public buildings, churches, and on prison-ships. All of these facilities proved inadequate in size for the numbers of prisoners forced into confinement in them. There were no provisions made for the confinement of naval prisoners other than hulks, converted supply ships taken out of commission. An act of Parliament, 17 George III c. 9, passed in March, 1777, classified Americans taken in arms on the high seas as pirates and traitors. This act was renewed each year until March, 1782, when they were considered prisoners of war in 22 George III c. 10. See John K. Alexander, ed., "Jonathan Carpenter and the American Revolution: the Journal of an American Naval Prisoner of War and Vermont Indian Fighter," *VERMONT HISTORY* 36 (Spring 1968):80 n. 15. The literature on the horrors of confinement in these hulks is extensive. See for example 28th Congress, House Report No. 176; 54th Congress, 2d session, House Report No. 2939; George Taylor, *MARTYRS TO THE REVOLUTION IN THE BRITISH PRISON-SHIPS IN THE WALLABOUT BAY* (1855); Andrew Sherburne, *MEMOIRS OF ANDREW SHERBURNE A PENSIONER OF THE NAVY OF THE REVOLUTION. BY HIMSELF*, (Utica, New York: Williams, 1828; reprint ed., Freeport New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1970, pp. 107-115. Margaret N. Caldwell, "A Bit of History from Frenchman Bay," *NAUTICAL RESEARCH JOURNAL* 2 (December 1949):151-152; Charles H. Jenrich, "The Old Jersey Prison Ship," *UNITED STATES NAVAL INSTITUTE PROCEEDINGS* 89 (February 1963):170, discusses those on prison ships who wrote diaries: Captain Dring, Robert Sheffield, Lieutenant Dunscomb, Alexander Coffin, Thomas Andros, and Silas Talbot.

(2) Fanning, p. 2.

(3) Robert Wilden Neeser, ed., *LETTERS AND PAPERS RELATING TO THE CRUISES OF GUSAVUS CONYNGHAM -- A CAPTAIN OF THE CONTINENTAL NAVY 1777-1779*, (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press reprint, 1970), p. 160; M. B. Clark, "Narrative of Gustavus Conyngham, U.S.N., While in Command of the 'Surprise' and 'Revenge,' 1777-1779," *PENNSYLVANIA MAGAZINE OF HISTORY & BIOGRAPHY* 22 (1898):487; Samuel Cutler, "Prison Ships, and the 'Old Mill Prison,' Plymouth, England, 1777," *NEW ENGLAND HISTORICAL & GENEALOGICAL REGISTER* 32 (1876):43; Charles Francis Jenkins, "John

Claypoole's Memorandum-Book," PENNSYLVANIA MAGAZINE OF HISTORY & BIOGRAPHY 16 (1892):183. A description of Conyngham's capture and arrival in England can be found in the London REMEMBRANCER for 1779, p. 341. For the controversy over Conyngham's status as a captain, see Greenwood, CAPTAIN MANLEY, pp. 158-161. He was considered a pirate because he could produce no commission, (p. 160). Connor mentions one crew of 100 privateersmen from which 25 enlisted, (31:184).

(4) Isaac J. Greenwood, CAPTAIN JOHN MANLEY SECOND IN RANK IN THE UNITED STATES NAVY 1176-1783, (Boston: C. E. Goodspeed & Co., 1915), p. 116, and Gordon Grant, THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF JOHN NICOL MARINER, (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, Inc., 1936), p. 53. The experience of the officers captured differed considerably from that of their crew. On the capturing vessel, the officer prisoners, or at least the captain, dined at the captain's table and had the freedom of at least part of the ship. If there were exceptions to this, they occurred due to a clash of personalities or as a result of an attempt to escape. Boardman, a merchant captain captured in March, 1776, was well treated by the lieutenant and ship's master, but not by the captain, who eventually "turned him out of the regular mess...to mess with a gunner." For attempting to escape, Boardman was "thrown in irons for some days". This confinement in irons was considered a punishment rather than an effort to contain Boardman. He escaped soon after being released from the irons by swimming ashore. That he was not plundered of his valuables and therefore had the money to make his way home is described in his preparations for swimming ashore. He "stripped, except for his trousers and a kerchief with money in it tied around his neck." Connor mentions a special meal for the officers of his privateer served up by the captain on arrival in Portsmouth, (p. 343). Lieutenant Matthewman also tried to escape with close confinement as a result, see Thomas C. Parramore, "The Great Escape from Forton Gaol: An Incident of the Revolution," NORTH CAROLINA HISTORICAL REVIEW 45 (December 1968):352.

(5) Charles I. Bushnell, "A Memoir of Eli Bickford, A Patriot of the Revolution," MAGAZINE OF HISTORY WITH NOTES AND QUERIES, Extra No. 166 (1931):128; John B. Meserve, "A Privateersman of the Revolution," GRANITE STATE MONTHLY 59 (May 1927):140; J. Hall Pleasants, ed., JOURNALS AND CORRESPONDENCE OF THE STATE COUNCIL OF MARYLAND 1781-1784, (Baltimore, Maryland: Maryland Historical Society, 1931), p. 262. Seth Clark gives a deposition concerning his capture and enforced service on various British ships. See Clark, pp. 96-98.



(6) Fanning, pp. 2, 3, 8; Jenkins, "Claypoole," p. 183. List any others that describe plunder of valuables and enlistment of part of the crew.

(7) Connor, p. 177; Fanning, pp. 4-6.

(8) Israel Ralph Potter, "Life and Adventures of Israel Ralph Potter," (Providence, Rhode Island: Privately printed by J. Howard, 1824; reprint ed., New York: William Abbatt, 1911), in THE MAGAZINE OF HISTORY WITH NOTES AND QUERIES, Extra No. 16 (1824):631.

(9) IBID., p. 632.

(10) IBID.

(11) Henry T. Tuckerman, THE LIFE OF SILAS TALBOT A COMMODORE IN THE NAVY OF THE UNITED STATES, (New York: J. C. Riker, 1850), p. 96. The Deposition of Eliphalet Downer describes close confinement in the stifling heat of August on board the ship that brought him to England and then on different guard ships. Only severe illness enabled him to leave the ship for Haslar hospital, in which he recovered. See Downer, pp. 95-96.

(12) Fox, pp. 90-91.

(13) Bushnell, HAWKINS, pp. 24, 31, 62-63.

(14) George, Carey, "Songs of Jack Tar in the Darbies," JOURNAL OF AMERICAN FOLKLORE 85 (April-June 1972):168; and Bushnell, HAWKINS, pp. 63-64.

(15) Carpenter, pp. 44-45, quoted in John K. Alexander, "Forton Prison During the American Revolution: A Case Study of British Prisoner of War Policy and the American Prisoner Response to that Policy," ESSEX INSTITUTE HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS 103 (October 1967):368. Jenkins, "Claypoole," p. 185, also mentions the "inducements to enter" while serving time on a guard ship.

(16) "The Old Mill Prison, Plymouth, England," MAGAZINE OF HISTORY 20 (January 1909):19. English humanitarians were also a factor. A letter appearing in the London GAZETTE in the fall of 1776 pleaded for the Mayor to remedy the situation of the American seamen confined below decks in their own captured privateer, see Richard H. Amerman, "Treatment of American prisoners during the Revolution," NEW JERSEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY PROCEEDINGS 78 (October 1960):273 n. 47.

(17) Carpenter, p. 46. Foot, p. 110. In his analysis of the prisoner experience, Alexander, "Forton," pp. 366-368, lumps the capturing ships with the guard ships and fails to distinguish that Foot was reacting to a two week stay on a guard ship, confinement on which he volunteered, giving up his parole, in the hope of a quick exchange. He also attempts to compute the rate of entry into British service by comparing the number of men carried on a privateer with those who entered Forton. The numbers of crew carried are very inaccurate, usually being the number of hands the vessel should carry rather than the number actually on board. This type of comparison also does not account for escapes between the time of capture and arrival at Forton. See Cutler, pp. 185, 187. It is accurate, however, to conclude that British efforts to recruit were probably more successful on the capturing vessels and guard ships than in Forton and Mill prisons. But factors other than severity of treatment were the probable cause of this relative success.

(18) Neeser, CRUISES, p. 170. For an example of the commitment form, see Greenwood, CAPTAIN MANLEY, pp. 117-118.

(19) Marion and Jack Kaminkow, MARINERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION, (Baltimore, Maryland: Magna Charta Book Co., 1967), p. xii; Parramore, "Great Escape," p. 352, Parramore, p. 353, notes the release of the nephew of the owner of the ship; Jonathan Elkins, "Reminiscences of Jonathan Elkins; from a manuscript in the possession of the Vermont historical society," VERMONT HISTORICAL SOCIETY PROCEEDINGS (1919-1920):207; Sherburne, pp. 77-78, gives a detailed list of the questions asked him. Three justices examined Cutler and eight other Americans at the Fountain tavern. "After four hours examination together, and separately, we were delivered to two constables and seven soldiers, to be committed to Mill Prison for high treason," (p. 186).

(20) Carpenter, p. 46. Connor, p. 343, and Thompson, p. 222, mention the warrant. Alexander, "Carpenter," pp. 79-80; see Eunice H. Turner, "American Prisoners of War in Great Britain 1777-1783," MARINER'S MIRROR 45 (July 1959):200, for confusion in the mind of the agent at Portsmouth over the manner of commission to prison.

(21) Fanning, however, found the commissioners pleasant. They did not abuse or threaten him. In fact, he recalls that they "assured us we should be kindly used as prisoners of war," (p. 9). Fanning wrote his recollections

around 1805 and can be excused for thinking they used the term "prisoners of war". But, if his experience was typical, then it was probably so only for officers. Alexander, "Forton," warns about Fanning's "bolder comments," but should also have been careful about implying that Fanning's experiences might have been typical for all prisoners of war, (p. 367 n. 9).

(22) John Kilby, "Narrative of John Kilby," edited by D. T. Stokes, MARYLAND HISTORICAL MAGAZINE 67 (Spring 1972):27. The trial took place in the Royal Naval Hospital at Haslar, located in Gosport, across the harbour from Portsmouth. Barney's description of Mill prison concerns the walls only. They were high, double walls with twenty feet between them, (p. 148). Marion S. Coan, "A Revolutionary Prison Diary -- The Journal of Dr. Jonathan Haskins," NEW ENGLAND QUARTERLY 17 (June 1944):295. Jonathan Haskins mentions that the examination took place at the Fountain tavern, and that, of his group, one captain escaped between the first examination and being called back. A Dutchman was sent back to the guard ship. A later group "gave little or no answers to the interrogation asked but still was comttd. upon suspicion of high treason as others," (p. 296). Haskins also mentions men being discharged as being ship's masters, (p. 295).

(23) Jenkins, "Claypoole," p. 187.

(24) Sherburne, p. 82.

(25) Cutler, p. 186; Jenkins, "Claypoole," p. 187.

(26) Coan, "Diary of Jonathan Haskins," p. 296.

(27) Christopher Lloyd and Jack L. S. Coulter, MEDICINE AND THE NAVY 1200-1900, 4 vols, (London: E. & S. Livingstone, Ltd., 1961), 3:190-192, 195, for the history of hospitals at Portsmouth and Plymouth. For information about buildings presently occupying the site, see Kaminkow, MARINERS, p. 215.

(28) Nathaniel Fanning, FANNING'S NARRATIVE: BEING THE MEMOIRS OF NATHANIEL FANNING, AN OFFICER OF THE REVOLUTIONARY NAVY, 1778-1783, edited by John S. Barnes, (New York: De Vinne Press, 1912), p. 9. Connor gives the date for the officers moving to "their new apartment" as January 20, 1778, (p. 348). Neeser, CRUISES, p. 171; Alexander, "Forton," p. 378. Forton prison was pulled down in 1812. It was the same building that was Fortune Hospital

which "was hired from the owner by the Sick and Hurt Commissioners previous to the completion of the Haslar Hospital in 1762." See Hardy, C. F. (ed.), BENENDEN LETTERS, p. 146.

(29) Alexander, "Forton," p. 369 n. 21, and 98/11/87.

(30) Parramore, "Great Escape," p. 354.

(31) George Thompson, "Diary of George Thompson of Newbury-port, kept at Forton Prison, England, 1777-1781," ESSEX INSTITUTE HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS 76 (July 1940):238-240; Jenkins, "Claypoole," p. 181. Thompson lists twelve, including a table of victualling. See also Parramore, "Great Escape," p. 353.

(32) Thompson, "Diary," pp. 238-240. See also 98/11/162 and Alexander, "Forton," p. 370. As these punishments failed as effective deterrents, the Admiralty instituted extra measures. Starting in January 1779, attempted escapes were further punished by putting the prisoner's name at the bottom of the exchange eligibility list. See Thompson, "Diary," p. 225, and letter of January 6, 1779, in Ad/M/404. In February, 1779, local prison authorities were given the right to put unruly prisoners in irons, but there is no record of that being done to ordinary prisoners at Forton or Mill. See letter of February 16, 1779, in Ad/M/404.

(33) Connor, pp. 345, 347. List others descriptions of the black hole. Cutler, p. 307. Cutler mentions that the black hole was "nct large enough for those already there" plus the seven captured escapees that were brought in that day. There were at most only a few in the hold on that day according to his account. Cutler states that two tried to escape from the black hole but were caught and returned, p. 308. Another who had escaped and was returned the next day spent 54 days on half allowance as punishment. Connor notes that two dug their way out of Forton's black hole in July, 1777, p. 344. Mill had a new black hole built. Cutler mentions that masons began work on September 3 and finished September 26, 1777, p. 395. According to Connor Forton's black hole held 25 prisoners on December 2, 1777, p. 347.

(34) Connor (p. 344) gives six ounces of beef, one-half pound of bread, and one pint of small beer as "black hole" rations. See also Fanning, p. 13; Foot, p. 100, and Cutler, p. 395. Connor mentions one example of using half allowance as pressure to give information. All

the officers were put on short rations to force them into telling who dug the escape hole that had been discovered, (p. 19). They were let off short rations twenty-three days later, (p. 213). Carpenter wrote that the day after 30 of 50 officers got away in a mass escape all the remaining prisoners were locked in until noon. They retaliated by breaking the lock. On another occasion the agent held back half the day's allowance to pay for the damage done to the prison in the previous night's escape attempt. (See Alexander, "Carpenter," pp. 82-83). Cutler has entries on July 9 and 11, 1777, stating simply, "no one allowed to speak to prisoners this day" and "short allowance". Whether this is a delayed retaliation for the celebration of independence day or something else is unclear. The only other instance of blanket punishment on half allowance for all prisoners comes from Kinsale. The source of this information, however, is not a prisoner. The Reverend William Hazlitt, upon hearing of this treatment, wrote a letter to the Cork newspaper in protest and the day after publication the order was reversed. See Ernest J. Moyné, "The Reverend William Hazlitt: A Friend of Liberty in Ireland During the American Revolution," WILLIAM AND MARY QUARTERLY 21 (April 1964):292-293.

(35) Connor, p. 73, and Alexander, "Forton," p. 371.

(36) There are several cases of prisoners being returned by the press gang. See Connor, pp. 165, 349, 351, and Sherburne, p. 87. Alexander, "Forton," p. 371, finds only one case (letter of October 18, 1780 in Ad/M/404) of pressed men not being returned. This may have been the only one to come to the attention of the Admiralty, or it may have been the only case mentioned in the sample of Admiralty papers that Alexander was able to read. (See p. 366 n. 6 for his explanation of his use of a selection of photostatic copies of parts of the Admiralty records). There are numerous cases, however, of incidents of Americans being taken into British service. See M. K. Barritt, "The Navy and the Clyde in the American War, 1777-1783," MARINER'S MIRROR 55 (January 1969):37; Neeser, CRUISES, p. 167; Turner, "American Prisoners of War," p. 201. That only one case found its way into that selection of the Admiralty records that Alexander examined should not be surprising given the desire to keep such actions quiet. That there were fewer cases than otherwise might be thought given the manpower shortages in the British navy can be attributed to the pressure put on the government by those sympathetic to the American cause. Alexander, however, views the lack of cases as an action undercutting "the argument of excessive punishments."

(37) Connor, pp. 351, 165. It is difficult to ascertain positively who the returned prisoners were when their names were not given by Connor in the specific entry, but a careful tabulation of who escaped, who "got clear," and who returned, indicates that the men returned in this instance were from a group of officers of ten that escaped together, (p. 287). The only other case of the press gang returning men to Forton refers to French prisoners, (p. 70).

(38) Fanning, pp. 13, 20; Connor, p. 344; Thompson, p. 239; 98/11/138; Alexander, "Forton," p. 373; Cutler, p. 187.

(39) Thompson, p. 239. On May 20, 1779, Carpenter wrote, "I went out in my turn betwixt the Gates to tend Market etc," (Alexander, "Carpenter," p. 83). This implies some regulation of the number of prisoners at market at a time or per day that is not mentioned in the regulations. It is understandable as a security measure.

(40) Clara Breed, "Extracts from the Journal of George Herbert," DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION MAGAZINE 58 (October 1924):625. Cutler, pp. 187, 306; Anton, A MILITARY LIFE, pp. 31, 32.

(41) Carpenter, p. 50; Fanning, pp. 14-15, and Thompson, p. 239. For other descriptions of daily activity see Barney, p. 88, Russell, p. 133, Cutler, p. 187, and Haskins, p. 296. Lemuel Pearson taught mathematics to Jonathan Elkins, see "Jonathan Elkins, Plymouth Prisoner," MAGAZINE OF HISTORY 19 (October 1914):171. Herbert's journal was written in cipher and carefully concealed, (Breed, "Extracts," p. 625). For an example of the poetry, see Sidney G. Morse, "The Yankee Privateersman of 1776," NEW ENGLAND QUARTERLY 17 (March 1944):85.

(42) Connor, pp. 18-20, 72, 166, 281, 31:285, 345, 347, 350; Thompson, 239; Carpenter, 48, 50, 53; Foot, 97; Widger, 73:40, 143, 74:346. Turner, "American Prisoners of War," p. 202, "Letters were intercepted but if innocuous allowed to proceed to the prisoners." Turner gives the impression that letters were not delivered, but even in the case of Benjamin Franklin's letters the message was conveyed: "no letters from Dr. Franklin or any other agent were to be read to the prisoners without the Commissioners' permission first being sought," (N.M.M./Adm/M/404, 22 October 1778). Alexander, "Carpenter," p. 81. Carpenter mentions a letter from a former prisoner named Greenleaf.

(43) Alexander, "Carpenter," pp. 83-84, Carpenter or another prisoner at Forton received letters from Mill on May 8, and June 14, 1779; the newspaper story appeared June 21, 1779.

(44) Alexander, "Carpenter," p. 81. The possibility of exchange coincided with the British fear of invasion, war with France, and their extreme need for seamen to man their fleet. News of Admiral Keppel's fleet is interspersed between Carpenter's comments on exchange.

(45) Herbert, pp. 86-87, 110, 141; Widger, p. 145. Howard L. Applegate, "American Privateersmen in the Mill Prison During 1777-1782," ESSEX INSTITUTE HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS 97 (October 1961):318, suggests that the information from the British officials, being "pure lie or propaganda," resulted in constant dejection. In "'American Privateersmen in the Mill Prison during 1777-1782': an Evaluation," ESSEX INSTITUTE HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS 102 (October 1966):332, Alexander attempts to counter that by noting that the prisoners were not always dejected and pointing out the good news that they received to elate them. The problem seems to lie in the source of the information that the prisoners received. The official British sources do appear to be uniformly bleak from the American prisoner point of view, while the cheerful sources are dissenting newspapers or other unofficial sources. Herbert's example shows that the prisoners were capable of rising above the information they received and making a judgment about it. That the prisoners were not always dejected is not a credit to British prison policy or practice, but rather to the prisoners themselves.

(46) N.M.M./Adm/M/404, letter dated 30 April 1777; Turner, "American Prisoners of War," p. 202; Cutler, p. 186; Kaminkow, MARINERS, p. xiii. The Kaminkows omit the butter and mention that greens or peas were served five times per week. Thompson made a copy of the table of victualling posted in the yard which lists four ounces of butter once per week and two pints of peas distributed evenly over the week, (p. 240). Connor received cabbage every other day, (p. 343). Howard, p. 194, notes greens instead of peas on Saturday.

(47) Kaminkow, MARINERS, p. xiii. JOURNALS OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS, 38:531-532 (June 20, 1781), 38:551-552 (June 29, 1781); George Taylor, MARTYRS TO THE REVOLUTION IN THE BRITISH PRISON-SHIPS IN THE WALLABOUT BAY, (New York: W. H. Arthur & Co., 1855), p. 18; ANNUAL REGISTER FOR 1781

(London, 1782), p. 152. Howard states that bread for Americans was increased to one and one-half pounds by November 5, 1782, (p. 187). Jenkins, "Claypoole," gives the date of the increase as 29 April, (p. 179).

(48) Thompson, p. 240.

(49) Fanning, pp. 11, 17-18. Fanning wrote that the prisoners were half starved, found ground glass in the bread, begged for bones at the gate, and picked up bones in the yard. Connor (p. 352) cites three other cases of bad beef, (pp. 70, 213, and 343). Herbert linked the poor quality and lack of food to low morale and saw the end of subscription money as driving prisoners into the British service, (pp. 65, 207).

(50) Howard, p. 187; Cutler, p. 307.

(51) N.M.M./Ad/M/404 letter dated 29 April 1777; for corruption in the victualling service, see Daniel Baugh, *British Naval Administration in the Age of Walpole* (Princeton, 1965), pp. 403-405, 424-426, 447-451 and John J. Keevil, ET AL., *MEDICINE AND THE NAVY: 1200-1900*, 4 vols., (Edinburgh, 1957-1963), 3:83-85, and the discussion in Alexander, "Forton," p. 375; *ANNUAL REGISTER FOR 1778* (London, 1779), pp. 78-79. Perhaps the whole problem of corruption was too much for the those who sought to regulate it. Even Howard could only suggest as a remedy for the short-weighted bread that a "concerned gentleman" oversee the contractors and "oblige" them to be "more careful," (p. 194).

(52) 98/11/170, 371, and 98/13/507; Connor mentions two inspections, May and June, 1778, (pp. 20, 352), see also Thompson, pp. 224, 239; at Fanning's examination, he was told by the justice that he would be supplied with replacement clothing for what was taken, (p. 8). Alexander, "Forton," in his coverage of the clothing situation, concludes that the British "did provide clothes, although not as regularly as the official accounts imply," (p. 377). He includes Forton in this conclusion but the only citation of clothing distributed is for Mill in December, 1777. (See Herbert, pp. 70, 90, 94). Alexander then states that "the prisoners' clothing situation deteriorated quickly" after March 25, 1782, when the Americans officially became prisoners of war by British law and American assistance was lacking. It is more proper to consider the clothing situation as difficult throughout the war, fluctuating with the prisoners' ability to buy at market the items they felt



they needed. This varied more with their income than with the policies of either government. For the clothing situation at Kinsale, see Moyne, "Reverend Hazlitt," pp. 290, 292, 293. Turner, "American Prisoners of War," mentions that the British authorities at first stopped the distribution of shoes and stockings provided by funds contributed by English sympathizers but then gave permission, (p. 202). In the eighteenth century, officers were responsible for meeting their own clothing needs. Common prisoners were to have been provided for by the state of origin, but because Britain had not defined them as prisoners of war, responsibility lay with them. JOURNALS OF CONGRESS 3:400 (December 2, 1775) and 17:753 (August 21, 1780); REPORTS FROM THE COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS 10:776 (1780); JOURNAL OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS, 38:531-532 (June 20, 1781), and 38:551-552 (June 29, 1781).

(53) William E. S. Flory, PRISONERS OF WAR, (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Public Affairs, 1942), p. 57 n. 123; Moyne, "Reverend Hazlitt," p. 292; Howard, p. 187. Fanning complained of lice in the bedding, (p. 16). Carpenter only mentions "a general washing & cleansing [of] ye Priscn" once on May 10, 1779, (see Alexander, "Carpenter," p. 83).

(54) Cutler, pp. 187, 305, 306, 387. Two quarters of veal were sent in by a "charitable person" on June 8, 1777. Ten days later four packs of cards were given "by a gentleman." On July 7, 1777, a Bostonian gave seven guineas "to some particular persons." Cutler received two pence from a visitor from Boston, July 17, 1777. On September 9 and 30, 1777, Cutler received mail containing two pounds and two and a half guineas respectively. Captain Thompson, a successful escapee, twice wrote from France with money for the prisoners enclosed. Captain Conyngham had a relative in Ireland who sent "some little supply," (Neuser, CRUISES, p. 190). Connor, pp. 345, 347.

(55) Cutler, p. 187. One prisoner even addressed a petition for help to the Duke of Richmond asking for assistance to get back home. The seaman did not know the Duke, but a relative lived on one of the Duke's family estates in the colonies. Turner, "American Prisoners of War," p. 206. While Turner sees this as an example of the servile, almost pathetic deference of the commoner swept up in the currents of revolutionary war, it can be viewed as an

outlandish attempt to procure aid wherever it might be had. The petitioner possibly knew that the Duke had, as Turner points out, "interested himself in other cases," such as that of Captain Cunningham, and may have been a potential sympathizer. Petitions were even sent to the King of France, (Jenkins, "Claypoole," p. 187).

(56) Moynes, "Reverend Hazlitt," pp. 289, 297 n. 19. "On February 12, 1783, [Harvey] wrote to General George Washington concerning his activities in behalf of the American prisoners, and in a letter of August 10, 1783, Washington transmitted to Harvey a resolution of Congress thanking Harvey for the services he had rendered to American prisoners in Ireland." For the resolve of Congress, dated July 18, 1783, see George Washington, "Letters from George Washington to R. Harvey, Cork, Conveying the Thanks of the Congress of the United States of America in 1783," CORK HISTORICAL & ARCHEOLOGICAL SOCIETY JOURNAL 2 (1896):89.

(57) Alexander, "Carpenter," p. 83 n. 29; Fanning, pp. 18-19; Thompson, pp. 232-233; William Bell Clark, "In Defense of Thomas Digges," PENNSYLVANIA MAGAZINE OF HISTORY & BIOGRAPHY 77 (October 1953):405. Connor mentions that Wren was not allowed in one visit, (p. 352).

(58) Alexander, "Carpenter," p. 82. On April 5, 1782, he told those in Forton of the cartel to France from Mill and that the next would be from Forton. For background on Hartley and details of his political philosophy, see George H. Guttridge, "David Hartley, M.P. An Advocate of Conciliation 1774-1783," UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PUBLICATIONS IN HISTORY 14 (1926):268-271. During the war he put forward eight motions for reconciliation with the colonies and was a leader of the faction sympathetic with the American cause, (pp. 277-279).

(59) Laurens to Congress, May 30, 1782, quoted in Jenkins, "Claypoole," p. 189 n. 1. In the Tower of London, Laurens made contact with a woman who delivered his letters for him, he then corresponded "as freely as I could have done if I had been at full liberty," (see Clark, "Defense of Digges," p. 419).

(60) Bushnell, "Memoir of Eli Bickford," pp. 128-129.

(61) Connor, pp. 19, 347; Fanning, p. 10;

(62) Connor, p. 347; Haskins, p. 303, gives the totals as 2,660 at London, 260 at Bristol; GENTLEMAN'S MAGAZINE FOR 1778 (London, 1779), p. 43. The day before Christmas, the subscription was started off with a public meeting in London at which 800 pounds was subscribed. This coincided with the efforts of the Earl of Abingdon in bringing before the House of Lords the "rigorous treatment and poor conditions" faced by the American prisoners of war, Jared Sparks, ET AL., "Report on Exchange of Prisoners during the American Revolution," Massachusetts Historical Society PROCEEDINGS 5 (December 1861):343. For more on Lord Abingdon's role in the subscription, see Guttridge, David Hartley, M.P., p. 276. Another account gives the figures of 100 in attendance and 1,500 pounds pledged. Within fifteen days the total reached 3,700 pounds and a committee to administer the fund was appointed. See Clark, "Defense of Digges," p. 390 nn. 49 and 50, for quotations from the Public Advertiser. Dr. J. Fothergill and other Quakers are claimed to have contributed heavily to this subscription, Fothergill serving on the committee for dispersing the funds, R. Hingston Fox, DR. JOHN FOTHERGILL & HIS FRIENDS: CHAPTERS IN 18TH CENTURY LIFE, (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1919), p. 225. Connor accounted this humanity to the Americans' fair treatment of the Convention Army; the articles of that convention were published in full in Town and Country Magazine, December, 1777. The description of the subscription in the London REMEMBRANCER (vol. 6) mentions that, when the book in London was closed, "those in the country were closed likewise." The friends of the ministry opened a counter-subscription and used the money thus raised for "bounties for seamen for the navy, and recruits for the army," (p. 103). William Gordon claims that the subscription was "inefficiently sponsored at first by some opposition peers. Between 24 December 1777 and 17 February 1778 L 4,647 13s. was raised for the relief of the 400 or so American prisoners largely on the strength of a good many misrepresentations about the lack of heating, clothing and so on, and from these funds Americans received money, coals or lavish extra food." (See THE HISTORY OF THE RISE, PROGRESS, AND ESTABLISHMENT OF THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, 4 vols., (London: 1788), 1:100.

(63) Connor, p. 280.

(64) Carpenter, p. 49; Fanning, p. 19; Thompson, p. 222; Applegate, "American Privateersmen," p. 313; Alexander, "Forton," p. 379, and Alexander, "Carpenter," p. 81.

(65) Connor, pp. 348, 350, 20, 72, 280, 281, 282. The officers received two shillings those last two months. Connor made no mention of the subscription in his last six months at Forton.

(66) Clark, "Defense of Digges," pp. 400-401. An attempt was made to re-open the subscription in mid-March, 1780, but it met with little success, (Clark, "Defense of Digges," p. 413). Clark, p. 398, describes the two shiploads of exchanged prisoners, the first on March 25, 1779, the second on July 2, 1779, carrying 17 officers and 102 men. For the difficulties encountered in attempting to exchange the 500 men captured by John Paul Jones as a result of the battle with the SERAPIS, see Clark, "Defense of Digges," p. 404. The British did not wish to exchange those "in Holland as the vessels and their crews might well be retaken when Jones would be forced to bring them around from the Texel to Dunkirk." For Franklin's attempt to switch prisoners with the French, see William Bell Clark, BEN FRANKLIN'S PRIVATEERS A NAVAL EPIC OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION, (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1956). For the special attempts to exchange certain officers (Conyngham and Manley), see Greenwood, CAPTAIN MANLEY, pp. 118-119. Alexander, "Forton," pp. 385-387, briefly covers the history of exchange in Europe. Catherine M. Prelinger, "Benjamin Franklin and the American Prisoners of War in England during the American Revolution," WILLIAM AND MARY QUARTERLY 32 (April, 1975):261-294, attempts to credit Franklin for the efforts he put into caring for the prisoners but deals only with the diplomacy and underemphasizes the lack of success that Franklin had in his efforts.

(67) Neeser, CRUISES, pp. 194-195. The letter as dated 22 December, 1779. Conyngham had left Mill in a mass escape November 3. Carpenter expressed feelings bordering on despair, March 27, 1779: "I am almost tired of Imprisonment -- we have had but 6d per week for 8 weeks past which will Scarcely admit of paper to write & Cypher to keep ourselves out of Idleness," (Alexander, "Carpenter," p. 82).

(68) John Howard, THE STATE OF THE PRISONS IN ENGLAND AND WALES, WITH PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS, AND AN ACCOUNT OF SOME FOREIGN PRISONS AND HOSPITALS, 4th ed., (London: J. Johnson, C. Dilly, & T. Cadell, 1792), p. 194; Fanning, p. 10. This refers to an allowance of two shillings and six pence. Officers, having other sources of income, felt the loss of the allowance relatively less than the common seamen.

(69) N.M.M./Adm/M/404, letter of June 22, 1780. See Turner, "American Prisoners of War," p. 205, for other examples of release from prison to service other than the navy. Most French prisoners of war were confined in separate prisons from the Americans, some serving on American privateers were confined with the Americans and vice versa. The principle places of confinement for the French were Winchester, Kinsale, and Mill. Forton was used as a stop off for those on their way to Winchester, (see Alexander, "Carpenter," p. 85). Some captured seamen were given no choice at all. Cases of American prisoners being transported to Africa and the East Indies existed more in their fears and tall stories, but some were real, see Winthrop L. Marvin, THE AMERICAN MERCHANT MARINE ITS HISTORY AND ROMANCE FROM 1620 TO 1902, (London: Sampson, Low, Marston & Co. Ltd., 1902), p. 17. Eliphalet Downer swears in a deposition that American seamen were carried off to Africa and the East Indies, (see Downer, p.96).

(70) Connor, pp. 281-282, 284. Not all who volunteered did in fact enter. The period of low subscription payments coincided with a time of heavy recruiting and few prospects of exchange, so it is impossible to isolate the effect that subscription had on the morale of the prisoners of war. It does seem to be an important factor, one which has not been recognized in previous treatments of the subject of American prisoners of war in England.

(71) Turner, "American Prisoners of War," p. 205. Turner fails to realize that the names listed on the pardons did not correspond with the number who actually enlisted, (see Kaminkow, MARINERS, p. xvi). Also his statement that pardons "came in a steady stream" is unsupported by his own evidence, not to mention those who did not take advantage of the pardon. For an example of the spunky attitude that condemned the pardons, see the dialogue between the agent and prisoner in Alexander, "Carpenter," pp. 83-84. See Kaminkow, MARINERS, p. xvi, for the dates on the main pardons.

(72) Turner, "American Prisoners of War," p. 206.

(73) Kaminkow, MARINERS, pp. xv-xvi.

(74) Clark, "Defense of Digges," p. 389 n. 45; Alexander, "Forton," p. 379.

(75) Alexander, "Forton," p. 379; Clark, "Defense of Digges," PASSIM., and Clark, FRANKLIN'S PRIVATEERS, PASSIM, for Franklin's attempts to collect prisoners for exchange by hiring Irish smugglers and Frenchmen to American privateer commissions.

(76) Clark, "Defense of Digges," pp. 414, 418.

(77) IBID., p. 424. The estimate came from Digges in a letter dated January 9, 1781. Widger, pp. 326, 344.

(78) Clark, "Defense of Digges," pp. 422-425. The exact amount of the swindle is difficult to determine, however, Clark makes a good attempt at pinpointing it around 200 pounds. This is far below the amount that Franklin claims, but he never kept decent books at probably had little clue as to true amounts. Perhaps the significant part of this incident is that the money embezzled was not that which went to the prisoners. Wren or Duckett would hand out money and then bill Franklin. Except for the depletion in the total amount of money available and the outrage of it all, this fiasco was not the cause of the small amount of aid going to the prisoners. The amount of money available to Franklin was considerable, see Clark, FRANKLIN'S PRIVATEERS. Although later historians were to accuse Digges of being a spy, Franklin was unwilling even to sue for the lost amount, (Clark, "Defense of Digges," p. 436).

(79) Clark, "Defense of Digges," pp. 398, 400, 406, 411. Alexander's coverage of American government aid to prisoners is cursory at best. He accepts Applegate (whom he usually questions critically and accurately) and Bolton, although they give different amounts for the weekly allowance, (see Alexander, "Evaluation," pp. 328-329). He accepts Franklin's charges (to the specific amount) against Digges without citing Clark's "Defense of Digges." But worst of all, he assumes that because Franklin requested Hartley to distribute money in October, 1777, it was done, (Alexander, "Forton," p. 379). Jenkins, "Claypoole," p. 186, gives six pence as the amount of government aid.

(80) Connor, pp. 212, 351-352; Fanning, p. 11; Russell, pp. 145-146; Thompson, p. 223; Widger, pp. 38-39; Paine, p. 131; Alexander, "Evaluation," pp. 333-334; Alexander, "Forton," p. 372. Cutler (p. 395) gives one example of a diligent sentry overhearing a plot to escape.

(81) Herbert, p. 115. They were caught and punished, April, 1778.

(82) Connor, pp. 18, 20, 71; Foot, p. 110, Thompson, pp. 224, 225; Haskins, p. 297; Applegate, "American Privateersmen," p. 305, concludes that hatred of the guards appeared to raise American morale; Alexander, "Evaluation," pp. 331, 333; Alexander, "Forton," p. 372.

(83) Fanning, p. 16; Connor, p. 18.

(84) The details of the incident are from Fanning, p. 12. An investigation ruled it to be manslaughter. Carpenter wrote on March 25, 1779, that "Bartholemew White a prisoner in the yard was Shot through the boddy by a Corporal of ye Guard which consists of 60 of the Westminster Militia--he died in 24 hours after The Corporal was tryed by a Jury and Cleared Proved (but very falsly) to be an accident", (Alexander, "Carpenter," p. 82). Neeser, CRUISES, pp. 171-173, Conyngham heard of the shooting incident at Forton and wrote, "I have been told that Corporal Spelman being on Duty at fortune prison under the command of Capt. Parsons of the Middle Sex Militia, that an American prisoneer the name of White said Corporal shot him with a ball through the Boddy." The death of this prisoner was also recorded by Foot, p. 110, and Thompson, p. 227. Alexander, "Forton," gives the name as John Whwright[sic], concludes that the hatred of this guard did not extend to others, and that the general feeling of prisoners for guards was mixed, (pp. 372-373). The Reverend Hazlitt refers to an incident at Kinsale in which a bullet was fired into the American section of the prison, but gives no details other than that there was "no enquiry ever made," (Moynes, "Reverend Hazlitt," p. 293). On May 7, 1779, Carpenter mentions a disturbance caused by the sentinel firing and wounding two prisoners, (Alexander, "Carpenter," p. 83). It is not clear whether these were escaping prisoners or that the sentinel fired more than once.

(85) Anton, A MILITARY LIFE, p. 31; Alexander, "Carpenter," p. 83. The Surrey militia relieved the Lincolnshire militia after only three days, according to Carpenter, but the normal shift was a month.

(86) Alexander, "Carpenter," p. 81 n. 22; Carpenter, p. 52; Thompson, p. 226; Connor, p. 345; Fanning, p. 9; Carpenter, pp. 49, 51-52; Foot, p. 97.

(87) Kaminkow, MARINERS, p. xiii; Cutler, pp. 186, 395. John How was the agent at Kinsale, (see Moyne, "Reverend Hazlitt," p. 291). Whether he was also the keeper who turned away John Claypoole and the other American prisoners, accepting only the French, is not known. (See Jenkins, "Claypoole," p. 184). Turner, "American Prisoners of War," concludes that the relationship between the prisoners and their keepers was "reasonably good" because an escaped prisoner wrote back to the keeper giving instructions as to the disposition of the money he left behind. Turner fails to consider that this could have been money the keeper forced the prisoner to leave with him as a means of inhibiting his ability to finance his escape. That the prisoner thought the keeper would parcel out his money as per instructions from France does indicate something.

(88) 98/11/132; Alexander, "Forton," p. 374.

(89) Cutler, pp. 185, 187; Fanning, pp. 3-5; Foot, pp. 105-107; Matthewman, p. 181;

(90) Carpenter, pp. 47, 50; Connor, pp. 19, 73, 166, 280, 281, 32:284, 287-288, 343, 344, 345, 348; Fanning, pp. 13-14; Matthewman, pp. 181-182; Thompson, pp. 224-226; Clark, "Defense of Digges," p. 405; Parramore, "Great Escape," pp. 349, 355; Greenwood, CAPTAIN MANLEY, p. 160; Neeser, CRUISES, p. 190. Luke Matthewman, "Narrative of Lieutenant Luke Matthewman," MAGAZINE OF HISTORY WITH NOTES AND QUERIES 2 (March 1878):181; Kaminkow, MARINERS, p. xv.

(91) "Escape of American Prisoners from the British Prison near Gosport in 1778," PENNSYLVANIA MAGAZINE OF HISTORY & BIOGRAPHY 13 (1889):484; Foot, pp. 97-98, 100-101; Nathaniel Harrington, "Letter," NEW ENGLAND HISTORICAL & GENEALOGICAL REGISTER 59 (July 1897):322; Thomas Smith, "Letter," ESSEX INSTITUTE HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS 41 (April, 1905), p. 227; Thompson, pp. 224, 225. Fanning, p. 13.

(92) Thompson, pp. 241-242; Cutler, p. 395. Moyne, "Reverend Hazlitt," p. 289; Clark, "Defense of Digges," pp. 405-406; Turner, "American Prisoners of War," p. 204. See Thomas Smith, "Revolutionary Letter from T. Smith, Forton Prison, 1780," ESSEX INSTITUTE HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS 4 (April 1905):227, for the intricate network of friends, letters, and contacts necessary to supply Samuel Porter with "15 guineas & clothes" which "will Enable him to make his Escape."



(93) Connor, pp. 36-39. Fanning gives the figures 138 out of 367 for the twelve months he was imprisoned, but does not indicate whether these were successful or how he obtained them. Hazlitt states that 91 out of 336 escaped from Kinsale but does not give details, (Moyné, "Reverend Hazlitt," p. 293). Anderson estimates that over one-third of the American prisoners escaped, crediting this to the ease with which it could be done rather than special endeavours on the part of Americans. While it is true that Forton and Mill were not particularly secure institutions, that the guard was insufficient, incompetent, and corrupt, that they had no orders to fire on escaping prisoners, and that the punishments for attempting to escape were not effective, these factors do not sufficiently explain why the high escape rate for Americans was not equalled by others. Prisoners from other countries had the same buildings and guards. The orders not to shoot at escaping prisoners were not obeyed. Losing one's place on the exchange list was no deterrent at all when there were no exchanges taking place. Half rations in the black hole were supplemented by prisoners sharing their rations with those in the black hole. At the end of her article, Anderson adds that the American seamen were "more energetic and ingenious" than others but does not attempt to ask why this would be so. The answer to that unasked question would have to include the distinctive nature of the American Revolution, the status of American prisoners as pirates and traitors rather than legitimate prisoners of war, the friends and supporters that the American cause had in England as well as the prisoners' ability to blend in with the populace. That they received less food and clothing and that most of the officers were not allowed parole had to have an effect as well. Olive Anderson, "American Escapes from British Naval Prisons during the War of Independence," MARINER'S MIRROR 4 (May 1955):240. For orders not to fire on escaping prisoners, see Herbert, p. 142, and Haskins, p. 425, as well as 98/11/206, 218-219, 227. For incidents of guards firing on escaping prisoners of war, see Jenkins, "Claypoole," pp. 179, 188. For Americans blending in with the English, see Neeser, CRUISES, p. xlix, Kaminkow, MARINERS, p. xiv. For the aid American escapees received from English friends, see Clark, "Defense of Digges," p. 405, Turner, "American Prisoners of War," p. 204, Moyné, "Reverend Hazlitt," p. 289, Smith, "Letter," p. 227. On the difficulties of exchange, see Kaminkow, MARINERS, p. xv, Clark, "Defense of Digges," p. 403, Alexander, "Carpenter," p. 81, Alexander, "Forton," p. 385. That escapes were not just for a share of the reward and a night on the town, see the references in the prisoner journals to escapees being

taken thirty, forty, and fifty miles from the prison, and in one case "on the coast after eight weeks," (Cutler, pp. 306-307, and Connor, pp. 71, 165). In the diary of a British sailor who spent the war on convoy duty and capturing American privateers, John Nicol remarks that "it was nothing uncommon for us to take the same men prisoners once or twice in the same season," (Grant, LIFE OF JOHN NICOL, p. 100). For the exceptional instances of paroles being given, see Turner, "American Prisoners of War," p. 203.

(94) Clark, "Defense of Digges," p. 411. For the argument that patriotism was the motivation of the colonial seamen's activities, see Lemisch, L. Jesse, "Jack Tar in the Streets: Merchant Seamen in the Politics of Revolutionary America," WILLIAM AND MARY QUARTERLY 25 (July, 1968): pp. 371-407, and IBID., "Listening to the 'Inarticulate': William Widger's Dream and the Loyalties of American Revolutionary Seamen in British Prisons," JOURNAL OF SOCIAL HISTORY 3 (Fall, 1969), pp. 1-29.

(95) Ad/M/404 letter of July 10, 1777; Connor, p. 347; Fanning, p. 10; Matthewman, p. 182; 98/11/141; Justice of the Peace to Ad. dated October 15, 1779, in Ad/M/404, and Ad/M/405. Kaminkow, MARINERS, p. xv, gives the new reward as fifteen shillings.

(96) Alexander, "Carpenter," p. 80.

(97) Carey, "Songs of Jack Tar," p. 180. Connor collected 58 songs, writing them down as new prisoners arrived with them or as they were adapted to prison life, (p. 168).

(98) IBID., pp. 175, 176, 179. "The first song in the collection, for example, recalls the woes of an unfortunate rake who, having contracted a healthy dose of venereal disease from a local prostitute, swears he'll serve the entire village in the same manner and begins by servicing his chambermaid," (p. 170).

(99) IBID., pp. 168-169, 172. For a short patriotic song, see "Gage's Lamentation," (p. 173). In Jenkins, "Claypoole," Claypoole gives the verses of a patriotic song, (pp. 181-182). Not all songs had pro-American themes, however. There were some songs with Tory verse, (p. 170). For other references to prisoner singing, see Carpenter, pp. 51-52, 55; Foot, pp. 97, 99-100; Haskins, pp. 383-385; Alexander, "Carpenter," p. 86, and Alexander, "Forton," pp. 387-388.

(100) IBID., p. 169.

(101) Breed, "Extracts," p. 626. Cutler (p. 305) also refers to a celebration in 1777.

(102) Sherburne, p. 83.

(103) IBID., pp. 80, 83.

(104) Connor, p. 288; Carpenter, p. 83, mentions that one tunnel took two months to dig. For faking the muster, see p. 347, and Cutler, p. 306. For covering sources of information and escape, see Sherburne, pp. 86, 88.

(105) Thompson, p. 225; 98/11/442-444; Alexander, "Forton," pp. 383-384. Alexander's sees the prisoner government solely as a response to the need for security.

(106) Sherburne, p. 83. For a description of the "blind mess" system used for the issuance of meat at Mill prison, see p. 84.

(107) Connor, p. 165; Sherburne, p. 80.

(108) Fanning, p. 15; Elkins, "Reminiscences," p. 208; Kaminkow, MARINERS, pp. xvi-xvii.

(109) George E. Merchant, "Revolutionary Prisoners of War in Gloucester," ESSEX INSTITUTE HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS 45 (October 1909):350-352; Louis F. Middlebrook, HISTORY OF MARITIME CONNECTICUT DURING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION, 2 vols., (Salem, Massachusetts: Essex Institute, 1925), 2:325; Connor spent two years, three months, and seven days in prison before his exchange, (p. 285).

(110) Joshua Coffin, A SKETCH OF THE HISTORY OF NEWBURY, NEWBURYPORT AND WEST NEWBURY FROM 1635 TO 1845, (Boston: S. G. Drake, 1845), p. 408; Connor, p. 285. See also Alexander, "Carpenter," p. 85, for Carpenter's exchange, July 2, 1779. On July 22, he boarded the General MIFFLIN privateer.

## CONCLUSION

The prisoner of war in the American Revolution is a revealing topic of study for understanding the common man in the revolutionary era. Previous attempts to study the prisoner of war have not viewed him in his historical context. The role of the British navy, the nature of the war, the status of prisoners of war, and the undeveloped state of the British penal system were all important factors which shaped the situation facing American captives in the revolutionary war.

The role of the British navy as protector of the empire forced it to be the oppressor of seamen. This contradiction was driven into Jack Tar's perception of the world. The actions taken to liberate himself from forced service in the navy taught him the lessons of self-reliance and escape. The British navy was the major threat to the pursuit of a livelihood that was one of the few available to the person without wealth. The limited opportunities available in colonial society forced all kinds of men to the uncomfortable job at sea. Indians, runaway slaves, and those without skills or capital had little choice. The sea was not so much a lure as the best available option. An

incentive to this work was the opportunity of accumulating capital through private ventures. In the decade before the war for American independence, the British navy began to curb this route as well as threaten the seamen with impressment.

The guerilla nature of the war lent itself to the self-reliant tactics developed by the colonial seamen. The privateering venture became a tremendously popular and successful aspect of the struggle. Because of the unorganized nature of privateering, the hazards of capture were great and many seamen found themselves faced with an uneasy imprisonment. An important part of captive life was the unclear status of the colonial prisoners. As rebels they stood outside the precedents of international law. The manpower needs of the British and the strategies of war delayed prospects of exchange. Faced with this grim situation and under pressure to enlist with the British, the choice of prison or escape by the vast majority is impressive.

That escape was possible was in large measure the result of the makeshift nature of the British prison system. Having relied on transportation up to the war, the British were forced to use converted hospitals and other buildings

not built with security in mind. Ease of escape did not guarantee successful escapes, however, as the cost of reaching France was prohibitive to all but a few. That prison life was not more costly in human lives was because of generous aid from British sympathetic to the prisoners' plight and prisoner self-reliance rather than enlightened policy by the British authorities or aid from the American government.

The history of the common seaman on the privateer and in prison in Britain is one of concern for self. Every day matters took strong precedence. Class solidarity did not emerge from the experience because of the diversity of types forced into a life at sea, their individualistic orientation, accumulative aspirations, and history of self-reliance. Patriotic solidarity emerged in the occasional demonstration. The government formed in prison was primarily concerned with punishments for informing, theft, fighting, etc. The ideological revolution did not occur in this arena. What solidarity that did exist was imposed. Common seamen were separated from their officers. This separation resulted in vastly different prison experiences.

The captive experience was one of two different worlds: officer and seaman. On the capturing vessel the officers were usually given liberty of the deck, dined at the Captain's table, and generally treated with gentlemanly respect. The crew was closely confined between decks, harassed, and pressured to join the British service. The common seamen were shuttled from one overcrowded guard ship to another while they awaited processing before being taken to prison ashore. While the officers did not fare well, some were given parole and the liberty of the port. The prisons were divided into compartments segregating officers from common seamen. The officers had more room and other physical comforts such as a fireplace and glazed windows. They were permitted to arrange credit accounts through the keeper and thus their financial connections enabled them to live more comfortably. The common seamen prisoners felt the absence of these funds.

The treatment in prison differed between officers and prisoners of common background. The officers gained access of the towns by day parole. The seamen encountered periodic harassment from the guards and prison officials. The dispersal of charitable funds raised for the "poor American prisoners" went double shares to the officers. The chances for successful escape hinged upon the amount of money

available to the escapee. The cost of a successful escape being quite expensive, the officers were in a better position to succeed. A judgment concerning the likelihood of financial support and exchange was an important factor in the motivation for escapees. Prison conditions, the ease of escape, and patriotism were secondary factors.

Consideration of the harshness of the prison experience in Britain in the American Revolution must take into account the two worlds of experience--officer and common seaman. The difference between official British policy and the practice at the local level is also important, the significant factor governing the condition of the prisoners was the subscription funds raised by humanitarians and friends of the American cause. Concentration solely on the situation of the prisoners and crediting the low death rate to enlightened British policy is misguided. Likewise, an emphasis on the complaints of the prisoners without an analysis of the changes in their condition through the course of the war leads to inaccurate conclusions. The treatment of prisoners of war must be viewed in a larger context including the need for manpower by the expanding British navy, the conflicting economic forces between Britain and the colonies, and the typical job conditions of the seaman in the eighteenth century. Only in comprehending these perspectives does an accurate picture of the common man begin to emerge.



## APPENDIX I

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The secondary sources that do exist covering to some extent the situation of prisoners of war in the American Revolution fall into three categories: early, recent British, and recent American. The early sources are uniformly weak in scholarship. Ralph D. Paine's SHIPS AND SAILORS OF OLD SALEM (New York: Outing Company, 1909) consists of edited prison diaries with little attempt to check an obvious pro-American bias in his editorial comments. Danske Dandridge's AMERICAN PRISONERS OF THE REVOLUTION (Charlottesville, Va.: The Michie Company, 1912) is a collection of shortened primary material mostly prison diaries. Gardner W. Allen's A NAVAL HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION, 2 vols., (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1913) uses prisoner accounts for sources, but tends to emphasize the material that supports an anti-British view at the expense of other sources that would qualify that position. Francis Abell's PRISONERS OF WAR IN BRITAIN 1756 TO 1815; A RECORD OF THEIR LIVES, THEIR ROMANCE, AND THEIR SUFFERINGS (London: H. Milford, Oxford University Press, 1914), is very

sketchy and seldom analytical. Recent British attempts to deal with the prisoner of war issue have focused on British policy toward prisoners under their control and have relied heavily upon official sources, mainly the Admiralty papers in the Public Records Office in London. Olive Anderson's "The Treatment of Prisoners of War in Britain During the American War of Independence," BULLETIN OF THE INSTITUTE OF HISTORICAL RESEARCH 27 (May 1955):63-83, concludes that official British policy and treatment of their prisoners in Britain was enlightened and generally quite humane. She only documents, however, the official statements of policy and leaps to the conclusion that these were enacted and enforced. She fails to analyze the role of American aid to the prisoners, efforts on their own behalf, and the notable subscription and other humanitarian activities of the English people, especially members of the opposition. Eunice H. Turner's "American Prisoners of War in Great Britain 1777-1783," MARINER'S MIRROR 45 (July 1959):200-206, is brief and inaccurate.

The recent American articles on prisoners of war in the American Revolution began with an attempt to show how harsh conditions were in the British prisons, (Howard L. Applegate, "American Privateersmen in the Mill Prison During 1777-1782," ESSEX INSTITUTE HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS

97:303-320). Published in October, 1961, this article should have dealt with Anderson's contentions but did not. Worse, however, was Applegate's lack of scholarly judgement in failing to detect the considerable plagiarism in the sources he relied on so heavily. Applegate's effort has been taken to task quite thoroughly by John K. Alexander in his "'American Privateersmen in the Mill Prison During 1777-1782': An Evaluation," ESSEX INSTITUTE HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS 102 (October 1966):318-340. Alexander, while making a good effort to point out Applegate's flaws, commits several errors of his own, coming to conclusions that he does little to substantiate. Alexander has, however, done the best work in a set of articles on American prisoners. "Jonathan Haskins' Mill Prison 'Diary': Can it be accepted at face value?" NEW ENGLAND QUARTERLY 40 (December 1967):561-564 and "Jonathan Carpenter and the American Revolution: The Journal of an American Naval Prisoner of War and Vermont Indian Fighter," VERMONT HISTORY 36 (Spring 1968):74-90 are merely an investigation into a case of plagiarism and the account of a young man's exploits during the American Revolution based on his journal. Neither attempts to expand beyond the limits of the specific issue in its title. The reverse is the case with his latest article concerning prisoners of war, "Forton Prison During the American Revolution: A Case Study of British Prisoner of

War Policy and the American Prisoner Response to that Policy," ESSEX INSTITUTE HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS 103 (October 1967):365-389. In this study, Alexander arrives at some conclusions which he has not adequately substantiated. He otherwise accepts a middle position between those whose sources led them to pro-British conclusions and the others whose use of American prisoner material resulted in anti-British judgments. This compromising path is not always justified. It stands as the best attempt to date to come to terms with the prisoner of war issue in the American Revolution.

All fail, however, in achieving a comprehensive understanding of the issue partially because of the limits of their focus. The prisoners of war, whether in Great Britain or in the colonies, cannot be studied in isolation and certainly cannot be accurately described and analyzed with a one-sided approach to the source material available. Howard L. Applegate, in his Ph.D. thesis, CONSTITUTIONS LIKE IRON: THE LIFE OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY WAR SOLDIERS IN THE MIDDLE DEPARTMENT, 1775-1783, (Syracuse University, 1966), asserts that historians "assumed that only [the elite] contribute information." He cites Bolton's PRIVATE SOLDIER UNDER WASHINGTON as the only one to differ. He then notes that such "subjects as prisoners of war, militias,

officers, music, auxiliary agencies...have not been included in this study." But he considers that "Each of these additional areas deserves primary treatment in its own right," (p. 2).

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